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Third U S Army OPERATIONS

DECEMBER ——— MARCH
1944 ——— 1945



A BRIEF SUMMARY

*The Bastogne — St Vith Campaign
19 December 1944-28 January 1945
—— and ——*

*The Eifel to the Rhine and the capture
of Trier*

29 January — 12 March 1945

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S E C R E T

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THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY
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SUBJECT: A Brief Summary of Operations

TO : See Distribution

1. This is the third of a series of pamphlets which will be issued by this headquarters to summarize operations on the western front during the period 6 June 1944 - 9 May 1945.

2. The material herein is written from the Army point of view. Details should be added by corps, divisions and separate units to provide a review of historic accomplishments for use during the special six-week information and orientation program now under way.

3. These summaries will not be reproduced for further dissemination, nor be mailed from this Theatre.

By command of General PATTON:

C. V. Frey
C.V. FREY
Lt Col., AGD,
Asst. Adj. Gen.

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THE BASTOGNE - ST. VITH CAMPAIGN

19 DECEMBER 1944 TO 28 JANUARY 1945

The ARDENNES operation was the heaviest, most concentrated and bloodiest of all those in the European War. Roughly, so far as Third US Army was concerned it was broken down into 5 phases which include: (1) the reorganization and shift to the north, (2) the relief of BASTOGNE and protection of the MEUSE River Line, (3) the drive to HOUFFALIZE and junction with Allied Armies, (4) the attack toward ST VITH and seizure of positions along the OUR and SAUER Rivers, and finally (5) the prolongation of the attack to originally held positions and into SIEGFRIED Line fortifications.

The whole operation grew from an attempt by the enemy to launch an attack in Army Group size with the purpose of throwing the Allied time table out of order, separating the American forces, and possibly breaking into France to cut off or interfere with, Allied supplies. That the operation failed was due to the harmony between Allied Armies under one centralized command, and to the utmost efforts of the First and Third US Armies and the British Second Army.

Third US Army's offensive along the SAAR River against the SIEGFRIED Line was progressing well during the middle of December, and a large sustained attack had been planned in that zone when the Germans launched their heavy counter offensive in the First US Army zone, late on 16 December.

By 17 December the enemy had broken through First US Army lines on a 30 mile front, and had penetrated 40 miles. Twelfth US Army Group in the city of LUXEMBOURG was separated from the majority of First US Army units by the enemy salient. Accordingly, First US Army was assigned to 21st Army Group (British).

Penetrations were made into the VIII Corps zone which then consisted of the 4th, 28th and 106th Infantry Divisions and the 9th Armored Division and in the 99th Infantry Division zone of the V Corps. This penetration of approximately 40 miles in depth and 30 miles in width was made along the ST VITH - ST HUBERT axis, with the flanks anchored in the south on ECHTERNACH and ETTLEBRUCK, and in the north on MONSCHAU, MALMEDY and STAVELOT.

To combat the affects of the breakthrough and to take away the impetus of the enemy drive, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces on the Western Front through the Commanding General, Twelfth US Army Group ordered the Commanding General, Third US Army to assume command of all available forces south of the enemy breakthrough, which could be regrouped and committed, and to attack north to drive, cut off and destroy the enemy that penetrated the First US Army zone. This included the forces of the VIII Corps (First US Army) with all elements that were then able to be committed.

Third US Army immediately began shifting its forces to the north, leaving only protecting forces behind to cover its present zone. Army units of all types shifted their zone of action to the north - and Third US Army prepared to enter into the ARDENNES campaign.

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A series of fragmentary orders were sent by Third US Army on 17 and 18 December to the various corps. They ordered XII Corps to pass control of its zone to Seventh US Army, to pass the 80th Infantry Division and 4th Armored Division to III Corps, to pass control of the 87th Infantry Division to Seventh US Army, to assume control of the 5th Infantry Division, and finally, following its relief by Seventh US Army to move to the vicinity of LUXEMBOURG. Fragmentary orders to III Corps provided that the Corps would give up its zone to XX Corps, would pass control of the 6th Armored Division and Task Force FICKETT (6th Cavalry Group) to XX Corps, and would move the 26th Infantry Division and III Corps Headquarters to ARLON in BELGIUM to operate on the south flank of the enemy salient. XX Corps was ordered to assume control of the 6th Armored Division and Task Force FICKETT, and to relieve the 5th Infantry Division in the SAARLAUTERN bridgehead, so that it could be employed in LUXEMBOURG.

Immediately, major units began moving north, the entire switch of Third US Army to its new northern zone being a well planned, excellently executed example of tactical speed in troop movements. The III Corps moved its elements north of ARLON, while XII Corps moved to LUXEMBOURG, and the XX Corps held the lower zone after an adjustment of the Sixth - Twelfth US Army Group boundary moved the zone of the Seventh US Army north to take over part of the former Third US Army zone.

