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**BATTLE OF THE BULGE:  
INTELLIGENCE LESSONS FOR TODAY**

BY

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Military history has many examples proving the importance of intelligence. While intelligence successes have many who take credit, intelligence failures go looking for people to blame. Symptomatic of this process is the fact that intelligence failures receive all the bad publicity, are ill-defined, and are an easy excuse for commanders or policy-makers who erred in judgement or simply ignored intelligence. This paper is not an apology for past or future "intelligence failures". Instead, I attempt to demonstrate that even today there is still a tremendous potential for military intelligence failures and explain the major reason for that failure. An examination of a true intelligence failure can provide insights into the problems the intelligence community has in doing its job correctly. The case study I have chosen is the Battle of the Bulge. By the end of 1944, Germany seemed defeated. Allied armies were poised to deal the death-blow on a beaten nation. However, on 16 December, this beaten nation proved that it was not ready to die without a last fight. The German army counterattacked, surprising and overrunning a large sector of the Allied line. In the weeks leading up the battle, many of the intelligence indicators were available to the Allies. What they did with this information to come to the wrong conclusions is the subject of this paper.

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BATTLE OF THE BULGE:

INTELLIGENCE LESSONS FOR TODAY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Military history is replete with examples proving the importance of intelligence. While intelligence successes are rarely discussed, intelligence failures are the events that receive all the bad publicity. Unfortunately, intelligence failures are seldom defined and are an easy scapegoat for the policymaker or commander who ignored intelligence, erred in judgement, or both. To be sure, there are shortcomings in the intelligence process. It is a fairly complicated system of collecting, processing, analysing, understanding, and disseminating information. Any part of the process is subject to problems, both technical and human.

This paper is not an apology for past or future "intelligence failures." Instead, the purpose of this analysis is to show that there is great potential even today for military intelligence failures and to explain the major reason for potential failure. An examination of a true intelligence failure can provide insights into problems the intelligence community has in doing its job correctly. While there are a number of intelligence failures in recent history from which to choose (e.g. the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950, the Chinese entry into the Korean War, and the Egyptian attack across the Suez Canal in 1973), the one I will analyse was the German counterattack of Allied forces in December 1944, resulting in the Battle of the Bulge. In the weeks leading up to

the battle, many intelligence indicators were available to the Allies. What they did with this information to arrive at the exact wrong conclusion is the subject of this paper.

By the end of 1944, the war in Europe seemed to be nearing an end. The combined Allied armies were poised on the Roer River preparing for the final push into Germany. The German Army in the west had suffered nearly half-a-million casualties since June and appeared defeated; however on 16 December, this seemingly beaten army counterattacked, surprising and overrunning a large sector of the Allied front.

#### CASE STUDY OF THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

By August 1944, most of Germany's military leaders were convinced that the unwelcome end was near. The thousand-year Reich was collapsing. In the east, Russian armies were advancing steadily and now controlled much of Poland. In the south, Allied armies were in the Po Valley and moving inexorably northward. In the west, the enemy was less than one hundred miles from the industrial areas of the Ruhr Valley and poised to strike into the heart of Germany. Formerly occupied countries had defected to the Allied side as German soldiers retreated, cutting off vital war supplies. Various estimates put German military casualties in five years of war at between three and four million. The number of civilian casualties from the Allied bombing was unknown but significant.

Still, in all this despair, Adolph Hitler was convinced there was hope. He still had nearly ten million men in uniform and could

gain additional thousands more by implementing more economies at home. Despite the bombing raids, German military production reached its peak in the late summer and fall of 1944. Hitler continued to put great faith in his "secret" weapons such as the ME-262 jet fighter aircraft which he believed would permanently remove the Allied air threat. Additionally, because he still ruled a police state, he had no internal Communist threat, despite the Russian advances.<sup>1</sup>

### GERMAN GOALS

Hitler wanted time. There was nothing he could do in the east except trade land for time. Land was less important in the vast expanses of the eastern region as no critical industrial areas were in immediate reach of the Russians.

The west was an entirely different situation, however. With the Allies less than one hundred miles from the Ruhr Valley, Hitler had to act. But it was more than just a fear of losing this vital industrial area. Hitler seemed to genuinely believe that he could split the Allied coalition in the west. Even before the Allied Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Hitler had instructed his staff to keep him informed of the public arguments and increasingly recriminating debates between the Allies, particularly the U.S. and the U.K. The escalating rhetoric, especially in the U.K. press, on topics such as calling for Montgomery to be named as overall ground commander, and the equally rancorous response by the U.S. press, fueled Hitler's imagination. But his imagination had some basis in

fact.

Hitler knew that the British and Canadians were at the end of their manpower reserves and felt that, if a crippling blow could be delivered, they might negotiate a separate peace with Germany. If that happened, Hitler believed the United States would not go it alone. Adding to this argument was his belief that the Allies would not allow large regions of Europe to fall under Communism. Therefore, it was in the best interests of the western powers not to see a totally defeated Germany. Once they were convinced of this viewpoint, he could turn his armies from the west and send them to the east to defeat the communist threat.<sup>2</sup> Hitler convinced himself that he needed this crippling blow.

#### THE PLAN

Evidence suggests that Hitler briefed a few very trusted people on his plan as early as mid-August, 1944. It was to be a bold stroke, an attack to split the Allied armies and to capture the vital port of Antwerp. His military planners were told to prepare for a November date as that is when traditional European rain and fog would severely hamper Allied air operations, the German Army's greatest concern.

