

Generaloberst JODL: Re Ardennes.

Place : CCPWE # 32, "Ashcan"  
Date : 26 July 1945  
Interviewer: Major Kenneth W. Hechler.



\* Note: References refer to answers to written questions, e.g. (See ANS to Q. 1)

Q: What advantages did you expect to gain from attacking during the new moon period? Did you feel that you lost these by waiting until 16 December?

A: Our object was to avoid enemy air attacks by night, so that you could not observe our nightly troop movements.

Q: Did you lose by postponing the attack until the 16th or did the foggy weather on the 16th counter-balance the disadvantages?

A: It was to this extent a disadvantage: on the basis of past experience, November was always the worst flying weather. From December on, conditions gradually improve for flying. But this exercised no decisive influence on the success or failure of the operation. The decisive factor was that we had expected a hard, frosty ground and had not calculated on the deep mud.

Q: Did you calculate on the frosty ground to support your tanks?

A: With solid enough ground we would have expected to drive through in one day with our tanks.

Q: What delayed the start of the counter-offensive until 16 December?

A: We were simply not ready and our troops had not yet arrived. The entire Sixth SS Panzer Army, the Volksgrenadier Divisions, and the transportation was not yet ready.

Q: Did the slowness of your moving up cause the timing to be thrown off?



A: The original date set (end of November) was just a tentative or estimated date. We had hoped to be ready in time for it. We told Hitler that we figured we could be ready by that date. But when we got to conferring with the Replacement officers and the Panzer officers we found it could not be done so fast. Formerly (1940-43) the Replacement Army was able to deliver divisions exactly at the times promised but by this time supplies and equipment of many kinds were short and delays were caused.

Q: What weather experts did you consult in picking the date? What did they tell you about the possibility of bad flying weather after 16 December? Were these the same experts who predicted five days of good weather prior to the 1940 invasion? Do you think you would have had better results had you attacked several days before or several days after?

A: The Air Force meteorologists played a big part in 1940 in the campaign in the West. Col. Diesing was later succeeded by Dr. (Lt. Col.) Schuster, "regierungsdirektor im Wetterdienst der Luftwaffe." Mid-December was a very foggy high-pressure period and on 13 December an extended period of fog was predicted, broken about mid-day only. Fog was already experienced on the 14th. On the 16th we were already afraid that it would clear. Schuster made the prediction at our CP at Ziegenberg near Giessen on the 13th, after making meteorological observations.

But weather was not really decisive in this offensive as in some others. Of course we would not have attacked in perfectly clear flying weather, but we did not have to be assured of particularly bad weather. We could not wait much longer anyway.

Q: When was 16 December actually fixed as the date for the attack?

A: Hitler himself decided on it on 14 December at Ziegenberg.

Q: What troops were involved in the first, second and third waves and how were the waves arranged? (See last sentence in Ans # 1).

A: In the Sixth SS Panzer Army the first wave was made up by the I SS Panzer Corps, 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions, and the second wave by the II SS Panzer Corps, with the 2d and 9th



SS Panzer Divisions. In the Fifth SS Panzer Army there were two divisions in the first wave and only one in the second.

No special theory was involved in this arrangement. There were only a few roads along which we could advance, so we had to echelon in depth rather than in width. We had to seize bridge-heads over which to pour our troops. The third wave consisted of several divisions forming an OKW reserve and kept at their disposal.



Q: Were these reserves later committed?

A: All of these were actually committed during the operation.

Q: How many days did you estimate between the two waves?

A: In general a period of two days between waves as a maximum. We expected the first wave to reach the Meuse on the first day, or at the latest on the 17th.

Q: How did the idea for the counter-offensive originate? Was it Hitler's personal plan, and how much of the details did he arrange? When did you first hear about it and when did you start to perfect plans for it? When and where were various conferences held to perfect the details, and who was in attendance at these conferences?

A: The entire plan was Hitler's, absolutely. All of us had been studying where we could launch an offensive, e.g. whether we could attack in Italy or on the Eastern front, or in the West.

The first idea to counter-attack in the West originated in the zone of the Army Group Blaskowitz. Blaskowitz was ordered back from Italy on 17 August.

