THE BATTLE FOR HÜRTGEN FOREST
SEPTEMBER 1944 — FEBRUARY 1945

THE GREEN HELL

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Akbulut '10

The Green Hell

The Story of a Forgotten Feat of Arms

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"Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime. Ask the infantry, ask the dead."

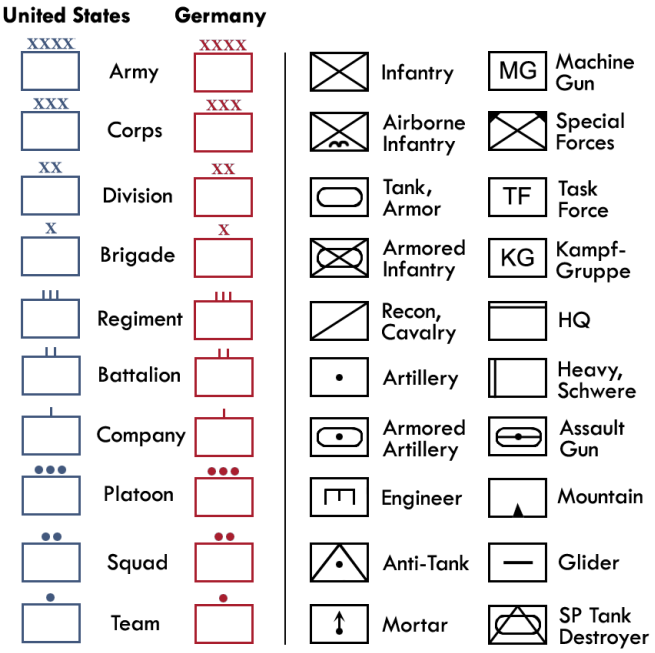
Ernest Hemingway

Do you remember the hour of din before the attack?
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads — those ashen-grey
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?
Have you forgotten yet?
Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you'll never forget.

"Aftermath," Siegfried Sassoon

THE HÜRTGEN FOREST

KEY TO MAP SYMBOLS



This monograph is a result of the surprising number of people who have contacted me over the years asking for more information about this campaign or to relay that a dear family member had lost his life on this battlefield. This work would not have been possible without their interest.

In the pages that follow, expect no romantic rationalizations of war, no sentimental reminisces. Instead what follows in my attempt to describe the campaign as it happened, with its ugly details. There might have been no glory in the battle but there was honor, strewn in splotchy dabs across the dull green landscape, and there was courage. So much was expected of men from both sides that most gave everything they had. Tens of thousands gave their lives. For sheer human drama alone, few engagements equal this sad, arguable unnecessary campaign.

Akhil Kadidal
United States
December 2010

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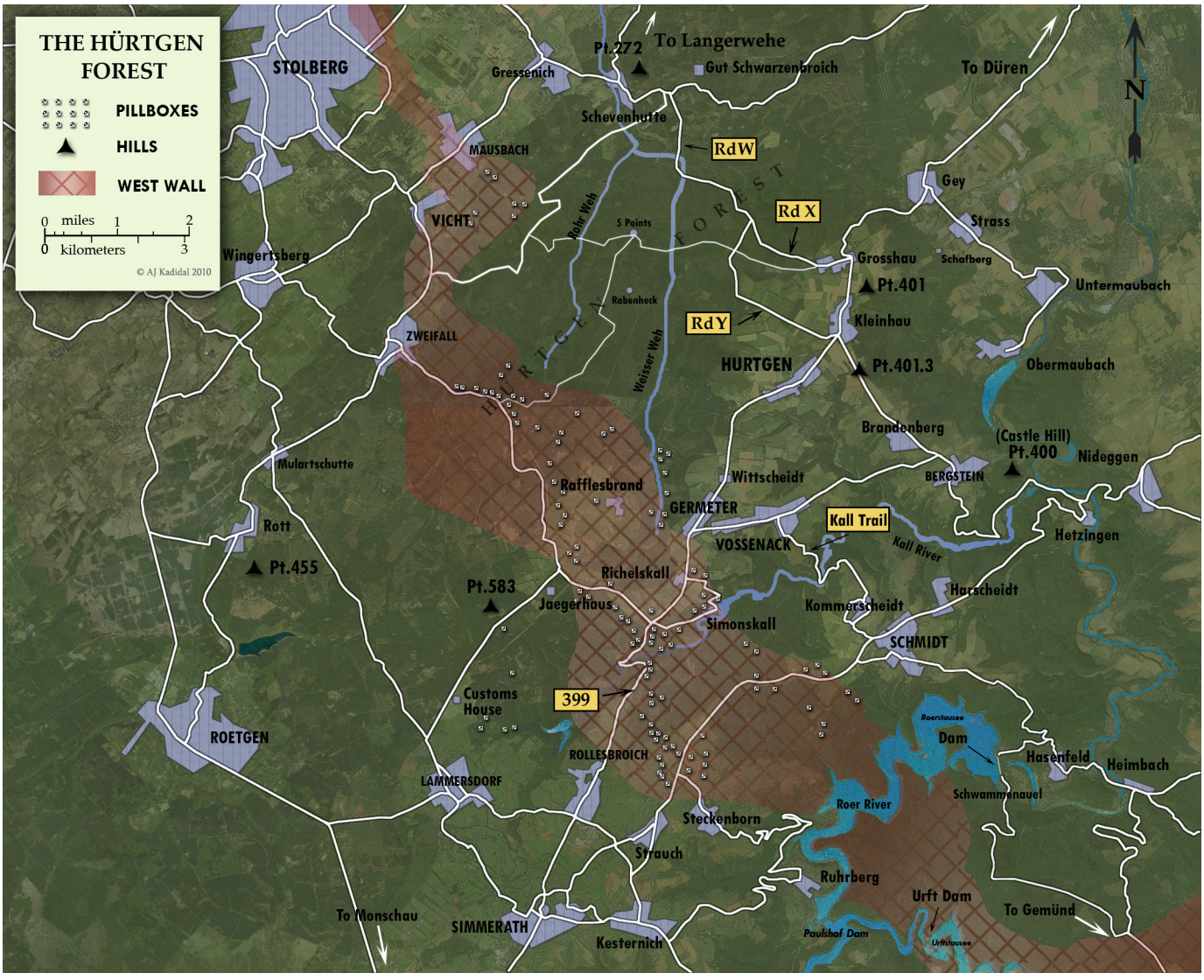
INTO THE GREEN HELL

