

Chicago Sunday Tribune, Jan. 15, 1947  
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# BULGE BATTLE— PROUD CHAPTER IN U. S. HISTORY

## 'GI Courage Routs Hitler Bid for Victory

(This is the third of a series of five stories by Tribune correspondents retelling the great American campaign of World War II, in Europe. In its William Strand, who was at the Ardennes front, begins his epic account of the Battle of the Bulge, where Tank courage in the face of tremendous odds smashed Hitler's legions.)

BY WILLIAM STRAND  
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The allied winter offensive was exactly one month old when the German line burst into flame along a 70-mile front southeast of Antwerp on Dec. 16, 1944. The thunder of German artillery that cold December day and the roar of advancing enemy tank columns heralded the start of the Battle of the Ardennes. The battle ended a month later with Hitler's legions in full retreat, closely pursued by American infantry, try and pounded by the steady sledge hammer blows of American artillery and war planes.

The events of those four fateful weeks constitute one of the proudest chapters in the history of American arms. The story of how the "Yanks fought and died in the German Bulge has taken a prominent place in the lore of American valor.

Many Deaths of Heroism  
In the snow swept woodlands of southeastern Belgium deeds of extraordinary heroism occurred so frequently and in such numbers that they were commonplace. Men fought "tiger tanks with hand grenades and rifles. Foot soldiers, retreating, yield ground, stayed in their foot-holds and fought until enemy tanks rolled over them.

Scores of handfuls of resistance to the enemy rear developed from the first day, as civilians of most left to the waist of the advance fought against tremendous odds. For days afterward they lived in a sickening whirlpool of mud, destruction and death, striving to cut their way back to the American lines.

In Bastogne's public square today is a sign placed there as a permanent reminder of the battle for that city, which marked the turning point in Hitler's last gamble for victory. It says:

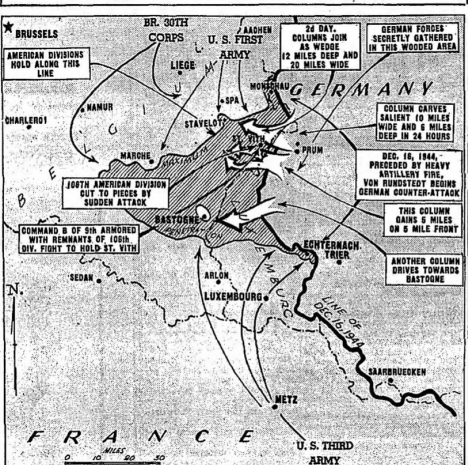
"This is Bastogne, Bastion of the Battle of the Bulge of the 101st American Airborne Division."

Gambled on Weather  
It was the 101st which sent back the reply, "Nuts!" to an enemy demand for surrender of the beleaguered garrison.

Field Marshal von Rundstedt gambled on the weather as an ally for his surprise blow. For days before he launched the Battle of the Bulge, extreme cold and lack of visibility thru fog and snow had kept both combat and observation planes grounded. Thus the Nazis were able to assemble their striking force secretly and hoped to complete their strategic gains before the overwhelming weight of allied air power could be brought to bear against them.

But the allied air forces were there in the moment of decision. Gen. Doolittle's 8th air force was called upon during the grapple period to bomb the advancing Germans thru the clouds, a precise and unusual task for heavy bombers. The fighters and fighter bombers of Gen. Vandenberg's 9th air force flew low thru narrow valleys searching out enemy columns in the murky overcast. Frequently these flyers—as they heeded and blasted at the rear armor with bombs and machine guns—were all that stood between Von Rundstedt and his first objectives while American artillery and

### Division of Forces in Battle of Bulge



Areas of assault and the components of the American defense forces in the historic battle of the Bulge which started Dec. 16, 1944, and lasted for a month.

tanks were being rushed forward to meet him.

Divided 62 Miles Into Belgeim  
Von Rundstedt's lance carried his armored spearheads 60 miles into Belgium and only five miles from the French frontier. It was checked on the forested Malmsey line, and on the Stoumont-Malmsey line. It was split at Bastogne, delayed at St. Vith, and finally smashed at Collet in a tank battle of unbelievable fury in which the cream of German armor was destroyed by the mechanical monsters from America.