On 20 December the Army Commander issued a directive to the four corps (including VIII Corps), giving the major Army mission of attacking north from the LUXEMBOURG - ARLON area to destroy the enemy on its north while being prepared to change direction of advance to the northeast. III Corps (26th and 80th Infantry Divisions, 4th Armored Division) was to attack north in zone in direction of ST VITH while keeping contact with XII Corps on its east flank and VIII Corps on its west. XII Corps (4th, 5th Infantry Divisions, 10th Armored Division (less Combat Command "B"), plus Combat Command "A", 9th Armored Division), and 2d Cavalry Group) was ordered to hold the west bank of the MOSELLE River in zone, and to attack upon Army order, initially north on the right of III Corps while pushing patrols to the east and northeast to determine location of crossings of the SAUER and OUR Rivers, and the strength of the enemy in the ECHTERNACH area. It was further ordered to protect the right (east) flank of Third US Army, to maintain contact with the III and XX Corps and to be prepared to change direction of attack to the northeast. VIII Corps (101st Airborne Division, 28th Infantry Division and 9th Armored Division less Combat Command "A", plus Combat Command "B", 10th Armored Division) was to regroup its forces, and prepare for an attack to the north while defending its zone. XX Corps (90th and 95th Infantry Divisions, 6th Armored Division, 3d and 6th Cavalry Groups) was to defend its SAARLAUTERN bridgehead, passing the lower part of its zone to Seventh US Army, while maintaining contact with XII Corps on the north and Seventh US Army on the south.

The first attack into the enemy salient was made in the morning of 22 December by III Corps, with the 4th Armored Division, the 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions making substantial gains. The original advance headed for BASTOGNE where the 101st Airborne Division and attached units was completely surrounded by the enemy. III Corps was deployed with the 4th Armored Division on its west flank, 26th Infantry Division in the center and the 80th Infantry Division on the east flank. In 2 days such substantial advances were made that the 4th Armored Division reached a point 6 miles due south of BASTOGNE, and the 26th Infantry Division reached a point 10 miles southeast of the city. Then

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the enemy resistance stiffened, and the Corps made steady gains toward BASTOGNE for the next 2 days, which culminated in a juncture of the 4th Armored Division and the 101st Airborne Division on 26 December at ASSENOIS 2 miles south of BASTOGNE.

The successful drive by the 4th Armored Division to contact and liberate the 101st Airborne Division around BASTOGNE was due not only to the powerful attack of the Division and the supporting attack of the 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions, but also support furnished by VIII Corps on its west, which took pressure from its flanks during the late stages of the attack.

XII Corps opened its attack into the enemy salient in a zone east of the III Corps on 23 December, when the 4th, and 5th Infantry Divisions and the 10th Armored Division with Combat Command "A", 9th Armored Division attached, made local gains to the north against heavy resistance. This advance continued steadily with gains of 1 or 2 miles per day for the following 3 days. On 25 December the 35th Infantry Division moved from METZ and assumed positions on the front line.

The VIII Corps, then consisting of the 4th, 28th and 106th Infantry Divisions, the 7th and 9th Armored Divisions and the 101st Airborne Division, was badly mauled by the enemy in the breakthrough. On 18 December the 10th Armored Division, the first Division of Third US Army to swing to the north, reinforced the 101st Airborne Division around BASTOGNE with its Combat Command "B". That combat command was trapped soon thereafter with the 101st Airborne Division and the attached Reserve Combat Command of 9th Armored Division when the enemy completely surrounded the city.

By 19 December the 106th Infantry Division had lost 2 regiments, and the third had been driven north of the enemy salient, the 101st Airborne Division was completely surrounded at BASTOGNE, the 7th Armored Division was on the north flank of the enemy salient, the 28th Infantry Division was split up with its 109th Infantry attached to the 9th Armored Division, and the 9th Armored Division was separated into three separate parts, one of which was forced to the north of the enemy bulge, and attached to XVIII Airborne Corps, another was at BASTOGNE with the 101st Airborne Division, and the third (Combat Command "A") was on the southern part of the salient with 109th Infantry (28th Infantry Division) attached.

Third US Army took over the task of attacking to the north from the area LUXENBOURG - ARLON to destroy the enemy on its front while prepared to change direction to the northeast to seize crossings of the RHINE River, a mission prescribed by the operational directive issued 20 December. It passed control of the 4th Infantry Division from VIII Corps to XII Corps, and gave the remainder of the VIII Corps the mission of regrouping forces prepared to attack to the north, maintaining contact with III Corps and continuing defense of zone. Thus, the line-up of VIII Corps, following the reshuffling of units, included elements of the 28th Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division with attached Combat Command "B" 10th Armored Division and Reserve Combat Command 9th Armored Division (then isolated in BASTOGNE) and remaining elements of 9th Armored Division.

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During the period 21 - 25 December VIII Corps defended BASTOGNE with the 101st Airborne Division and its attached armored elements while the remainder of the Corps was gradually pushed back from SIBRET, 5 miles southwest of BASTOGNE to NEUFCHATEAU about 15 miles southwest of BASTOGNE. Liaison between the 28th Infantry Division and the 4th Armored Division (III Corps) was established 25 December, and from that time on the situation improved. The following day, 26 December, other elements of the 4th Armored Division contacted elements of the 101st Airborne Division at ASSENCOIS, 2 miles south of BASTOGNE, finally effecting solid contact between all elements of Third US Army on the southern perimeter of the enemy salient. This contact furnished a great uplift in morale of Army troops who could see the ultimate success ahead. The enemy did all in his power to capture BASTOGNE, but by determination and spirit of Third US Army troops he was held off.

