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ENCIRCLEMENT AND CAPTURE OF THE RUHR
28 MARCH 45 - 18 APRIL 45

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ENCIRCLEMENT AND CAPTURE OF THE RUHR
FROM 28 MARCH 1945 TO 18 APRIL 1945
General Subject

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the encirclement and capture of the Ruhr during the period 28 March 45 to 18 April 45.

In order that the reader may have a better perspective of this operation, a review of events leading up to this operation appears desirable.

By 16 January 45, the battle of the Ardennes was substantially concluded and the Allied Armies once more took up the order in which it was ranged in order to re-grasp the strategic initiative and to resume the advance eastward in the heart of the Reich. Foremost in the minds of the Allied Commanders at this time was the vital Ruhr industrial area without which the Germans could not expect to continue to wage war. (1)

In planning for the spring offensive, General Eisenhower envisaged that this vitally important area of the Ruhr be isolated and denied the enemy by a double envelopment and from which further operations could be conducted leading to Germany's collapse. However, before this plan could be put into operation, it was necessary to destroy the enemy forces west of the Rhine river and to close to that river and seize bridgeheads from which to develop operations against the Ruhr district. It was further anticipated that once the forces west of the Rhine were eliminated, exploitation of Bridgeheads over the Rhine could be made with a minimum of losses, and subsequently,

(1) A-7, P. 83

advances east could be made with relatively little opposition.

In accordance with Supreme Commander's wishes, the Allied Armies initiated a drive to the east directed at the heart of the Reich, and immediately after the Ardennes Campaign, operations west of the Rhine gathered momentum.

On 8 February 45, Allied Army Groups held a line generally along the Roer, Our, and Sarre rivers with the 21st Army Group to the North; 12th Army Group in the center and the 6th Army Group to the south. In operations north of Cologne during the period 8 February 45 to 5 March 45, the Germans were driven east of the Rhine river from Nijmegen to Dusseldorf by an attempted envelopment of the First Canadian Army and the U.S. Ninth Army of the 21st Army Group to the northwest and to the southwest respectively. In the center, the First and Third Armies under command of General Bradley had by 12 March 1945 accomplished an encirclement north of the Moselle river by converging attacks of both armies between Bonn and Coblenz. First Army elements, due to its rapid advance had successfully seized the Remagen bridgehead across the Rhine on 7 March 45. By 22 March 45, armored elements of the Third Army again had broken through along the Moselle and had closed to the Rhine river from Coblenz to Mannheim seizing a bridgehead near Oppenheim on the Rhine. (2) See Map A

The seizure of the Remagen bridgehead (only one left intact of 31 bridges across the Rhine) by elements of the 1st Army on 7 March 45 was a factor of great significance inasmuch as it paved the way for further penetration into the heart of Germany. In addition, the enemy's plan to defend the bank of the Rhine had been upset, forcing the Germans to defend the rich industrial area along the Sieg river on the east bank (2) A-13, P. 45

of the Rhine river. (3)

In the operations to close the Rhine river during the period 8 February 45 to 22 March 45, the German Armies were virtually destroyed. By 22 March 45, 21st Army Group Intelligence reports indicated that it was facing approximately ten German divisions; General Bradley's 12th Army Group was opposed by six divisions, and General Dever's 6th Army Group to the south was opposed by five divisions making a total of twenty-one German divisions. During this period, Allied Armies had a total of 71 divisions poised ready to strike. (4)

Once the Rhine river had been crossed, there were two main avenues of approach into the heart of Germany and defeat such enemy forces as were left. The first of these was north of the Ruhr and into the German plain, the second from Mainz northeast through Frankfurt toward Kassel. However, due to the generally flat terrain in the northern German plain, it was contemplated having the main effort take place in the north where advantage of our superior mobility could be achieved to its maximum. Furthermore, it was felt that importance of the Ruhr to the enemy was such that he was likely to accord it first priority in his defense plans; thereby making it necessary ^{to use} for a superior mobile force in order to achieve success. In the south, the advance for armored operations would be a little more difficult due to less favorable terrain. However, it was the latter route of advance that the Allied commanders selected, taking full advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness and his erroneous expectation that the attack would be launched north of the Remagen Bridgehead (5)

