

When the Japanese Bombed the Huertgen Forest

How the Army's Investigation of Pearl Harbor Influenced the Outcome of the Huertgen Forest, Major General Leonard T. Gerow and His Command of V Corps from 1943-1945

**A Monograph
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In September of 1944, Major General Leonard T. Gerow, the V Corps commander was relieved of command in combat to return to the United States and testify before the Army's Investigation Board on Pearl Harbor. The board found General Gerow partially responsible for the American defeat at Pearl Harbor. After testifying before the board he returned to Europe where he resumed command of V Corps. The timing of the board, the nature of its findings and its effect on him disrupted his confidence and capability to command. In the month he was absent from the overall Allied situation had changed. The Allied armies were logistically culminated; short of trained combat personnel and facing determined German resistance. The findings of the board also stung him personally and affected his relationship with superior officers. His embarrassment coupled with mute resentment towards the investigations findings would prove disastrous in the coming month. Less than three weeks after his return from testifying, V Corps initiated a series of attacks to secure the Ruhr River dams in western Germany. His tactical effort during this offensive was his poorest performance of the war. He was uncharacteristically remote from his subordinates, micromanaging, and physically absent from the battlefield. The battle for the Huertgen was a dark blemish on an otherwise distinguished career. The timing of the Pearl Harbor Investigation and his terrible performance in the Huertgen was not a coincidence. His unsatisfactory accomplishment during the Huertgen was related to the investigation. Less than a month after his failed attack, the Germans launched their final counter-offensive of the war. The Ardennes Offensive was his moment of redemption. Gerow was one of the first leaders to recognize the nature of the Nazi attack. During the battle he was energetic, resourceful and very effective in blunting the German assaults. He was present on the battlefield when needed, he was quick and adamant about requesting support and he made rapid and inventive decisions that greatly contributed to the corps success and the ultimate Allied victory.

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Abstract

When the Japanese Bombed the Huertgen Forest: How the Army's Investigation of Pearl Harbor Influenced the Outcome of the Huertgen Forest, Major General Leonard T. Gerow and His Command of V Corps from 1943-1945 by Major Jade E. Hinman, U.S. Army, 45 pages.

In September of 1944, Major General Leonard T. Gerow, the V Corps commander was relieved of command in combat to return to the United States and testify before the Army's Investigation Board on Pearl Harbor. The board eventually found General Gerow partially responsible for the American defeat at Pearl Harbor. After testifying before the board General Gerow returned to Europe where he resumed command of V Corps.

The timing of the board, the nature of its findings and its effect on him disrupted his confidence and capability to command. In the month he was absent from the front his corps as well as the overall Allied situation had changed. The Allied armies were logistically culminated; short of trained combat personnel and facing determined German resistance. The findings of the board also stung him personally and affected his relationship with superior officers. His embarrassment coupled with mute resentment towards the investigations findings would prove disastrous in the coming month.

Less than three weeks after his return from testifying, V Corps initiated a series of attacks to secure the Ruhr River dams in western Germany. These dams were crucial to subsequent allied advances into northern Germany. These attacks were launched into a heavily wooded area known as the Huertgen Forest. The attempt to seize this area was met with fierce German resistance and heavy U.S. casualties. His tactical effort during this offensive was his poorest performance of the war. He was uncharacteristically remote from his subordinates, micromanaging, and physically absent from the battlefield. Prior to the Huertgen his was one of the most successful corps commanders in the U.S. Army in Europe. His corps landed on D-Day at Omaha Beach, fought through the hedgerows of Normandy, liberated Paris and was one of the first units to enter into Germany. The battle for the Huertgen was a dark blemish on an otherwise distinguished career.

The timing of the Pearl Harbor Investigation and his terrible performance in the Huertgen was not a coincidence. His unsatisfactory accomplishment during the Huertgen was related to the investigation. Less than a month after his failed attack, the Germans launched their final counter-offensive of the war. The Ardennes Offensive was his moment of redemption. Gerow was one of the first leaders to recognize the nature of the Nazi attack. During the battle he was energetic, resourceful and very effective in blunting the German assaults. He was present on the battlefield when needed, he was quick and adamant about requesting support and he made rapid and inventive decisions that greatly contributed to the corps success and the ultimate Allied victory.

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Introduction

The sun rose on the twentieth of November 1944, a dark day for the United States Army, as it had just suffered its most disastrous division level defeat of World War II. The 28th Infantry Division suffered over 6,000 casualties in an eighteen-day battle for the town of Schmitt on the German Border.¹ Schmitt was a small hamlet in the Huertgen Forest, an area so densely wooded that the commander of the 82nd Airborne Division General Gavin recalled, “Upon entering the forest, you want to drop things behind to mark your path, as Hansel and Gretel did with their bread crumbs.”² Even the soldiers fighting for the woods lamented the nature of the terrain, with one Sergeant of the 22nd Infantry declaring the Huertgen, “the bloodiest damn ground in all of Europe.”³

Strategically this battle was an important step in the Allied advance into Germany and seizing its crucial war industry of the Ruhr valley. Operationally it was fought to clear German forces from the Huertgen in order to control the Ruhr River dams and to secure the right flank of the First U.S. Army’s attack into Northwestern Germany.⁴ In order for the Allies to seize the key German industrial Ruhr Valley their armies were required to cross the downstream of the dams. The concern to senior commanders was that if the dams were left in control of the enemy they could release the impounded water

¹ Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign: The European Theater of Operations - United States Army in World War 2* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1963), 373-4.

² James Gavin, “Bloody Huertgen: The Battle That Should Never Have Been Fought,” *American Heritage* (December 1979): 32-44.

³ William Walton, “The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest,” *Life* (January 1, 1945): 33-36.

⁴ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 30.

in the upper reservoir system and inundate the lower valley and delay the allied attack or worse yet, isolate friendly units on the eastern side of the flooded river. So long as the Ruhr River dams remained under Axis control, the Allied advance was threatened.⁵

In response to the threat of the enemy flooding the Allies axis of advance First Army developed a plan on the fourth of October 1944 as to how it would continue its attack into Germany.⁶ It would attack along the Aachen-Cologne corridor with the intent of crossing the Rhine in the vicinity of Cologne. Its main effort, VII Corps, would be responsible for securing the city of Aachen, but V Corps needed to secure the Rhur Dams first. The First United States Army Commander, Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges put his most senior corps commander, Major General Leonard T. Gerow, in charge of securing the dams.

A battle tested and competent corps commander, General Gerow had lead the invasion of Omaha beach, fought in the hedgerows of Normandy, was personally selected to oversee the occupation of Paris, and had played a crucial role in pursuing the defeated German Army to the frontiers of Germany.⁷ His V Corps consisted of the 4th, 28th and the 9th Infantry Divisions plus elements of the 5th Armored Division.⁸ He designated the seasoned and veteran 28th Infantry Division to lead the attack to secure the approaches to the Ruhr dams. This division was a sound choice to attack the strong German positions

⁵ Harry Yeide, *The Longest Battle: September 1944-February 1945: From Aachen to the Roer and Across* (St. Paul, MN.: Zenith Press, 2005), 57.

⁶ John T. Greenwood, ed., *Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney H. Hodges and the First U.S. Army (American Warriors Series)*, annotated edition ed. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 143.

⁷ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 23.

⁸ United States. Army. *V Corps History. V Corps Operations in the ETO*, 6 Jan. 1942-9 May 1945. (U.S. Government: 1945), 281.

in the Huertgen. It had participated in both the pursuit across France as well as the initial fighting for the Westwall in September of 1944. The division was also well rested following a four-week rotation to the American refit facility at Camp Elsenborn.⁹ This formation was very experienced at attacking well-defended German positions; in September of 1944 one of its regiments destroyed over 140 German pillboxes in a ten-day operation.¹⁰ Additionally, it had been attached to the corps for most of the war, making for a strong command relationship between Gerow and the division's commanding officer Major General Norman "Dutch" Cota.¹¹

The 28th Infantry Division's tragic offensive into the Huertgen lasted from the second to the twentieth of November. While sufficiently reinforced, the corps commander displayed poor leadership and micromanaged the division's assault which resulted in a poorly coordinated attack and heavy casualties.¹² The corps commander was uncharacteristically directive in his orders to the commander of the 28th Infantry, insisting that the division advance along three divergent axes. He was dismissive of Cota's concerns about the suitability of the offensive and was unusually withdrawn from

⁹ Cecil B. Currey, *Follow Me and Die: The Destruction of an American Division in World War II* (New York: Stein & Day Pub, 1984), 57.

