

16 January 1945

Major General James L. Collins
Headquarters Fifth Service Command
Fort Hayes, Columbus, Ohio

Dear James:

Your letter of the 8th of November reached me shortly before Von Rundstedt launched his attack into the Ardennes. We were just winding up our drive to the Roer, and it looked as if we might have a relatively quiet Christmas.

However, when it became apparent that the German attack was a major effort, my headquarters and corps troops were quickly shifted to the south where I took over a couple of divisions which had already been thrown into action and some additional troops. As indicated in the attached newspaper interview by Marshal Montgomery, it was originally intended that we be kept out of the defensive fighting and used only for counter-offensive purposes. But it became necessary for part of my forces to hold defensively and for a while it appeared as if the Germans would be able to completely outflank the First Army before we were fully concentrated. On Christmas Eve I was faced with the decision as to whether to counterattack or to "roll back with the punch" while covering the Army flank. I decided to counterattack with one of our fine armored divisions, and on Christmas day we not only stopped the point of Von Rundstedt's spearhead, but broke it off completely. Our armor destroyed practically all of the tanks of the German 2d Panzer Division, and the whole Allied north flank was saved. Some day I will give you the details of the situation as it was put up to me, but I can't right now although much of this has already been made public and I am letting out no secrets. Unquestionably this was the major decision I have had to make thus far. As usual, in retrospect it might appear that there was nothing else to do, but with a lack of definite enemy information at the time and a threat on our left flank as well, it was not as simple as it now seems.

Monty's story is not altogether complete inasmuch as we, and not any other force, went back to the counter-offensive role as soon as we had definitely stopped the German drive. Since the 3d of January we have been attacking along the north face of the salient. The weather and terrain have been our greatest enemies. It began to snow the morning of our attack, and for the next five days we had almost constant snow and icy wind to contend with. Our men have again proved their remarkable adaptability and their willingness to take anything that is thrown against them. Last night we made a link with the forces coming up from the south at Houffalize, and it is only a question of time before the entire German salient will have been liquidated. We have destroyed a great quantity of German equipment and have taken close to eight thousand prisoners. The only reason that the Germans managed to get



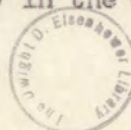
out at all, was that the weather prevented our air from operating and made artillery observation extremely difficult.

I have seen quite a good deal of Monty since this operation began and I am impressed again with his ability. However, off the record, I don't think he is nearly as able a tactician as Omar Bradley. He never makes a move without an eye to what the enemy might do to him, and he will normally not attack unless he has quite overwhelming superiority. The Germans are not likely ever to defeat him, but he also is not likely ever to win a decisive victory. Personally, he is a very attractive man and we get along with him fine. There has been first-rate cooperation between the British and ourselves throughout this show, and the British have been high in their praise of the stand that our people made in the face of the great superiority of the Germans in the initial phases of the attack. Incidentally, I know very well General Tony McAuliffe who made the epic reply of "Nuts" to the German demand for the surrender of Bastogne. There is no question but that his retention of this key center was a major contribution to the defeat of Rundstedt's drive.

Many thanks for the dope that you sent on the stock market. I read most of the principle articles, but have taken no action nor advised Gladys to take any up to date. We are simply too far away and I'm too much absorbed in the constant fighting we have had to be able to give any time to the question of investments. Actually with two girls at college, we will probably have to spend our current savings on tuition and other expenses. I have paid no income tax since the war started, having been advised by some of my friends in civilian life, now in the army, that there was a possibility of a bill being passed someday exempting from income tax, members of the armed services during the period that they were actually in the combat zone overseas. There appears to be little likelihood now of such a bill being passed, so that I have a considerable backlog of income tax that we will be able to meet only by cashing in a large share of the War Bonds which we have bought. I feel as you do, that there will be a drop in the stock market once the European war is definitely over, and it will probably be wise to keep in the savings account any current funds we have that are not needed for the children's college expenses.

Lawton came in to see me ten days or so ago to extend his greetings for the new year. He was just passing by and had no time to stop. His battalion supported the division that made our counterattack southeast of Dinant and again gave a fine account of itself. I thought Lawton looked better and more rested than he had at any time since D-day. He appeared to have put on a little weight, which he needs, though I may have gotten this impression from the fact that he was bundled up in a coat.

Our youngsters were all home for Christmas and apparently had a wonderful time. Jerry got by in calculus on the skin of his teeth, but he has studied very hard this year. Of course, the amount of calculus that he learns is of little or no importance, but he has gained a great deal of self-confidence and a determination not to let his academic difficulties get him down. I think he will make a fine officer if he decides to stay in the army.



Gladdie is thoroughly enjoying Vassar, and Nancy is anticipating entering there next year if she can sufficiently impress the college entrance board. Like Jerry, she has no natural aptitude for book learning, but I am sure that she will do well at Vassar as well as in life.

Clear sky and bright sunshine outside is offering our first opportunity to use fighter-bombers in some time, so I am hoping that we can wind up the current phase of our operations before dark tonight. But I must get out to check up on a couple of our divisions, so will say "adios".

Love to you all,

