

## *PLANS FOR THE 1945 CAMPAIGN*

By early 1945, the German oil supply was critically short and there was a growing transportation crisis which was already affecting every aspect of the German war effort. Our successful land advances had disrupted the German air defense system, had enabled us to install blind-bombing aids on the Continent, and had increased the depth to which fighter escorts could accompany the bombers into Germany. All these factors greatly increased our bombing power and reduced the capacity of the German Air Force to resist attacks.

By 16 January, the Battle of the Ardennes was substantially concluded. The First and Third Armies had joined hands through the salient at Houffalize, and their junction marked the achievement of tactical victory. At midnight on 17-18 January, the First Army reverted to command of General Bradley's 12th Army Group, and the Allied line once more took up the order in which it was ranged along the threshold of Germany at the time when von Rundstedt's offensive interrupted our invasion preparations a month earlier. The task now was to regasp the strategic initiative and resume the advance.

In planning our forthcoming spring and summer offensives, I envisaged the operations which would lead to Germany's collapse as falling into three phases: first, the destruction of the enemy forces west of the Rhine and closing to that river; second, the seizure of bridgeheads over the Rhine from which to develop operations into Germany; and third, the destruction of the remaining enemy east of the Rhine and the advance into the heart of the Reich. This was the same purpose that had guided all our actions since early 1944.

The immediate aim was to be the smashing of the enemy west of the Rhine, in order to reduce to a minimum the forces which would be available to oppose our crossing of the river and subsequent advance. A secondary purpose was to give us a maximum ability for concentration along chosen avenues across the Rhine, with maximum economy of security troops on other portions of the front. The form which these operations west of the Rhine were to take was largely dependent upon the geographical factors which would condition our progress in the later phases.

Once we had crossed the Rhine, there were two main avenues by which we could advance to the heart of Germany and defeat such enemy forces as were left to oppose us.

The first of these was from the lower Rhine, north of the Ruhr and into the North German Plain; the second was from the Mainz-Karlsruhe area and thence northeast through Frankfurt toward Kassel. The former axis of advance, apart from offering the most suitable terrain for mobile operations — the type of warfare which we wished to force upon the enemy in order to exploit our superior mobility — afforded the quickest means of denying to the Germans the vital Ruhr industries. The northern and eastern exits of the Ruhr could be cut by enveloping action on the part of the ground forces, while the southern ones could be interrupted by air action. On the other hand, the importance of the Ruhr to the enemy was such that he was likely to accord it first priority in his defense plans, so that the rapid deployment of a superior force across the Rhine would be essential to Allied success. An advance on the southern axis from Mainz toward Kassel would also secure to us an industrial zone, in the Frankfurt area, and would therefore also be likely to afford us an opportunity of destroying considerable enemy forces. It would, moreover, offer suitable airfield sites from which to support further advances. On the debit side, however, the advance would be over terrain less suitable for armored operations, although once Kassel had been reached the Allies could either push north to complete the encirclement of the Ruhr, or northeast toward Berlin, or eastward toward Leipzig.

From the Mainz-Karlsruhe sector, a thrust might also be made eastward toward Nürnberg, but this, important as it was later to become, was not of immediate concern in the long-term planning on which we were engaged in January. We still held to the hope for opportunity to effect a massive double envelopment of the Ruhr, to be followed by a great thrust to join up with the Russians, but we could not then foresee to what extent the forthcoming Russian offensive, in its sweeping advances, might influence our strategy in this direction.

With respect to the local geographical factors governing our choice of Rhine-crossing sites, the Mainz-Karlsruhe sector was more favorable than that north of the Ruhr. In the latter, between Emmerich and Wesel, there were sites suitable for three divisional assaults on a 20-mile front, in addition to one possible, though difficult, further side. Flooding conditions west of Emmerich would quite

likely preclude any extension of this assault area until after June. In the Mainz-Karlsruhe sector there were sites for five divisional assaults, with a possible sixth south of Karlsruhe. In addition to these two main sectors, there was one site on each side of Cologne which would accommodate a single divisional assault crossing, but this would prove tactically difficult, and, once across the river, the forces would be faced with unfavorable terrain. The nature of the country likewise militated against the use of sites between Coblenz and Bonn except under conditions of very light opposition.