Far to the south the XX Corps held a good part of the former Third US Army zone. A change in the Third - Seventh US Army boundary moved the boundary north to give Seventh US Army control of the former XII Corps zone. XX Corps assumed control of the former III Corps area in addition to its own. It assumed control of the 6th Armored Division and the 6th Cavalry Group, released the 5th Infantry Division to XII Corps and retained the 90th and 95th Infantry Division. On 20 December the Corps was ordered to release the 6th Cavalry Group to III Corps, to protect the south flank of Third US Army while maintaining contact with Seventh US Army on the south and XII Corps on the north, defend the SAARLAUTERN bridgehead and other positions on its front. The DILLINGEN and ENSDORF bridgeheads were abandoned and forces occupying them were removed to the west bank of the SAAR River; elsewhere all positions were maintained. On 23 December the 6th Armored Division gave up its zone to the 103d Infantry Division (Seventh US Army) and proceeded to METZ for refitting. Then, on 26 December the 6th Armored Division moved to XII Corps while the 10th Armored Division moved to XX Corps zone from XII Corps to refit at METZ.

On 26 December the Army Commander issued orders to the four corps. These orders called upon III Corps to pass control of the 80th Infantry Division to XII Corps, to assume control of Combat Command "A", 9th Armored Division, retain control of the 318th Infantry (80th Infantry Division), and to assume control of the 35th Infantry Division. XII Corps was ordered to pass control of the 35th Infantry Division and 10th Armored Division to III and XX Corps respectively, to assume control of the 6th Armored Division, and to move Combat Command "A", 9th Armored Division to III Corps. The XX Corps was to move the 35th Infantry Division to III Corps area, and to pass control of the 6th Armored Division to XII Corps. The VIII Corps was given the important mission of protecting the MEUSE River line south of GIVET with its 11th Armored Division which had closed in the Corps area after a forced march from the docks at LE HAVRE, and to employ the 17th Airborne Division for this purpose upon its arrival, relieving the 11th Armored Division to SHAEF control at that time. This further exchange of units was designed to give the Army the strongest possible striking force into the enemy bulge, while assuring protection against a possible determined enemy effort to break out of the ARDENNES area across the MEUSE River toward SEDAN.

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Following the establishment of contact with the units at BASTOGNE, a general offensive was placed under way by the III, VIII and XII Corps. The VIII Corps on the west attempted to push in the western extremity of the bulge, while the III Corps exerted pressure on the south toward HOUFFALIZE and ST VITH, and the XII Corps patrolled along the eastern border of LUXEMBOURG prepared to pivot to the north toward ST VITH, or strike east into Germany across the MOSELLE, OUR and SAUER Rivers and through the SIEGFRIED Line. The two major objectives of (1) seizing HOUFFALIZE and continuing the attack northeast toward ST VITH, and (2) crossing the SAUER River in the vicinity of ECHTERNACH to drive up the PRUM Valley in the direction of BONN, were given Third US Army on 28 December. At the same time units were further shuffled, with the 6th Armored Division passing from XII to III Corps, the 4th Armored Division and 318th Infantry (80th Infantry Division) from III to XII Corps, and Combat Command "A", 9th Armored Division, passing from III to VIII Corps. By this order the 80th Infantry Division and 9th Armored Division were again given their detached elements. III Corps' major mission was to be prepared to attack northeast toward ST VITH, VIII Corps was ordered to continue the mission of protecting the MEUSE River line while attacking northeast to seize high ground around HOUFFALIZE. XII Corps was ordered to maintain contact with III Corps while being prepared to cross the SAUER River in vicinity of ECHTERNACH, and drive toward BONN. XX Corps was ordered to protect its southern zone, while being prepared to attack northeast to clear the enemy from the area between the MOSELLE and SAAR Rivers.

III Corps advanced slowly northward, fighting against very strong forces during the period 26 December - 14 January. The corridor leading to BASTOGNE was gradually widened and highway communication was firmly reestablished. From 26 December till 8 January, the 4th Armored Division was busy around BASTOGNE, fighting with the 101st Airborne Division in protecting the city which was still endangered by repeated enemy counterattacks. Some ground east and north of the city was captured by the 4th Armored Division which was perhaps as instrumental in saving the city from being again cut off, as it had been in establishing contact between units in the city and other Third US Army units to the south.

The 26th and 35th Infantry Divisions and 6th Armored Division gained ground north and east of BASTOGNE, while repulsing heavy counterattacks. Nowhere was there any semblance of breaking through the enemy positions, but each day there were gains of 1 and 2 miles. On 4 January the III Corps was ordered by the Army Commander to continue its attack northeast in the direction of ST VITH and of maintaining contact with First US Army on the north. LUTREBOIS was taken on 5 January, and HARLANGE on 10 January. The 90th Infantry Division was attached to the Corps on 8 January at which time the 4th Armored Division was passed to VIII Corps. On 13 January the 26th, 35th and 90th Infantry Divisions employed a pincer movement on the town of BRAS, thereby creating a pocket of trapped enemy troops which were reduced and taken by the 26th Infantry Division and Task Force FICKETT (6th Cavalry Group). Following this movement the 6th Cavalry Group and the 35th Infantry Division both went into Corps reserve on 14 January.