Much has been written by Americans and Germans alike about how the German generals reacted to the plan. One thing seems clear--no senior officer was willing to voice very strong objections. Hitler was still the Supreme Commander of the German Armed Forces and had absolute authority. Also, after the failed assassination attempt

on Hitler in the July plot, high ranking officers were most anxious to prove their loyalty. Hitler saw through this sycophantic behavior and used the opportunity to proclaim in August that the sole responsibility of all commanders was to carry out his orders unconditionally and without question.<sup>3</sup>

Even if there had been strenuous objections they would have been in vain as Hitler had now made up his mind and was completely focused on the plan. He saw clearly what had to be done at all levels. One of his first acts after he approved the plan was to return Field Marshal von Rundstedt to command in the west--a position von Rundstedt held until Hitler relieved him in July. Though done for entirely different reasons, this single act of reinstating von Rundstedt turned out to be one of the major deceptions in the campaign. In reality Hitler needed a figurehead leader in the west who would act in a rational military manner, while unknowingly being deceived and circumvented by those Hitler entrusted with execution of the campaign. Von Rundstedt was not immediately told of the plan. He was instead directed to prepare for and conduct a classic defense for as long as possible and then to fall back on fortified positions. He was told everything everything depended on this final, decisive battle with the Allies.

Hitler seems to have participated in all phases of the planning. He directed the creation of the 6th Panzer Army and personally selected its commander, General Sepp Dietrich. He personally ordered his ministers, such as Goebbels, to prepare the homefront by increasing production and finding the necessary

manpower. Also, he seems to have early-on picked the Ardennes area as the point of main effort. Though he could not have known what Allied forces would be in the area by years' end, he did seem to feel that traditional military minds would view the Ardennes as terrain unsuitable for large mechanized operations.

Hitler knew that total surprise was the only way he could achieve success, and he directed his planners to prepare a deception plan to fool the Allies. To impress upon those with knowledge of the plan the importance of secrecy and deception, all were required to sign an oath swearing silence on penalty of death. All who signed the oath knew that Hitler would invoke that clause without hesitation or remorse.

The plan was approved by Hitler in October, with the attack to occur in the last week of November. He also picked the name of the operation: WACHT AM RHEIN (Watch on the Rhine) hoping that, if it became known to the Allies, they would think it to be defensive operations to protect the homeland. In fact, almost all the German Army preparations proceeded with this cover. With the loss of Aachen, the first significant German town to fall, and the Allied armies so close to striking into the interior of Germany, extra defensive preparations were not unusual.

As planning progressed, it became a concern to some that the Allies could get significant information on the build-up of forces and supplies. Hitler, too, was concerned and issued another of his personal directives saying that all messages regarding the plan would be carried by courier with armed Gestapo escort.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, to aid the deception plan, movement orders began with the words "in preparation for the anticipated enemy offensive".<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the early stages of the planning process, many of Hitler's top field commanders tried, unsuccessfully, to convince him that if an offensive operation was to be conducted, much more realistic objectives than Antwerp should be selected. Hitler was adamant, as he so often was when focused on a particular problem. He was convinced that he, not his generals, had brought Germany this far in the war, and he was not going to listen to Cassandras. Finally, after several browbeatings by Hitler, it became apparent that no further objections would be tolerated and the generals fell into line.

#### GERMAN ARMY PREPARATIONS.

The initial date for launching the attack came and went in November. Hitler had to accept what his quartermasters were advising all along; i.e., there was not enough time. Finally, after at least one more postponement, Hitler would accept no delays beyond 16 December.

The problems presented were formidable. The original plan called for the movement and assembly of 4 armies, 11 corps, 38 divisions, (later reduced to 30), 9 Volks artillery corps, 7 Volks Werfer (rocket) brigades, and the required service and support troops.<sup>6</sup> All preparations were required to be accomplished in such a way as to disguise not only the intent of the build-up but the location of the main attack.

The German railroad system had to be the principal mover of heavy equipment and troops; however, planners worried about the vulnerability of railroad bridges and marshalling yards. Here again, a population functioning under a dictator proved what could be done. In a relatively short period of time, road and railroad bridges were reinforced by German engineers to withstand hits from more than one bomb. Additionally, railroad repair crews would have even the most heavily damaged marshalling yards operational again in less than 48 hours.

By 11 December, the assault divisions were nearly in place, with the follow-on forces assembled shortly thereafter. The timetable for final movement into the jump-off points now required only three nights to complete.<sup>7</sup>

#### GERMAN DECEPTION PLAN

The German deception plan, like all successful deception plans, contained enough truth to make it plausible. The purpose of the plan was to convince the Allies that the German Army's greatest fear was Allied penetration and breakthrough in the northern area near Cologne and a subsequent drive to the Rhine. Therefore, they wanted the Allies to believe that the German Army was preparing for this possibility by moving units into the area for an eventual counterattack. In the south a smaller, less capable force was being assembled in the Eifel region to contain the Allied penetration there.<sup>8</sup>

The German Army was very serious about not letting the Allies

discover the intent of the build-up. At Army headquarters a separate war diary was maintained, and no one with knowledge of the plan was allowed to travel by air. Additionally, the strict German Staff procedures precluded anyone without proper "need to know" to see anything more than needed to do his job. Therefore, most of the staff officers transferring units and stockpiling supplies did not know why they were doing it. More than one was to question the seemingly illogical movements.