¹⁰ Ibid, 57. The 28th Infantry Division was no stranger to combat and had been in theater since the mid-July 1944. The 28th was one of the first divisions to have combat troops enter into Germany proper and played a leading role in establishing early Allied foot holds in the German's Westwall defensive line. The 110th RCT's destruction of so many pillboxes spoke to the rapid advances of late September 1944 through partially manned defenses. The situation would change dramatically in November 1944 when the German's had time to fully occupy their defensive positions.

¹¹ United States, *Historical and Pictorial Review of the Twenty-Eighth Division in World War II* (Divisional series) (Nashville, Tenn.: Battery Press, 2003), 3.

¹² MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 143. General Gerow, the V Corps commander provided the 28th Infantry with a chemical mortar battalion of 107mm mortars, three combat engineer battalions, a battalion of towed anti-tank guns, a battalion of tanks, a battalion of tank destroyers, and an allotment of forty-seven M29 Weasel Cargo Carriers. Additionally, the 28th could and did call upon the support of fourteen battalions of artillery.

the battle, preferring to remain in his command post, never coming closer than ten miles to the forward battle area of the Huertgen.

The battle began with a success but that changed quickly. The lead regiment of the division rapidly seized the key town of Schmitt with a single battalion on the third of November, but in the process the entire division was overextended into enemy territory with only a narrow supply line that passed along a narrow one-lane path called the Kall Trail.¹³ The Germans mounted fierce counter-attacks well supported by armor and infantry against 28th Infantry's vulnerable position and tenuous lines of communication.¹⁴ By the fourth of November its position in Schmitt was under constant German assault. Within a few days the it had gone from assaulting and seizing Schmitt, to desperately trying to hold ground that they had captured. The exhausted soldiers held on for as long as possible, but crushing German pressure and scant reinforcements resulted in withdrawals becoming routs.¹⁵ By the thirteenth of November all three American infantry regiments had been driven from Schmitt and the corps commander was forced to call off the offensive. On the twentieth of November the division withdrew from the Huertgen having lost nearly half the division's strength.¹⁶

¹³ Charles Whitting, *West Wall: The Battle For Hitler's Siegfried Line* (Conshohocken, PA.: Da Capo Press, 2000), 71.

¹⁴ Carey Clark et al., *Armor in the Hurtgen Forest* (Fort Knox: The U.S. Armor School, 1948-1949), 58-59

¹⁵ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 364.

¹⁶ Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945*, (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 38. The losses suffered by the 28th Infantry in Huertgen are not truly representative of the division's destruction. At full strength, a 1943 U.S. Infantry division was authorized 14,253 soldiers. The actual number of infantrymen in the rifle companies was 5,211. Since a vast majority of the losses suffered were by the infantry in the rifle companies it is easy to see that the 28th Infantry was essentially destroyed in the Huertgen.

Why did General Gerow perform so poorly in his attempt to seize the Huertgen? For the first time in his distinguished career, and at a location more critical than any before, he made a mistake of such significant proportions as to alter the entire U.S. Army's plan in Europe. As shocking as this misstep was to the commanders of the Allied forces, the reason for his poor performance during the battle can be traced back to the investigation of an attack that occurred nearly three years earlier. In September of 1944 he was summoned to testify before the Congressionally mandated Pearl Harbor Investigation board. The timing of his testimony, the difficult professional nature of the investigation, and the effects of the negative findings on his personal morale all contributed to his poor performance in the Huertgen Forest campaign.¹⁷

Gerow's Background to the Pearl Harbor Investigation

To understand how the Pearl Harbor investigation affected Gerow in the Huertgen it is important to understand a few things about his exemplary and distinguished background.¹⁸ He had served on General Pershing's Staff during World War I and held many of the key positions needed for promotion. He graduated number one from the

¹⁷ For a more detailed read on the Huertgen Forest Campaign I recommend, MacDonald's *Siegfried Line Campaign*, Rush's *Hell in the Hurtgen Forest*, Astors *Bloody Forest*, Currey's *Follow Me and Die*, and Whiting's *Battle of Hurtgen Forest*. The MacDonald book is very well organized and full of useful data. It is relatively dated but MacDonald was a veteran of 2nd Infantry Division in the southern Huertgen area and is somewhat biased in that manner. Astors book is one of the most recent work on the subject and a good read with an excellent combination of first person accounts and third person overview. The Whiting and Currie books are less contemporary, both being published in the 1980's. Currie is definitely anti-Hodges and Gerow with very little sympathy for Cota. The Rush book is the most recent work but only deals with the 22nd Regiment and is somewhat limited in scope for this paper.

¹⁸ For a detailed chronology of General Gerow's career consult Appendix I.

Infantry Course in 1925, and second two years later from the General Staff School.¹⁹ He served in a variety of stateside and overseas positions, and like many of his peers, suffered through the periods of slow promotions and tedious garrison work. His performance in the 1930's was not meteoric but it was steady. Many officers spent fifteen years as a major and he was no exception.²⁰ The looming threat of war in the late 1930's caused careers to pick up as the Army began its rearmament. He went from Major to Brigadier General in five short years; stopping at Colonel for only 60 days before being promoted again. Competent enough to attract the attention of Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall, he was made Chief of War Plans in October 1940 and served in that capacity until he took command of the 29th Infantry Division.²¹ Command of the 29th Infantry Division lasted from February 1942 until July of 1943, at which time he was selected to command V Corps.²²

It was his experience as Chief of War Plans that would come back to haunt him in late 1944. The issue of Pearl Harbor resurfaced in early 1944 as part of partisan politics

¹⁹ Peter J. Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II (Modern War Studies)* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 143. Graduating number two from the General Staff School was no small accomplishment and usually had a direct impact on an officer's potential for promotion. Top graduates gained automatic admission to the Army's War College and increased their likelihood of commanding at higher levels. Gerow's performance at the General Staff School was a critical point in his career and contributed to his promotion and success.

²⁰ Schifferle, *America's School for War*, 22. Promotion in the inter-war Army was difficult to say the least. One of the most significant reasons for the slow promotion rate was the large numbers of officers that entered the Army during WWI. This group of officers created a statistical "hump" in the promotion timeline. The effect was such that by 1926 55% of all officers on active duty had been commissioned between 1916-1918. The author describes this hump as a "pig in a python". An excellent metaphor for the distortion it created in the normal officer timeline.

²¹ Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 334.

²² Harold R. Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes (Modern War Studies)*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 33-35.

to discredit President Roosevelt. Information had been leaked to the political insiders in Congress that the U.S. military had broken the Japanese codes in early 1941, prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor. An intense political debate ensued as to whether the President had concrete knowledge of the attack prior to its commencement and purposefully withheld that information in order to facilitate the United State's entry into the war.²³ As a result Congress called for an investigation of Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. Army launched a special board of inquiry in the fall of 1944 to determine responsibility.

The U.S. Army's role in the attack on Pearl Harbor is usually less sensationalized than the U.S. Navy's, but Gerow was at an interesting nexus of Army involvement. As the Chief of the Army War Plans Department in December of 1941, he played a crucial role in the message traffic that communicated warnings to U.S. Army commands in the Pacific and attempted to analyze the intent of Japanese activity just prior to the surprise attack. In 1941 the American military had broken the Japanese diplomatic codes and the U.S. War Department was reading diplomatic cables between Japan's Embassy in Washington D.C. and Tokyo. This ability was a very closely guarded secret within the U.S. military and there was great caution exercised on the part of senior American officials to ensure that any response to Japanese activity was not connected to deciphered messages.²⁴ For this reason, when General Marshall decided to issue warnings to U.S. Pacific commanders in the final days of November 1941, the War Department wanted to

²³ Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory, 1943-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1999), 471.

