

Notes 80N, Copy 2

Gen. Courtney Hodges

Washington, D.C.

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Interview with General Courtney Hodges, former commander of First U S Army, at the Pentagon Building on 12 January 1949 by Forrest C Pogue.

(General Hodges seemed to be aging rapidly, but for the most part he was able to make good answers. I was struck by his seeming lack of bitterness at various people).

Ardennes

No one forecast it. (I gathered that General Hodges did not have full confidence in Colonel Dickson's forecast.) He said that Dickson had been angry since his name was taken off a promotion list for BGs, while the other Gen. were promoted. He said that Dickson was "kindly peculiar. Gen. Hodges agreed that Dickson had noted movements of Germans into the Ardennes area, but said all of us thought they were getting ready to hit us when we crossed the Rorer." He said "You know Dickson was on leave when the attack came; he wouldn't have been if he had expected an attack." I asked him if I had it right when I said "No one predicted an attack at the place it came, with the force that was used, at the approximate time it came with the objective the German had." He said that that was correct. He said that he had not asked for any additional troops on the basis of movements into the Ardennes area. After all there were no extra troops.

He made clear that the original dispositions at Bastogne and St. Vith were made by him. Said he called Bradley and asked for the release of the airborne troops. Bradley had to ask Eisenhower since these were in SHAEF reserve. Says if they had not moved rapidly to Bastogne and St. Vith he doesn't see how they could have pushed the Germans out later. Says that the people were not withdrawn from St. Vith; stayed until they were forced out.

I asked him if he had any trouble with Monty. I said that I had heard Monty had asked for his relief. He did not think so. However, said he was tired like everybody else. May have impressed Monty as being tired. They were just in the middle of the Roer fight and everyone tired when other battle came. Sometimes slept only an hour a night. Monty came to his Hq which was located at a bad place. Very noisy. Monty said can't you stop that noise. I said there was nothing to be done about it. He may have gotten a little upset; he liked to have people jump, and we Americans didn't. (You know they nearly got my HQ at Spa; we stayed as long as we could and then went back to the place where our rear Hq had been. I wanted to go to Namur, but they said it would take seven days to get the wire in. So I had to take this bad place. Buzz bombs came in near where we were. The explosions knocked out several windows. One nearly hit poor Maurice Rose. Almost deafened him). But I had no trouble with Monty. We got along very well He could be like a kid at times. Once when I went to see him, he said stay awhile; I want to show you a document. Stay and take the review with me. I found the document was nothing but a picture of the various army commanders and he had been carrying it around for several weeks to get everyone to autograph it.

General Hodges was unable to tell me whether or not it was true that 12th Army Group officers had been unable to get to 1st Army (or had not reached 1st Army) the two days before Monty was put in charge of 1st Army. Said he did talk with Gen Bradley several times during the Bulge.

Gen Hodges said he and Gerow and Collins had the idea of striking down from Elsenborn to hit the Germans. Road net there not good, so took next best place-to hit down towards Houffalize. Monty wanted to go in further west near Celles. I said--Marshal that is opposed to the American idea of warfare. Hit the enemy from the well-anchored flank nearest the point of penetrations. Monty had wanted to pull back troops from Elsenborn. I said---Marshal some of our best troops are there, and they have good positions. That is the point from which to make the attack. Joe Collins helped me argue with him. I had sent up 1st Div. We also had 2d Div there; some of our best troops. He finally agreed. I did agree on pulling 82d A/B back from its positions. They were stuck too far out. Had some tough fighting.

VII Corps stopped Germans at Celles. British are liars if they said they did that.

Monty gave me 51st Guards Div without any strings. I used them to protect Liege. Didn't put them into battle. Wanted protection, Monty put in other divisions further west. I had to get 9th Army units from Monty; we didn't control them.

When we got ready to attack, Monty said we can't go until the 5th. I might have considered that, since the 5th was my birthday, but I said we can go earlier. He said we must take time to regroup. I said Americans don't regroup. We set a new line of departure and when they get there they are regrouped. We got away earlier; never really stopped after that time.

On the withdrawal business: Monty wanted to go all the way back to Gerow's headquarters (Eupen).

The change of command from 12th to 21 A Gp very humiliating for Bradley; but it is a part of war.

Collins a gt. general. He kept trying to get a reserve ready for his attack; troops kept getting involved in battle.

