

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia.

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1947 - 1948

THE ALLIED WINTER OFFENSIVE IN WESTERN EUROPE
(8 NOVEMBER - 14 DECEMBER 1944)
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: OFFENSIVE WINTER CAMPAIGN
OF COMBINED ALLIED ARMIES

First Lieutenant Clinton G. Merrill, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction and General Situation.....	3
The Specific Situation on the Western Front.....	8
The Offensive Opens.....	9
The Conduct of The Campaign.....	10
The Conclusion.....	13
Analysis and Criticism.....	13
Lessons.....	14
Map A - Overall European Situation	
Map B - Specific Western Front Situation	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ✓ A The War (Sixth Year) by Edgar McInnis, P 3-82 (TIS Library)
- B Biennial Report of The Chief of Staff, The U S Army (1 July 1943 to 30 June 1945) (TIS Library)
- C Atlas (A supplement to Biennial Report of The Chief of Staff, The U S Army (1 July 1943 to 30 June 1945) (TIS Library)
- D Effect of Air Power on Military Operations (Western Europe), Air Effects Committee, 12th Army Group (TIS Library)
- E Strategy of Campaign in Western Europe, 1944-45, from Airborne File (TIS Library)
- ✓ F History of World War II, by Francis Trevelyan Miller (TIS Library)
- G Field Artillery Journal, February 1945 (TIS Library)
- H Destruction of the German Army in Western Europe. Headquarters 12th Army Group, Chapter 6, page 16 (TIS Library)
- ✓ I Top Secret, by Ralph Ingersoll (Personal possession of Author)
- ✓ J The Strange Alliance, by John R. Dean (Personal possession of Author)
- ✓ K A Record of the War, 21st Quarter, by Philip Graves (TIS Library)
- L The Infantry Journal, March 1947, page 17
- ✓ M New York Times Editorial, 10 October 1944 (Personal Possession of Author)
- N Yank Magazine, 9 November 1944

OPERATIONS OF THE ALLIED ARMIES ON THE GERMAN
WESTERN FRONT FROM 8 NOV - 14 DEC 44
(WINTER OFFENSIVE DURING RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SITUATION

On the 8th of November 1944, the allied armies opened a winter offensive against Germany's western front. The "rat race" across France by the Combined American, British, Canadian, and French armies under General Eisenhower had resulted in lengthened supply lines and wider frontages to such an extent that regrouping, resupplying and replanning had involved unavoidable delay. (1)

The feeling of the allied world during the late fall of 1944 was one of disappointment and frustration. Hopes for a quick, sweeping victory had been high and plans had already been made for redeployment of our war effort to the Pacific Theater. Russian armies in the east, as well as allied forces in the west had made tremendous advances into German held territory against what seemed to be a disintegrating enemy. (2) Now we were faced with a long battle of attrition before the final defeat of Germany. Herr Goebbels claimed that German arms had made a successful withdrawal to the rear and that the enemy would now be destroyed at the Siegfried Line. (3)

Malinowski's Russian Army Group was advancing in Hungary but was still a long way from Germany proper. A stalemate existed in Italy, while allied armies in the west were hung up on Germany's West wall defenses. (4) American military personnel in Europe, who had been concerned over the possibility of redeployment to the Japanese war zones, began seeing cartoons in service publications picturing the plight of Pacific veterans preparing for transfer from tropical jungles to European pill-boxes. (5)

Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) had already prepared an estimate of the situation. In addition to British, French, Canadian and other allied forces, the United States had over 3,000,000 troops on the continent. (6) A new allocation of manpower for combat

(1) A, p. 11; (2) M; (3) M; (4) A, p. 12; (5) N; (6) B, p. 194.

had been made. As a result of previous air force and technical force priorities, Army Ground Forces were finding it impossible to secure suitable replacement material for the large losses of extensive combat. New priorities had been set up in reception center classification while a screening of air, technical, and service forces was under way to discover eligible replacements for our combat units. With increased air superiority, thousands of men heretofore needed for anti-aircraft batteries and for Air Corps maintenance were made available as infantry reinforcements. (7) Service schools, training centers and administrative headquarters were searched for combat serviceable fighting material. As a result, unhappy men with high AGCT scores and healthy bodies began streaming through replacement depots to combat divisions. (8) Some 8,000 anti-aircraft officers were hurried through 6 weeks of infantry training and then detailed as infantry officers. (9) Many of the replacements received during the fall and winter of 1944-45 were obvious misfits who had probably been transferred from their previous organization with sighs of relief. This latter aspect was of detrimental value to morale. On the other hand, the majority of the non-infantry trained replacements soon became veterans and performed satisfactorily. In addition to the special procurement just mentioned, normal replacement through training centers and through the rehabilitation of wounded veterans was speeded up and of the eleven infantry divisions still in the Zone of the Interior, nine of them sent their infantry regiments to Europe for the attack on the West Wall. (10) In anticipation of the drawn-out winter campaign, a system of rotation was established and plans for rest camps and tours to Paris or England were prepared. At the end of October some units had been in constant contact with the enemy since D day in Normandy. (11)