Then we considered a counter-attack from the area of the German border. The first plan was to strike the flank of the Allied forces moving northwards from Metz by attacking towards Belgium. Blaskowitz was to advance and the U.S. (Third) Army be caught in the rear. The other German forces were to hold their ground. This was early in September. The plan was never carried out.



Q: Why was this plan never carried out?

A: The bridge-head was too weak and could have been snapped off too easily. Blaskowitz was driven back on the Nancy-Epinal area. We could not launch an operation so well from the Vosges.

Gradually, on the basis of the picture presented in the regular operational reports it appeared that, although the Ardennes presented many terrain difficulties, the enemy troop dispositions there offered the best chances of a successful attack.

Hitler took a great part even in the details of the plan. There were various opinions. I wanted to avoid the danger of having the Sixth Panzer Army running against the strong Allied forces around Aachen and pressing it from the north and south. Model, on the other hand, wanted to try to clip off the Aachen sector. Hitler was firmly opposed to Model's plan, especially for the use of the Sixth SS Panzer Army there. Then Model suggested that the Sixth SS Panzer Army attack between Monschau and Liege, but Hitler rejected this also.

Q: When did Hitler first refer to the final plan? Who had the first idea of any counter-offensive, and who first suggested the Ardennes in particular?

A: Both ideas were Hitler's. The idea of a counter-offensive of some kind was first stated in principle. It came up as soon as it was realized that the American Army was advancing on a broad front and not in depth, very soon after Avranches and when the Americans struck for the Loire and did not wheel around. We believed that the American advance would out-run its supplies. If we had had the strength this would have been the moment with the greatest opportunity of success for a counter offensive. But the moment found us too weak.

Q: Was there any connection between the counter-attack towards Avranches and the later counter-offensive? In other words, after the counter-attack toward Avranches failed, was there a continuing desire to launch a counter-blow?

A: Avranches would have been the easiest and simplest, had it succeeded. Then came the plan to strike with Army Group "G".



The 3d and 15th Panzer Grenadiers were brought up from Italy to North of Langres for the purpose of attacking towards Metz and the North. As this could not be carried out, the idea of an attack in the Ardennes developed. This area was weakly held by the U.S. VIII Corps. This attack would be towards the Meuse, and not a big frontal attack. It was clear that we did not have adequate means for a big attack against an enemy who had all the modern armor, supplies and artillery.

Q: When was the VIII Corps area selected as your objective?

A: Already in September. Since Avranches, the idea of a counter offensive was constantly in our minds.

Q: Can you give a general outline of the series of conferences held to perfect the details of the plan between September and December, and what suggestions were made there?

A: When Hitler conceived the first idea he was sick in bed with an attack of jaundice. No very lengthy conferences were in order. 12 o'clock daily the Hq Staff met, some 20 to 30 people. Being relieved, on account of his illness, from attending to many details, Hitler had all day in which to think. I saw him alone as he lay in bed (he usually disliked anyone seeing him in bed except his aides) and he spoke of the idea. I made a rough sketch on the map, showing the direction of the attack, its dimensions and the forces required for it. Hitler wanted to make its base wider, with a direct attack on Luxemburg included. He feared that otherwise it would form a wedge and might be driven in from the sides in the first Allied counter-attack. Hitler's ideas were very sound. It was my task simply to convert the idea into practical form, bearing in mind the troops we had at our disposal. Then a draft of the plan was made.

Then there was a conference of Hitler, myself, General Westfall (Chief of Staff of Oberbefehlshaber West--Rundstedt) and General Krebs (Chief of Staff of Army Group Model). Westfall and Krebs were informed of the plan and charged to inform Rundstedt and Model, their Commanders, and to submit detailed plans for the attack.



Soon after this Field Marshal Model, I believe it was, came with maps and a representation of the attack. There were slight differences between our ideas and those of the front Commanders. Model thought Antwerp was too far to reach and beyond our means. He thought the troops around Aachen would be a danger to our advance unless they were wiped out first.

Hitler and I believed that we could not wipe out the very strong and well-armed Allied forces around Aachen, with their masses of tanks and artillery. A frontal attack or even a flank attack would be an attack on the enemy's strong point. We thought our only chance was in an operation of surprise which would cut the life-line of the Allied forces at Aachen and in that way alone neutralize them.

I fully agreed with Hitler that the Antwerp undertaking was an operation of the most extreme daring - there was no question of that - but we were in a desperate situation and the only way to save it was by a desperate decision.

