

# Battle of Bulge Nearing Climax Five Years Ago

Washington — Five years ago American soldiers squatted in soggy foxholes of Belgium's rugged Ardennes country along the German border. Christmas was in the offing, a Christmas none would ever forget.

On the northern flank of the First army's 125 mile front, fighting was still bitter and cruel, both in Hurtgen forest, and in the attack toward the Roer river dams. But General Courtney Hodges' southern flank, the loose 80 mile front held by three divisions and a cavalry group of VIII corps was quiet.

It had been quiet for weeks and months, a "rest" area for the Fourth and 28th divisions, battered and bloody from Hurtgen, an indoctrination for the untried 106th, only a few days in the line on the Schnee Eifel. It was quiet until 8:30 a. m. on December 16, 1944, when all hell broke loose.

That was the start of the Battle of the Bulge, the most ferocious single battle of the western front, launched by Hitler himself. It was the German high command's last desperate gamble, and when it ended, Germany, as a military machine was through and finished.

The crisis came on December 26. It was met successfully by the armies of General Omar N. Bradley, commander of 12th army group, and by the supreme commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

But the fighting continued, even increasing in tempo until one month later, on January 16, when the original lines of First army were restored, with the help of General George S. Patton's Third army, and divisions sent from General William Simpson's Ninth army, while Field Marshall Montgomery's British soldiers back-stopped along the vital Meuse river front.

**Casualties Were Heavy**  
The cost was not light. Eisenhower's personnel officer reported 8,607 killed, 47,139 wounded, and 21,144 missing; total casualties of 76,890, including 8,000 men, amounting to two regiments, of the 106th division.

We also lost 733 tanks and tank-destroyers. For the Germans, the cost was even heavier. They had scraped the bottom of the barrel, and unlike the United States, could not replace their losses in manpower, tanks, guns and gasoline.

The figure generally accepted for German losses, according to "Dark December," a history of the Bulge, by Robert E. Merriam (Fifth), former Army historian, was 81,834. It included 12,652 killed, 38,600 wounded, and 30,582 missing, as of December 31. Their losses in tanks and assault guns at that time were 324.

The counteroffensive launched by Hitler in extreme secrecy was often described as a Von Rundstedt offensive, after Field Marshal Gerd Von Rundstedt, commander-in-chief in the west. But, as a war prisoner, Von Rundstedt confirmed to Army interrogators that all the planning was done by Hitler and Hitler's army and SS favorites, outside his ken, and without his approval.

For this final gambit on the war books, Hitler had husbanded his dwindling resources. He hoped the attack would carry across the Meuse, below Liege, through Brussels to Antwerp, the new Allied supply port which had just been opened.

If this maneuver succeeded, it would trap 20 to 30 American and British divisions. At best it might cause England and the United States to sue for peace. At worst it would delay for months any Allied offensive, while Germany perfected its new V weapons, such as the V-1 and V-2 rockets, already bombarding London.

### Attempt to Block Patton

The Germans sent 29 divisions roaring into the weakened VIII corps front, led by SS General "Sepp" Dietrich's new Sixth SS panzer army and General Von Manstein's Fifth panzer army. On the north the 15th Army lent a corps to block the shoulder of the gap while the Seventh German army turned on the south to block Patton.

But for the Germans an awful lot of things went wrong, mostly American. Some Americans broke under the attack, but more stood firm, fighting with resolution and courage.

Probably the greatest surprise of all to the enemy was the speed with which Eisenhower's troops reacted, recovered, and went into action. Eisenhower and his commanders, for one thing, did not delay by consulting their political

chiefs, as the Germans would have done. The first objective of the enemy was the Meuse river, 60 miles away at its nearest point. Armored spearheads got within sight of the water, but never reached it. General "Ernie" Harmon's Second armored division, rushed down from Ninth army, saw to that at Celles.

St. Vith, the strategic road junction held by the 106th division, was to have fallen at once. The shredded 106th, the Seventh armored division which was rushed in to help, and assorted units, held on for days, and irrevocably shattered the German time table.

### 101st Held Bastogne

A lot of other things happened, too. The Second and 99th divisions, attacking toward the Roer dams on the north, turned around, pulled back, and held on to the northern shoulder, bolstered by the old reliable First division, hastily rushed into action from a few days of rest.

Like pieces of a mosaic, other units were slipped in to the elastic front, just in time to check and halt the fanatical SS tankers and Volksgrenadiers. It was a marvel of traffic discipline, moving divisions across main lines of supply on congested and poor road net, to reach critical cross roads at the last moment.

That's what the 30th division did at Stavelot and Malmédy, where isolated engineer units had held off roaring tank columns. That's what the 82nd airborne did, when rushed in overland from Rheims, to Wernmont, where it also extricated the Seventh.

And the 101st airborne, which held at Bastogne with remnants of the Ninth and Tenth armored divisions. And the 84th division, or the

Third armored, the First army's famous wheel horse, or the Second armored, and all the others.

While on the south, Patton executed a brilliant disengaging maneuver, withdrew divisions from combat, shortened his lines, and roared north to meet the German Seventh army, and plug away at the southern shoulder, with his Fourth armored division finally affecting the relief of beleaguered Bastogne.

St. Vith and the northern flank were the key factors in the battle. It was there that the German timetable fell apart. It was there that the Germans failed in their plan to cross the Meuse below Liege.

Only after that failure, did Field Marshall Walter Model, commander of the army group B — the overall commander of the attacking force — throw his weight at Bastogne. Capture of that road center would have given his army more room for maneuver off their congested bottlenecks, a far better position in which to take the defensive.

But the Germans ran into a hornet's nest at Bastogne, and a dough-ty division commander, Anthony McAuliffe, who off-handedly said "Nuts!" to an enemy demand for his surrender.

And another decisive factor of great importance was the American Air Forces and the British rocket-flying Typhoons. For seven days, at the start, and again for a short period in January, weather shut down a blanket of fog, mist, and dense clouds.

When it lifted the entire weight of the heavy and medium bombers and every fighter plane was thrown in against the most that the battered German air force could muster. The effort cost 267 fighters and 255

bombers, but it smashed the German tank columns, ruined enemy supplies, battered railroads and freight yards into oblivion, and isolated the battlefield so that the Germans finally could not advance.

Historians will mull over the pros and cons of that battle for generations to come, and the controversies on decisions may never be revealed.

**Enemy's Last Effective Fight**  
Bradley, now chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, has often said he welcomed the opportunity to draw the Germans out into the open beyond their Siegfried line where they could be destroyed.

They were destroyed. It was the enemy's last effective fight. But there is no doubt, too, that the Allies were caught completely off guard. The intelligence officers of Eisenhower and Bradley were badly fooled. They had predicted for weeks that the Germans were through, unable to muster a counter-attack.

Only one high level intelligence officer came through the melee with his banners flying. Colonel B. L. Dickson, of Hodges' First army, for weeks had pointed out that the Germans definitely had the capacity to smack us with a heavy counter-attack at any time or place.

Dickson didn't pick the exact spot in the Ardennes where the gray clad soldiers boiled through, but he was the only one of the lot who came near to it.

Glass fibers are drawn out faster than a mile a minute.

May this Christmas bring to your fireside every joy that is dear

**HOLIDAY GREETINGS**

**AVENUE SHOPPE**

**Season's**

Our best wishes for a Merry Christmas

WINONA, MN

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