From a theater standpoint, supplies were not yet critical but delivery of these supplies to Army areas had run into difficulties causing a dis-

(7, 8) L; (9) Personal knowledge; B, p. 171; (10) B, p. 194; (11) B, p. 193

torted picture. The long distances involved, the lack of adequate port facilities, the destruction of the French railroad system, and black market operations accounted for unexpected losses and a large dead weight of supplies which were in the theater but not yet in the hands of the using units. (12) The famous Red Ball trucking operation from Normandy to the front was operating efficiently but was overburdened. Upon the capture of Antwerp with its harbor facilities another truck route was established from there. Time was still needed, however, to build up the terrific tonnages necessary for successful breaching of the Siegfried Line. General Eisenhower asked General Marshall to stimulate the American home front for the tremendous task of supplying his ammunition requirements. He estimated that we needed 6,000,000 artillery shells and 2,000,000 mortar shells per month for the attack on Germany's West Wall defenses. The necessary engineer equipment, winter clothing and vehicle maintenance supplies, for a variety of cold weather operations against fortified positions, were astronomical. (13)

The problems of military government and civilian control now began to harass the effective tactical and strategic operation of the allied armies. Military leaders in Belgium were ready to enforce martial law while British troops were fighting Greek partisans in the streets of Athens. (14) Fraternization, with its danger to tactical security, had raised its ugly head in those small sectors of Germany now held by allied forces. (15) German "civilians" were crossing and recrossing our front lines nightly in many sectors. In addition to these problems, black market operations reached large proportions and made it necessary for the home front and our overburdened transportation system to provide enough Class I supplies, Class III supplies, and Class IV tobacco for the black market and the personnel in the Communications Zone, while still furnishing enough for the fighting armies to carry on the war. (16)

(12) E, p. 17; (13) E, p. 193; (14) A, p. 23; (15)(16) Personal knowledge.

Air power had gone into high gear. We now had, not only air superiority when and where we wanted it, but what should be called "air monopoly". We were capable of delivering a saturation bomb load of 5,000 tons on a single target at one time. Our new 6 ton bombs were 9 times as effective as our outmoded 2 ton bombs. We could put more planes in the air during 12 hours of daylight than Germany possessed on all fronts put together and could deliver a greater tonnage of bombs to a single German city in one day than London had received during any one year of the war. During October of 1944, we proceeded to do just that. (17)

Weather conditions were unfavorable for offensive action, to say the least. This was one of the wettest and coldest winters that Europe had experienced in many years. Snow, cold, sleet, rain and the ensuing mud virtually halted the offensive use of armor except as self propelled artillery. Overcast skies and storms hampered air support, both tactical and strategic. The unprecedented severity of the winter strained our supplies of cold weather clothing and equipment. Well fortified and well concealed positions, further protected by anti-tank and anti-personnel mines; wire entanglements and camouflaged villages; snipers and vicious counter attacks made infantry progress unusually hazardous, physically uncomfortable and relatively slow. (18) It was the "trench foot" period when some authorities considered that trench foot casualties should be awarded the Purple Heart. (19)

The German army consisted of well over 300 divisions. About 200 of these were engaged on their eastern front against the Russians. With 20 odd divisions committed in Italy and with 10 or 12 in outpost garrisons, approximately 70 divisions faced the allied forces in the west. No strategic reserve of trained troops were left even after air corps and naval arms had been depleted to fill up the ranks of combat divisions.

