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DDE/nmr

15 April 1945

Dear General:



✓ BCOS  
Patton

Today I forwarded to the Combined Chiefs of Staff the essentials of my future plans. In a word, what I am going to do now that the western enemy is split into two parts, is to take up a defensive line in the center (along a geographical feature that will tend to separate our forces physically from the advancing Russians) and clean up the important jobs on our flanks. A mere glance at the map shows that one of these is to get Lubeck and then clear up all the areas west and north of there. The other job is the so-called "redoubt". I deem both of these to be vastly more important than the capture of Berlin - anyway, to plan for making an immediate effort against Berlin would be foolish in view of the relative situation of the Russians and ourselves at this moment. We'd get all coiled up for something that in all probability would never come off. While true that we have seized a small bridgehead over the Elbe, it must be remembered that only our spearheads are up to that river; our center of gravity is well back of there.

Montgomery anticipates that he will need no help from the Americans other than that involved in an extension of Simpson's left. However, I rather think that he will want possibly an American Airborne Division and maybe an Armored Division. I will have enough in reserve to give him this much help if he needs it. But assuming that he needs no American help, that job will be performed by the 17 divisions of the 21st Army Group.

In the center, extending all the way from Newhouse on the Elbe down to the vicinity of Selb on the border of Czechoslovakia, will be the Ninth and First Armies, probably with about 23 to 24 divisions, including their own reserves. This will be enough to push on to Berlin if resistance is light, and the Russians do not advance in that sector. Bradley's main offensive effort will be the thrust along the line Wursberg-Munich-Linz, carried out by the Third Army with about 12 divisions. Davers, with another 12 U.S. divisions and 6 French divisions, will capture Munich and all of the German territory lying within his zone of advance.

About 8 divisions at that time will be on strictly occupational duties, largely under Fifteenth Army. This will leave about 5 divisions, including Airborne, in my Reserve.

The intervention of the British Chiefs of Staff in my military dealings with the Soviet has thrown quite a monkey-wrench into our speed of communication. If you will note from Antonov's reply to the telegram that

-1-  
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146

SECRET

we finally sent (as revised on recommendation of the BCOS) the point he immediately raised is whether our message implies an attempt, under the guise of military operations, to change the occupational boundaries already agreed upon by our three governments. Frankly, if I should have forces in the Russian occupational zone and be faced with an order or "request" to retire so that they may advance to the points they choose. I see no recourse except to comply. To do otherwise would probably provoke an incident, with the logic of the situation all on the the side of the Soviets. I cannot see exactly what the British have in mind for me to do, under such circumstances. It is a bridge that I will have to cross when I come to it but I must say that I feel a bit lost in trying to give sensible instructions to my various commanders in the field.

On a recent tour of the forward areas in First and Third Armies, I stopped momentarily at the salt mines to take a look at the German treasure. There is a lot of it. But the most interesting - although horrible - sight that I encountered during the trip was a visit to a German internment camp near Gotha. The things I saw beggar description. While I was touring the camp I encountered three men who had been inmates and by one ruse or another had made their escape. I interviewed them through an interpreter. The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick. In one room, where they were piled up twenty or thirty naked men, killed by starvation, George Patton would not even enter. He said he would get sick if he did so. I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to "propaganda".

If you could see your way clear to do it, I think you should make a visit here at the earliest possible moment, while we are still conducting a general offensive. You would be proud of the Army you have produced. In the first place, the U.S. ground and air forces are a unit; they both participate in the same battle all the way down the line from me to the lowest private. I can find no evidence whatsoever of any mutual jealousy, suspicion or lack of understanding. In fact, I know of one or two Major Generals in the Air Force that one of my Army Commanders would accept as Division Commanders today.

Next, you would be struck by the "veteran" quality of the whole organization. Commanders, staffs, and troops, both air and ground, go about their business in a perfectly calm and sure manner that gets results. I am quite certain that no organization has ever existed that can re-shuffle and re-group on a large scale and continue offensives without a single pause, better than can Bradley and his staff.

Another thing that would strike you is the high average of ability in our higher command team. In recent telegrams to you I explained something of

-2-  
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the quality of our Corps Commanders. Inadvertently I left out the name of Ridgway, one of the finest soldiers this war has produced. If ever we get to the point that I can recommend to you additional Corps Commanders for promotion, he will certainly have to be one.

In Army command, there is no weakness except for the one feature of Patton's unpredictability so far as his judgment (usually in small things) is concerned. These Army Commanders, with Bradley, make up a team that could scarcely be improved upon. Bradley, of course, remains the one whose tactical and strategical judgment I consider almost unimpeachable. Only once have we had a real difference of opinion on a major question. He is big, sound, and has the complete confidence of those above and below him.

Patton's latest crackpot actions may possibly get some publicity. One involved the arbitrary relief of a censor (over whom he had no authority whatsoever) for what Patton considered to be an error in judgment. All the censor did was to allow the printing of a story saying we had captured some of the German monetary reserves. Three or four newspapers have written very bitter articles about Patton, on this incident, and to my disgust they call it another example of "Army Blundering". I took Patton's hide off, but there is nothing else to do about it. Then again, he sent off a little expedition on a wild goose chase in an effort to liberate some American prisoners. The upshot was that he got 25 prisoners back and lost a full company of medium tanks and a platoon of light tanks. Foolishly, he then imposed censorship on the movement, meaning to lift it later, which he forgot to do. The story has now been released and I hope the newspapers do not make too much of it. One bad, though Patton says accidental, feature of the affair was that his own son-in-law was one of the 25 released. Patton is a problem child, but he is a great fighting leader in pursuit and exploitation.

This developed into quite a long story, all to convince you that in a short visit here you could see, in visible form, the fruits of much of your work over the past five years. In a matter of three or four days I am sure you would see things that would be of great satisfaction to you from now on. This sounds like I am completely and wholly satisfied with everything that I see. This is far from the case, but the point is that higher commanders have learned to handle the important things and we have gradually developed an organization that keeps the nagging details in the hands of people that can give their whole attention to them.

With best wishes,



Sincerely,

General of the Army George C. Marshall,  
The Chief of Staff,  
Washington, D.C.

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