²⁴ Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman* (New York, N.Y.: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 244.

make sure that commanders' increased alert levels were not overtly connected to Japanese code traffic.²⁵

Gerow's fault in Pearl Harbor stemmed from an ambiguous worded message. As Chief of War Plans Department, he was personally responsible for communicating with U.S. Commands in Hawaii and the Philippines. On the twenty-seventh of November 1941, more than a week before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Marshall instructed Gerow to issue a warning to all American commands in the Pacific that all diplomatic means with Japan were exhausted and that Japanese military action against the United States was very likely in the immediate future.²⁶ Concern that an abrupt change in U.S. military posture would raise Japanese suspicions about the security of their codes led to the inclusion of a final sentence to the War Department message, "but these measures should be carried out so as not repeat not to alarm civil populations or disclose intent."²⁷ This final sentence was not part of the Pacific original message approved by Chief of Staff George Marshall. Although he later concurred to its addition, it was Gerow who added the sentence before sending the alert. The Army's inquiry revealed that this final phrase served to dramatically alter the tone and effect of the warning. The ensuing Army investigation of Pearl Harbor found both Army Chief of Staff and General Gerow at fault for their role in the pre-attack message traffic. Ultimately this one sentence would have grave repercussions three years later in the Huertgen.²⁸

²⁵ Cray, *George C. Marshall*, 244.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 243.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁸ Whitting, *West Wall*, 71-2.

The opening days of World War II were difficult times for the entire country, but more stark for the man who had done so much of the staff work prior to the Japanese attack. All of his effort seemed to come to a frustrating end with the series of lopsided Japanese victories in early 1942. On General Eisenhower's first day as the Chief of the Army's War Plans department he noted in his diary Gerow's parting words before assuming command of the 29th Infantry Division " Well, I got Pearl Harbor on the book; lost the P.I. (Philippines Islands), Singapore, Sumatra and all the NEI (Netherlands East Indies) north of the barrier. Let's see what you can do."²⁹ Better than anyone else he summed up his own nature of the American condition in 1942. Less than three years later he had to give up command of his corps, travel to the U.S., and testify before the investigation committee. The results of this board were personally humiliating and professionally embarrassing. The Pearl Harbor board jeopardized his career, his professional relationships, and his confidence to lead. Only the German winter counter-offensive of December 1944 seemed to snap him out of his depression.³⁰ The Battle of the Bulge caused him to rebound with energy and enthusiasm. He was able to recover from the disruption caused by his testimony before the Army Pearl Harbor board and the subsequent disaster in the Huertgen and redeem himself as an effective corps commander. He took command from the front, allowed subordinates freedom to fight,

²⁹ Dwight Eisenhower, Journal Note, February 16, 1942, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years, Volume I*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler and Stephen E. Ambrose (U.S. Government: John Hopkins Press 1970), 109.

³⁰ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 112.

and he regained the confidence of his superiors. He led his corps with great skill and played a crucial role in defeating the German offensive.³¹

³¹ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 129

A Corps Without a Commander

On fifteen September 1944 General Gerow relinquished command of V Corps to Major General Edward Brooks, then commander of 2nd Armored Division, and flew back to Washington to testify before Congress.³² The fact that he had to leave theater, travel to the United States, and then testify placed an enormous burden on him and negatively affected his ability to resume command when he did return four weeks later. His month long absence from the front disrupted his continuity of command, appreciation of the overall Allied operational environment and understanding of his own corps tactical situation. All of these things would factor into his poor handling of the Huertgen Forest campaign.

Brooks' replacement of Gerow as commander of V Corps was not unusual, as Bradley had shown a preference for selecting new commanders from outside the corps to command, the selection of a commander from outside the corps would disrupt the continuity of command as the corps staff and subordinate divisions adjusted to a new leader.³³ His selection as corps commander was also a strong indication that his predecessor's relief would be permanent.³⁴ This is based on the fact that Brooks did not

³² United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 256.

³³ Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 190 and 423. Bradley and Eisenhower showed a preference to select corps commanders from outside the corps. This was the case when Bradley had to relieve General Corlette of XIX Corps and replaced him with General McLain from the 90th Infantry. McLain was a division commander in Patton's Third Army. This did not always hold true as the 1st Infantry commander, General Hubner, took command of V Corps from Gerow in January of 1945.

³⁴ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 261. There were several other strong capable officers within the corps, namely General Clarence Hubner, who were candidates for corps command. In fact, Hubner would eventually replace Gerow in January of 1945 when he was finally promoted to command Fifteenth

return to his division command when Gerow returned; instead he was given command of VI corps in 7th Army.³⁵ V Corps staff and subordinates had no idea that Brooks would command for less than a month and were no doubt occupied with understanding their new commander and learning his leadership style. All of this work and preparation was for naught when Gerow returned in mid-October 1944.

The Pearl Harbor investigation could not have come at a worse time for him in context of the Allied advance into Germany. From the time he departed theater in September of 1944, until he returned almost a month later in October of 1944, events on the Allied operational environment had changed significantly. When he left, the Germans were in full retreat across France and Belgium and the Allies were in hot pursuit of a defeated enemy army. His last day before leaving, September seventeenth 1944 was the opening day for Montgomery's ambitious Market-Garden Campaign. The Allies were in full offensive mode and the end of the war seemed imminent.³⁶ By October, much of that had changed. Market-Garden did not achieve its strategic goals of ending the war before Christmas and the allied supply situation that was critical in September

Army, but these officers were not chosen owing to Bradley and Hodges preference for new blood in organizations.

³⁵ Ibid., 408. There is little commentary on Brooks performance as the V Corps commander. The fact that Bradley and Hodges set him on his way so shortly after assuming command is remarkable. Its possible to conclude that neither Hodges nor Bradley thought much of his ability, V Corps did not have any tactically significant missions under Brooks aside from moving north 40 miles. The fact that Brooks was sent to General Dever's command with little resistance indicates that he was not a good "fit" in First Army. Ultimately he was quite successful in 7th Army and ultimately retired as a lieutenant general and commanded Second Army. Of other significant note, his son was killed in combat on the 22 September 1944, a week after assuming command. It is very likely that this affected him and his ability to command. Hodge was not known for his concern for commanders.

³⁶ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 136. By the end of September even General Hodge thought that the war was nearing its end. He felt that only two weeks of good weather for unrestricted bombing would bring the Germans to their knees.

was a full-blown crisis in October.³⁷ Fuel, ammunition and replacements were in such short supply that severe rationing was directed. In one example, Bradley was forced to restrict artillery ammunition to the barest levels to prevent a complete exhaustion of available stocks by the first of November 1944.³⁸ The supply and personnel problems forced First Army to a halt its offensive operations.³⁹ Additionally, casualties and the steady flow of replacements were a significant problem for commanders. The expected eighty thousand replacements were barely sufficient to cover the seventy-five thousand casualties suffered in September and October.⁴⁰ Of particular concern to Eisenhower and Bradley was the disproportionately heavy loss of riflemen in infantry divisions. These losses prompted an aggressive search in the rear-areas for trained infantrymen and ultimately lead to many soldiers being reclassified into foot soldiers to meet critical shortfalls.⁴¹ The mounting casualties were sufficiently worrisome to First Army leadership that Hodges issued his cautionary order “all troops should stay tightly buttoned up” in an effort to limit needless losses to frontline troops.⁴² All of these were new operational conditions for Gerow when he returned.

³⁷ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 13.

³⁸ Ibid., 386.

³⁹ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 149. In a note in the War Diary of Major Sylvan it was apparent that subordinate commanders vexed the FUSA commander and his staff with daily complaints for supplies and troops. General Corlette, the XIX Corps commander was evidently a “squeaky wheel” and his persistent requests for more supplies grated on the FUSA staff. Despite the FUSA staff having plenty of sherry, bourbon and scotch for visiting dignitaries the Army itself operated on minimal supplies. Major Sylvan noted that General Hodge made a not so subtle hint that General Corlett was to stop requesting supplies or “as far as you are concerned the war is over.”

⁴⁰ Ibid., 388.

⁴¹ Forrest C. Pogue, *European Theater of Operations: The Supreme Command. U.S. Army in World War II* (Washington D.C.: Dept. of the Army, 1954), 306.

⁴² Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 56.

Also new was the location of his corps. A week after relinquishing command, V Corps was directed by First Army to assume a new sector. Hodges ordered Brooks to have V Corps change sectors with elements of XIX and VIII Corps and move forty miles to the north of their current area of operation.⁴³ This change was a major event that required more than a week to complete, and resulted in V Corps moving off its original axis of attack and occupying a new area of the front. The shift in line of advance required that V Corps advance towards the objective of Bonn-Remagen rather than towards Koblenz; a realignment north of over twenty-five miles.⁴⁴ It was after the corps had accomplished its repositioning that he returned to reassume command.⁴⁵

General Gerow returned to First Army Headquarters on the fifth of October 1944 and spent several hours in a conference with the General Hodges catching up on the latest developments and plans.⁴⁶ He returned to a corps that was extremely weary, with morale nowhere near as high as it was a month previous. He was only gone for a month but the tenor of the war had changed in his absence. In his farewell letter to his corps, he declared, “it is probable that the war with Germany will be over before I am released to return to V Corps.”⁴⁷ This optimism was no longer prevalent when he returned. The war was not ending quickly and the German resistance was improving. The rapid-paced

⁴³ V Corps Field Order #27, 22 September 1944.

