



Convoy hurries to the lines. There are many stories of the heroic sacrifices in December, 1944 that could fill a book. This chapter only touches the tip of the iceberg. Far right, night falls early between 3:30 and 4 p.m. in the winter, and when a blizzard descends the night is long.

The **Battle of the Bulge**, as the battle which began December 16 has been called by historians ever since, involved a triple gamble of sorts entering on: 1) bad weather in the West; 2) the idea that Stalin

would not launch his new invasion offensive once the news broke of the Battle of the Bulge (Stalin was prepared to go for his own offensive on December 20, but politics and logistics prompted him to wait. This basically revealed Hitler's ability for a hunch, one last time); and 3) the astonishing ability to remain concealed in the thick forests until the offensive started. If his planning went without a hitch, he thought Germany could hold off the Allies until his new wonder-weapons, which his German scientists were designing, could change the outcome of the war.

The chief military objective was to blitzkrieg through the forests of the Ardennes, crossing the Our river on the first day of the offensive, drop paratroopers, cross the Meuse river by the fourth and then turn for Antwerp by the twenty-third of December. Hitler's highly optimistic mind even foresaw the encirclement of the Allies as occurred in the bygone Dunkirk era; his General Staff took the latter as one objective too much. Dunkirk took place in summer and against a punier force. However, they fell **the crossing of the Meuse and an envelopment of Allied** forces in the Ardennes realistically possible.

From the Allied perspective this was illogical because, as recently as December 10, U.S. Intelligence had issued data that German forces were "unable to launch large-scale counterattacks." In addition, most enemy armor units were believed to be near the Rhine, near Aachen.

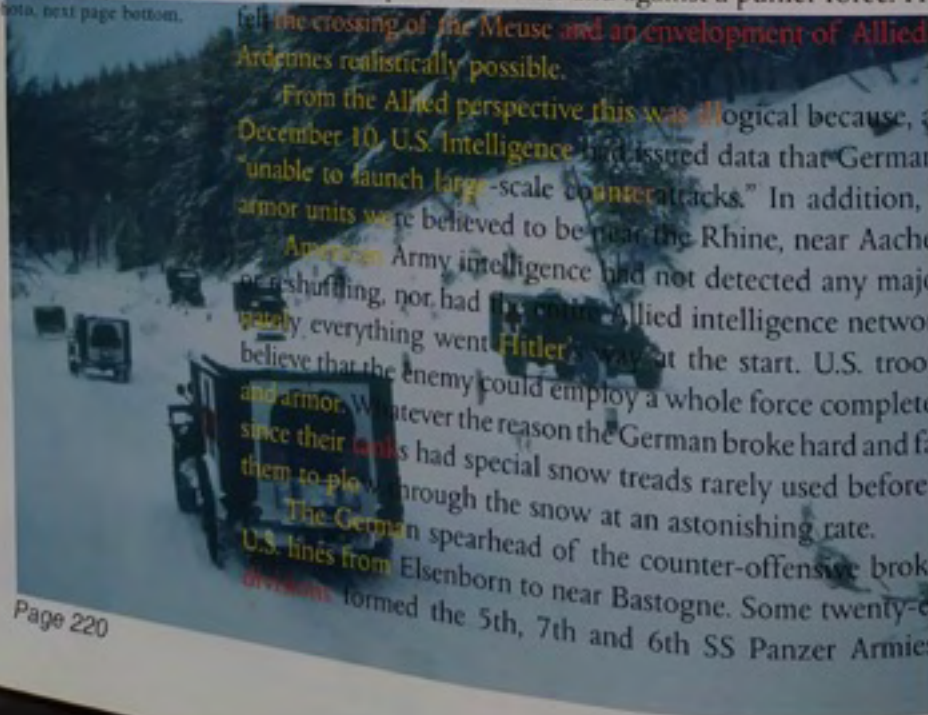
American Army intelligence had not detected any major movement or shuffling, nor had it come Allied intelligence network. Unfortunately everything went **Hitler's** way at the start. U.S. troops could not believe that the enemy could employ a whole force complete with supply and armor. Whatever the reason the German broke hard and fast, especially since their tanks had special snow treads rarely used before that allowed them to plow through the snow at an astonishing rate.

The German spearhead of the counter-offensive broke all forward U.S. lines from Elsenborn to near Bastogne. Some twenty-eight German divisions formed the 5th, 7th and 6th SS Panzer Armies, with eight



101st Airborne
Bastogne, Longchamps,
Monschau, Battle of the Bulge,
Ardennes

The nights of Christmas reverberated with echoes of artillery and (center) ominous gas of a 3-inch motor carriage dug in the snow. A force of 45,000 Germans surrounded Bastogne, which was held by some 19,000 Americans: one of the bleary-eyed U.S. defenders in an extremely rare color photo, next page bottom.



Page 220



1st Inf Div
Battle of the Bulge,
Ardennes



9th Inf Div
Battle of the Bulge,
Ardennes



2nd Inf Div
Battle of the Bulge,
Ardennes



4th Inf Div
Bastogne, Ardennes

28th Inf
Battle of the
Ardennes

hundred King Tigers and Panthers, juiced up on three and a half million specially-saved gallons of gasoline; Hitler actually thought of teaching the Americans a lesson, as he believed Americans could not take a stand and maintain an atmosphere of order; in the 1930's Hitler loved to call the American race "unauthoritative slots" and social brats. But, despite the brutal breakthrough, the so-called American misfits fought back. And different from Hitler's interpretation, held their lines, and gave up their lives in places nobody heard of.



