

50 years after the Bulge

'I don't know how any of us ever came back'

By Sara Hammond
The Arizona Daily Star

They were told it was a "quiet front," these young soldiers of the 106th Division. But after spending just a few days on the front lines settling in, boys became men and the course of their lives and the world were forever changed.

Instead of a quiet spot in thick Belgian woods close to the German border, the place where the 106th Division had been sent to replace weary soldiers from the 2nd Division became a major battlefield, as Adolf Hitler sent nearly everything he had left in his arsenal west for one last stand, in what came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge.

"I don't know how any of us ever came back," said Henry V. Hayden of Tucson, then a 21-year-old staff sergeant with the 81st Combat Engineers attached to the C Company of the 424th Regiment of the 106th, the division's one regiment that fared the best on the December day that the German offensive began.

Hitler's army moved around 5:30 a.m. on Dec. 16, 1944, as the American troops lay sleeping, unaware what had been massed in the nearby woods.

The day before, the troops had amused themselves playing football.

"We hadn't been thinking about war," Hayden said.

"When it all started, it was so confusing," he recalled. "We lost so many officers at the beginning."



The Associated Press

Dec. 16, 1944: The Ardennes again becomes a monumental battlefield

Hayden said when an officer fell, a lower-ranking man would step in to take his place in the chain of command.

"The Germans thought the rest would quit, but the American soldier was trained to go all the way down to private" to lead, he said.

"Our whole division was on the front line holding a 20-mile front. Normally, it would have been nine miles," he said.

"We were hit with five to six divisions and were outnumbered."

Hayden said engineers were trained to fight as infantrymen. He was wounded

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GIs withstand Third Reich's death spasm

EDITOR'S NOTE - It was Adolf Hitler's goal-line stand and he came with a blitz against the Allied onslaught. Germany's World War II counteroffensive at Christmastime in 1944, the Battle of the Bulge, proved horrendously costly to both sides, but the Americans were not to be denied.

By Sid Moody
The Associated Press

In the forest the snow lay deep and silent. From that, they called it "The Ghost Front."

Capt. Henry Reath, a gunner, went looking for his forward observer. He found him ensconced in an armchair in someone's summer cottage looking through a picture window with binoculars at the winter solitude.

Had he been able to look beyond the trees that Dec. 15, 1944, the spotter would have seen the impossible: a mechanized German army somehow risen from the rubble of impending defeat about to launch its last blitzkrieg.

In retrospect, the Battle of the Bulge that struck out of the pre-dawn fog the next day was a death throes of Adolf Hitler's Thousand-Year Reich. At the

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