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106th Infantry Division

December 15, 2007 - Intelligence



It would be an exciting day for Roy and his buddies, that December 15 at a place called the Schnee Eiffel. They had just arrived on the continent, had never fired a shot or had one fired at them, yet this was their big moment because somewhere beyond the forest ahead lay the enemy. Now all their training would be put into practice even though the outfit they had replaced had spent a quiet month totally lacking in action.

Roy was in a reconnaissance unit of the 106th Infantry Division. They were about to make their first foray beyond their lines and it didn't matter that there was little chance of encountering trouble. That might be true but even so it would be an adventure.

The air was frigid as they started out. The stillness, the complete silence of the forest in winter, was broken only by the sound of their own vehicles as they moved steadily ahead among the mist-shrouded trees. They were near the limit of their advance when they first became aware of sound in the distance. They stopped, shut off their motors, and listened in wonder and surprise to the unmistakable roar of dozens of large engines. Tanks. German Tigers and Panthers and Mark IVs, there was nothing else it could possibly be.

They returned to their own lines as quickly as possible and reported to Intelligence. They were laughed at. Called greenhorns who probably heard a dispatch rider starting his BMW motorcycle and believed they were hearing an entire panzer division ahead. Chastised and embarrassed, they returned to their position and settled in for the rest of the day and the approaching night.

Sometime after midnight the engines they had heard in the distance were fired up again. Along a wide front the tanks of Liebstandarte Adolph Hitler, Das Reich, Panzer Lehr and other armored divisions began a relentless advance. What would become known as the Battle of the Bulge was underway. By noon somewhere between 9,000 and 11,000 men of the 106th Division had been overrun and captured. Roy Bigger and his friends were among them. The 28th Division also collapsed and soon the entire American front in Belgium and Luxembourg was either broken or besieged.

There had been time to at least warn the front line divisions, to quickly move a few units to more advantageous positions. Intelligence chose not to.

Months earlier a battalion of the 4th Infantry Division hiked to a position bordering a forest in a valley. They had been cleaning out pockets of Germans left behind following the St-Lo

Breakthrough. Intelligence said there was another squad-strength pocket in the valley. There were nine men in a German squad, twelve in an American. Fifteen men were sent into the valley. Soon they were surrounded. Then the rest of their company, battalion and entire regiment. That squad-strength pocket near the town of Percy contained 15,000 Germans.

They called it Intelligence. They still do today.

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