By remaining on the defensive we could not expect to escape the evil fate hanging over us. By fighting, rather than waiting, we might save something.

We realized that it would not be as simple as in the 1940 campaign. It was an act of desperation but we had to stake everything. A major battle at Aachen seemed inadvisable. The only chance of success was in a fluid advance over the Meuse.



Q: Can you give dates for these various conferences?

A: The first discussions with Hitler were about the end of September or early in October.

The conference with Krebs and Westfall was perhaps a week later (by this time Hitler was up again).

The conference with Model was perhaps in the second half of October.

Of course there were some discussions on the plan every day. Besides those already mentioned, the plan had been disclosed to Field Marshal Keitel, to my Staff Officers (Oberstleutnant Waizenecker and Major Buechs); then, as secrecy was relaxed a little at the end of October, SS Obergruppenfuehrer Fegelein



as liaison to Reichsfuehrer der SS Himmler and General der Infanterie Burgdorf who was Hitler's aide and the Personnel Adjutant and from whom we could secure the best possible artillery and other officers.

Everyone had to sign a paper to the effect that if he let a word of the plan leak out he would be shot. That is an exaggeration of course. But it was phrased that any disclosure, whether intentionally or by negligence, would be punished by court martial.

Q: Whose idea was it to have signed secrecy statements?

A: I don't remember. It wasn't Fegelein. We always had strict SOP on secret matters, e.g. that secret papers should not be carried by plane. (This particular rule worked out badly as carriage by plane was safer in Russia than carriage by ground vehicle).

Q: Who else knew of the plan?

A: Press Chief Dietrich and his deputy Lorenz were told of the plan, and other government heads.

As time went on we would find new people present during the discussions of the plan; then their names had to be written down and they were later made to sign statements. In this way we succeeded in keeping the attack secret.

In the earlier days of the war you met Hitler alone in the Bismarck Hall in Berlin and never took anyone with you. This practise was followed at the time of the campaigns in France and Norway.

Later, however, there was always a big group at these conferences and one had to see Hitler personally after the discussion, in order to discuss secret matters.

By the middle of November the small circle had to be still more increased, e.g. Buhle had to be consulted on supply matters, and representatives of the Air Force and Navy. The head of the Replacement Army had to be asked when he could have the divisions ready for action. General Gehrke had to be asked when transportation could be ready. Every day the plan was discussed and maps made of the approach routes for our forces.



I went to Oberbefehlshaber West in Ziegenberg to discuss details. Hitler discussed many details. In the case of the offensive in 1940 in the West he had gone even more minutely into details. Owing to his illness he was not quite so painstaking now.

I made this trip perhaps in the first half of November. There were thousands of things to discuss with Rundstedt and Model, such as artillery preparations, disposition of divisions within the various Armies, choice of routes &c. We were to avoid being drawn in towards Liege and therefore the plan of attack was changed in favor of a more westerly route for the Panzer Armies, to avoid being cut off for lack of sufficient crossings. Hitler went into all these matters intensely. The time allotted for preparatory artillery fire had to be settled, and the allocation of GHQ units (artillery &c) among the various Armies. Supply shortages were discussed, and how to make them up. Naturally we could not discuss any of these things on the telephone.

Some of the Operations Division of the Staff worked on the plan but none of the Staff who were concerned with other theatres of war knew about the plan for a counter-offensive in the Ardennes.

Q: You remember that our press always referred to it as the 'Rundstedt offensive'. How far did Rundstedt exercise any influence on the plan?

A: The title 'Rundstedt offensive' is without foundation. That is not any reflection on Rundstedt. But the plan was Hitler's. If any general should be identified with it, it is Model, who particularly developed it. Rundstedt neither originated it nor was he specially concerned with it. His function was merely to execute the plan. He was concerned with the routing of troops and the allotment of troops, working under higher instructions, e.g. other Army Groups further South also needed more men.

Q: What was the further development of the plan up to 16 December?

A: Important discussions were held in Berlin about 23 November. Hitler spoke to all the leaders, down to the rank of Army Commander. There was Rundstedt, Model, Westfall, Krebs, Man-teuffel and Sepp Dietrich. Dietrich complained about non-



receipt of supplies and Buhle and Thomale proved to him that the supplies had been sent. He had probably not received notice yet of their receipt.