Another factor which had to be taken into account in planning the Rhine assault operations was the technical opinion of the engineers that until March there would be a danger of ice hampering the crossings and bridging. Below Mainz summer floods, following the melting of the Alpine snows, would make it imperative to complete the construction of permanent bridges by May. This estimate differed from earlier technical reports in that it indicated the advisability of a March-April attack, whereas the engineers originally believed that conditions on the Rhine would render unwise any such attempt between 20 November and late May.

From the logistical aspect, there was available to the Allied armies sufficient bridging equipment and personnel to launch nine assault crossings, and, in addition, one unopposed crossing of the Rhine. After the crossings had been effected, it was estimated that our lines of communication would enable us to build up to a maximum of some 35 divisions north of the Ruhr, leaving some 55 divisions (counting scheduled arrivals) for holding and secondary operations.

None of the considerations above mentioned indicated any change in the decision arrived at during our pre-D-day planning, that is that the main thrust of the Allied armies for the crossing of the Rhine and the isolation of the Ruhr should be on the axis north of the Ruhr. Without that vast industrial region, Germany would be incapable of continuing to wage war, especially when the expected Russian offensive had engulfed the Silesian industrial area which alone was comparable to the Ruhr in productive capacity. Since we could not attack the Ruhr frontally, we must bypass it; and the most favorable terrain lay to its north. I was equally certain that this main effort on the north should be accompanied by a secondary effort as strong as our means permitted after the main, northern thrust had been provided for, from the Mainz-Karlsruhe

area in the general direction of Kassel. Thus the maneuver would constitute a great double envelopment, which would encircle the Ruhr and the mass of the enemy forces which were certain to concentrate in its defense.

With this in mind, the first task must be to initiate operations west of the Rhine and north of the Moselle which should destroy the enemy in that zone and bring our armies on to the Rhine north of Düsseldorf to permit preparation for the ensuing main attack. That done, we must direct our main effort to eliminating other enemy forces west of the Rhine which might still constitute an obstacle or a potential threat to our subsequent crossing operations. When the enemy had thus been cleared from the west bank, we must seize bridgeheads over the river both in the north and the south. North of the Ruhr, we must deploy east of the Rhine the maximum number of divisions which we were capable of maintaining there, while to the south, on the axis Mainz-Frankfurt-Kassel, we must deploy such forces as might be available after providing the estimated 35 divisions required for the principal thrust north of the Ruhr.

The primary task of the southern force was to draw away enemy units which might otherwise oppose the main advance in the north. It was essential to force the enemy to disperse his strength, so that we might use all possible crossings and lines of communication to establish in western Germany a concentrated force of sufficient size to complete the conquest. Flexibility had to be an essential of our plans, as the possibility of failure to secure the necessary bridgeheads in one or another sector could not be overlooked. Logistical preparations must therefore be made rapidly to switch the main effort from north to south if this should prove necessary. Whatever the opposition might be, the fact remained that in any case the crossing of the Rhine, on the narrow frontages available, would be a tactical and engineering feat of the greatest magnitude. Use of airborne forces, air support, and amphibious equipment on the maximum scale would be required if the successful passage of the main Allied armies was to be assured.

The strength of our land forces, at the time of planning in January, was 71 divisions, but this figure did not accurately represent their effective value. Many of the American divisions were seriously understrength in infantry, and, although strenuous efforts were being made to find the necessary replacements both by accelerating the flow of reinforcements from the United States and by taking fit men from rear echelon employment,

it was obvious that some time must elapse before these men could become available for front-line duty. For the moment, the French divisions on our southern flank were depleted to relatively low combat effectiveness. By the time at which we estimated we should be ready to cross the Rhine, in March, the Allied strength would, under the existing build-up program, have risen to 85 divisions, including 6 airborne, with 5 to 8 new French divisions organizing, training, and equipping for possible later employment. It was also hoped that the existing French divisions would have their combat value largely restored.