VIII Corps was deployed on 26 December with the 101st Airborne Division and its attached armored units around BASTOGNE, the 28th Infantry Division protecting NEUFCHATEAU while the 17th Airborne Division was moving up to assume

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positions, and the 11th Armored Division was moving back to SHAEF Reserve. The 9th Armored Division was in reserve west of ARLON. The Corps received orders on 28 December to continue its defense of the MEUSE River, seize the high ground in the vicinity of HOUFFALIZE in order to control the roads leading from the town, and to protect the left (northeast) flank of Third US Army. The 87th Infantry Division closed in Corps area on 29 December, while the 11th Armored Division moved up into position following release from SHAEF Reserve. These two divisions launched an attack on 30 December which proceeded well during the next three days, with advances of up to 8 miles being made. Then, on 3 January the 17th Airborne Division relieved the 11th Armored Division which went into assembly area, the 28th Infantry Division assumed control of the MEUSE River line, and the 101st Airborne Division and 87th Infantry Division continued their missions.

On 4 January, substantially the same orders as those of 28 December were given to the various corps, with the additional order of preparing to attack northeast in the direction of ST VITH. Small gains were made by the 87th Infantry Division and the 17th Airborne Division west of BASTOGNE during the period 4 - 8 January on which date the 4th Armored Division was attached to VIII Corps from III Corps, and orders were given to continue the attack on HOUFFALIZE. Daily gains of 1 to 2 miles were reported by the 17th Airborne Division and the 4th Armored Division from 8 to 12 January. Then, the 11th Armored Division and the 17th and 101st Airborne Divisions speeded up their attacks to the east, gaining 2 to 3 miles per day. This attack continued to the outskirts of HOUFFALIZE, where, on 16 January contact was established with First US Army. On 14 January, the 87th Infantry Division contacted the British 51st Infantry Division on the western tip of the enemy salient. At this time the enemy threat was considerably reduced with elements of all three Armies in contact, and driving toward the east.

On 26 December XII Corps was ordered to release the 35th Infantry Division and Combat Command "A", 9th Armored Division, to III Corps, the 10th Armored Division to XX Corps, and to assume control of the 6th Armored Division. The line-up of major elements within the Corps then included the 4th, 5th and 80th Infantry Divisions, 6th Armored Division and 6th Cavalry Group. The orders of 28 December gave the Corps the mission of being prepared to cross the SAUER River in vicinity of ECHTERNACH to drive up the PRUM Valley in the direction of BONN.

Minor advances were made by all divisions in the next few days to the MOSELLE, SAUER and SURE Rivers in zone. By 2 January the various divisions had reached the river line and were prepared to continue their attack. Bridgeheads across the SURE River were secured on 5 January by the 80th Infantry Division with limited attacks continuing in the bridgehead areas for the next three days. For the remainder of the period to 16 January there was no change in the Corps situation. Units patrolled aggressively, repelled several small counterattacks and awaited the Army order to continue their attack toward PRUM.

XX Corps was directed in the orders of 26 December to pass control of the 6th Armored Division to XII Corps, pass control of the 35th Infantry Division to III Corps, and to assume control of the 10th Armored Division from XII Corps. Then, on 28 December it was ordered to be prepared to clear the area between the

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MOSELLE and SAAR Rivers on Army order. It consisted, following the reshuffling of units, of the 90th and 95th Infantry Divisions and 10th Armored Division.

At no time did large scale action occur in XX Corps zone. The SAARLAUTERN bridgehead was maintained, and limited objective attacks were carried out in the bridgehead as well as in the TETTINGEN - SINZ area. No appreciable gains were made, but a considerable number of enemy troops were held along the Corps front, thereby reducing the enemy strength that could be employed in the fronts of other corps.

From 15 January till 28 January the III Corps continued its push to the northeast. It consisted on 15 January of the 26th and 90th Infantry Divisions and the 6th Armored Division on the line with the 35th Infantry Division in Corps reserve. Initially the drive was practically due north, but it pivoted as though on a hinge, so that at the end of the period the direction of the drive was due east.

Daily advances of from 1 to 2 miles were made by the 90th Infantry Division and 6 Armored Division on the Corps left flank. On 18 January the 35th Infantry Division departed from corps zone en route to the METZ area for training. On the following day III Corps was ordered to seize high ground southeast of ST VITH while prepared to continue the attack to the northeast. WILTZ on the north bank of the WILTZ River was cleared on 22 January, and CLERVAUX was captured by the 26th Infantry Division on 25 January. By 28 January positions on the high ground southeast of ST VITH between the CLERF and OUR Rivers were secured.