At the operational level, success or failure of the deception plan revolved around both the 5th and 6th Panzer Armies. (See map on page 36). The 6th moved into an open plain northwest of Cologne and purposely practiced lax security measures. The increased road and rail movement was done in daylight and only partially hidden. Additionally, German engineers conducted extensive repairs on roads and railroads with no attempt at concealment. Radio traffic was increased to subordinate divisions, some civilian evacuations were begun, and additional antiaircraft units were moved into the area and given extra allotments of ammunition to convince Allied airmen of the importance of the region.<sup>9</sup> All this was done with one intention: to convince Allied intelligence that these were the prudent movements of an army preparing to defend its homeland with a counterattack if necessary. The other key unit in the plan was the 5th Panzer Army, an experienced armor unit commanded by von Manteuffel. It had to be moved from the vicinity of Lorraine, opposite Patton, to the north in such a way as not to arouse Allied suspicions. It was brought up and put into the line near Aachen

with very little secrecy in what was interpreted by western intelligence as clearly a logical military maneuver to reduce the span of control of one commander, Brandenberger and his 7th Army. While in the line, the headquarters of the 5th kept up the normal radio traffic of a unit preparing for the defense. Under this cover, subordinate units rotated out of the line for refitting.

This was only the first step for the 5th. It next had to be pulled out of the line in secrecy as the date for the offensive approached. On schedule, the headquarters of the 15th Army (previously operating in the Netherlands) secretly relieved the 5th and assumed the title "Gruppe von Manteuffel". Normal movements and radio traffic continued. The 15th was then in turn relieved by the headquarters of the 25th Army which began calling itself the 15th. The final step in this evolution was the creation of a completely bogus 25th Army with all necessary radio traffic and fictitious order of battle.<sup>10</sup> To make it even more plausible, the 25th's radio traffic suggested that it was forming in the vicinity of the 6th for defensive operations.

One final major command shift had to be concealed: Field Marshal Model's Army Group B. It was assumed that any Allied intelligence officer or commander would recognize that Model's front, extending over 150 miles, was overextended. Therefore, the creation of Army Group H in the north without any attempt at secrecy would not seem unusual.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, this shift left Model, the man Hitler entrusted to carry out the plan, responsible for the sector from Aachen to Ardennes.

Once the final date for the attack was determined, the tactical portion of the deception plan began. The three-day movement into the Eifel had to be protected at all costs, and the German Army carried it out with great success. The average German soldier had learned since Normandy the importance of camouflage. Allied air superiority dictated that his very survival depended on it. Therefore, the strict security measures put into effect in the Eifel were second-nature to him, and he executed them without question.

The thick forest of the Eifel region lent itself to camouflage. Small, insignificant villages that were ignored by Allied aerial reconnaissance could hold large numbers of vehicles and men. All movement into these villages was done at night; and no movement on the streets, even by individual soldiers, was allowed in daylight. Cooking fires were not permitted. Special security detachments patrolled the region to observe the size of vehicle parks and the overall implementation of security measures.<sup>12</sup> (They had the authority to relieve commanders on the spot). The radio blackout by ground units was total.

Though the German soldier was not told of the plan and his role in it until the night before the attack, German commanders were worried about deserters who might give away details of the plan that could be pieced together by Allied intelligence officers. Since the rugged nature of the Eifel lent itself to desertions, "Volksdeuschers" (ethnic Alsatians and others), had been previously culled from front line units and would not be returned

until the night before the attack. (They were not allowed to go on patrols even then in case they learned more than they should.) The concern these "Volksdeuschers" caused is evidenced by the fact that Hitler himself required a report every twenty-four hours listing by name every deserter.<sup>13</sup> Of note, there were only five deserters along the entire front in December.

In addition to deserters, senior army commanders worried about prisoners of war, especially the higher ranking officers. Already there were several German generals in POW camps in England. If captured, these officers must not be allowed to give away any information of substance. These concerns, though real at the time, proved groundless. For example, one German division commander captured by the Allies produced completely confusing information.<sup>14</sup> (It is not known if he did it by design or whether he, too, was deceived).

Only a few trusted officers were permitted to conduct ground reconnaissance, and combat patrols were limited to defensive measures in search of Allied patrols. Artillery fires were restricted to the established normal patterns, and only guns that had been on the line could conduct registration fires.

Movement into the line was restricted to 12 miles the first night. Then, over the next two nights, the units moved to six miles and finally to two. Recognizing the noise made by tanks, Panzer units were kept further back. On the last two nights as tanks and other mechanized units moved forward, straw was laid on the roads, and German aircraft flew low over the area to muffle the

sound.<sup>15</sup> Finally, on the night of 15 December, the German soldiers were told the true mission and what was expected of them. Most of the front line units were then given hot meals and bottles of schnapps and told to prepare.

The discipline required by the individual soldier to mask the movements of units into the line was extraordinary. It was constantly drummed into the German soldier that his greatest fear would be Allied aircraft. This was not just hyperbole, as the German commanders believed it also. Therefore, it was not difficult to achieve the secrecy demanded of an operation of this magnitude. It was survival, and everyone understood it.

#### WHAT THE ALLIES KNEW

Much has been written since the war on the Allies' intelligence failure. Many of the writings have been by former intelligence officers who were directly involved in the campaign. Most, if not all, claim to have predicted in some way the German attack and try to shift the blame to the commanders. Therefore, much of the information on what the Allies knew is suspect. One thing is certain, however. There is enough blame to go around.

#### Reliance on ULTRA

There were many Allied intelligence success stories in the war, but one of the most important was the breaking of the German radio codes. These codes were produced by a machine called Enigma and were used by both the German military and the diplomatic corps.

The Germans thought these codes to be unbreakable and relied on them throughout the war, attributing any possible compromises of information to other sources such as spies.