Q: Sepp Dietrich has complained that he did not hear of the plan until 12 December.

A: Dietrich was present at the meeting on the 23d. I remember it definitely. We had coffee together. Everything was again explained to the generals. All the generals had their maps with them. We discussed what yet remained to be done. High pressure was asserted to get all the things still needed.

By this time, forms were no longer being signed. This practice had been dropped at the end of October.

On 13 and 14 December all Commanding Generals of Armies and Corps and of some Divisions conferred at Ziegenberg.

Q: Why did Dietrich complain of shortages?

A: Those supplies were probably in transit but Dietrich had not yet been informed of their arrival.

This offensive could not be executed so speedily as those of the past. There was a wide gulf between the wishes of the Supreme Command and the ability of the lower echelons to put them into effect. Considerable strain resulted. We were short of many things that had been over-abundant in 1940. But whatever we did have and could give, we gave to the Ardennes offensive.

Q: What other shortages were discussed at the meeting of 23 November?

A: Most complaints were about the fuel supply. Keitel wanted a much bigger allotment of fuel than we had to give.

Some fuel was held back on principle; other wise the commanders would have been too extravagant with it. This was Keitel's idea.

Most of these supply problems were cleared up by the time of the offensive.



Q: Was there any particular technique employed to transport the fuel?

A: We used the last reserves we had.

At the last moment before the collapse of Germany, however, a vast supply of fuel from various tanks was bound to exist, which had been stored and was not easily accessible, so that in those last days it seemed that the world was on the roads, everybody in Germany was driving and using this last stock of fuel.

Q: What steps were taken immediately before the attack?

A: We took aerial photographs and studied the condition of the Meuse bridges at the last minute before the attack.

Then, without Model knowing it, we brought up two divisions, the Fuehrer Begleit Division and the Fuehrer Grenadier Division. The first was formed from men of the "Grossdeutschland" Division who had been used as Hq guards; it was a fairly strong unit and its men had had combat experience and were good soldiers. The second was formed from replacement unit of "Grossdeutschland".

Q: What was the tactical importance of the aerial reconnaissance of the Meuse?

A: We had to ascertain where the existing bridges were, to discover whether the bridges we had destroyed on our retreat had been rebuilt and whether auxiliary, pontoon bridges &c. were in use. Bridges were vital to us and we had to take them by surprise.

Q: Was the lack of success of the Sixth Panzer Army due to some deficiency in Sepp Dietrich?

A: Dietrich was a good soldier. He never ran down the Army like some SS generals.

It is hard to judge without knowing all the facts. I believe that it would have turned out differently had we been as well prepared as in 1940. The Sixth SS Panzer Army did not have so many well-trained officers and men who could work out their plans to the minutest detail. I have not studied the orders



given during the course of the attack and so I cannot say if there was any weakness in its execution.

Q: Can you recall any particular mistake which was made?

A: I do not know the facts well enough. Such an enterprise generally requires an older officer with longer experience and study of past campaigns than these SS officers had. Bravery will not necessarily take the place of training. The men in the Sixth SS Panzer Army did not have the training we had had. Only genius can compensate for lack of long study and experience.

Q: To what extent were your initial attacks on 16 December intended to be a reconnaissance in force rather than an all-out attack?

A: That was not our intention, but if that was your impression of them, that must have been all they amounted to.

Probably some forces were sent ahead to secure the bridges. Our vehicles could not move forward until the infantry had taken the bridges and cleared them for vehicular traffic. Actually the restoring of the bridges took much too long.

We had two full units of fire (Feuerausstattungen) and one whole unit was to be expended in the preparatory artillery fire. Our artillery fire therefore should have been much too strong to be mistaken for a reconnaissance in force.

Some of the rivers we bridges were the Pruem, the Our and the Clerf.

Q: To what extent was ammunition specially saved for the offensive?

A: Rocket (Werfer) ammunition was spared for the offensive - we had very little. There was a shortage of ammunition for 150mm and 105mm Field Howitzers. Ammunition had therefore to be economized on other fronts. We found that they used up proportionately more ammunition on the Eastern Front than we did on the Western, and ordered economies there, and in the fighting around Aachen.



Q: How much ammunition was provided for the offensive?