(17) A, p. 24; (18) B, p. 194; Personal knowledge; (19) Personal knowledge; (20)

New drafts were made of men heretofore ineligible for military service while a Home Guard composed of all remaining men from 15 to 60 years of age was formed as a last resort. (20) (See Map A)

German strategy involved delaying action against Russian troops, holding the stalemate in Italy, holding action followed by slow withdrawal in the southern part of the western front and an intense holding action in the northern part of the western front where the greatest threat lay. The area just north and south of Aachen was opposite the Cologne plain which led directly into the heart of the Reich. Here in October, the American 1st and 9th Armies had penetrated but not pierced the Siegfried Line, last bastion of the German defense west of the Rhine itself. (21) (See Map B) German plans called for holding fast in this area and delaying on other fronts while formulating a decisive counter offensive to split and destroy allied forces in the northwest. Tied in with all Nazi strategy at this time lay the hope for a long enough delay to enable them to snatch victory from defeat through the use of new weapons. On 7 November, German V2 bombs were first fired on London and Antwerp. (22) The German military command now seemed free from the "intuition plans" of Adolph Hitler and began to operate efficiently according to accepted military principles. Organization and execution of defenses, delaying actions and withdrawals, attacks and counter attacks were carried out with an economy of force and an efficiency of movement not evident since ^{the} early days of the war. As usual, their intelligence work was excellent and their knowledge concerning allied identifications, location and strength was almost perfect. (23)

The situation in the east against the Russians (see Map A) was not yet as serious from a military standpoint as that in the west, but from a political and supply viewpoint was more serious. To Nazidom, the over-run of her satellite and buffer states by Russian Bolshevism was a calamity.

(20) ; (21) A, p. 12; (22) H. p. 16; (23) G.

Most of these buffer states had been furnishing supplies and manpower for the German army. Severe fighting was taking place in Hungary and Czechoslovakia where Germany was sparing no effort to hold back the might of Russian arms. (24)

SPECIFIC SITUATION ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The ground situation on 7 November on the western front was as follows: (See Map A) On the south the German army had room to maneuver in Alsace and Lorraine. Allied advances here would enter the upper reaches of the Rhine, which were well fortified. Antwerp had just been taken on the North opening a new supply base for the allied armies. The British 2d Army and the Canadian 1st Army faced the Germans in this area. The American 3d Army was opposite Metz while the American 7th Army and the First French Army were in the Vosges Mountains. The allied armies were lined up opposite the north-south German lines, from north to south, as follows: (25)

- 1 - Canadian 1st Army
- 2 - British 2d Army
- 3 - American 9th Army
- 4 - American 1st Army
- 5 - American 3d Army
- 6 - American 7th Army
- 7 - First French Army

Allied strategy, in preparation for the final all out assault on the Reich called for a constant and increasing pressure on German defenses at all points in order to deny them time to fully organize the west wall and to deprive them of the time to adequately train their recent drafts of new men. (26) In line with this strategy a general offensive was planned to begin on or about 8 November 1944. (27) Some advisors recommended a massed attack on a narrow front. The American 3d Army Commander in par-

(24) A, p. 54; (25) F, p. 73; (26) E, p. 18; (27) A, p. 28.

ticular favored this action. Ralph Ingersoll, in his best seller "Top Secret" claimed that the main supply effort during this period went to General Montgomery's forces in the north for an attempted flanking of the Siegfried line, and that any American successes were due to "aggressive defensive action" rather than to an approved offensive. (28) At any rate, proponents of mass on a narrow front were overruled, as it was felt that in order to make such an attack, it would be necessary to weaken other sectors to the point where enemy counterattack might endanger our overall success. The German breakthrough in mid December helped to prove the validity of this argument.

THE OFFENSIVE OPENS (See Map B)

The offensive opened on 8 November as planned with the American 3d Army jumping off towards Metz. On the 14th, the British 2d Army with the Canadian 1st Army attacked in the north while the American 7th Army attacked in the Vosges Mountains. On the 15th November the 1st French Army started for the Belfort Gap and next day the right flank of the British 2d Army together with the American 1st and 9th Armies began a coordinated assault against the defenses guarding the Cologne plain. (29) The timing of these assaults indicated the strategy of the allied tactical plan. Successive efforts were made to draw the enemy toward their flanks prior to the main effort in the vital area opposite Cologne. (30) The Germans had been particularly concerned over an attempt to flank the west wall by the British in the north and in an effort to make any such advance as difficult as possible, had blown up dikes and dams, flooding large parts of the area. In the south where they had room to maneuver, a slow delaying action was fought, while in the sectors just north and south of Aachen a terrific struggle developed, advances being measured in yards with each yard being bitterly contested. (31)

((28) I & A, p. 30; (29) A, p. 28; (30) A, p. 29; (31) A, p. 30.