⁴⁴ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 252.

⁴⁵ V Corps General Order no. 60, 6 October 1944.

⁴⁶ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 143.

⁴⁷ Leonard T. Gerow, Letter, “To All Officers And Enlisted Men Of The V Corps Headquarters And Units Permanently Attached To The V Corps.” 17 September 1944.

advances of the summer were replaced with more deliberate offensives in increasingly poor weather.

Also in his absences there were significant changes to strategic and operational environment of the war. The entire theater was no longer attacking with the same speed and intensity of the previous months and allied morale was faltering due to poor supply and high casualties. Additionally, his corps had made a forty-mile move north thus changing his understanding of the terrain and enemy that he faced prior to testifying. The board's timing was very disruptive for his continuity of command but it was not the only aspect of the investigation that would affect his performance during the Huertgen campaign.

A Corps Commander Professionally Shattered

Difficult situations and complex professional relationships were nothing new for him, but the Pearl Harbor investigation shook him to his core. His relief from command and subsequent disassociation by long time friends and superiors was a terrible blow to his ego and confidence to lead. Gerow, who prior to the investigation, thought he had a solid relationship with his superiors was dismayed to realized how quickly his favor had fallen. The combination of his relief and lack of professional support following his return would set the conditions for a significant change in his leadership style, a change that would have tragic results during the battle for the Huertgen Forest.

It is important to understand his professional and personal relationship with General Eisenhower and General Bradley and how these relationships were affected by the investigation. He depended on the support of these two men for his career and professional advancement. Relieving a successful Army corps commander, in combat, in the name of partisan politics, was not only embarrassing for Gerow but, Eisenhower, and Marshall as well.⁴⁸ When he left for the United States he suspected that he would not return and his career was probably over. This had a profound effect on him. For an ambitious officer with over thirty years of service being summarily relieved was both

⁴⁸ Eisenhower to Marshall, Letter, August 19, 1944. *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 2079. Eisenhower specifically uses the word “embarrassment” to describe his and Marshall’s feelings about having to send Gerow back to the states to testify. Eisenhower also specifically mentions that he planed on Gerow’s relief from V Corps being permanent.

professionally humiliating and personally shattering.⁴⁹ The investigation prompted a waning of support that nearly cost him his command and his future promotion to lieutenant general and command of an army.

Eisenhower's abandonment as a result of the Pearl Harbor investigation was very damaging because of their close, long time friendship prior to the war.⁵⁰ Mamie Eisenhower even credited Gerow with playing an instrumental role in introducing the couple in October of 1915 at Fort Sam Houston.⁵¹ The two men were both assigned to the General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth in 1925 during which time they built a "model command post" in the third story of their apartment where the two studied together successfully; Eisenhower graduated first in his class with Gerow finishing second by less than two-tenths of a percent.⁵²

As the Chief of the War Plans Department (WPD), Gerow knew his old friend and Staff School study partner, then a colonel, would be of considerable use in planning the future war.⁵³ He made several entries to Eisenhower hoping he would volunteer for service in the WPD but his former Staff School friend was very reluctant to give up troop

⁴⁹ Robert H Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography* (Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1989), 7. Only seven corps commanders were relieved during World War II, two for health reasons and the other five for substandard performance (three of which by Hodges) and Gerow did not want to be categorized with failed commanders like Lucas, Dawley, and Fredendall.

⁵⁰ David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1986), 176.

⁵¹ Merle Miller, *Ike the Soldier* (New York: Putnam Adult, 1987), 138.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 230.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 330. Gerow played a role in Eisenhower's assignment to the War Plans Department but the Army Chief of Staff, George Marshall was well aware of Gerow and Eisenhower's friendship. Marshall was probably inclined to accept Gerow's endorsement of Eisenhower as Gerow's replacement but it was a conversation with Major General Walter Kruger following the end of the Louisiana Maneuvers in the fall of 1941 that cemented Marshall's decision to bring Eisenhower to the War Plans Department.

command of the 15th Infantry Regiment for yet another staff position.⁵⁴ However, by January 1942 his long time friend was his deputy and heir apparent at the War Plans Department.⁵⁵ When he left the War Plans Department to command the 29th Infantry Division, Eisenhower remained to become the Chief of the War Plans Department.

As the command situation with the Allies began to take shape in late 1942, Eisenhower assumed command U.S. forces in England and he wanted to make Gerow his deputy but Marshall did not support the idea instead he recommended choosing an Allied officer.⁵⁶ He ultimately accepted the Chief of Staff's recommendation for a British deputy and did not pursue the issue, thus leaving him in command of the 29th Infantry.⁵⁷ His enthusiastic support for his former War Plans boss did not end with his desire to make him the deputy Supreme Commander. In January of 1944 he wrote Marshall trying to arrange a transfer of general officers between First Army and General Jacob Dever's Mediterranean Theater. He was looking for experienced corps commanders and was willing to trade any of Bradley's corps commanders for Generals Lucian Truscott and Joe Collins. He said Dever's could have any corps commander save Gerow, telling Marshall that transferring him would be prejudicial to the invasion of Normandy.⁵⁸ All of these were strong displays of his support and confidence, and Gerow knew that he could depend on the continued backing of his old friend and former subordinate.

⁵⁴ Merle Miller, *Ike the Soldier*, 313.

⁵⁵ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe, 1949* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949), 31.

⁵⁶ Eisenhower to Marshall, Letter, September 19, 1942. *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 566.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 568.

⁵⁸ Eisenhower to Marshall, Letter, January 18, 1944. *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 1665.

Gerow knew that there were plans for his future promotion and that an embarrassing political scandal such as the Pearl Harbor board could easily derail his promotion. Eisenhower, in a 17 August, 1944 letter to Marshall, stated that he would like to make him commander of the Fifteenth Army, and was in favor of him staying in the state's following his testimony to Congress ostensibly to take command of the forming army while it was still in the United States. He did caveat his recommendation by saying that he would like to make him the an army commander if "between now and October 1st (Gerow) continues at the present high standard..."⁵⁹ Gerow was politically savvy enough to realize that the outcome of the Pearl Harbor investigation had the power to leave him below this "present high standard."

His concern was well founded. While he was testifying in Washington Eisenhower wrote to Bradley that Truscott had been promoted to Lieutenant General, and should be considered to command Fifteenth Army rather than Gerow.⁶⁰ Both men had lobbied for Truscott to take command of a corps in Twelfth Army Group prior to the invasion of France and now that Truscott had been promoted, he seemed the best candidate to command the newly formed Fifteenth Army.⁶¹ Prior to returning from testifying, Eisenhower gave his Army Group commander the option of returning him to V Corps or keeping him in "supernumerary" for a while until the "occurrence of a vacancy

⁵⁹ Eisenhower to Marshall, Letter, August 19, 1944. *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 2079.

⁶⁰ Eisenhower to Omar Nelson Bradley, Letter, September 25, 1944. *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 2192.

⁶¹ The issue became moot when Truscott assumed command of Fifth Army in Italy. Truscott had commanded VI Corps in the Anzio breakout and was very familiar with the nature of the Italian Peninsula so when General Clark move up to assume command of 15th Army Group over the entire Italian Theater, Truscott was a logical choice to replace him.

in corps command.”⁶² Not the most ringing endorsement of confidence and a hardly coincidence of timing. His enthusiasm for his old friend and former boss appears to have cooled.

If Eisenhower’s support for him had gone from warm to cool then it is no surprise that Bradley’s support waned even further. He began the war as Gerow’s peer, commanding the 82nd then 28th Infantry Division followed by corps command. Then he quickly moved up the chain of command to be Gerow’s superior as the First Army commander.⁶³ While cordial, the two men’s relationship was not close. Eisenhower displayed enthusiastic support for him but Bradley was less impassioned. There were several areas where his tepid attitude towards Gerow was evident. He wasted little time in eclipsing V Corps’ planning role for the invasion of France. Additionally he did not fully use or appreciate Gerow’s tactical input in regards to the actual beach landings. Finally as the time for the invasion drew nearer there was a debate as to whether the invasion corps commanders should have command experience. He ultimately chose to keep him as an invasion commander despite his lack of combat experience, but his reasons for doing so were probably more pragmatic than reverent.