By the fall of 1944 the Allied code-breaking effort had yielded tremendous results. The Allies were reading enough of the military messages to have a reasonable idea of the German order-of-battle and operational plans. A system was devised whereby Allied operational commanders and their intelligence officers received all intercepted messages pertinent to their area of operations, generally within twenty-four hours of intercept. The translated and interpreted messages sent to the Allied commanders bore the overall codename of ULTRA.

This successful effort became a two-edged sword that was not apparent until after the battle. So successful was this program that by December 1944, Allied commanders had come to trust ULTRA so exclusively that they relied on it to provide both enemy capabilities and intentions. Generally, this information was unambiguous and did not always require detailed analysis. When Hitler directed that all messages regarding the planning for the offensive not be transmitted by radio, the Allies were deprived of much of this "unambiguous" data. There was one area, however, that was unaffected by this directive but which the Allies failed to fully recognize and exploit.

Regardless of Hitler's concerns, the logistic and deployment preparations could not be accomplished in a sufficiently timely fashion without the radio transmission of messages. Here ULTRA

provided considerable amounts of data. By late October, the Allies knew that the Germans were forming a formidable reserve that would contain several Panzer divisions.<sup>16</sup> Many Allied intelligence officers did believe that this reserve would be built around the newly created 6th Panzer Army, but what ULTRA didn't tell them was the purpose for this reserve and how it would be used. More importantly, ULTRA did not tell them that this reserve was neither for Model nor von Rundstedt, but for Hitler.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout October and November, ULTRA was providing the Allies a rich diet of information on troop movements, both into and out of the front lines. ULTRA intercepts also provided the Allies with considerable information on the train movements into the region, as much of the dispatching and tracing was done by radio. Additionally, there were a number of messages from army headquarters requesting Luftwaffe air cover on detraining and marshalling areas. By the end of November however, Allied intelligence officers seem to have made up their minds that all this movement and logistic resupply was for the assumed German counterattack in the north. The German deception plan reinforced this analysis, regardless of the additional information ULTRA furnished.

Another good source of ULTRA intercepts was the Luftwaffe. The German Air Force never stopped using radio transmissions to any great extent, and the Allies were reading much of their traffic. In particular, the Luftwaffe on several occasions referred to the "Jageraufmarsch" (the coming operation) when requesting

serviceability reports on aircraft or providing information to air defense units.

Reading Luftwaffe intercepts also provided an unambiguous indication of the transfer of air force squadrons to the north and west in addition to the formation of a new headquarters for fighters in the central region. A message intercepted on the 19th of November informed German air defenses of the build-up of fighters in western Germany and directed them to take extra precautions not to shoot down German planes.<sup>18</sup> On the 21st, a Luftwaffe message referred to the "final" decision of Reichsmarschall Goering that fighters in the west scheduled to fly in the upcoming "operation" were not to be fitted with bomb racks. Instead, these racks were to be stored away from the planes and kept in good condition. On the 1st of December, another Luftwaffe message said that it is certain that the Allies had recognized the increased concentration of fighters in preparation for the "Jageraufmarsch" and to prepare for Allied bombing of these concentrations.<sup>19</sup>

These messages, and many others like them, were ambiguous in the sense that the "upcoming operation" could have been either an offensive operation or a counterattack. But Allied intelligence officers were already convinced that a German counterattack was likely since it supported the overall defensive scheme as they saw it. Consequently, the Luftwaffe messages were read in that context. Even an intercepted message from a German ground unit for aerial reconnaissance of the Meuse River from Liege to Givet did

not seem to have raised any undo concerns.

Additionally, ULTRA was providing considerable information from lower echelon units reporting, almost daily, of chronic fuel shortages. These messages outlined curtailed flying hours and other measures Luftwaffe units had to take to save fuel. By relying on these intercepts from the lower echelon units, Allied intelligence officers made the logic inference that the entire German Air Force had these same fuel shortage problems. As a consequence, no one anticipated that fuel could or would be saved at the strategic level.

ULTRA also provided diplomatic information that was available not only to Washington but front line units as well. The more telling of these diplomatic messages was in mid-November from the Japanese Ambassador, Baron Oshima, to his government. It was composed after the ambassador had had lunch with von Ribbentrop. During the lunch von Ribbentrop continued to assure the ambassador that things were going well for Germany and that they planned to stay on the offensive until the end. The German also stated that an offensive in the west was planned, although he gave no dates. It is unclear how intelligence officers in Washington and Europe viewed this intercept, as few make any reference to it. It is likely, however, that many thought that it was nothing more than the German attempting to allay the fears of an ally.

It is possible that the effect of ULTRA on the minds of the intelligence officers and commanders had a negative reinforcing role. Previously, commanders viewed what they received from ULTRA

in the context of how they saw the battlefield and to corroborate information from other sources. Montgomery, for instance, used ULTRA to reinforce information about German armor units on his front and could immediately see any changes in patterns. But prior to Ardennes this corroborative effect, because of German deception, was absent. In fact, the decline in ULTRA traffic was viewed by some, especially Bletchley Park, as a positive sign that victory could be imminent.<sup>20</sup> Without ULTRA the Allies did not seem to view information from other sources with the same sense of urgency or importance.