A: Two complete units of fire. The figures differ with the different types of weapon, e.g. 250 shells for light Field Howitzers, 150 shells for heavy Field Howitzers. General Buhle would know more exactly.

Then we had an OB West reserve of about one-half a unit.

We had a highest echelon reserve (Fuehrerreserve) of 30 trainloads with 500 tons on each train.

Q: How does that compare with the units of ammunition you had in 1940?

A: In 1940 we had more than we needed and plenty back in Germany. Otherwise a division generally had its normal supply, one unit, along with it, in its vehicles and 'trains' (Nachschubkolonnen). The second unit was carried with the Army supply units. It was not usual to have two full units at your disposal.

Q: Can you recall any of Hitler's statements as to the importance of the offensive?

A: His main theme was that an attack must be carried through on as broad a basis as possible, that it must not be drawn into attacking Liege or Aachen, which he considered too strong to be taken by surprise, but should cross the Meuse to the west of Liege, that the forward units must not worry too much about their rear but press on right over the Meuse through a rapid advance over undestroyed bridges.

He kept returning to these points. That is the reason why we did not stop to take St. Vith or Bastogne.

Hitler discussed these matters in a final conference with his commanders. It was "Now or never", and we had to stake everything. We were not getting any stronger and a better opportunity was unlikely to offer itself later. Hitler had done all he could and thrown in his last reserves for this attack although they were sorely needed in the East. A large number of tanks and assault guns had been provided.



If the attack were successful Hitler believed the entire situation on the Western Front would be radically changed. He emphasized this as we had thought earlier that no attack could be made in the West at all, in view of the unheard-of Allied air superiority.

We had to attack in the West because the Russians had so many troops that even if we succeeded in destroying 30 divisions it would not make any difference. On the other hand if we destroyed 30 divisions in the West it would mean more than one third of the whole invasion Army. Hitler discussed these matters in a final conference with his commanders.

Q: Was the offensive designed to raise the morale of the troops and the German nation after the troops had been on the defensive since Normandy?

A: Yes. The fact that we were still in a position, after the French defeat, to launch an attack, should raise morale, especially at Christmas time. Feeling became hopeful at home and on all fronts. This factor did play a part during the preparatory phase and during the first stage of the counter-offensive. Hitler said that after all these reverses the offensive would produce a positive impression on the Wehrmacht and the people.

Q: Did launching this offensive use up reserves which were needed later on the eastern side of the Rhine? Could you have held the line of the Rhine in March 1945 more strongly had it not been for this offensive?

A: Naturally. We could have defended the line of the Rhine longer. But we would have had to give up any chance of winning if we had not tried some kind of offensive.

Q: Did the offensive handicap the campaigns in the East?

A: Of course. If we had not used all these divisions for the offensive, but waited for you to attack, we could have kept them at home and on 12 January could have used them to meet the Russian offensive. Had the offensive not been made in the West, the Russians would naturally have not advanced so rapidly and successfully.



Three of the four newly-formed divisions were sent to the East on the urgent plea of General Guderian. Our lines were relatively further away from the interior than those in the East and communication zone units could be more easily moved there. But we felt that a big victory in the East was now impossible.

Italy offered more hope but the railroad connections were much worse than in the West. Aerial reconnaissance would have eliminated our hope of surprise, as planes would have observed the long marches.

The West was the only place in Europe where we had a chance of success.

Q: What was the mission of the paratroops used in the Ardennes?

A: They were to seize key points and block the roads so as to check the advance of the enemy until relieved by other forces. They were supposed to hold out for two days and in fact held out for some time, but our ground troops never succeeded in reaching them.

They landed at the Hohe Venn crossroads between Verviers and Malmedy and sent a radio message to the effect that they had landed without trouble and had taken up their positions and wanted to know when we were coming. We never reached them. They broke their way out to the east and some succeeded in reaching Germany.

Q: Did these airborne operations do any good at all at any specific point?

A: In general, very little. Not of much value at any point. Had we gained more ground on the first day, the paratroops could have formed a protective screen for our flanks and been very useful.

Q: Were any special instructions of a tactical nature given to Army, Corps or Division?

A: No. The Supreme Command Staff (Wehrmachtsfuhrungsstab) did not give tactical directions. We did give digests of reports to the training staffs (Ausbildungsstab) for further dissemination but the Army Groups or Armies gave tactical instruction. We employed the usual tactics in the offensive.