When he took command of V Corps in July of 1943 he was the senior standing U.S. Army headquarters in England and this gave him significant influence and prestige.⁶⁴ Most importantly he became a principle planner, if by default, for the U.S.

⁶² Eisenhower to Bradley, Letter, September 25, 1944. *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 2192.

⁶³ Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 2.

⁶⁴ United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 17.

Army's role in the impending invasion of France.⁶⁵ The arrival of Bradley's First United States Army and the creation of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in England, dramatically diminished his role in planning for D-Day.⁶⁶ He was no doubt upset or at least perturbed by the creation of two additional levels of command and bureaucracy above him between 1942 and the spring of 1944. He went from being a principle player in the planning of the invasion to several levels removed in a few months. Ironically, the First Army commander was extremely and loudly displeased when he learned that the invasion would be a joint endeavor commanded by the British Twenty-First Army Group under Field Marshal Montgomery.⁶⁷ Like Bradley, he was equally vexed to see his role increasingly displaced by emerging headquarters that were significantly less versed in the operational planning than his V Corps staff.

His ire at being largely removed from the operational planning of the invasion of France was further compounded by differences with Bradley's tactical vision of the invasion. His dealings with Gerow in this regard were probably the best indication of the relationship that existed between the two men. He did not seem to hold his corps commander's opinion in any special regard, dismissing many of his ideas and suggestions without much explanation as to why.⁶⁸ In many cases it seems apparent that he felt his

⁶⁵ Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach*, 165.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁷ Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story (Modern Library War)* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 204.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *Omaha Beach*, 182.

experience in Africa and Italy made him more of an expert on amphibious landings than the V Corps commander.⁶⁹

The two disagreed on some key aspects of the invasion. Notable were the composition and sequencing of the assault waves and the time of day for the actual landings. Bradley was in favor of landing tanks first, followed by engineers, and then the infantry.⁷⁰ He was also a proponent of the Duplex Drive tanks and wanted the invasion to be conducted in daylight.⁷¹ Gerow was less enamored with the Duplex Drive tanks. This is not to say that he did not want the Duplex Drive tanks, but he wanted to land some of the tanks with more reliable and tried methods. He specifically wanted to land at least two battalions of medium tanks with Land Craft Mediums (LCMs).⁷² He was also concerned about engineers having to clear obstacles in the open and in broad daylight in the face of hostile fire.⁷³ Gerow along with the 1st Infantry Division commander Major General Clarence Hubner wanted to conduct that landing at night to give the assault forces some sort of concealment. In the end, his concerns were overruled and Bradley's vision of the invasion was the vision that was executed on D-Day.⁷⁴

One vision of the invasion that both Bradley and Eisenhower worried about was the issue of commanders with combat experience. There was concern within the Allied chain of command that corps commanders for the invasion of France needed more

⁶⁹ Bradley, *A Soldier's*, 237.

⁷⁰ Lewis, *Omaha Beach*, 172.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷⁴ Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 242.

combat experience.⁷⁵ The three corps slated to lead the U.S. invasion of France had commanders with no combat experience. This fact troubled the two men to the point where they decided to relieve Generals Crittenger and Woodruff of VII and XIX Corps and replace them with General Collins and Corlette respectively. These two generals were proven combat leaders from the Pacific Theater and they were brought into the invasion planning with the hope of providing critical experience.⁷⁶ Bradley's support of the decision to keep him as the V Corps commander was more demur than Eisenhower's. He described Gerow as "conscientious, self-confident and steady."⁷⁷ His words of endorsement were not overly sanguine, particularly when viewed next to his ringing and shining assessment of the young and aggressive VII Corps commander, General Joe Collins.⁷⁸ The Army commander did, however, feel comfortable enough with his abilities to allow him to remain as the V Corps commander despite his lack of experience under fire.

Cynically, it is possible to conclude that Bradley allowed him to keep his job in view of his inexperience due to his close personal relationship with Eisenhower; more likely that he kept his job for a more practical reason. He was a competent officer and had

⁷⁵ Field Marshal The Viscount of Alamein Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic (WWII, 21st Army Group)*, (London, UK Hutchinson & Co., Ltd. 1946, 45. Montgomery was quick to point out in his book that his D-Day commanders were experienced officers from the North African campaigns. He also mentions that he made recommendations that he found a "prevalent lack of combat experience" within the Army Group. All of this was sideways language for him suggesting to Eisenhower and Bradley that their choice of inexperienced corps commanders was a bad idea. There is no doubt that Montgomery's subtle, if somewhat snide injection, played a role in Eisenhower and Bradley having second thoughts about leaving Woodruff and Crittenger in command.

⁷⁶ Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 227.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁷⁸ Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 228.

been planning for the invasion of France since his arrival to England in 1942. Bradley even admitted that he was “thoroughly schooled in the Overlord plan”.⁷⁹

The Pearl Harbor investigation did not radically change the otherwise cool professional relationship between the two, but it did increase the personal tension to the point where the Twelfth Army Group commander did not even bother to welcome him back to theater. Eisenhower gave Bradley the option of placing him in standby when he returned, but he chose to place him back in command. Again, the reason for this was probably more practical than personal. He was a proven veteran corps commander and those were in short supply.⁸⁰ What is significant is that the day he returned to the First Army headquarters from testifying in Washington. Bradley was also visiting the First Army area. In fact he was in Hodge’s headquarters the day before and the day after Gerow arrived but did not find time to greet his former Infantry School classmate.⁸¹ This was hardly a warm return welcome and the significance of this snub was not lost on him.

While he did not record his feelings regarding the board’s findings, others did. The Pearl Harbor Investigation also held Chief of Staff of the Army George Marshall responsible and he was shattered by the boards findings as well. He fell into a three-day depression where he even offered to resign in the face of the board’s findings. He told

⁷⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁸⁰ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 319. On eighteen October 1944 Bradley relieved the XIX Corps commander Major General Corlett citing health reasons. This is a partial story, Corlett did have lingering stomach and skin ailments from his time in the Pacific, however, Hodges was not impressed with his performance during the Westwall campaign and health reasons was an effective face-saving reason. Corlett was one of the combat experienced corps commanders brought in by Eisenhower and Bradley in early 1944 to replace Generals Crittenberger and Woodruff. Bradley did not have capable corps commanders to spare.

⁸¹ Greenwood, ed., *Normandy to Victory*, 144-145. Bradley left the day before Gerow arrived to visit XIX Corps. That was the most distant corps from First Army headquarters. This was no coincidence.

the Secretary of the Army “he thought his usefulness to the army had been destroyed by the boards report.”⁸² President Roosevelt also believed the Pearl Harbor investigation to be a petty and venial proceeding with the findings unjust. When told of the board’s critical findings he replied “Why this is just wicked.”⁸³ The “wickedness” of the board’s findings were evident in the performance of Gerow in the weeks that followed his return to theater and particularly during the battle for the Huertgen Forest. If the Chief of Staff of the Army was deeply affected by the Pearl Harbor board and on the verge of resignation it is no leap of imagination to assume that he was also deeply wounded by the board’s findings.

The effects of these changes in professional and personal relationships were devastating to him. Prior to the investigation he was an essential member of the Allied team. He had significant support from his long time friend the Supreme Allied commander. He had the solid, albeit somewhat uninspired support of the Twelfth Army Group commander. He was looking forward to advancement and promotion. The position of Fifteenth Army commander and its associated promotion to lieutenant general was well known. Prior to the investigation he felt that he was the only name on the list for the next army command and certainly felt that he deserved that promotion. The subsequent relief of command and “deportation” to Washington to face the Pearl Harbor board was a rude shock to a proud and distinguished officer. Suddenly, his prospects for command no longer seemed as certain and there can be little doubt that word of

⁸² Cray, *George C. Marshall*, 481.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 481.

Eisenhower's shifting support had made it to him in Washington. The notion that his future command was about to be given away while he was testifying, and that he might return to a "supernumerary" limbo, had a profound effect on him. The very support that he depended on for command and advancement seemed to abandon him. Worse yet, upon his return to theater his Army Group commander did not even make time for him to welcome his return. The professional trauma that Gerow suffered from his loss of support from friends and peers had tragic results in the months to come.