As against the Allied power, it was difficult, as the situation then stood, to calculate the likely strength of the enemy in the spring. This depended partly upon the extent to which he might be able to draw reinforcements from Italy and Norway for the Western Front. It would depend also upon the destructive effects of our continuing winter operations, which, as always, I was determined to pursue vigorously. Finally, it depended upon the degree to which events on the Eastern Front would engross the enemy's attention. If the worst happened and the anticipated Russian spring offensive proved weak and ineffectual, the enemy was estimated to be capable of maintaining as many as 100 divisions in the west. But if the Russian offensive proved as successful as we hoped, it seemed unlikely that more than 80 divisions could be spared to meet our attack, while the German logistical potentialities would be correspondingly impaired.

Now that the time was approaching for what, we trusted, would be the final blow to Nazi Germany, a closer coordination with the Russian High Command and mutual understanding of our respective plans became essential. Our first liaison with Moscow had been effected late in 1944 when air operations necessitated the establishment of a coordinated bomb-line, but little further had been accomplished. The only link between my Headquarters and that of Marshal Stalin was through the medium of the Allied Military Mission in Moscow, and it appeared most difficult to learn of Soviet intentions. Up to the end of 1944 I had received no information on matters affecting the Russian grand strategy, although I had expressed my willingness to afford any such information concerning my own over-all plans as the Red Army might desire. At Christmas time, however, following upon a message which I sent to the Combined Chiefs of Staff explaining the difficulty with which I was faced in attempting to evolve plans while still

ignorant of the Russian intentions, President Roosevelt secured from Marshal Stalin his agreement to receive our representative in order to discuss the correlation of our respective efforts in the forthcoming spring.

Accordingly, in January, my deputy, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, accompanied by Maj. Gen. Bull (G-3) and Brig. Gen. Betts (G-2), journeyed to Moscow for this purpose. The conference proved conspicuously successful. In the course of a discussion ranging over many aspects of the forthcoming campaigns, Marshal Stalin was acquainted with the nature of our own plans, including the timing. He, in turn, responded with a full explanation of the great four-pronged offensive, involving from 150 to 160 divisions, which the Red Army was preparing to launch. He further gave us an assurance that, in the event of the main offensive being halted by bad weather, the Red Army would still conduct local operations which he believed would so pin down the German armies as to permit no major movement of divisions from east to west during the difficult period of the spring thaw. As events showed, the success of this gigantic offensive proved even greater than had been anticipated. In the meantime, fortified by Marshal Stalin's assurances, we were able to proceed with our own operational planning.

In addition to his preoccupation with the Russian forces, the enemy was certain to be seriously hampered in the forthcoming operations on our front by the logistical difficulties which had been imposed upon him by the attacks of the Allied strategic air forces from the west, while in the east the vital Silesian industrial region was soon to be overrun by the Soviet armies. Despite superhuman efforts to keep the lines open, the German railroad system was gradually breaking down under the weight of ever-increasing air blows. The attacks upon the facilities behind the Ardennes front had forced the railheads back nearly to the Rhine. Heavy destruction had also been inflicted upon the enemy's airplane industries, although dispersion of plants and the construction of underground factories had enabled him to make some progress with his jet aircraft production — the most serious threat with which we were faced. But planes would be of little avail without fuel, and it was against the German refineries and synthetic plants that our greatest effort was directed. Although some recovery had been effected during the autumn and early winter, the heavy blows struck at the end of the year once more brought production down to an extremely critical figure. The gasoline produced during

January was likely to be no more than 100,000 tons (20 percent of the pre-raid amount), and there was a prospect of a further drop to about half this figure with the intensification of our attacks in the near future. In fact, with the immobilization of probably the whole Ruhr synthetic fuel industry the simultaneous stoppage of the great installations at Bruz, Leuna, and Politz, and the threat of the Russian advances to the synthetic plants in Silesia, the German oil industry was facing a graver crisis than ever before, and this at a time when operational requirements were likely to rise to a point higher than in any previous period of the past six months.