One novel feature was the use of large searchlights turned on the clouds, which illuminated the way for us, as the attack began in darkness, but blinded the enemy. We learned this from our experiences in Italy, where the Allies had used it. I don't know to what extent this idea was carried out or what success it had.

Q: Was there any difference in the tactics of the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies? Were any particularly successful tactics used?

A: The Fifth made better progress but they had better roads, some of them paved. Otherwise I know of no difference.

Q: Were there any special road priorities for movements of gasoline to re-supply the panzer divisions?

A: That was not our concern. The head Quartermaster officer, Oberst John, of Rundstedt's staff, would know more about it. Gasoline movement must have been organized by the Armies; there was a normal SOP. Supply columns for such forces were always near the front, to eliminate delays, and certainly the order in which movements must be made on the roads was arranged, but were not concerned with it.

Q: Why did Hitler reject the plan to attack to the South between the Meuse and Geilenkirchen? (See Ans to question 2).

A: The enemy force was too strong to be attacked. The British had made big preparations for an attack on the Ruhr. We should have been attacking into the strongly-manned Aachen area. This was Model's idea of advancing and catching the enemy in the rear (See above). The 15th and I believe the 3d Panzer Grenadier Divisions, which had been intended for this other attack, were then used as OKW reserves further South behind the main front of the attack.

Q: Was the plan of indicating only the main objective usual in all offensives? (See last sentence in Ans 2).

A: This had always been a general principle with us. The objective was fixed and we left it to the lower echelons to reach it their own way. Other Armies have applied the principle of fixed objectives to the extreme, e.g. the British would stop when they reached it, even if there was no opposition in front of them. To obviate this we set a fairly distant objective. Sometimes our troops went ahead even of this e.g. at Douaumont in the last war when there was a tempting opportunity.



Q: How did you visualize the "opposite pole" in the operations toward Antwerp, as contrasted with an operation to the South against the Third Army (See first sentence of ans. 3)?

A: I referred to the possibility of securing a definite result in one movement. By reaching Antwerp we should have cut off a large enemy force. Had we gone to the south, the enemy still could have got out or counter-attacked (It would then require a second attack from still further south to come in and meet our first, in order to pinch off the enemy.) The result would at best therefore merely be a change in the shape of the front.

Q: How far was radio silence employed to keep your plans secret?

A: There was no general silence..On the contrary we wanted our radio operation to continue without any noticeable difference. Of course the Sixth SS Panzer Army, for example, was under radio silence and no new CP stations &c could be operated. They had a few staff officers in a CP near the front and had a station with a cover name.

Q: To what extent was the Luftwaffe spared for this offensive and how far was it important during the offensive?

A: We organized quite a few fighter groups in Germany and these pursuit planes were only used for home defense in the meantime. There were about 325 planes (3 Geschwader) in Berlin. Another 500 planes were ordered to the West. There were also 3 Geschwader on the Western Front. When the time came, the 500 planes were held up by bad flying weather. Those from northwestern Germany arrived first, those from further east later. It took 5 to 6 days before they all got to the Ardennes and by that time it was good weather again. By January we had 850 to 900 fighter planes operating.

Q: To what extent were V-1 flying bombs used tactically for the counter-offensive?

A: We concentrated V-1 bombs on Liege and fired about 60 in advance of the offensive. After the Ardennes offensive started, we directed our V-1 at Antwerp.

Q: Why did you fire at Liege?

A: We had been firing at Liege as we believed it to be the end of the fuel pipe line.

Q: Did you use any new weapons?