A Commander Affected by the Investigation

The Pearl Harbor Board found Gerow partially to blame for the Army's role in the Pearl Harbor attack. Having been officially censured by the Congress was very troubling personally and professionally for him. The investigation found him responsible for the defeat at Pearl Harbor in three ways. First he failed to keep General Short apprised of the most recent developments between Japan and the United States. Second, he failed to give clear guidance to General Short. Third, he failed to supervise the orders given by the War Department to General Short, particularly when it became evident that Short had misunderstood the War Departments meaning with the twenty-seven November 1941 message.⁸⁴ This stinging rebuke from Congress over basic leadership principles had tragic negative effects on his confidence and profoundly altered his style of command in the weeks to come. It is evident that he was determined not to make the same mistakes as he did at Pearl Harbor three years prior but ironically his attempts to fix his mistakes created even worse problems.

There is little doubt that the three main points of his censure from Congress correspond to his main failures in the Huertgen. During the battle he was uncharacteristically detached physically from the battlefield, reserved with his subordinates and micromanaging with his guidance. His concern about keeping seniors and subordinates apprised of the situation resulted in him spending too much time in his command post thus being detached from the battlefield. Wanting to give clear guidance

⁸⁴ United States. Congress. Joint Attack, Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack. Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, Congress of the United. 299.

resulted in him being aloof from his subordinates issuing imperial orders and not taking their concerns into consideration. Finally his rebuke about failing to follow up on subordinates resulted in him dictating the 28th Infantry's attack plan and micromanagement of Cota.

Prior to the investigation Gerow was a very up-front leader and while not a particularly gregarious officer, he did understand the value of personal leadership. He did an outstanding job leading his corps on D-Day. He personally commanded the corps' invasion from the USS Ancon that was often only a few thousand yards off shore.⁸⁵ He interacted with subordinates for the initial landings waves via radio reports and from what he could personally observe from his command ship. D-Day was shining example of his ability and steadfastness as a commander. Reports received from his Information Detachment ashore and from commanders on the beaches, depicted a confused and often desperate battle. The initial landings had encountered significant resistance and the situation was perceived as sufficiently dire that he briefly considered the possibility of abandoning the beach and sending following waves of troops to support the British success on Sword and Gold.⁸⁶ Only by sending deputy Chief of Staff Colonel John Talley ashore to render a report did General Gerow get a more realistic and optimistic assessment of the beach.⁸⁷ By the evening of D-Day, Omaha beach was sufficiently secure and he was able to establish his command post on the beach only 500 meters from

⁸⁵ United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 56.

⁸⁶ James Scott Wheeler, *The Big Red One: America's Legendary 1st Infantry Division from World War I to Desert Storm* (Modern War Studies) (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 277.

⁸⁷ United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 62.

the front lines.⁸⁸ Once ashore, he made a personal tour of all the landed units' command posts all the way down to battalion level.

Gerow's decision to land the corps command post was both bold and necessary. All of the pre-landing intelligence indicated that the Germans would conduct immediate counter attacks, and he knew that his presence ashore was critical for ascertaining the significance and intensity of the German response to the Allied landings. His fears of a counter attack were well founded and while counter attacks did occur they were nowhere near the intensity expected by pre-landing planners. An excellent example of his steady leadership and calm response came in early morning of June eighth when the commander of the 1st Infantry Division, General Hubner reported a strong German counter attack with infantry and armor support. This action is exactly what Gerow feared the most, fortunately the V Corps headquarters was located very close to the 1st Infantry command post, and he was able to personally visit Hubner's headquarters and observe the action as it unfolded. His concern was greatly allayed when it became obvious that the "strong armored counter attack" was little more than a reinforced combat patrol.⁸⁹

This situation was not the case in the Huertgen. If Gerow practiced a very "hands-on" and personal leadership with subordinates during the landings at Normandy then he was very "hands-off" or detached from the battlefield during the Huertgen. His decision to be afloat within a few miles of the beaches, land on the opening day, and place his command post near the action all speak to a direct and personal leadership style.

⁸⁸ United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 66.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 74.

He knew that the Normandy landing would be a bloody, difficult and emotional battle and that personal leadership and steady hand would be required close to the front and in the thick of the action so as to assess the situation.⁹⁰ All of these aspects of his command seemed absent during the battle for the Huertgen.

Gerow's detachment from the battle could be explained by distance. The V Corps headquarters was nearly twenty miles direct line from the 28th Infantry's area of operation.⁹¹ By November the weather was cold and wet and travel was increasingly difficult. The weather and distance notwithstanding, he made few visits to the 28th Infantry headquarters preferring, to assess the situation by reports that he received. He also preferred summoning Cota either in person or via the phone and he never traveled further forward than 28th Infantry's main command post which itself was ten miles from the front lines.⁹² Additionally, he was occupied by an impending visit by Generals Eisenhower, Bradley and Hodges on the eighth of November 1944.⁹³ This visit was the first meeting he had with Eisenhower and Bradley since his return from testifying. The visit was unquestionably very tense. The entire party of leaders went forward to visit 28th Infantry and gain an appreciation for the disintegrating battle. Hodges took the opportunity to give Cota a "sharp conference on the lack of progress made by the 28th Infantry."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 281-2

⁹¹ V Corps Operations Map, *V Corps History*, 295.

⁹² V Corps Operations Map, *V Corps History*, 299.

⁹³ United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 298.

⁹⁴ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 168.

There is little doubt that this “sharp conference” was an unpleasant discussion by the army commander to the division commander all the more furthering the professional distance between Gerow and Cota. When Hodges left the V Corps headquarters his parting comment was that he should consider any personnel changes that thought necessary.⁹⁵ Hodges’ comment was twofold. First he was clearly indicating that Gerow should consider relieving Cota. Hodges had relieved commanders in the past for failures less public and less profound than what was occurring in the Huertgen and he was clearly displeased with the 28th Infantry’s progress and division commander’s performance. The second aspect of Hodges parting comment was directed at Gerow himself. He was clearly at fault for allowing one of his subordinates to stray, thus allowing such disaster. He could not have mistaken the implied threat of “personnel changes” if the First Army commander was considering relieving one of the public heroes from D-Day, then he would have little compunction about relieving the scape-goat of Pearl Harbor.

Not only was Gerow physically detached from the battle he was also very aloof from his subordinates, particularly the 28th Infantry’s commander. This aloofness possibly stems from the investigation and its assertions that he gave unclear guidance to General Short. In an effort to be as clear as possible he established that he would not tolerate deviation from the plan by subordinates. When Cota voiced his concerns to his corps commander that the 28th Infantry was attacking “down the throat” of the enemy’s

⁹⁵ Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 168. Hodges was clearly concerned about the lack of progress made by the 28th and Cota’s apparent lack of situational awareness. The division command post did not know where its subordinate units were exactly and at the time of the visit the division commander did not even know the location of his deputy division commander, Brigadier General Davis. In Cota’s defense, the attack had been ongoing for nearly a week and it is very likely that he had not slept much during that time. The commander was literally at the end of his rope.

defenses he was dismissed out of hand and told the attack would continue as planned.⁹⁶ He did not even forward Cota's issues or request for more time from First Army.⁹⁷ This unwillingness to work with subordinates is in sharp contrast to his normal pattern of accepting input. During the planning for the invasion of Normandy, he was a supporter of his division commander's concerns, notably Hubner's concerns about landing during the day versus the night. He approached Bradley on several occasions with his subordinates worries and suggestions about the landings. He even held a conference about the D-Day landings on seven February 1944 with the express purpose of gaining his division commander's input to the plan.⁹⁸ The results of which formed V Corps recommendations to the First Army invasion plan released three weeks later.⁹⁹

The most significant direct effect of the investigation was Gerow's micromanagement of Cota's attack. The few times he chose to give his attacking subordinate guidance it was detailed to the point of overly controlling. This detailed guidance removed much of his leeway towards planning. The reason for his uncharacteristically dictatorial nature during the Huertgen can be traced back to Pearl Harbor and his interaction with the commander of Hawaii, General Short. Upon receiving the War Plans Department's warnings of a possible attack, Short responded with his plan of action. He misunderstood the nature of the alert and replied to the War

⁹⁶ Currey, *Follow Me and Die*, 60.

⁹⁷ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 348.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *Omaha Beach*, 184.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

Plans Department that he was preparing for a possible attack by consolidating his available aircraft to improve security against possible sabotage.