*Ruhr area not to be used
as main effort May 45*

Route 1 shown

(3) A-1, P. 19 (4) A-2, P. 103 (5) A-1, P. 102 - no 102

It might be mentioned at this time that the principal reason for the enemy's inability to cope with Allied Forces west of the Rhine was the fact that the German offensive during the Ardennes compelled General Von Rundstedt to draw units from other sectors and as such, he was incapable of building up a reserve force to meet the Allied drive eastward. (6)

General Situation and Envelopment of the Ruhr

On 22 March 45, most of the 21st Army Group was concentrated on a front of about seventy-five miles from Nijmegen to south of Dusseldorf. Its mission was to effect crossings of the Rhine in its zone north of the Ruhr river commencing on 23 March 45. (See Map B) Following the seizure of the bridgehead, it was then to drive east and northeast to envelope the Ruhr industrial area from the north. The 12th Army Group, extending south of Dusseldorf to Oppenheim on the Rhine river was directed to establish an enlarged bridgehead east of the Rhine and north of the Main river along the Seigen, Geisen, Seig river boundary after which it was to move in the direction of Kassel. (See Map B) The 6th Army Group, extending from Oppenheim on the Main river as far south as Wissembourg, was directed to take over the Rhine south of the Main river. (See Map B) The main effort was to be made by the 21st Army Group to the north with secondary efforts made by both the 6th and 12th Army Groups to the south. The combined action of the 21st Army Group in the north and the 12th Army Group, 6th Army Group in the south was intended to result in a huge double penetration with breakthroughs approximately one-hundred miles apart followed by a double envelopment of the Ruhr. (7)

(6) A-1, P. 104 (7) A-13, P. 45

General Gerow's 15th Army, which was activated on 30 March 1945, was to be prepared to take over the western defense of the Rhine from Bonn north about 60 miles and to contain the enemy in that zone, thus relieving the Army Group Commanders of that responsibility in order that ^{the} ~~the~~ Allied ~~Armies~~ could keep up with their rapid advance (8)

The plan ^{was} ~~for this~~ operation was to take place on 23 March 45 and was as follows: British Commandos were to assault the town of Wesel at 2200 hours on 23 March 45; British 2d Army was to cross the Rhine at Rees; the 9th Army was to cross north of the Lippe river on the following day at 0400 hours; 18th Airborne Corps attached to the 21st Army Group for this operation was to drop two to six miles east of the Rhine in the vicinity of Wesel at 1000 hours on 24 March 45. Its mission was to disrupt hostile defenses in that city in order to deepen the bridgehead in an assault crossing of the Rhine by British ground forces. It was planned that the drop was to be made during daylight hours taking advantage of our air supremacy and the overwhelming superiority of artillery in order to achieve tactical surprise. Six days after the operation, the 18th Airborne Corps would be relieved from the 21st Army Group control and would be assigned a similar mission under 12th Army Group in operations east of the Rhine river as we shall see later. (9) (See Map B)

Under cover of heavy air and artillery concentrations, the British Commandos crossed the Rhine at Wesel and the XXX Corps of 2d British Army struck across the river at Rees. Five hours later, the main crossing was to be made by the (8) A-2, P. 103; (9) A-3, P. 35

XII Corps of 2nd British Army in the vicinity of Xanten.

In the sector south of the Lippe river, XVI Corps of 9th Army launched its attack across the Rhine. Opposing the Allied Forces on the east bank of the Rhine at this time were a total of seven German divisions. (10) (See Map B)

By nightfall on 24 March 45, XII Corps of 2d British Army had expanded its bridgehead six miles deep and over six miles wide including the area seized by the 18th Airborne Corps. On the left, XXX Corps of 2d British Army had seized a bridgehead equally as large; and south of the Lippe river, the XVI Corps of the 9th Army had seized a similar bridgehead. (11) (See Map B)