CONDUCT OF THE CAMPAIGN
(See Map B)

The 3d Army, started with three divisions toward Metz and gradually added additional power until by 11 November, 8 divisions had been committed, two of them armored. As they began to push on ~~or~~ around Metz, the Germans counterattacked the edges of the arc without success. Rather than commit more troops to an area now threatened with isolation, the Germans retired slowly to the Siegfried Line leaving a rear guard in Metz itself. Metz fell under a frontal assault on the 18th of November and two days later resistance ceased in this area except for the outlying forts, some of which held out until the 13th of December. Third Army troops bypassed the forts and continued on toward the Saar region astride the Moselle river. (32)

On the 14th of November, the American 7th Army advanced on a 10 mile front into the Vosges Mountains, covering the flank of the 3d Army and attacking the northern flank of the German defending forces. (33) On the next day, the 1st French Army pushed off for the Belfort Gap in the southern part of the Vosges Mountains. Advancing rapidly, they entered Belfort on the 20th of November and immediately struck out for the Rhine in a sweep to the north along the Alsace plain. On the 22d of November, the American 7th Army broke through the mountains into Strasbourg where part of their forces began a converging movement with the 1st French Army. By mid December the closure was completed containing a pocket approximately 1000 square kilometers in area in the vicinity of Colmar. (34)

The main effort of the 7th, combined with, and along side of the 3d Army continued moving irresistably north-east against slowly crumbling German defenses. (35)

Operations in the north, meanwhile, had opened on the 14th of November when the British left flank moved into the offensive along a 40 mile front. Behind this area lay the northern flank of the Siegfried Line.

(32) A, p. 32; (33) A, p. 33; (34) A, p. 33; (35) B, p. 195.

This was the area where dikes had been breeched and dams blown in order to inundate as much of the area as possible hoping to delay and halt a British advance. By the 4th of December, the British and Canadians had cleared the west ~~h~~ank of the Maas River.

The mission of the British left flank was to engage as large an enemy force as possible while their right flank, together with the American 9th and 1st Armies made a coordinated attack just north of Aachen. This main attack began on the 16th of November preceeded by the most intense tactical air support since the breakthrough at St. Lo. (36)

Air-ground coordination together with troop safety had been assured by a series of measures taken by both air and ground forces to insure maximum accuracy with minimum casualties to friendly troops. Most of our aircraft were equipped to receive vertical beam signals plus signals from two marker beacons. The marker beacons kept the planes on their course until signals were received from a vertical beam, this indicating their exact position in relation to friendly front lines and bomb release points. In addition, ground control stations were established along the front for direct radio communication with the planes in the air. Ground forces placed two huge white panel markers, shaped like arrows on the boundary between 1st and 9th Army pointing toward the front. The first of these was 19 miles to the rear near Liege while the second was 4000 yards in rear of the front near Aachen. A line of cerise and orange panels, each 36 feet by 7 feet were laid down parallel to the front, 500 yards to the rear at a density of 4 per mile. A line of eleven very low altitude captive balloons (borrowed from ^{the}RAF) were placed 4000 yards in rear of the front at an altitude of 2000 feet with 300 yards between balloons. Four batteries of 90-mm AA guns, from positions 8000 yards to the rear, fired ~~a~~ simultaneous red smoke shell bursts ^{each} every 15 seconds at a height of 2000 feet below the altitude of successive bomber formations and above the

(36) D, p. 106.

captive balloons. These AA batteries were tied in directly by wire and radio to 9th Tactical Air Force control and was the most effective coordinating measure of all. Many of the captive balloons were shot down by enemy fire while the panels could not always be seen by high altitude planes. Two thousand seven hundred and fifty bombers and fighters participated directly in the two hour preparatory mission, while heavy bombers of the American 8th Air Force contributed with area support. (37)