### Aerial Reconnaissance

Allied aerial reconnaissance was the greatest worry of German commanders. Many of the intelligence officers writing their memoirs after the war have selective memories about the availability and usefulness of this asset, glossing it over by claiming that bad weather frequently grounded the aircraft. Nevertheless, the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Group in the month before the Ardennes offensive flew 361 missions, of which 242 were considered successful.<sup>21</sup> From the 10th to the 15th of December, 71 missions were flown; and only one day, the 13th, had a total grounding of all reconnaissance assets.<sup>22</sup>

The 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group was able to prepare a detailed and accurate picture of the German build-up, confirming a dramatic increase in both road and rail movements.<sup>23</sup> Other evidence included concentrations of searchlights, flatcars loaded

with Tiger tanks, and hospital trains.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, in the area that was to prove critical--the Eifel--few missions were flown. Early in November, before the build-up began, was the last time large numbers of missions were flown in this region. Ground units made numerous requests for reconnaissance over the Eifel, but air officers generally assigned them low priority. Whenever the weather was marginal the missions were aborted and sent to other "higher priority" areas. Only three missions were flown over the area between 10 and 15 December.<sup>25</sup>

Hugh Cole, in his analysis of the aerial reconnaissance problem, finds two faults. The first is not a lack of information but a problem in interpretation. The information was available; but what the Allies saw were the prudent moves of an army preparing to defend their homeland--the reinforcing of the 6th Panzer Army and the reinforcement of other units in the line. The second fault lies in the lack of coordination between ground and air headquarters. Responsibilities for the prioritizing, tasking, collecting and interpreting of aerial intelligence was never fully defined causing information to simply disappear into a "twilight zone".<sup>26</sup>

#### Civilians and Prisoners of War

Since the Normandy invasion Allied intelligence had been very successful in debriefing German prisoners of war. Confident of their own abilities, when deserters, POW's of low morale, and those from such units as the so-called stomach battalions (created for

men with special dietary needs) began showing up, intelligence officers used the information to reinforce their belief that Germany was running out of manpower.<sup>27</sup> On the night of 15 December, four POW's were captured by units of the VIII Corps. When interrogated, all claimed that their units were preparing for an attack very soon. Allied officers had heard this before and did not attach any real significance to the reports. They were duly filed and reported to higher headquarters.

Another source of intelligence had dissipated since the crossing into Germany--friendly civilians. They were a tremendous asset while campaigning across France, but were now of limited usefulness. The exception was the now famous (infamous) case of Elise Dele, who had been allowed by the Germans to travel from her house in Bivels to Bitburg, where she noticed a large build-up of German soldiers and equipment. Escaping with the aid of partisans, she stumbled into the bivouac of the 28th Infantry Division where her story was taken seriously enough for her to be sent to First Army Headquarters. She arrived on 16 December.<sup>28</sup>

Another source of information was the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and its agents. Though useful before and during the campaign in France, they were not universally accepted by all intelligence officers who branded them as too individualistic, and sometimes restricted their movement. Consequently, not one OSS agent penetrated German lines before the offensive began.<sup>29</sup>

### Front-Line Intelligence

There was no shortage of reports from front-line units claiming increased enemy vehicular movements. These reports became so numerous, especially from units new to the theater, that they seemed to be largely discounted. In the American system of reporting (battalion to regiment to division to corps, etc.), it was easy for information to be lost as it passed up the chain; and there was no attempt to hold anyone accountable. In fact, there is enough reporting to suggest that more than one junior intelligence officer was chastized for taking these reports too seriously. Subsequent to the battle, however, it seems nearly everyone claimed credit for predicting the attack.

With the near perfect vision of hindsight, the information in the hands of Allied intelligence officers was impressive. Enough indicators were known to cause alarm in even the most myopic of officers, especially in the last days before the attack. The problem was a near-fatal tendency to underestimate the enemy. The universally accepted opinion was that Germany was on the verge of collapse and would be unable to do more than defend its homeland. This widespread optimism permeated all levels of command. In fact, the Allies seemed to be in a contest with themselves to be the first to predict the fall of Germany. An example of this optimism was the 12th Army Group intelligence summary issued on 12 December by BG E.L. Sibert:

It is now certain that attrition is steadily sapping the strength of the German forces on the Western Front and that the crust of defenses is thinner, more brittle and more vulnerable than it appears on our G-2 maps or to the troops in the line.<sup>30</sup>

This underestimation of the enemy was not confined to the Americans. At about the same time, Brig. E.T. Williams, a former Oxford don and Montgomery's G-2, issued his estimate:

The enemy is in a bad way...his situation is such that he cannot stage a major offensive operation.<sup>31</sup>

Colonel Dickson, G-2 of the American First Army, perhaps came the closest to predicting what the Germans might attempt. On 10 December he issued Intelligence Estimate No. 37, and spent the rest of his life claiming he foresaw what would happen.

The estimate does say that "von Rundstedt is husbanding his forces and is preparing for the application of every weapon at the focal point and correct time to achieve defense of the Reich west of the Rhine by inflicting as great a defeat on the Allies as possible." The estimate also lists as a current capability that "the enemy is capable of concentrated counterattack with air, armor, infantry and secret weapons at a selected focal point at a time of his own choosing." <sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, where Colonel Dickson placed this focal point of the German attack was well north of the Ardennes. Also, his warning may have lost some of its shock affect when he went on leave to Paris on the 14th.

### Why the Plan Succeeded

Michael Handel, a recognized authority on deception in World War II, defines deception as the process of influencing the enemy to make decisions disadvantageous to himself.<sup>33</sup> He then lists nine

considerations he sees in the successful strategic deception plans of that war. Though his approach was from the Allied point of view and should not be taken too far out of context, his analysis is pertinent to the German deception plan preceding the Ardennes battle. Of the nine elements, some were in evidence in the German plan (e.g., organization, security, and a sense of vulnerability) while others, it could be argued, were missing altogether (e.g., unique intelligence sources and time).<sup>34</sup> One could argue that, in a sense, the German plan succeeded in spite of itself. I believe the plan was successful because it provided the Allies with the information they wanted to see. The near-flawless execution furnished the Allies with sufficient data to continue viewing the battlefield in the context of a German counterattack in the north-- a course of action they had already determined to be the "correct" one.