- A: We used a new 12.2 cm. Russian gun on a new mount; we had 6 or 8 batteries of these. You captured one battery in the Allied breakthrough near the Roer dams. The Royal Tiger tank had already appeared in action. The Jagdtiger, a very remarkable heavy assault-gun with 12.8 cm. Flak had not arrived in time. It was later used in Hagenu against the pillboxes.
- Q: Did new weapons play any decisive role in the offensive?
- A: New types of weapon did not play a big part in the Ardennes offensive.
- Q: What do you think of the training, morale and performance of the Volksgrenadier Divisions, e. g. the 62nd at St. Vith?
- A: Their morale was good. Training was deficient everywhere and not just in these divisions. For lack of time the various units had only been trained so far to operate as battalions and not as units at division level. Performance varied. The 12th Volksgrenadier Division was very good, the 560th good. Others were weaker or just mediocre. In general the troops were aggressive and could not have fought better than they did. Remember, a million and a half of our best troops had been killed, up to this point in the war.
- Q: Was any particular role assigned to the Volksgrenadier Divisions?
- A: No. Normal employment as infantry.
- Q: Did you personally believe the offensive would reach Antwerp, or did you consider its main value as a delaying action.
- A: On the first day I wasn't sure. On the second day I knew already that it would not come up to expectations. I was filled with doubt. It could not succeed without surprise. Once you had brought in all your divisions we knew we could not do what we wanted. In the sector of the Sixth SS Panzer Army, where we had the most armor and expected the quickest breakthrough, we had achieved the least.
- Q: Where did you expect to get on the second day?
- A: The Sixth Army should have been across the Meuse at Huy, whereas in fact it had only gone 25 kilometers.
- Q: What made you decide on 25 December that you had gone far enough and would defend what you had gained?





A: There were so many divisions against us that we could no longer expect to throw you back across the Meuse.

Q: Where did you expect our main counter-attack, from the north or the south?

A: We expected your main counter-attack from the north. Personally I expected it a little further east, from the Aachen side, driving south from Elsenborn. We anticipated that there would be some delay while you 'sent to London and Washington for authority to act.'

Q: Why did you withdraw when you did?

A: First, we could not continue to attack. Second, it would be harder and require more men to defend the bulge than if we had a straight front. Thirdly, we had to send troops to the Eastern Front in view of the attack of 12 January.

Q: What was your general plan of withdrawal?

A: Model had general instructions to carry out a withdrawal. We did not specify how it was to be done, except that the nine armored units, including the four SS Panzer units, were needed in the East and should be withdrawn as soon as possible.

Q: Did the counter-attacks of our First and Third Armies on the North and South shoulders of the bulge interfere with your withdrawal movement from the Ardennes?

A: Yes. Several divisions which were to be withdrawn had to be re-committed to hold the American counter-attacks. For example, the 9th SS Panzer Division was held back a long time in this way on the northern side, and the Fuehrer Begleit and Fuehrer Grenadier Divisions were similarly employed on the southern, west of Bastogne. We had to strengthen our flanks as we drew in the point of the salient.

Q: Were the Panzer divisions adequately trained? (See Ans.18c)

A: None of the divisions had had time to train as units. The Panzer divisions were not necessarily any worse than the others, but a Panzer division requires much more training in moving and fighting as a unit than, say, an infantry division, and this training was seriously lacking. In the course of a long war with heavy casualties younger men take the place of the more veteran and the capacity and experience of the officers gradually declines. The SS officers were brave but inexperienced. Remer, the commander of the Fuehrer Begleit Division, for example, was a Major, who had been battalion commander. To lead a large unit requires courage and spirit but also experience.





- Q: Was it part of your original plan to cut off the two regiments of the 106th Division on the Schnee Eifel.
- A: It was planned to by-pass the Schnee Eifel and encircle the troops there. This was the only place where our plans fully succeeded. Hitler wanted to do the same thing at other points by forming strong points and then breaking off and reducing sections. We expected the Schnee Eifel troops to hold out much longer, as they could have been supplied from the air.
- Q: To what extent do you feel that the security precautions you adopted slowed up the preparations for the offensive?
- A: Subordinate officers, especially in the artillery, picked their positions and studied the terrain very late and had to work in great haste. Artillery usually requires much more time to study the ground ahead. But we thought that surprise outweighed a more careful preparation. Had the Allies known of the attack a week ahead they could have put in several armored divisions and the whole attack would have failed.
- Q: If you had to fight this offensive over again, what would you do differently?
- A: I would not change the plan because we could not do anything else. Had we had the equipment of 1940 and the air superiority we then had, we could have done much better.
- Q: Personally I would have used fewer armored divisions and more infantry divisions. Your Panzer divisions clogged the roads; your infantry divisions might have got through.
- A: I would have liked to use 10 mountain divisions. They are the most mobile troops of all and always get through. But we did not have them. We wanted the 2d and 6th Mountain Divisions, from Finland. They marched 1200 kilometers on foot but did not arrive in time.