At the completion of the air mission, ground troops began a grim struggle as German forces contested every yard of advance. The thick defenses of the Siegfried Line, aided by the weather, hampered the offensive use of tanks and grounded our tactical air force. The taking of each small hamlet necessitated a coordinated attack by at least a reinforced battalion. A day of good flying weather plus a brilliant concerted action by a combination of British and 9th Army troops finally encircled and captured the city of Geilenkirchen on the 19 of November. This city was the key defense point on the northern sector opposite the Roer River, while Eschweiler, the key southern defense point fell to 1st Army troops on the 22d of November. The Germans considered the Roer River a strong defensive line. Normally a narrow stream, control of several dams further south allowed them to flood the river valley at will to as much as 2 miles in width at some places. To hold this line 12 German divisions of good quality, half of them armored, had been massed on the front between Hurtgen and Geilenkirchen. Each small gain in this area had to be held against immediate and successive counterattacks before the position could be properly consolidated. (38) In spite of this bitter resistance, the 9th Army pushed through 5 miles of defenses to the Roer by 22 November to a position just below Juelich. The 1st Army forced a withdrawal of German troops across the swollen Roer on the night of 10 December while 9th Army troops were rolling up the west bank of the river

(37) D, p. 107; (38) A, p. 36.

to the town of Tinnich. (39)

CONCLUSION

By the 14th of December, the Germans had lost almost all the area left them for maneuver. In the Saar region and in the lower Rhineland they were under powerful pressure which would mean disaster if they yielded to it. In the north, the allies had reached the Roer but would need to pause before continuing across this formidable barrier. German arms still controlled the dams on the Roer and the stage was now set for a German counter offensive. (40)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The allied offensive, as powerful as it had been, had not succeeded in engaging all of the German forces committed to the western front. Favored by weather, terrain and fortifications, Von Runstedt had succeeded in keeping the superior power of allied forces from a break-through or a decisive victory. The original German strategy of delay, while forming physical counter measures had been successful. The allied offensive had cost the enemy over 150,000 casualties but their own losses approximated the same figure. As expected, the battle had been one of attrition and at this stage could be better afforded by the allies. In line with allied strategy, continued pressure had been maintained on German defenses while large stock piles of men and material were being readied for the final blows against the Reich. These final blows were now to be delayed by the German break-through in the Ardennes.

We shall never know if the alternative plan of massing our available resources on a narrow front would have been successful from the standpoint of complete theater success. Aggressive military tacticians may continue to claim that an opportunity was lost for an earlier victory while more conservative strategists will favor the more assured success guaranteed by

(39) Personal knowledge; (40) A, p. 38.

the necessary buildup of power for successful and complete exploitation of moderate or unexpected successes. The sudden seizure of the Remagen bridge across the Rhine at a later date would have been a futile success if we had lacked the means for complete exploitation in force.

Much stress has been placed on the unfavorable weather condition prevalent during this campaign. If it had been possible to make efficient use of tactical air support and armor, there is little doubt but that allied arms would have been solidly entrenched along the west bank of the Rhine by mid December. The German break-through in the Ardennes would not have taken place.

LESSONS

1. Fortified lines, such as the Siegfried Line are successful as a delaying factor or as a jump off position for attack. They will not halt a determined enemy.

2. Armored units are seriously handicapped in their primary role of attack and exploitation when attacking an organized fortified position.

3. In long operations during uncomfortable weather, rotation of troops with provision for rest and recreation is important to morale. With this in mind, the troops necessary for successful completion of this type of operation must be increased over the normal.

4. A high level system of concurrent training or of retraining is necessary for the changing manpower needs during total war.

5. Confidence in close tactical air support must be built up in front line troops similar to that now enjoyed by infantry-artillery teams. Much time was lost in the attack opposite Cologne between the last pre-attack bombing and the actual jump off of ground troops. The bomb safety line could have been much closer to friendly troops and the subsequent tactical support, partly affected by bad weather, left much to be desired.

6. Overall supply estimates for operations in battle torn areas must include food and fuel requirements for loss and waste due to civilian demands - both legal and illegal. It must be borne in mind that unusual equipment, in short issue, such as sleeping bags, shoe pacs, field coats and quarter ton vehicles have a "human" tendency to lose their impetus from rear to front.

7. Defense of a well organized fortified position enables the defender to use an economy of force not possible in other deliberately prepared positions.

8. Contact with questionable, unfriendly or enemy civilians, of either sex, leads to loss of tactical security and endangers strategic security.

9. Long supply lines result in a terrific dead weight of supplies which are present but not presently usable. Experiences in supply of American armies in Europe point to air supply from point of issue directly to point of use as the ultimate solution.

10. Air strikes, like artillery fire, are capable of killing an enemy in the open. A well entrenched enemy is merely "neutralized", and that, only during the period of actual bombardment. Similar to artillery support, tactical air support must be closely followed and should be continuously on call for maximum results.