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Allied Hindsight

Nobody tried to deny it. The Germans had achieved perhaps the most valuable of military advantages—surprise. How did they do it? Allied officers gave some obvious reasons, but critics guessed at some that were less obvious.

Everyone recognized that the weather enabled the Germans to concentrate their divisions in the Eifel Mountains without being subjected to the usual, thorough-going Allied aerial reconnaissance. The Allies knew that the Fifth Panzer Army, under Gen. Hansel Eccard Mannteuffel, had moved into the Cologne Plain and they expected it to be used to counter Allied drives there. But apparently it was suddenly shifted south. Since the road net is close and the distance short, the Germans could accomplish the movement rapidly and secretly.

From SHAEF, Joseph S. Evans Jr. of NEWSWEEK cabled the following comment:

“Allied information does not seem to have been at fault but the interpretation of that information does seem to have been. Reportedly, the Allies knew the Germans were massing strength but they seem to have failed to change their own dispositions to meet a possible attack. They apparently thought the Germans were massing to meet an Allied attack. Therefore, the Allies complacently went ahead with their own offensive plans while the Germans counted on and initially capitalized on that complacency.”

Another consideration was that such surprises are inherent in modern war. Armored and motorized forces can be shifted with such speed from one sector to another that no general can predict the exact spot for an attack, even if he knows where the enemy is concentrated.

In this case, of course, the Germans were aided by the strategy that had spread out the Allied armies over a long front (see General Fuller's *War Tides*).

Furthermore, the Germans themselves had tipped their hands four days before the opening of the offensive. On Dec. 12, Lt. Gen. Kurt Dittmar, official radio commentator of the German High Command, broadcast this statement: “For the first time in a long time, the German military command has, at the points of immediate decision, felt to a considerable extent free of the shortage of men and material which had formerly weighed so often on all its decisions.” Stripped of its military phraseology, this amounted to an open boast that the Nazis now had reserves for offensive action.

Why Nazis Caught Allies Off Base: Not One but Many Serious Errors

Everybody was wrong. That conclusion emerged last week as the detailed picture of Allied miscalculations in the war against Germany began to come into

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focus. The setback in Belgium was only part of it. The roots of the trouble went back to last spring and the highest Allied echelon of command—the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

At that time the staff's most reliable intelligence reports indicated that Germany had only relatively small quantities of tanks and heavy artillery. A feeling of optimism, which led Chief of Staff George C. Marshall to think that the war would probably be over by Christmas, permeated the Allied High Command. As a result, it allocated more shipping to the Pacific and slashed tank, heavy artillery, and ammunition production.

Whom to Blame: Naturally enough, this grave error of judgment carried over into Supreme Headquarters in France. General of the Army Eisenhower prepared against a counterattack in the Ardennes region, but not against a full-fledged counteroffensive. As for the slip that led to the break-through itself, what possibly happened was that front-line units had a good idea of the enemy strength, but by the time their reports had been coordinated and passed through successive commands to top intelligence levels they had lost their punch.

The responsibility for the mistake could not be pinned on any one scapegoat because all had shared in it. In his State of the Union message (see page 30) President Roosevelt said of Eisenhower: "He has my complete confidence." Nor did the belated announcement of the shift of the American Ninth and the bulk of the American First Armies to Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery's command imply a rebuke to Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, who was thus left with only the Third Army plus one division of the Seventh in his Twelfth Army Group command. The explanation was simply that the German offensive had severed Twelfth Army Group communications and a lightning change was necessary. It was actually made on the second day of the Nazi drive and presumably was temporary.

The German offensive did, however, raise the fundamental question of reorganizing Supreme Headquarters either to give Eisenhower a deputy commander or to free him from political and administrative duties so that he could devote full attention to synchronizing all the armies on the western front. The man most frequently mentioned as Eisenhower's new aide was Field Marshal Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, now Allied commander in the Mediterranean and generally rated one of the outstanding soldiers produced by the war.

What Next: Supreme Headquarters expects Rundstedt to launch another offensive somewhere between the North Sea coast of Holland and the Swiss border. The seriousness of this prospect was underscored by a trip Prime Minister Churchill made to France, where he conferred with Gen. Charles de Gaulle, Montgomery, and Eisenhower. Even now the counterblows which the Allies are throwing against the Germans are phases of an essentially negative plan. The truth is that Rundstedt has forced Eisenhower to conform to Nazi strategy.

This about-face has effectively delayed the opening of an all-out Allied offensive for at least three months. It will

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take weeks just to reequip hard-hit units and fill up their ranks with "reinforcements," as replacements are now called officially. Now an early ending to the war seems to depend largely on Russia. The Russian offensive expected by Washington and London may now be somewhat overdue. Soviet censors, however, allowed Henry Shapiro of the United Press to file a story from the Warsaw front which stated flatly that "several mighty Russian and Polish armies are poised ready to strike across the ice-covered Vistula River at Warsaw."

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