VIII Corps, consisting of the 17th and 101st Airborne Divisions, 6th and 11th Armored Divisions continued to drive eastward in the direction of ST VITH as the second half of January got under way. On 17 January, Third US Army was freed of the responsibility for the defense of the MEUSE River line, and the Army Commander in turn relieved VIII Corps of the mission. On 18 January the 76th Infantry Division was assigned to the Corps, but did not close in Corps zone till 23 January. The 101st Airborne Division initiated movement to Seventh US Army zone on 19 January following change in assignment. Gains were limited from 16 to 21 January, at which time the effort was expanded with daily advances of from 1 to 3 miles recorded.

By 22 January leading elements of the 17th Airborne Division were 9 miles southwest of ST VITH. The 76th Infantry Division did not see action with VIII Corps, inasmuch as it was released to XII Corps on 25 January while still uncommitted by VIII Corps, and the 90th Infantry Division passed to VIII Corps on 26 January, at which time leading elements of the 17th Airborne Division were $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from ST VITH.

On 23 January ST VITH was taken by 7th Armored Division (First US Army) which attacked from the north. Movement on 24 February was begun by the 11th Armored Division to Corps reserve. Following a change in the inter-Army boundary the 87th Infantry Division relieved the 17th Airborne Division on the line and some elements of the 87th Infantry Division moved to ST VITH to take over defense of that area from First US Army, while the 4th Infantry Division passed to Corps control.

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On 28 January when this Campaign ended the 4th Infantry Division relieved the 87th Infantry Division following an adjustment in VIII - XII Corps boundary, the 87th Infantry Division moved to the ST VITH area, and the 90th Infantry Division was clearing a zone to the OUR River. To the rear, the 17th Airborne Division and the 11th Armored Division were in reserve.

XII Corps consisted of the 4th, 5th, 80th and 87th Infantry Divisions and the 2d Cavalry Group on 17 January. A coordinated attack across the SURE River by the 4th and 5th Infantry Divisions was launched on that date. The 80th Infantry Division joined in the attack on 18 January. DIEKIRCH was taken by the 5th Infantry Division on 18 January. On 19 January the Corps was directed to attack north on the axis DIEKIRCH - ST VITH to destroy enemy on its front, while clearing the enemy west of the MOSELLE and SAUER Rivers. From 17 January till 24 January the various corps units advanced between 8 and 12 miles, securing positions along the SAUER and OUR Rivers.

On 26 January the 76th Infantry Division closed in Corps zone, while the 87th Infantry Division passed to control of VIII Corps. The 4th Infantry Division also passed to VIII Corps on 27 January.

At the end of the Campaign the XII Corps was clearing its zone to the OUR River while patrolling vigorously.

XX Corps was unchanged throughout the entire Campaign. There was continuous action in the SAARLAUTERN bridgehead and in the SINZ - TETTINGEN area, but it was on a small scale. The 94th Infantry Division was occupied in the latter region, making numerous small attacks, and repulsing numerous counterattacks. In the SAARLAUTERN bridgehead the 95th Infantry Division on several occasions made local gains. The 95th Infantry Division was relieved in place by the 26th Infantry Division on 28 January. Then, the 95th Infantry Division moved north to VIII Corps zone.

All through the Campaign III, XII and VIII Corps faced determined and heavy resistance. It was largely due to the extreme power exerted on the enemy salient from the south that the enemy operation ended in failure. Although contact was established with the surrounded forces in BASTOGNE early in the operation the issue remained partially in doubt till the middle of January when contact with the British and with First US Army was made on successive days. From that point on, there was steady gains, and the enemy, his penetrating power gone, was forced to give ground and to retreat into his SIEGFRIED Line emplacements. By 28 January all positions held by First US Army at the time of the breakthrough had been regained, and Third US Army was ready to begin its major assault of the SIEGFRIED Line, and to strike toward the RHINE River.

XIX Tactical Air Command contributed a great deal throughout the entire operation. The Luftwaffe rose in greater strengths than during previous months in the all out attempt to exploit the German breakthrough, but it was unable to stop our fighter bombers from inflicting a heavy toll on enemy ground installations and transportation. For the most part, enemy planes avoided combat with the fighter bombers and their effect against our ground troops and motor vehicles was largely held to a minimum by effective anti-aircraft and aggressive air action, anti-aircraft having accounted for 115 planes destroyed and 42 probably destroyed.

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Claims of XIX Tactical Air Command during the period included:

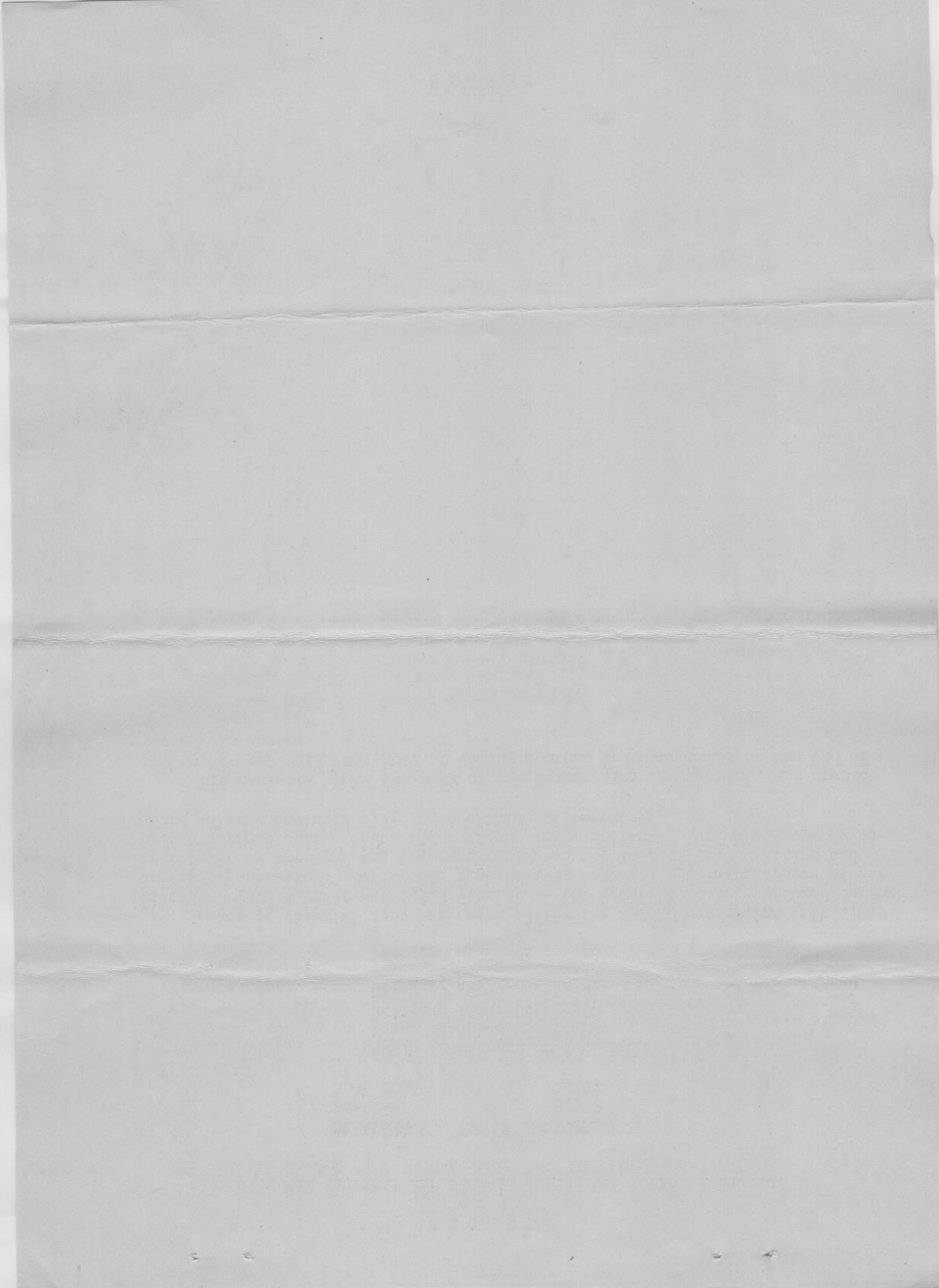
Missions	884
Sorties	9,582
Bomb Tons	2,167

TARGETS (Destroyed or Damaged)

Motor Vehicles	7,480
Railroad Lines Cut	390
Railroad Cars	4,161
Locomotives	128
Factory Buildings	668

Losses of Third US Army were high during the ARDENNES Campaign with 4,248 killed, 20,303 wounded and 5,319 missing -- the greatest losses suffered during any major operation. During the same period, however, 23,218 prisoners of war were taken by the Army and the enemy suffered the loss of 32,000 killed and 88,600 wounded on the south flank of the enemy salient. During the operation Third US Army captured 2,935 square miles of territory.

This Campaign broke the back of the German Army in the west, and opened the way to the rapid advances of coming months, and eventually to the end of the war in Europe.



S E C R E T

THE EIFEL TO THE RHINE AND THE CAPTURE OF TRIER

29 JANUARY TO 12 MARCH 1945

By 29 January units of the First and Third US Armies had regained all territory that had been seized by the enemy in his December breakthrough. Some units of the Third US Army were fighting against SIEGFRIED Line positions, and were endeavoring to achieve a complete penetration of the Line. A badly disorganized enemy was reeling in the front of Third US Army which continued its remorseless march to the east.

As the Campaign began Third US Army was lined up on a north-south front with its VIII Corps (4th, 87th, 90th, 95th Infantry Divisions, 11th Armored Division) on the north, then the III Corps (5th, 76th, 80th Infantry Divisions, 4th Armored Division) and, on the south, the XX Corps (26th, 94th Infantry Divisions). The main effort was being made in VIII Corps zone where an attack was conducted toward PRUM, a communications center deep inside SIEGFRIED Lines. Elsewhere in zone, positions were maintained while aggressive patrolling continued.