The next day the separated bridgeheads were linked up and the 21st Army Group continued to consolidate and slowly expand its foothold on the east bank of the Rhine. The main drive by the 21st Army Group to the north did not proceed as rapidly as anticipated in view of the fact that the enemy correctly noted 21st Army Group assaults in that sector. What reserves he had left were held in readiness in that area. However, to the south, the enemy was not given time to reorganize the remnants of the recently defeated forces which he had pulled out across the Rhine near Moselle due to the rapidity with which the 12th Army Group struck. (12)

In the 12th Army Group sector, the enemy was disorganized and unprepared and consequently lacked the strength to stop its assaults. As such, the 12th Army Group from its recently established bridgehead thrust quickly forward to penetrate the enemy's lightly held lines. On 24 March 45, the success of the 12th Army Group was such that General Bradley instructed (10) A-11, P. 243; (11) A-11, P. 247 (12) A-2, P. 100

the 1st Army Commander, General Hodges, to attack vigorously from the Remagen bridgehead and assist the Third Army by an envelopement of the Frankfurt, ^{May show and deny} Weisbaden area from Limburg after which the 1st Army was then to prepare to move in the direction of Kassel to effect a junction with 21st Army Group elements to the north. (13) (See Map B) The Third Army was to seize the line Hanau-Geissen and then prepare to advance on Kassel.

2nd Army not shown
By directing both the 1st Army and 3d Army initially on Geissen, a double envelopement of enemy forces in the Frankfurt, Limburg area might be achieved. When the two armies were concentrated on a forty-five mile front east of Geissen, they were to make a coordinated effort to assist the 21st Army Group in the encirclement of the Ruhr. (14) (See Map B)

Corps not shown
To reach its objective, Third Army planned to envelope Frankfurt with the XII Corps from its Oppenheim Bridgehead, after which it would advance toward the northeast. The VIII Corps left of the XII Corps was ordered to cross the Rhine south of the Lahn River and attack directly east. The XX Corps would regroup and prepare to follow through the bridgehead secured by either the VIII or XII Corps (14-A) (See Map B)

Plan not shown
In the zone of 1st Army, General Hodges planned a three Corps assault. The VII Corps was to seize the remainder of the line of the Sieg River; the III Corps was to attack southeast astride the Cologne-Frankfurt highway and capture Limburg and the high ground north of that city; V Corps was directed to clear the area between the zone of III Corps on its left and Lahn river. All three Corps were then to be prepared to advance toward Geissen and Kassel. (14-B) (See Map B)

(13) A-1, P. 41; (14) A-1, P. 41; (14-A) A-1, P. 43; (14-B) A-1, P. 44

On the 26 March 45, elements of XII Corps of the 3d Army moved directly on Frankfurt and entered the outskirts of the city that day without major opposition. By the 28th of March, contact with elements of III Corps of 1st Army and armored elements of 3d Army was made in the vicinity of Geissen. This closed the Frankfurt, Limburg trap. (SEE Map B)

by whom
The next day contact was made with 9th Armored elements of V Corps of the 1st Army, thus splitting in two, the Frankfurt-Limburg pocket (15)

Motorized and Shermans
Corps not shown
On the 28th of March 45, in the zone of the 1st Army, the 7th Armored division of III Corps had cleared Geissen of enemy forces and was about to make contact with elements of the XII Corps of the 3d Army. The V Corps of the 1st Army had contacted elements of the XX Corps northeast of Weisbaden. Behind these armored spearheads of the 1st Army, motorized Infantry units were moving rapidly forward mopping up pockets of bypassed enemy troops. (16) (See Map B)

In six days of operation, the 12th Army Group had extended its Remagen Bridgehead to a penetration of about sixty-five miles.

where are you expanding bridgehead?
On 28 March 45, General Bradley issued instructions as follows: 21st Army Group was to expand its bridgehead north of the Ruhr with the objective of gaining contact with the 12th Army Group; the 12th Army Group was to advance northeast and make contact with the 9th Army of the 21st Army Group in the Paderborn Kassel (1st Army and 3d Army) area. The emphasis shifted the main effort from the 21st Army Group to the 12th Army Group in the center because of the swift advance and excellent highways in the 12th Army Zone. By the 29th of March, the 3d Armored Division of VII Corps was sent directly north from Marburg and in two days, it advanced forward within three miles of Paderborn.