Underestimation of intentions and capabilities is perhaps the worst mistake an intelligence officer can make. Many of the new intelligence indications were examined (fuel shortages, lack of manpower reserves, movement of enemy units, etc.) along with the traditional considerations (weather and terrain); but the Allies saw only what they expected to see.

#### AMERICAN VS. BRITISH INTELLIGENCE

In the American Army prior to World War II a career officer did not go into the intelligence field. These positions were filled by officers of marginal capability who were not successful

in combat arms. There was no career progression, and additional duties generally consumed most of the day. After the war started, G-2 positions were frequently filled by reserve officers or those with language skills. On-the-job-training was the rule. The lack of respect for intelligence officers by commanders and G-3's before the war continued, to the extent that G-2's were constantly striving for credibility while simultaneously performing all their regular duties.

Intelligence in the British Army, by contrast, was a field with great respect attributed to it. Officers planned for an intelligence career from their early days at Sandhurst. There was definite career progression, and the more capable could expect to make general officer.

There were also differences in intelligence procedures. In the British system, the intelligence officer would forecast not only capabilities but intentions as well. This was in sharp contrast to the American custom. American intelligence officers determined enemy capabilities, but intentions were reserved for the commander.<sup>35</sup>

Other differences were in staff and headquarters organization. American G-2's reported only to the commander of the unit to which assigned; higher headquarters G-2's had no command authority. Therefore, a subordinate intelligence officer could make any analysis he wanted and was not obliged to accept analysis from higher headquarters. Additionally, upper echelon G-2's accepted or rejected reports from subordinate units as they deemed appropriate.

This system had a tendency to diffuse responsibility to such an extent that no one was directly accountable.

Allied operational organization also contributed significantly to the problem. Eisenhower's leadership style allowed maximum latitude for his subordinate commanders. Consequently, army groups, armies, and even corps operated almost as theater commands. The ramifications for intelligence were that each command was responsible for the intelligence view of the battlefield to its front, and it was not unusual for armies and army groups to have differing analysis of enemy capabilities and intentions.

#### OPERATIONAL AND POLITICAL DECISIONS PRIOR TO THE ATTACK

By November 1944, the Allies were making significant advances in some areas of the front, but not all their goals were achieved. They had hoped that by December all German units west of the Rhine River would be decisively defeated. In early December the senior Allied commanders met to discuss future operations. Though they seem to have agreed on the need for a major attack in January, Eisenhower and Montgomery once again disagreed on how it was to be done.

Montgomery, not a modest man, wanted tactical command of all ground forces for a major, single push into Germany through the Ruhr Valley. Eisenhower, on the other hand, held out for his plan of a two-pronged attack. He would allow Montgomery's forces to be the point of main effort but wanted Patton to drive into Germany from the south.

This emphasis on a two-pronged attack led directly to the disposition of forces as they were on the night of 16 December. Most Allied commanders and their staffs, knowing Eisenhower's intent, focused on these two areas for both planning and intelligence collection.

Eisenhower, in keeping with his plan, needed to build-up his forces in the north and the south in preparation for the Allied offensive. Therefore, he directed that only minimal manning be employed in the Ardennes. American units fresh to the theater were rotated through the area for "combat experience." Others were seasoned but had borne the brunt of the fighting in the push across France and were tired and awaiting replacements.

General Middleton, VIII Corps commander, advised Bradley of his concerns for the thin defensive line prior to the German attack. Both Eisenhower and Bradley had driven through the area and expressed concern over the issue, however, there was very little either was willing to do about it. It simply was not the central focus. After the battle, Eisenhower admitted to taking a "calculated risk" in the Ardennes because he did not believe the Germans would attack from there but would, instead, defend against the Allied forces in the north.

Politics was involved as well. Since at least August Montgomery had wanted to be appointed officially as the Ground Commander for all Allied forces, a position Eisenhower reserved for himself. Eisenhower was very reluctant to agree to Montgomery's request for command, as he did not completely trust Montgomery and

was still angry over his failure to clear the Schelde Estuary so Allied resupply ships could offload at Amsterdam.

It was understood that ultimately the issue would be resolved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff or perhaps only by personal intervention of Roosevelt and Churchill. For the moment, however, the situation, though uncomfortable for both men, was manageable. The German attack brought this disagreement to the forefront with such animosity that by late December it resulted in a near-crisis in command.

#### ALLIED PERCEPTIONS OF GERMAN ARMY CAPABILITIES

By December 1944, the German Army seemed beaten. Its manpower losses were staggering. Its critical lack of fuel for airplanes and tanks was commonly known. It was being pushed inexorably back to its own borders, and on three sides the Allied powers were threatening invasion. Germany simply did not have the resources to mount a major attack. The Allied commanders felt that even if an attack was considered by diehard German generals it would be overruled by the traditional military commanders as a suicide endeavor that would bring on the final death knell for Germany. The consensus among the coalition was that the German military would act in a "rational" manner in its final days, meaning protection of the Ruhr Valley and Berlin for as long as possible. While a counterattack in the north was certainly possible, it, too, would be a rational military act. After all, Von Rundstedt was a traditionalist who, given the circumstances, could be expected to

act properly.

Allied intelligence officers and commanders were completely fixated on the tactical and operational intelligence picture. Therefore, all data received by the Allies was viewed from tactical and operational perspectives. The fuel shortage was never attributed to an attempt to build up reserves. The creation of "stomach battalions" and other "Home Guard" units was seen as a last gasp borne of desperation. While the capabilities of the individual German soldier and selected tactical units were still widely respected and known to have the capability to inflict substantial damage on Allied units, it was now just a matter of time. Germany had no choice but to surrender.