The problem was that he believed that Short's plan to mass aircraft was in addition to other measures and not the only measure being executed. Colonel Thomas Handy, one of his subordinates on the War Plans Staff, expressed his concerns that perhaps grouping aircraft was all that Short planned to do in response to the War Plans Department message. Gerow did not believe that Short would or could be so literal-minded. Handy, who had served with Short previously, was not so optimistic.¹⁰⁰ In the end, he chose not to pursue the matter, and incorrectly assumed that Short was acting to the fullest of his ability with the War Plans Department warning. He erred in November 1941 and was determined not to make a similar mistake in the November 1944.

While the Hawaii commander had ultimately betrayed his trust, he had no reason to distrust Cota's ability to conduct the attack. The two men had enjoyed a strong relationship since D-Day. V Corps landing force for D-Day consisted of a Regimental Combat Team from 1st Infantry Division and a Regimental Combat Team from the 29th Infantry Division.¹⁰¹ He designated the 1st Infantry as the lead headquarters for the assault to be commanded by 1st Infantry commander General Huebner.¹⁰² He had great confidence in Cota, then the assistant division commander of the 29th Infantry, selecting him to act as the deputy commander of the combined Omaha landing force.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, 210.

¹⁰¹ Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack (U.S. Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations)* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1951), 305.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 318.

In sharp contrast to the planning for D-Day where Gerow had given 1st Infantry commander considerable leeway in planning for the landing, he gave very little latitude for Cota's advance into the Huertgen.¹⁰⁴ He even took the uncharacteristic approach of detailing how the division commander would attack. He wanted to take Schmitt, but he was afraid that the 28th Infantry's flanks would be exposed so he mandated attacks to the north and south of Schmitt in an effort to secure the unit's vulnerable position.¹⁰⁵ These changes resulted in the main attack toward Schmitt being weaker than required, and contributed to the ultimate failure of the attack. Even as the situation in the Huertgen deteriorated he continued to dictate to Cota details of his division's operation by directing how he should deploy regiments and battalions.¹⁰⁶

The Pearl Harbor investigation dramatically altered Gerow's command style. This change in command style from "up-front" to remaining behind in the command post, accepting of advice to closed to suggestion and from goal oriented to micromanaging can be attributed to the Pearl Harbor investigation. He returned to his corps from the Pearl Harbor stung from an embarrassing rebuke. Chastised by the investigation for being uncommunicative, unclear, and unresponsive he left nothing to doubt upon returning. He had the ability to control Cota's attack and still stinging from the investigation it is understandable that he sought to redeem himself. Tragically the very things he sought to fix he created in the Huertgen.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, *Omaha Beach*, 257.

¹⁰⁵ Currey, *Follow Me and Die*, 66.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

Conclusion

The Pearl Harbor investigation had a significant effect on Gerow's command during the battle for the Huertgen forest. The timing of the investigation and his required absence from the front resulted in him losing his understanding of the battlefield and his own corps. The nature of the investigation itself was emotionally and professionally devastating. Prior to the investigation he was destined for advancement, with close personal friends in the Allied high command, but he was summarily relieved of his duties and sent back to the United States. He returned a month later to a cold reception, embarrassed and uncertain about his future. It was obvious to this writer that following his testimony and censure he was a changed man. His command style changed for the worse and his command confidence was missing. Once a personal, up-front leader, who allowed his subordinates to take charge, he came back sullen, removed from his subordinates, and prone to dictate details. His altered command style had tragic consequences in the form of the flawed and failed attacks into the Huertgen.

Had the war ended in November of 1944 it is very likely Gerow's career would have been over as well. The Pearl Harbor investigation negatively affected his leadership style, personal relationships with superiors and subordinates, and his personal morale. The conclusion of the battle for Schmitt left him in doubt about his career and his abilities as a commander. What helped save his personal and professional reputation was the German winter counter-offensive of December 1944. During the Battle of the Bulge, he once again displayed the leadership and personal qualities that had made him successful

prior to the Huertgen Forest campaign. He was once again an active, “up-front” leader, who gave sound tactical guidance that enabled his subordinates to succeed. The V Corps commander was one of the first leaders to realize the Germans were launching a major attack and he realized its importance and direction. He also returned to the front, taking frequent trips as far forward as possible, to ensure he understood the situation. Additionally, he took the bold and unprecedented step of task organizing one entire division to another division, thus ensuring unity of command at a crucial juncture during the battle. Gerow was able to overcome the failure of the Huertgen and throw himself into the task of stopping the Hitler’s winter offensive.¹⁰⁷

Gerow’s corps began the Ardennes Offensive with the 2nd, 8th, 78th and 99th Infantry Divisions and Combat Command B from the 9th Armored Division.¹⁰⁸ These units were spread out across a sixty-mile north-south front from approximately twenty miles north of Monschau Germany to the VIII Corps boundary, just north of Losheim Germany.¹⁰⁹ Prior to December fifteenth, V Corps continued its glacial offensive towards the Ruhr Dams and consequently its main effort and attention focused north of the German penetrations.¹¹⁰ The first indication that the situation had changed came on the morning of December sixteenth when the 99th Infantry Division reported heavy contact and began asking the adjacent 2nd Infantry Division for reinforcements.¹¹¹ He

¹⁰⁷ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 120

¹⁰⁸ J.D. Morelock, *Generals of the Ardennes: American Leadership in the Battle of the Bulge* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University (NDU), 1994), 369.

¹⁰⁹ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 114.

¹¹⁰ United States. Army. *V Corps History*, 351.

¹¹¹ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 120.

became aware of these requests and immediately notified First Army commander of the possibility of a German attack and requested permission to suspend his advance.¹¹²

Hodges was resistant to the idea of calling off his main attack but his persistence and persuasive arguments eventually won out and V Corps was in position to react to the Nazi offensive within hours of its commencement, requesting support and integrated the 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions into his scheme of defense.¹¹³

With V Corps actively and aggressively reacting to the German offensive, he was able to respond to a crisis on the penetration's shoulder. The 2nd and 99th Infantry Divisions bore much of the initial brunt of the German offensive in his sector. The 2nd Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Walter Robertson since early 1944, was considered a veteran unit and had been in continual combat since its arrival on the continent in early June.¹¹⁴ When the Nazis attack began, Robertson's division was advancing towards the Ruhr River Dams in Germany, reinforced with the entire 395th Regimental Combat Team from the 99th Infantry Division.¹¹⁵ The 99th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Walter Lauer, was a green unit arriving in theater in early

¹¹² Greenwood, *Normandy to Victory*, 214.

¹¹³ V Corps, Letter of Instruction, 1300 hours, 17 December 1944.

¹¹⁴ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 114.

¹¹⁵ United States, *V Corps History*, 344. Attaching entire regiment from green division to veteran division had become something of an unwritten policy in late 1944 and early 1945. This was done for several reasons. Allied losses, particularly to training infantrymen, were very high. New replacements to veteran units suffered even higher losses. By attaching green regiments to veteran divisions it was hoped and observed that green units would gain some valuable experience without repeating old mistakes and veteran units could gain some respite from continuous fighting. The other benefit to taking one regiment from green divisions was that it kept new division commanders from getting into too much trouble since they usually did not have a lot of combat power minus a regiment.

November and had only entered the line a week prior the German attack.¹¹⁶ Its initial task was to occupy a quiet sector of the American front, with a mission to protect the right flank of the more experienced 2nd Infantry Division.¹¹⁷ Gerow's decision to reinforce the 2nd Infantry Division with a combat team from the 99th Infantry was a deliberate measure to help the 99th Infantry gain combat experience. The 2nd Infantry Division had been assigned to V Corps on several occasions and Robertson had his complete confidence, while he and Lauer were still developing their relationship.¹¹⁸ The German assault hit the most heavily on the inexperienced 99th Infantry Division, fortunately the division did not break like other green units in the open days of the Ardennes offensive. When he requested reinforcements from corps, the commander quickly dispatched two battalions from the 23rd Infantry Regiment.¹¹⁹ Now active and energized, he quickly realized the gravity of the situation and began withdrawing Lauer's division northwards away from the brunt of the German attacks. As the 99th Infantry withdrew towards the north, Robertson's division began moving south to occupy the critical high ground around Elsenborn Ridge and the two divisions became intertwined.

With two of his major units enmeshed and in contact with the enemy, Gerow displayed the tactical ingenuity that had been lacking in Huertgen. The conventional wisdom of the day would have dictated that he engage in a deliberate and time-

¹¹⁶ John S. D Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods: The Dramatic Story, Told at All Echelons, from Supreme Command to Squad Leader, of the Crisis That Shook the Western Coalition: Hitler's Surprise Ardennes Offensives*, (New York: Putnam, 1969), 181.