(17) (See Map B)

(15) A-1, P. 45 (16) A-1, P. 48, (17) A-1, P. 48

On 31 March 45, a breakthrough by XIX Corps of the 9th Army was finally achieved and as a result, its elements contacted units of the 1st Army at Lippstadt and, at the same time, elements of XX Corps of 3d Army had reached Kassel, thus encircling the Ruhr district containing the entire ^{German} Army Group "B" which constituted the bulk of the German forces in the west. (18) (See Map B)

Reduction of the Ruhr Pocket

On 1 April 45, the Ruhr pocket was formed as a result of the link-up of the U.S. 9th Army and U.S. 1st Army at Lippstadt, approximately seventy miles east of the Rhine river. In order to prevent enemy forces from ~~any possible~~ escape¹² to the east and northeast, it was planned by the Supreme Commander to divide the forces of both armies. One force was to drive east in order to effect a junction with the Russian forces at the Elbe river; the western force was to continue operations in clearing the Ruhr pocket. (See Map C)

The Ruhr district approximately 4000 miles square, ~~in area~~ lying generally between the Sieg river on the south and the Lippe river on the north was to be compressed in coordinated efforts by forces of the 9th Army to the north of the Ruhr and forces of the 1st Army to the south of the district generally along the Sieg river. (19)

Let us now consider the operations designed to reduce the Ruhr pocket. On 2 April 45, representatives from both armies were to meet at 1st Army Headquarters in order to devise and coordinate the efforts of both forces on the Ruhr pocket. (20) It was contemplated to use two Corps from each of the armies to reduce the Ruhr while the remaining forces would continue their drive eastward to thwart any possible enemy escape and (18) A-11, P. 269; (19) A-11, P. 269; (20) A-11, P. 270.

to link up with Russian forces as previously stated. (21)

The plan drawn up was rather simple in structure. It provided for a converging attack by two Corps of 9th Army and two Corps of the 1st Army aimed directly at the heart of the Ruhr district. The boundaries for both armies were established as follows: the 9th Army boundary was to run generally along the Ruhr north to Ruthen and thence east to Paderborn; 1st Army boundary established as running generally along the ^{west bank} bank south of the Ruhr and extending south of Coblenz and thence running east and northeast along the line Geissen, Paderborn. The densely populated and built-up industrial area north of the Ruhr was given to the 9th Army and the rugged terrain to the south given to the 1st Army. (22) (See Map C)

See geographical features?

XVI Corps of 9th Army was to attack south to the Ruhr river from its present position north of the Herne Canal, while XIX Corps minus was to drive southwest from the Hamm, Lippstadt area to the Army's southern boundary along the Ruhr river. (23)

Concurrently, a drive by the 18th Airborne Corps and the 3d Corps of 1st Army were to make a coordinated attack north and northwest respectively from their present positions; thereby affecting a junction with 9th Army elements along the Ruhr river. When this was accomplished, the forces would then drive eastward to the Elbe river to assist the remainder of the forces of both armies in closing to the Elbe river. (24)

(See Map C)

(21) A-1, P. 69; (22) A-1, P. 69; (23) A-11, P. 272

(24) A-1, P. 69

The XVI Corps of 9th Army, pressing its forces north of the Ruhr river, was composed from east to west of the 79th, 35th, and 75th Infantry Divisions. In addition to its use in reducing the Ruhr pocket¹, In the XIX Corps pocket along the northwest wall between Hamm and Lippstadt were the 95th Infantry division, 83d Infantry Division protecting the south flank of the Corps along a twenty-mile front from Lippstadt to the vicinity of Hamm, and the 15th Cavalry Group screening the Corps flanks from Hamm to eighteen miles east. (25 (See Map C)

In both the XVI and XIX Corps zones, small and automatic weapons fire resisted the advances of its Infantry units but German artillery was comparatively light. The small amount of fire was usually harrassing and interdictory in nature and was generally delivered against front line elements and forward road intersections. However, the Ruhr district was heavily supplied with heavy anti-aircraft for air defense of its great industrial plants. The employment of these guns in a ground role often presented bitter defense² which was crushed only by the skillful fighting of our troops.