The Allies committed what is perhaps the most grievous of intelligence failures. They completely underestimated enemy capabilities and intentions. The German Army was "expected" to conduct itself in a rational military manner as defined by western military standards. The Allies could not transcend viewing the enemy through their own filters.

#### WHY IT COULD HAPPEN TODAY

Since World War II vast amounts of money and technical expertise ensure that the collection of information will continue at a tremendous pace. But an examination of the intelligence failures in the Battle of the Bulge demonstrates that the major problem is the proper analysis of information and its conversion into intelligence usable by the commander.

## COLLECTION VERSES ANALYSIS

By late 1944 the collection of information was the best it could have been. The Allies had similar capabilities then compared to what we have today. Aerial photography, communication intercepts, and human intelligence were used extensively. In fact, even then, Allied intelligence officers were complaining of receiving too much information and not having the manpower to properly analyse it. Then, as today, they were often unable to separate the important from the immaterial.

This trend, if anything, is accelerating. Since World War II enormous amounts of money and talent have been devoted to developing sophisticated collection systems. So much so that intelligence collection capabilities are overwhelming analytical capabilities. The number of "INT's", especially those collected by technical means, has grown dramatically.

Unfortunately, the analyst still operates in the "stubby pencil" mode with a brain that has not significantly changed or grown more capable in thousands of years. The average intelligence analyst is deluged with information but is still expected to separate the important "signals" from the "noise".

Analysts are furthered encumbered by the knowledge that intelligence failures are blamed on analysis, not collection. How can someone pass the buck to a machine? The truth is, though, that people are the weak link. All information that analysts consider is filtered through biases and perceptions of the world that have been ingrained throughout their lives. This is particularly

debilitating for the "westerner" who expects the world to be somewhat rational and orderly. We would not intentionally conduct a surprise attack to start a war or send 14-year-olds into a hail of gunfire once a war was begun. Our moral sense of fair play is assumed to be accepted by all peoples worldwide.

This outlook prevents us from seeing the underlying emotions in the events we are analyzing. The fact that people can kill each other without remorse because of a thousand-year-old rivalry still confuses us. We look in a mirror and superimpose our values on the world.

#### CAPABILITIES VERSES INTENTIONS

This is still one of the most misunderstood aspects of intelligence by non-intelligence people. Most often people assume these two terms to be synonymous. Unfortunately, even intelligence professionals can err.

As already pointed out, before the Battle of the Bulge Allied intelligence inferred intentions from their perception of German capabilities. The Germans did not have the capability so, therefore, they did not have the intent. The Allies were wrong on both counts.

The capability verses intent issue does not seem to be one of procedure. As Koch pointed out, in the U.S. military his job was to provide capabilities and the commanders would determine intent. The British, conversely, expected their intelligence officers to provide both. At Ardennes, both methods were failures.

Order-of-battle (OOB) reporting is one area of intelligence we can do fairly well. Long-time "bean counters" (OOB analysts) have a reasonably good idea of various target countries' OOB. However, OOB reporting provides capabilities, not intentions.

In our system, the responsibility for the determination of intentions is oftentimes unclear, with much latitude for assessing blame. When an intention is missed, seldom does anyone accept the blame.

Even the best and most respected of intelligence analysts are in difficult positions. If an intention is discerned and preventive measures are taken, absent that event occurring, the analyst can be accused of misrepresentation. More probably, however, the analyst is caught between truth and political reality. Even if the indicators are available and the best guess of the intelligence community is that an event will occur, political considerations take precedence. Unfortunately, this does not shield the analyst when political leaders err.

#### LACK OF REGIONAL ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

The role of perception has a particularly debilitating influence on intelligence analysis. There are two additional difficulties:

(1) We have institutionalized a generation of intelligence analysts who fought the Cold War. This orientation left few of them prepared for the new difficulties facing the world. These challenges will probably have a regional orientation and will

require a much deeper understanding of the conflicts that influence an area.

(2) We seldom take a long view when developing an intelligence analyst. Frequently the training of analysts is deficient in the very areas most needed. They are generally expected to be all things to all people and to move easily from one discipline or region to any another without formal training. This lack of formal training reinforces individual beliefs, because analysts are not trained to think in any other way. Perpetuation of biases becomes the rule. They become susceptible to "group think" and are unable to break out of the paradigm.

#### CONCLUSION

Intelligence failures, at least those where adequate data was sufficient before the event occurred, are the result of people making errors of judgment and perception. All too often an event is analysed by people who try to find "rationality" in an act defined in their own terms. They fail to understand the underlying emotions behind the events. When in doubt, they will usually rely on the "reasonable man" concept to see them through. They will look in a mirror and see themselves.