Falaise Gap

I got along all right with Bimbo Dempsey (he always said call him that instead of Sir Miles). We could have gone further north, but British asked us to stop. Never heard that area was mined.

Had trouble with British over roads. Monty's boundaries always gave them the good roads. Then we would have to ask to use them. Since we had to drag 2d Br Army along, we would usually use their roads a day or two before they came up. Sometimes they would need them before we got the last man off. Then they would fuss about us having their roads.

Did you know about haystack conference? Brad, Monty, Dempsey and I flew up there by cubs. No staff; just carried our maps along (You historians will have difficulties because you don't have a record of what was said in front of maps). Decided I could go north. We could have gone north of Elbeuf but British said no. We were doing this while others were worrying about Paris.

Then Ham Haislip found he had too broad a front for his corps to handle so they gave us two divisions and I gave them to Gerow. Then we put 2d Armored with it so the French could go into Paris. Thought it would raise their morale. We could have gone in sooner. Couldn't find LeClerc when we were ready for him to go in. Bradley, after hearing of difficulties in Paris, said we had better send in some Am troops. I was glad later to get rid of LeClerc; hard to get along with. In American army we weren't used to arguing with division commanders; we just told them.

Patton

I always liked Georgie. We started as cadets together, before it developed they had a different mathematical system and I left West Point after one year and enlisted.

Georgie not deputy from 28 July-1 Aug. Omar Bradley gave order for breakout. Ridiculous for French to speak of Patton road at certain points. He wasn't in Avranches. First Army had the main opposition to contend with.

Georgia called a great man to use armor. We had as much or more armor than he did. Fought through tougher country.

They say I slogged. I don't see how we could have avoided it in view of the opposition we had and where we fought.

We did a lot in the North during the Ardennes.

Fall of 1944

Ammunition shortage as bad or worse than gasoline shortage. Snorted at view that SHAEF robbed them of stuff to give to British. Trouble on ammunition can be traced all the way back here. We had it as early as Mortain. Frequently I had to tell them to fire when they were down to their basic load.

At Wallendorf we were just holding too wide a front with too few soldiers. Didn't have enough men.

British vs. US methods

Br had poorer staff work. Heavier in method. Wanted to regroup all the time. Waste of time to stop everything for that. We wanted to keep pushing; keep enemy off balance. Key to British trouble lay in lack of men; lack of replacements. Don't think bulk of British staff officers good as ours. de Guingand a fine person; thought more like an American than any of their people. Liked Williams, Monty's G--2.

Remagen

before (?)

Not true that we hid the crossing from Eisenhower. He knew it within three hours after Brad did. I was at Cologne. I said go ahead and told Bradley that. I wouldn't have selected that place to cross. Of course, plans made to cross elsewhere. Clift Andrus says worst fighting 1st Division had was in that bridgehead. We pushed troops across. Monty said "Oh that's jolly good, you are taking the Germans off my front." We got a batch of them Road net bad out of there, but I knew we would be all right if we got on top of that hill.

Made necessary a change in the big plan, because a double envelopment was now possible.

Millikan's relief made because in was not a good corps commander. Probably a good division commander, but no good for corps. Let his troops get mixed up. Didn't send troops forward when told to. I told him to push everything; he rested the 78th. I said let Bonn go, and he sent 9th Div to take it. I told him to stay forward and he didn't. Eisenhower was not sure I was right; checked with Van Fleet and others to see what kind of commander Millikin was.

Left flank in October

I twitted Dempsey and said you forgot the principal of mass and concentration. Went off on your own. Left Corlett's flank open. Corlett upset. He had peed blood since Normandy; sick map. Tended to complain too much. Said Germans on his flank; I said, You are on their flank.

Miscellaneous

After crossing the Rhine it is not true that we worked out schemes to make envelopment. Talked it over with Bradley. Was known to Monty.

Bayerlein tried to break out of Ruhr Pocket. I was worried for awhile. Nothing on right. I got ahead of Joe Collins once during this period. I asked if he could use another division before he could ask for it.

Says was told the reason they were to stop at Mulde was to avoid mixing up troops. Knew of no political agreement. Were told they could patrol beyond the Mulde. Says he fudged a little on that. Told them they could roam about a little. When they asked how many people, he said I have heard patrols as large as a battalion.