¹¹⁷ V Corps, Letter of Instruction to: Commanding Generals: 2nd Infantry Division, 99th Infantry Division & V Corps Artillery, 1300 hours, 08 December 1944.

¹¹⁸ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 125.

¹¹⁹ Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 194.

consuming process of establishing boundaries and control measures to untangle the two divisions. Time was something he did not have, and so he took the unprecedented step of attaching the entire 99th Infantry Division to the 2nd Infantry Division and placing Robertson in command of the combined division, with Lauer as Robertson's deputy.¹²⁰ In a single stroke, he solved several problems. First he placed a trusted and competent leader in charge of a key portion of the battlefield. Elsenborn ridge was key terrain and maintaining possession of this terrain was vital to the successful defensive of the main German attack. Second, he solved a difficult command and control problem, as the two divisions had regiments, battalions and even companies intermixed and creating one large division allowed Robertson the ability to continue the effective defense without having to untangle units in contact simply for the sake of separating divisions. Third, the decision to attach 99th Infantry Division to 2nd Infantry Division eased his span of command problems. By the evening of December eighteenth, V Corps had the 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions attached and more units were on the way from Ninth Army.

His interactions with Robertson and Lauer demonstrated key aspects of how he had recovered from the repercussions of the Pearl Harbor board and the failure of the Huertgen Forest. He clearly trusted the 2nd Infantry commander, as he had demonstrated a high degree of tactical skill in wheeling his division to face the German offensive. He valued his past relationship with his subordinate and intuitively understood that he was the best man for the job of defending Elsenborn Ridge. Instead of micromanaging the position, the corps commander provided assets and time needed to conduct a skillful

¹²⁰ V Corps, Letter of Instruction, 2000 hours, 18 December 1944.

defense. He spent extensive time on the telephone with his seniors and subordinates. He was determined to have an accurate picture of events and to make sure that his corps received everything it needed to defeat the German attack. He went forward as often as possible to meet with subordinate commanders, meeting with Robertson on the evening of December seventeenth 1944, to discuss the confusing situation with the 2nd and the 99th Infantry Division unquestionably influenced his decision to combine the two divisions.¹²¹

He was a corps commander with a proven record of success. He commanded his corps with great skill in Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge.¹²² His innovation and detailed planning made him successful and his knowledge and skill as a planner made him an ideal candidate for corps command but his testimony and subsequent censure by Congress affected his command. Gerow was a superb officer and it was no coincidence that his command was the corps selected to lead the Normandy invasion. He was one of the Army's premier planners; with a distinguished record of success, as V Corps' early role as the chief planning element for the Allied forces invasion of France was a task to which he was well suited. Even as First Army and SHEAF headquarters evolved to

¹²¹ Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 125.

¹²² Four excellent books on the Battle of the Bulge are Winton's *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, Morelock's *Generals of the Ardennes*, Eisenhower's *Bitter Woods*, and Astor's *A Blood-Dimmed Tide*. Arguably D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge are the two most popular subjects of American military history. Amazon lists over 500 books with the title or subject, so picking one is easy, picking a good one is much harder. This paper required literature focused on the senior American commanders at the corps and above. Winton's book is ready made for discussing corps commanders. Winton is a big supporter of Middleton and Collins, and less so of a Gerow. Gerow's role in the Bulge was less flashy than Middleton or Collins. V Corps did a lot more hanging on for dear life and less maneuvering. It is still a good read and very informative. Morelock's book is also a good read but it focus more on the leadership at Army and higher. Astor's book is a little less contemporary but provides excellent first person accounts woven into a larger operational theme. Eisenhower's book though dated, is still the sine qua non of Bulge books.

eclipse V Corps planning role, he continued to play a key part in the invasion planning. His performance on D-Day at Omaha Beach was remarkable. A less resolute commander might have wavered, but he did not. His coolness under fire and steady belief that his subordinates would get ashore proved decisive.

His one significant failure, the Huertgen Forest campaign, was a blemish on his outstanding record. Given the stress of the Army investigation and the general weariness of command it is easy to see how such an event could transpire. The Huertgen was not his shining moment. He had been relieved of command at a critical moment in his corps' progress, required to testify before a politically hostile congressionally mandated committee, chastised for past events and then thrust back into command with less than three weeks to prepare for a major assault. It is difficult to imagine anyone performing well under these conditions. The fact that he was able to accomplish what he did is remarkable. In the end, the attack by the 28th Infantry was a disaster and he was certainly responsible for his corps' poor performance.

This significant dip in performance was short-lived. Less than a month after calling off the attacks on the Huertgen, the Germans conducted their last major offensive of the war. His calm demeanor and deft employment of his division during the early days of the Battle of Bulge were crucial to the allies maintaining the key terrain of the Elsenborn Ridge. Without this defense, it is unlikely that the surprised and disorganized Allied northern shoulder would have held off the German assault. His levelheaded response and clear vision of the impending German offensive saved the Allies' position. His unprecedented task organization decision was almost single handedly responsible for

saving the Allies position. By defying the conventional military wisdom of the day and task organizing one division to another, he solidified his position and saved his corps front. He did stumble as a commander, but he was able to recover from his set back and keep his corps in the fight. There is little doubt that he left command on a high note. His shortcomings in the Huertgen forgiven, he received his third star and took command of Fifteenth Army in January of 1945. The Japanese Bombing of the Huertgen Forest was a setback, but not a fatal defeat for the Army or Leonard T. Gerow.

APPENDIX I- General Gerow's Personal and Professional Timeline

13 July 1888 – Born in Petersburg, Virginia to parents Leonard Roger Gerow and Annie Eloise Saunders

1911 – Graduated from Virginia Military Institute, Lexington Virginia

29 September 1911 – Commissioned as a second lieutenant United States Army

1911-1918 – Served with 19th Infantry Regiment, 37th Infantry Regiment and 57th Infantry Regiment. Stationed in Kansas, South Dakota, Texas, and Vera Cruz, Mexico

1 July 1916 – Promoted to First Lieutenant

15 May 1917 – Promoted to Captain

April 1918 – October 1919 – Served as a Signal Corps Officer for the American Expeditionary Force, France. Charged with purchasing signal equipment for U.S. forces

1 July 1920 – Promoted to Major

1919-1921 Commanding Officer, U.S. Signal School, Fort Sam Houston, Texas

1921-1941 – Served successively in Washington, DC, the Philippines, and China.

1925 – Attended the U.S. Infantry School, graduated 1st in his class. Classmates with Omar Bradley

1926 – Attended the U.S. Command and General Staff School. Graduated 2nd in his class. Classmate and study partner with Dwight D. Eisenhower

1931 – Attend the U.S. Army war college

1 August 1935 – Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel

1 September 1940 – Promoted to Colonel

1 October 1940 – Promoted to Brigadier General

1941 – Chief of War Plans Division and assistant Chief of Staff

14 February 1942 – Promoted to Major General

February 1942 – Commander of 29th Infantry Division

October 1942 – 29th Infantry Division deploys to England

July 1943 – Assumed command of V U.S. Corps in England

1 January 1945 – Promoted to Lieutenant General

January 1945 Assumed command of 15th U.S. Army

October 1945 – Returned to the U.S. and assigned as commandant of the
Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS

January 1948 – Assumed commanded of Second Army, Fort George Meade,
Maryland

July 1950 – Retired from Active Duty as Lieutenant General

July 1954 – Promoted to 4 Star General by Congressional Act

12 October 1972 – Died at age 84, Fort Lee Army Hospital, Virginia

APPENDIX II -The Official Congressional Censure of General Gerow.¹²³

3. Chief of the War Plans Division, War Department General Staff, Major General Leonard T. Gerow, failed in his duties in the following particulars:

(a) To keep the Commanding General, Hawaiian Department, adequately informed on the impending war situation by making available to him the substance of the data being delivered to the War Plans Division by the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2.

(b) To send to the Commanding General of the Hawaiian Department on November 27, 1941, a clear, concise directive; on the contrary he approved the message of November 27, 1941, (472) which contained confusing statements.

(c) To realize that the state of readiness reported in Short's reply to the November 27th message was not a state of readiness for war, and he failed to take corrective action.

(d) To take the required steps to implement the existing joint plans and agreements between the Army and Navy to insure the functioning of the two services in the manner contemplated.

¹²³ United States. Congress. Joint Attack, Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack. Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, Congress of the United, 299.

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