The intelligence lessons learned from the Battle of the Bulge are relevant today. By December 1944, intelligence collection was the best it could be. The data needed by decisionmakers was available. The problem was in interpretation. Those responsible had already decided the outcome of the war and expected the enemy

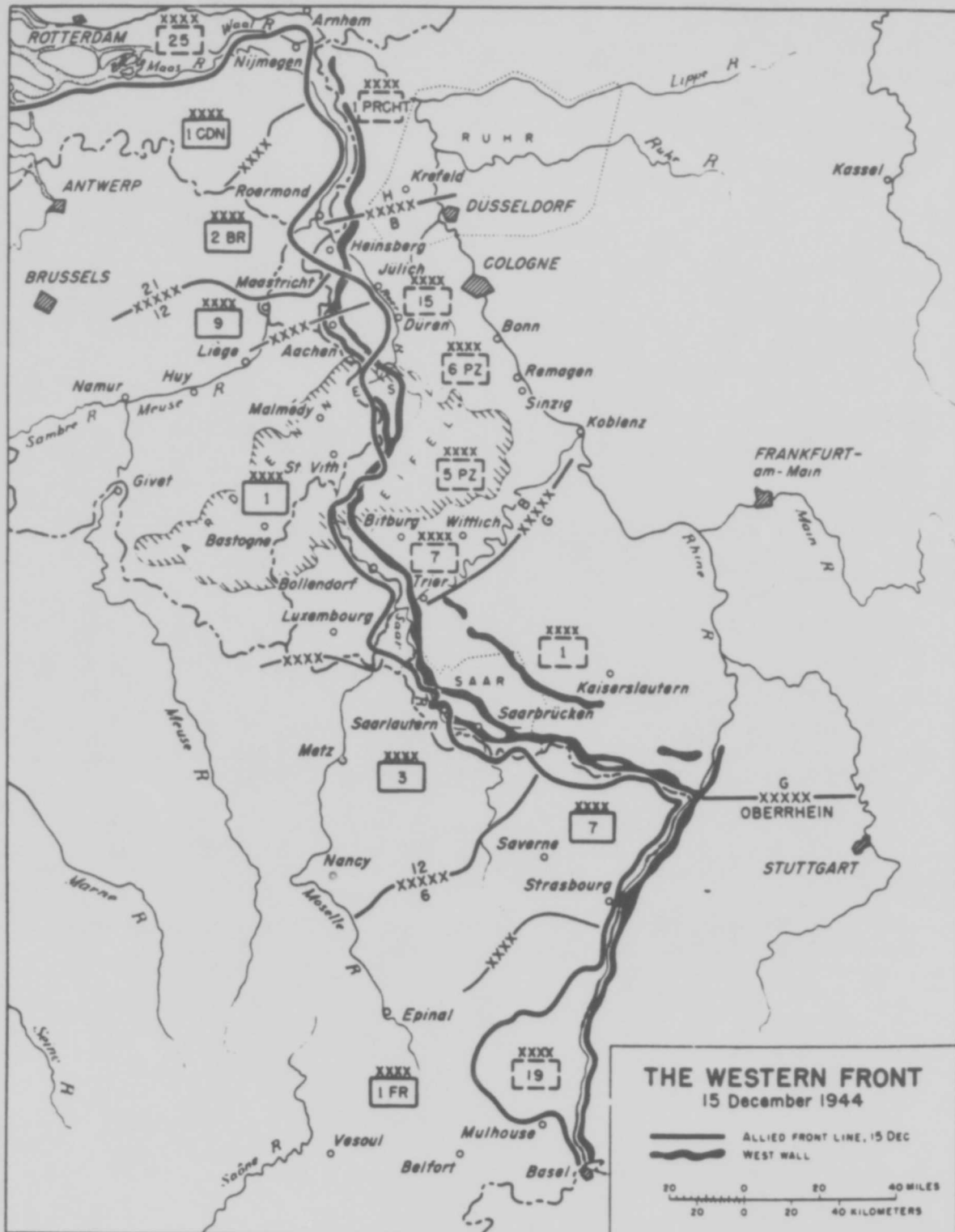
to act accordingly. When the Germans did not, a most unwelcome surprise ensued.

We are facing the same situation today. Technology has ensured a high speed, never-ending stream of information--much of it contradictory. But technology alone cannot determine the intentions of a potential adversary. Only people, their ingrained biases notwithstanding, can ferret out the accurate information from the background noise. Our most valuable asset is still the most overlooked.

## ENDNOTES

1. Charles B. MacDonald, A Time for Trumpets (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 18.
2. Ibid., 20.
3. Peter Elstob, Hitler's Last Offensive (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), 4.
4. This was especially significant because the Allies by now had come to rely on ULTRA as well as tactical radio interceptions to learn important aspects of German planning and operations. Only after the battle would the Allies realize that this was, in fact, an overreliance on a single source of intelligence. The Allies had indeed committed this same error on other occasions during the war, particularly in the North Africa Campaign.
5. MacDonald, 40.
6. Hugh M. Cole, The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 63.
7. Ibid., 70.
8. Ibid., 50.
9. Ibid., 50.
10. MacDonald, 41.
11. Ibid.
12. Cole, 50.
13. Ibid. 51.
14. Sir Kenneth Strong, Intelligence at the Top (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), 215.
15. MacDonald, 49.
16. Strong, 210.
17. MacDonald, 63.
18. Robert S. Whitlow, ULTRA Intelligence Procedures--IX Air Force (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 1945), 291.

19. Ibid., 294, 297.
20. Ronald Lewin, ULTRA Goes to War (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), 357.
21. Cole, 61.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Elstob, 47.
25. MacDonald, 56.
26. Cole, 62-63.
27. MacDonald, 55.
28. Cole, 59.
29. MacDonald, 56.
30. Cole, 57.
31. MacDonald, 53.
32. B.A. Dickson, G-2 Estimate No. 37 (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 1944), 1-3.
33. Michael I. Handel, ed., Strategic and Operational Deception in the Second World War (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 1.
34. Handel, 20-33. See also Douglas H. Dearth, ed, Strategic Intelligence: Theory and Application (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991), 248-253.
35. Oscar W. Koch, G-2: Intelligence for Patton (Philadelphia: Whitmore Publishing Company, 1971), 109.



SOURCE: Hugh M. Cole, The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 52.

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