31st Inf Div
Ardennes



6th Armor
Bastogne, Ardennes



The places were mainly in Belgium, undeclared tiny villages on a map, such as Saint Hubert-La Roche, Hotton-Manhay, Stavelot, Monschau, Butgenbach, Buissonville, Verdenne, St Vith, Bra,

Ambleve and Bullingen. Today they are charming little European towns, but in 1944, they and many other towns, were fought for with blood and guts, by paratroopers, riflemen, engineers, MP's, tankers, musicians, cooks, clerks, White GI's and Black GI's alike. At times, these brave soldiers were outnumbered and paid a price, but at times they checked the Nazi attack and did not allow them to penetrate according to their plan.

One of the earliest stands was at Stavelot and Trois Points. Near Stavelot a phenomenal 2.5 million gallons of gasoline was secretly hidden from the Germans; it was the largest fuel depot in the European continent. For the first 2 days of the offensive, a variety of units in the deep ravines, twisty roads and road blocks held off this German spearhead, notably the 1st SS Panzer Division, led by Col. Joachim Peiper, a veteran of the Russian Front. The Germans were





American prisoners, the largest number of captured Americans since the fall of Bataan, 1942.

13th Airborne
Ardennes

trying to cut through U.S. lines, through Stavelot and Liège to reach Antwerp, the prize only seventy miles away. Actually, Stavelot fell, and the U.S. had to retake it the hard way. The tiny river Ambleve was considered the final major obstacle; beyond it lay inviting open



44th Inf Div
Ardennes

tank country. But the Germans had another obstacle to overcome: lack of gas. Each of Hitler's best, the Tiger Tank II, got about half a mile to the gallon. At Bullingen and Samree they captured oil dumps, but they were going dry again. There were no more famous blitzkrieg armored formations like in 1940, and with the exception of captured U.S. trucks, the support troops of Von Rundstedt's breakthrough literally rode bicycles. Peiper's lead tanks never found out the true extent of the fuel depot near Stavelot—big enough to supply all his 1500 tanks— instead they turned south.



70th Inf Div
Battle of the Belg.
Ardennes

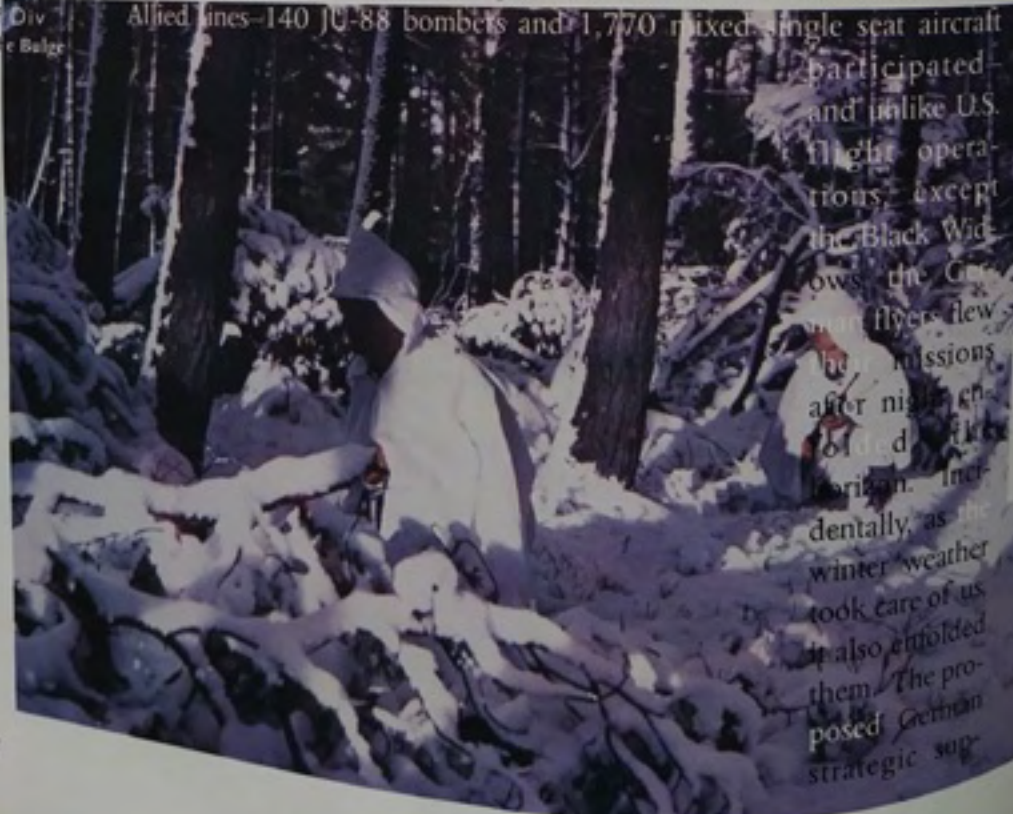


7th Armor
St. Vith, Bastogne



35th Inf Div
Ardennes, The Bulge

During those December nights, the Luftwaffe struck behind the



Ally lines—140 JU-88 bombers and 1,770 mixed single seat aircraft participated—and unlike U.S. night operations, except the Black Widows, the German flyers flew the missions after nightfall and did not fly in formation. Incidentally, as the winter weather took care of us, it also emboldened them. The proposed German strategic sup-



75th Inf Div
The Bulge