On 4 April 45, 9th Army reverted to the control of the 12th Army Group, thereby engaging all troops of the Army Group in the reduction of the Ruhr and the drive eastward to the Elbe river. On 7 April 45, the city of Hamm was cleared by the 95th division of XIX Corps and by 10 April 1945, Essen, "the Pittsburgh of Germany," fell to the 79th division without a struggle. By 13 April 45, 9th Army's role in reducing the Ruhr pocket had reached the mopping up stage. All resistance in its sector was easily cleared by 14 April 45, and its units were now consolidating the positions on the north bank of the Ruhr while waiting to

(25) A-11, P. 272

contact advancing forces of the 1st Army. On this day, the Ruhr pocket was split into, as the 79th Infantry division of XIX Corps and the 8th Infantry Division of 18th Airborne Corps of 1st Army established contact north of Hagen (26) (See Map C)

Paralleling the northern drive by 9th Army units in the reduction of the pocket were elements of the 1st Army to the south, driving north and northwest. On 30 Mar 45, the 18th Airborne Corps was relieved from attachment to the 2d British Army and had been attached to the 12th Army Group operating in the 1st Army zone for the purpose of conducting operations in reducing the pocket. Therefore, on ²~~3~~ April 45, the 18th Airborne Corps composed of the 78th and 8th Infantry Divisions held a line generally along the Sieg river on a sixty-seven mile front ready to make its attack northward. Because of the rapidly expanding units of the 7th Corps to the north-east, it was felt the addition of this Corps would affect better coordination to reduce the Ruhr. Instructions received by the 18th Airborne Corps were that it was to continue operations in the Ruhr district until contact with 9th Army elements was established, at which time, it was to be prepared to release the 8th and 87th Infantry divisions to Army control. (27)

Enemy attempts thus far to break out of the pocket had somewhat been isolated and an attempt to make a coordinated attack to open an escape corridor from the pocket had not been made. However, information received seemed to indicate that the enemy at this time was attempting to establish a defense line northeast and east beyond Paderborn and Kassel. Increased action in this direction necessitated therefore, (26) A-11, P. 278 (27) A-1, P. 52

a quick move in that direction before the enemy could fortify a strong defensive position in that area. (28)

*not regular
of Ruhr pocket*
As a result of this situation, 1st Army Headquarters announced on 3 April 45, that it was to ^{who} attack without delay. Splitting its forces, the V Corps and VII Corps containing six divisions two of which were armored were assigned the mission of driving east in order to eliminate this possible German threat of reorganizing defensive positions beyond Paderborn, while the 18th Airborne Corps and III Corps of 1st Army containing 8 Divisions one of which was armored, were to launch their attacks north and northwest to eliminate the Ruhr pocket in conjunction with 9th Army units. (29)

*not copying from
page 69*
By 5 April 45, regrouping of 1st Army units was completed and ^{they} were ready to continue their drives both eastward and northwest. On 6 April 1945, 97th Infantry Division became operative in the XVIII Corps area and had its three regiments in line from the mouth of Sieg river to the town of Stromberg, the 87th Infantry Division with two regiments along the line of the Sieg river from Dattenfeld to Brachbach, the 8th Infantry division with its units generally disposed between Siegen and Schameder. In the zone of the III Corps, the 99th Infantry division had its two regiments in line just north of Schameder and southwest to Schmallenberg; the 7th Armored division on a narrow front facing Schmallenberg, and the 9th Infantry division with its three regiments in line extending right to Brilon. (30) See Map C

(28) A-1, P. 69; (29) A-1, P. 57 (30) A-1, P. 69

At 0500 hours, 6 April 45, the XVIII Airborne Corps launched its attack and units of the ^{78th Div} ~~87th Infantry~~ (wrong unit) Division made an approximate gain of two miles north of the Sieg river. Other units against moderated enemy resistance also made slight gains. (31)