In order from north to south the 87th, 4th and 90th Infantry Divisions of VIII Corps attacked toward PRUM in the early part of the campaign, the 95th Infantry Division and 11th Armored Division being in reserve, however, the 95th Infantry Division was ordered to move to Ninth US Army on 3 February 1945. BIEIALF (P9683) was taken by the 4th Infantry Division on 1 February while BERG was cleared by the 87th Infantry Division on 2 February. The Corps was ordered on 3 February to seize PRUM while maintaining contact with First US Army on its north. Positions of the 90th Infantry Division were taken over on 5 February by the 11th Armored Division, with the 90th Infantry Division then moving to a new zone farther north. Very heavy fighting continued during the next few days as pillboxes were reduced in the fight through the SIEGFRIED line. As an example of the bitterly contested drive toward PRUM, the 90th Infantry Division reduced 153 enemy pillboxes in one day, 8 February.

Orders for the maintenance of an aggressive defense were given Twelfth US Army Group by SHAEF on 7 February, but an exception was made for Third US Army which was told to make probing attacks and single corps attacks toward critical objectives. Thus, the attack toward PRUM continued, while elsewhere in zone the Army went on an aggressive defense which was intended to hold the enemy on the Army front, and to prevent the redeployment of units then on the Third US Army front which might tend to slow the combined British - Ninth US Army attack toward the RHINE River.

The 22d Infantry (4th Infantry Division) entered PRUM on 11 February, the city being cleared by elements of 4th Infantry Division the following day. At that time the 87th Infantry Division was due north of PRUM and the 90th Infantry Division was south of the city. VIII Corps, after securing its objective, went on the aggressive defense.

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III Corps (17th Airborne Division, 6th Armored Division) patrolled aggressively during the early part of the operation. Limited objective attacks were made on 5 and 7 February. On 11 February, the Corps was relieved from Third US Army, passing to control of First US Army, at which time the 17th Airborne Division also went to First US Army control, the 6th Armored Division passing to control of VIII Corps. During the operation from 29 January to 11 February III Corps captured a total of 12 square miles.

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XX Corps operated initially with the 26th and 94th Infantry Divisions which defended aggressively on an extended front from south of SAARLAUTERN to the NENNIG - TETTINGEN area. The 10th Armored Division passed to Corps control from Seventh US Army on 11 February, and remained in the vicinity of METZ till 18 February. After this, the 10th Armored Division moved up to the front, and on 19 February it attacked jointly with the 94th Infantry Division from the NENNIG - TETTINGEN area to clear the triangle of land formed by the SAAR and MOSELLE Rivers. This attack proceeded well during the next 4 days, with the entire triangle of land being cleared. Firm bridgeheads over the SAAR River were established and expanded by both the 94th Infantry Division and 10th Armored Division. Then, on 26 February the 10th Armored Division struck north toward TRIER. The 94th Infantry Division followed closely mopping up en route. TRIER, a city of 70,000 was cleared on 2 March at which time the 10th Armored Division attacked to the east, securing positions on the north bank of the MOSELLE River. During the next few days, XII Corps elements made their historic dash to the RHINE River, with XX Corps elements being pinched out from further advances north of the MOSELLE River. On 6 March the 65th Infantry Division relieved the 26th Infantry Division in the SAARLAUTERN bridgehead area, and the 26th Infantry Division moved north to positions south of those held by the 94th Infantry Division. By 12 March when the 10th Armored Division was relieved by the 76th Infantry Division it had driven 15 miles east of TRIER on the north bank of the MOSELLE River. It moved back upon relief to an assembly area near TRIER, while other XX Corps units, patrolled aggressively, maintaining their positions.

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Positions in XII Corps zone were maintained in the early part of the operation. On 3 February orders were issued for XII Corps (5th, 76th, 80th Infantry Divisions, 4th Armored Division) to prepare for an attack to seize BITBURG. To carry this out, commencing 6 February, the 5th, 76th and 80th Infantry Divisions attacked across the SAUER River and secured bridgeheads which were expanded during the next four days to depths of 5 miles. These bridgeheads were consolidated by 11 February. The Corps did not attempt to attack on a full scale because of the orders of 7 February for aggressive defense, but gains of 1/2 to 1 miles per day were made by various corps units in sporadic thrusts. By 22 February, the 4th Armored Division had moved from its assembly area to positions immediately behind the front, and was furnishing fire support to the 80th Infantry Division. On 24 February the 5th Infantry Division established a bridgehead across the PRUM River, being followed the next day by the 4th Armored Division. At this time the Corps was attacking toward BITBURG with all its power and this city, the Corps objective, was cleared by the 5th Infantry Division on 27 February. Then the 76th Infantry Division struck south toward

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TRIER, a key communications center which was an objective of the XX Corps. As the XX Corps drove north toward that important city, XII Corps attacked south to prevent the enemy from reinforcing TRIER from the north. Contact with 10th Armored Division (XX Corps) was made by the 76th Infantry Division (XII Corps) 2 miles north of TRIER on 2 March after the 10th Armored Division and 94th Infantry Division (XX Corps) had cleared the city.