It was to this oil offensive that we pinned our faith to counterbalance the numerical superiority which the enemy enjoyed over us in respect to his jet aircraft. Had the program of production which the Luftwaffe envisaged been put into effect, our air mastery in the spring of 1945 would have been precarious, for our own production had not enabled us to meet the jets on equal terms. Fortunately our bombing campaign, both upon the production centers and upon the airfields from which the jet planes operated, so limited their numbers and potentialities that the German effort was too little and too late. So far as orthodox aircraft were concerned, despite a numerical strength that was still considerable, the fuel situation and the growing dearth of trained pilots were so acute that the German Air Force was never in a position seriously to interfere with our operations after the great but costly effort made on New Year's Day, when some 800 aircraft raided Allied airfields in Belgium and Holland.

On the Allied side, I was satisfied that our tactical air forces were strong enough to fulfill the tasks which would face them when our offensives began, and that the strategic air forces were fully capable of carrying out their planned programs. Attacks on oil installations, jet aircraft and armament factories, and naval and communications targets were to be the chief objectives of the heavy bombers, with an overriding priority of coordination with the ground force offensive operations. The air staff fully explored the possibility of destroying the 31 Rhine bridges behind the enemy armies west of the river, in the same way that in the previous summer we had cut the lines of communication over the Seine and Loire behind the German Seventh Army in Normandy, but did not consider such a program practicable. It was believed that to undertake the destruction of so many bridges as an additional target system would involve too great a diversion from the existing

strategic effort, and that the weather was unlikely to afford the requisite number of visual bombing days. Certain key bridges were to be attacked, however, in conjunction with a transverse blocking of communications within each battle area which would limit the enemy's tactical mobility.

In the latter respect, the enemy was favored by the advantages accruing from his strong defensive lines, first the Siegfried fortifications, and behind them the great barrier of the Rhine itself. These defenses were extremely formidable, and apart from the cost of piercing them on a selected front, their chief value to the enemy lay in the fact that they would enable him to concentrate safely for counterattack at our lines of communication. That capability was well demonstrated when the Ardennes thrust had been launched, and, although that attempt had been defeated, the possibility of further, though necessarily weaker, offensives remained. To meet this we would have to station all along our extended line more troops than we could afford, and any concentration on our part for an attack on a given point would entail a dangerous weakening of other sectors, unless before striking our decisive blow at the heart of Germany we ourselves possessed such a defensive line as the enemy himself enjoyed. I was convinced that only the Rhine could fulfill this requirement. Once we held the Rhine substantially throughout its length we should possess such a line as could be held with minimum forces along the inactive sectors. Thus we could safely concentrate the great strength required for our intended main thrust across the river north of the Ruhr and, by the exercise of economy elsewhere, provide reasonable strength for a secondary effort. Moreover, the enemy would find himself at the same disadvantage as that at which his possession of the Siegfried Line had formerly placed us. We would have the opportunity of threatening him at a number of points along the line, forcing him to disperse his defending forces, and thus making easier the task of our troops invading the Reich at the points selected for our attack.

For these reasons, we considered that before attempting any major operations east of the Rhine it was essential to destroy the main enemy armies west of the river, although it might not be worth the time and cost to indulge in protracted operations to reduce any strong but constricted bridgeheads that might remain in German hands. When the Combined Chiefs of Staff expressed doubts as to our ability to maintain two thrusts— north of the Ruhr and in the Mainz-Frankfurt area— with

the forces at my disposal, it was pointed out that such would indeed be the case if we did not clear to the Rhine before embarking on a major offensive to the east of that river. Given a situation, however, where we could operate without fear for the security of our flanks and without expending for defensive purposes more strength than we could afford, I felt confident of our ability to carry out the plans already indicated, putting the chief weight into the northern thrust but at the same time striking in the south and retaining flexibility enough to switch the main effort if the situation so required. Moreover, the simple fact remained that destruction of enemy forces should be easier on the west of the Rhine than on the east.