The drive probably will be remembered as the last convulsive blow struck by a dying war machine. Nevertheless, it had none of the fulfillment of a Japanese "banzai" charge and it gave the allied field command some of its worst moments of the war.

If the German commander had reached Liege he might have been in position to destroy the American 1st and 9th armies plus the British 21st and Canadian 1st armies. A thrust from Liege to Antwerp and the sea would have bottled up these forces and their vast stores of weapons and other supplies.

Employs Every Trick  
In choosing the moment to strike, the main commander took full advantage of the military situation and once he struck he opened wide his bag of tricks, using every death dealing device and resource at his command.

Paratroopers were dropped behind our lines and specially trained teams of saboteurs wearing American and British uniforms infiltrated our positions. Elements of more than 28 German divisions were identified in the Bulge; reserves.

And finally, in a desperate bid for victory at the year's end, Von Rundstedt tossed the remainder of his air force on the swaying scales. German planes were seen in the sky which they had not been since the Normandy landing.

From the outset, it was obvious that the enemy was riding much higher than we. But in making the decision to attack, he merely lowered his basic concepts of strategy for Mouschais forest and Trier. The rug Von Rundstedt put on the grass sure thru these three gaps and American poured his divisions into the Bulge

as fast as he could move them along the highways. The next day the 1st and 2nd SS spearheads followed east of St. Vith and formed a single wedge, 25 miles deep and 20 miles wide in the hour of the western front.

Allied Intelligence Falls  
It was increasingly plain in those first terrible hours that some one had erred, in the German plan. The latter force swung north to detect the extent of the enemy buildup in the Ardennes, and failed to evaluate the possibilities, and failed to deduce the probable point of attack.

On the day before Von Rundstedt began to move, allied intelligence maps carried the names of only five west-arm German divisions in the enemy line from Mentesch to Trier. This was due in part, of course, to the weather and our inability to observe enemy troop movements. There were other reasons why the enemy won an early success in the Ardennes. Allied officers, from the field to the high command, were off-awakened and had grown careless in such ordinary military safeguards as laying mine fields, preparing road blocks for emergency vehicles and otherwise planning a complete defensive system.

Exact Betwixt Favorably  
Hodges, seeing instantly that St. Vith, vital, sent 24th Gen. Robert W. Hartmann's 7th armored division roaring across the path of the German armor to the aid of the severely pressed 28th.

The German inability to liquidate this island of American courage proved a serious handicap for them. The 7th armored, the virtually surrounded, stood like a rock for five days of constant battering. It was longer than the combined length of the Delaware and the Meuse, followed by a slash out on the Cologne plain toward the heart of industrial Germany. They planned their offensive to beat the Americans and the British in the punch and throw them off balance at one of the most critical points of the war.

By threatening the flank of our 9th armor, Von Rundstedt also schemed to force Gen. Elmore to shift the weight of his division from the main blow to the series of sharp counterattacks all along the line.

He had the 6th Panzer army on his right flank, his 5th Panzer army in the center, and his 7th army on the southern flank. Reserves for each were massed in the rear areas. The weight of his blow was aimed at the lower section of Hodges' 5th corps and the entire length of the United States 8th corps.

The pre-dawn barrage was ferocious, with shells crashing down on the forward positions at the rate of more than 250 an hour in some sections. When it lifted, doughboys crouching in their foxholes saw the vanguard of two armored spearheads rumbling forward suddenly out of the morning mists. They were had to be taken. As a consequence, spearhead was led by the 1st SS Adolf Hitler Panzer division striking south of St. Vith. The other, which went north of that strategic road junction town, was led by the 12th SS Hitler Jugend Panzer division.

Drive Deep Into GI Lines  
These were what the Germans call "reconnaissance in force." They were heavily armored combat teams, designed to hit a terrific punch on a narrow front and go as far as they could. Barring thru the 24th American defenses, both met with unexpected success. The northern column carved a salient 10 miles wide and six miles deep in the first 24 hours. The one on the south had two prongs which executed a quick pivoting movement, cutting off thousands of American troops the first day and completing a penetration of five miles on a five mile front.

North of Trier, meanwhile, local attacks by the 5th Panzer army had found another soft spot in the American lines in the direction of Basle.

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Wed, Nov 22, 2017