Substantial progress was likewise being maintained by III Corps Elements. The enemy resistance was rather slight during this period and as such gains by both Corps were steadily mounting that by the 14th of April 45, the 79th Infantry division of the XVIII Airborne Corps established contact with elements of the 9th Army in the vicinity of Hagen while at the same time, III Corps elements had reached the north bank of the Lenne river, thus splitting the Ruhr pocket in two. On the following day, the breakthrough made the previous day had materialized considerably as the 8th Infantry division established contact with 9th Army units north of the Ruhr river. On 16 April 45, enemy resistance in the eastern sector of the pocket had ceased. The entire area of about eighty miles in diameter had been overrun, leaving only mopping up operations and by 18 April 45, all enemy organized resistance had ended. (32)

It must be mentioned at this time that Allied Air Forces contributed greatly to the success of this operation. In preparation for ground attacks, the interdiction of all rail lines surrounding the Ruhr was successfully effected. In the month of March alone, 31000 tons of bomb were placed on the Ruhr, neutralizing enemy air fields, reserve concentration areas, communication centers, and supply

(31) A-1, P. 69; (32) A-1, P. 75

installations. Further, the Allied Air Force served the dual purpose of demoralizing the enemy troops before their entry into battle, and disrupting the routes necessary for their movement. Constant attacks on communications prevented withdrawal of enemy troops from the Ruhr when encirclement was imminent. The destruction of motor transport immobilized many enemy units and contributed to the capture of thousands of prisoners. (33)

ANALYSIS CRITICISM

Summary

The entire operation was characterized by speed, boldness, and determination on the part of all commanders and units. Attacking on a two-hundred and fifty mile front, three Army Groups in a period of about three weeks passed some seventy divisions across the Rhine river. Advancing one-hundred and twenty miles across the Rhine deep into the heart of Germany, the Army Groups had completely encircled the bulk of German forces in the west under command of Field Marshal Model of approximately 325,000 troops among whom were included thirty generals and one admiral. During this period, the enemy, in addition to losing his most important industrial area, had lost in killed and wounded 50,000 men while the Allies' loss was approximately one-twelfth this amount. (34)

NB O

Flexibility in planning, ^{and} unity of command, whereby the seizure and exploitation of opportunities resulted, and the rapidity with which the units of the 12th Army Group carried out its assigned tasks contributed immensely (33) A-2, P. 98 (34) A-2, P. 105

to Allied success in this operation. Lack of confusion for such a large-scale operation was the result of identical tactical training, organization, and mutual confidence on the part of all Allied Commanders.

The enemy's characteristic refusal to admit tactical defeat led to his eventual downfall. Instead of making a strategic withdrawal as was indicated to be the only logical course to follow, he chose to fight a hopeless battle with his thinly held, disorganized forces. Moreover, his lack of mobility due to lack of fuel and to the destruction of his motor transport by the Air Forces rendered him incapable of rushing reinforcements to threatened areas. (35)

Surprise was achieved by the Allied Armies because of the speed and rapidity with which they moved.

During this operation, infantry commanders and even their division artillery advisors were inclined to forget that the field artillery support available to the infantry was not limited to the direct support artillery battalion or even to division artillery. As a result, Corps artillery for reinforcing fires often arrived too late to be of value. (36)

Isolation of a large battle area and destruction of enemy communications are essential before launching a coordinated large-scale operation. (37)

LESSONS

The following are highlights of lessons emphasized:

1. Destruction of enemy communication centers
(35) A-2, P. 102 (36) A-1, P. 104 (37) A-10, P. 111

*not true
as stated*
and isolation of a large battle area are essential for success before launching a large-scale operation.

poor
2. A prompt evaluation of the situation and an immediate request for artillery support is essential to success.

3. Concentration of forces at the enemy's weakest point, a basic principle of war, is essential for success in any operation.

4. Successful prosecution of war requires:

poor
less good
(a) Rapid and thorough organization of all available resources.

(b) Prior determination of lines of operation and the utilization of means at hand set in a manner which takes into account the geographical and strategical factors of the battle area.

5. The element of surprise still remains a basic principle of war, and if achieved, can oftentimes spell defeat into victory.

6. Success in battle is dependent upon wise, long-range planning, efficient preparation and able execution.