Of the 85 divisions which were to be at my disposal, 35 were tentatively allocated for the northern thrust. Of the remainder, I estimated that only 25 were necessary for defense and reserve purposes if we held the line of the Rhine, whereas as many as 45 would be required were the northern assault to be attempted while the rest of the front was substantially west of the river, with the enemy capable of striking us from behind his Siegfried fortifications.

Together with their suggestion that I should concentrate upon the single heavy drive in the north rather than run what might, except in the circumstances described, have proved a dangerous risk of weakening the Allied efforts by overdispersal, the Combined Chiefs of Staff submitted for my consideration a proposal by the British Chiefs of Staff that a single ground commander for the whole front north of Luxembourg be appointed, to exercise, under me, operational control and coordination of all ground forces involved in the offensive which was to take us across the Rhine. This suggestion was based upon the assumption that all the remainder of the front would remain on the defensive, contrary to my plans. I pointed out that, under these plans, the Ruhr marked the logical division of command zones, and that Field Marshal Montgomery would be in charge of all the forces — the Canadian Army, British Army, and U. S. Ninth Army — that were to participate in the northern offensive to capture the Ruhr. In the center, during the operations preceding the Rhine crossing, General Bradley's 12th Army Group, comprising the U. S. First and Third Armies, would concentrate primarily on an offensive through the Siegfried Line along the axis Prüm-Bonn, with its left swinging north to support the Ninth Army and its right swinging south to flank the Saar. South of the Moselle, General Devers' 6th Army Group,

with the U. S. Seventh and French First Armies, would remain on the defensive at first, subsequently operating to clear the Saar Basin and close to the Rhine when the Germans had been driven out of the zone north of the Moselle.

The existing Army Group system of command thus fitted naturally into the operational plans which we had evolved, and I could not see how the appointment of a C-in-C Ground Forces over the Army Group Commanders to direct the forthcoming battles would in any way secure better coordination of effort. On the contrary, the appointment would, in fact, have necessitated a duplication of personnel and communications which could have resulted only in decreased efficiency, while such functions as the allocation of forces and supplies between the Army groups were already performed by my own Headquarters.

In this connection, my views as to the place of a so-called "ground" C-in-C in a theater commanded by a single supreme commander are roughly as follows: Ground forces should ordinarily be commanded according to the possibilities, frequently determined by geography, of close battlefield supervision. Battlefield command extends upward through the Division, Corps, Army, and Army Group Commander. This last commander is the highest ground commander who has a logical function separate from that of the Theater Commander and who, at the same time, can be sufficiently freed from broad strategic, logistic, and civil problems to give his entire attention to the battle. The next higher commander above the Army Group Commander, by whatever name he is called, such as Supreme or Theater Commander, necessarily controls broad strategy and commands air and sea forces, and therefore is the only one in position to bring additional strength to bear to influence the action. When the ground front is such that configuration and extent permit close battle supervision by a single Army Group Commander, then this officer is also known as the Ground Commander of the entire force. But when there is more than one Army Group in a single Theater, there cannot logically be an over-all "ground commander" separate from the Theater or Supreme Commander. Each Army Group should normally occupy a well defined channel of strategic advance. A special case would be one where a series of armies would be operating, each in a distinctly separate geographical area and without close tactical relationship, one to the other. In this case each Army Commander would be directly

subordinate to the Theater Commander, since an Army Group Commander could serve no useful function.

These convictions, together with the outline operational plans which had been worked out, were explained to the Combined Chiefs of Staff when they met at the Malta Conference in the last week of January, on their way to the Tripartite Conference in the Crimea. My Chief of Staff, who attended the Malta Conference as my representative,

assured the Combined Chiefs that we would seize the west bank of the Rhine at the crossing sites in the north as soon as this was feasible and without waiting to come up to the river throughout its length. We undertook further to advance across the Rhine in the north with maximum strength and complete determination as soon as the situation in the south allowed us to collect the necessary forces and carry out the assault without incurring unreasonable risks.