Under cover of darkness on the night 2-3 March, the 5th Infantry Division attacked across the KYLL River, successfully establishing a bridgehead, and on the following day the 76th Infantry Division established a bridgehead over the same river farther south. Consolidation of the two bridgeheads allowed the 4th Armored Division to cross into the bridgehead, passing through the infantry on the night of 4-5 March, and beginning its history-making dash to the RHINE River, a 50 mile advance which was completed in 3 days. A regiment of the 5th Infantry Division was motorized to follow closely behind this armored spearhead. Other elements of the 5th Infantry Division followed farther behind. By 8 March, positions along the RHINE River were held by the 4th Armored Division while the 5th Infantry Division was mopping up by-passed enemy strongpoints about 10 miles from the RHINE River on the north bank of the MOSELLE River. The 76th Infantry Division followed the 5th Infantry Division about 15 miles, also mopping up by-passed enemy pockets en route. At this point the 76th Infantry Division stopped, consolidated its positions, and on 12 March relieved the 10th Armored Division along the north bank of the MOSELLE River. From 8-12 March the 4th Armored Division cleared ground north of the MOSELLE River up to the RHINE River, being assisted by the 5th Infantry Division. The 90th Infantry Division passed from VIII to XII Corps control on 12 March at which time the 4th Armored Division and the 5th and 90th Infantry Divisions prepared to strike south across the MOSELLE River. In the northern part of XII Corps zone the 80th Infantry Division was pinched out as spearheads of the 11th Armored Division and the 90th Infantry Division (both of VIII Corps) struck east toward the RHINE River.

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VIII Corps maintained positions around PRUM from 12 to 16 February, and then started advancing up the PRUM Valley to the east, gaining up to 5 miles in the next 4 days. Two wedges, one around PRUM, and the other near ECHTERNACH in XII Corps zone had forced the enemy to retreat, but also had created a bulge in the center. This salient, known as "The VIANDEN Bulge" received a good deal of attention from VIII Corps units during the period 20-24 February, with units striking south to reduce the bulge and straighten the Army front. This bulge was cleared on 24 February, allowing the Corps to regroup and continue aggressive patrolling. Early in March the VIII Corps was lined up with the 6th Armored Division, 4th and 87th Infantry Divisions in order from south to north, and with the 11th Armored Division and 90th Infantry Division in the rear. A Corps attack was started on 1 March, and on 3 March the 11th Armored Division moved forward and passed through the 4th Infantry Division, attacking sharply to the east. The 90th Infantry Division also moved forward and attacked, reaching the KYLL River. By 6 March the 90th Infantry Division was completely across the KYLL River while the 4th Infantry Division and the 11th Armored Division held small bridgeheads. Then, on 7 and 8 March the 11th Armored Division went into high gear and dashed for the RHINE. Its attack came two days after that of the 4th Armored Division, and was made somewhat easier because of the disorganization

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of the enemy that resulted from the earlier breakthrough. Closely following the armored spearheads of 11th Armored Division, the 90th Infantry Division made rapid progress while other VIII Corps units made good progress all along the front. The 4th and 87th Infantry Divisions were occupied largely from 9 to 11 March in containing the EIFEL Pocket, in which a large number of enemy troops was concentrated. This pocket along the Third - First US Army boundary had resulted from the rapid armored advances of both Armies. By 10 March the 11th Armored Division had reached the west bank of the RHINE River, on which date the 4th Infantry Division and 6th Armored Division were released from Corps control, both units going to Sixth US Army Group. For the last two days of the campaign, VIII Corps was occupied in reducing all enemy in zone west of the RHINE River.

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The EIFEL to the RHINE and the capture of TRIER, extending from 29 January through 12 March was for the most part a period of slow advance, although it ended in a blaze of glory with rapid advances in XII and VIII Corps zones. An order of 7 February from higher headquarters which called for an aggressive defense was largely responsible for the slow advances during February. However, this order was relaxed early in March when both VIII and XII Corps speedily secured bridgeheads over the KYLL River, and from them drove rapidly to the RHINE. On 12 March when this campaign ended all ground west of the RHINE was cleared except for a few minor pockets.

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XIX Tactical Air Command continued its close cooperation with ground troops of Third US Army. During the early part of the campaign the fighter bombers worked on enemy rail and motor vehicles in the PRUM, BITBURG area. In the last few days of the campaign it furnished close armored column cover for the 4th and 11th Armored Divisions as they dashed for the RHINE, and bombed and strafed in the EIFEL Pocket between First and Third US Armies. During the greater part of the campaign the enemy was able to keep his targets hidden so that claims were not as heavy as they had been during the preceding ARDENNES Campaign. More bomb tons were dropped than ever before, but the roads were not clogged with enemy vehicles as they had been when the enemy retreated from his ARDENNES salient. The XIX Tactical Air Command flew a total of 9,466 sorties in 911 missions during this campaign, dropping 4,303 tons of bombs. While losing 34 planes, the Command destroyed 50 enemy planes and damaged or destroyed 876 tanks and armored cars, 4,579 motor vehicles, 373 locomotives, 7,698 railroad cars and made 554 cuts of railroad lines.

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During this campaign the Army lost a total of 2,706 killed, 16,779 wounded and 1,081 missing - and captured 58,781 prisoners of war. The enemy lost an estimated 21,100 killed and 56,700 wounded. At the culmination of the campaign Third US Army held contiguous ground all along the north bank of the MOSELLE River to the RHINE, and was prepared to strike south into the industrially great SAAR-RHINE Palatinate.

PREPARED BY G-3 HISTORICAL SUB-SECTION

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