When the Normandy campaign ended in August 1944, the Allies swept into France and Belgium on a wave of exuberance. Seasoned military observers were certain that the back of the German army had been broken and that easy victory now lay within the Allied grasp by as early as December. But as the weeks passed and the days turned from summer to autumn, German strength gradually hardened. Then came several reversals, the biggest at Arnhem in Holland in the second half of September when a British effort to cross the Rhine River met bitter failure. Despite this, Allied morale was high and the senior generals studied the charts to plan their next strike. For US Lt-General Courtney H. Hodge's veteran First Army, the assignment for that autumn centered around taking the key Northern Rhineland cities of Aachen and Düren. In this area was a virtually unknown forest that would prove a tremendous hurdle to the ambitions of the First Army in their own drive to the Rhine. This was the Hürtgen Forest.



THE HÜRGEN BATTLEFIELD The area as it appeared in 1944.

THE FOREST

Described by one American historian as the "Witch's Lair," the dark, forbidding Hürtgen forest takes up an area of 31 square miles, a few miles south of the ancient city of Aachen near the Belgium-Germany border. Looking east from Aachen in 1944, one saw a great green swathe of interlocking forest covering the sweeps to the horizon and upon entering the towering trees itself one was struck with an ancient dread of the unknown, a primordial caution at what lay concealed within the depths of that dim world.

Despite its medievalist atmosphere the forest was fairly new in 1944, having been hand-planted a few years earlier under the aegis of a far-sighted German Army General Staff order. Despite its recent birth, however, the forest displayed an eerie and frightening visage of gothic proportions. Tall, stately Douglas Firs and other varieties were planted in rows, eight to ten feet apart and full-grown four years later, towered almost 75 to 100 feet high. Some had been planted so close together that they formed a natural impenetrable wall. The whole atmosphere was one of overpowering suffocation and claustrophobia, even among the bravest of soldiers. It was this forest that the American high command chose to fight over — Initially only as a means of flank protection but later more vociferously when it turned into a matter of prestige as the thick forest and adept German defenses proved capable of occupying nearly an entire army for over four months.

When the US 9th Infantry Division first entered the forest in September 1944 it found a challenge. The tall, thorny firs seemed to stretch on endlessly. Grouped and interlocked, they seemed to claw up towards the grey skies. The forest floor below lurked in perpetual darkness with hardly any underbrush, as little sunlight penetrated these shadowy depths, and remained muddy with puddles of chilly water stubbornly combating evaporation. Then later on, as the weeks passed, descending snow, sleet and freezing temperatures made the already unbearable forest even more intolerable.

Casualties were high, especially for the Americans who also suffered from bad morale stemming from setbacks. Almost 24,000 Americans died, were wounded or captured there and yard for yard, the battle represented the highest casualty rate suffered by the US Army during the European campaign. Little wonder then that Maj-General James M. Gavin of the 82nd Airborne Division later declared that this "was one battle that should have never been fought." Another eyewitness, the famed writer Ernest Hemingway, travelling with the fighting forces under the aegis of *Collier's Magazine*, linked the campaign to the bloody battle of Passchendaele of 1917. "But with tree-bursts," Hemingway would point out, "Always with tree bursts."

The Hürtgen campaign became the American "Passchendaele," but unlike Passchendaele, the Hürtgen campaign became largely forgotten. In December 1944 when the Germans launched the Ardennes offensive in Belgium, Hürtgen became yesterday's news, its lost troops a forgotten army, and the battle little more than a footnote in the back pages of history. But this is their story — of lonely and despairing soldiers, and of insurmountable courage and sacrifice in that lonely twilight of 1944. ➤

THROUGH THE EERIE TREES A squad from the US 110th Infantry picks its way through the forest.
US ARMY

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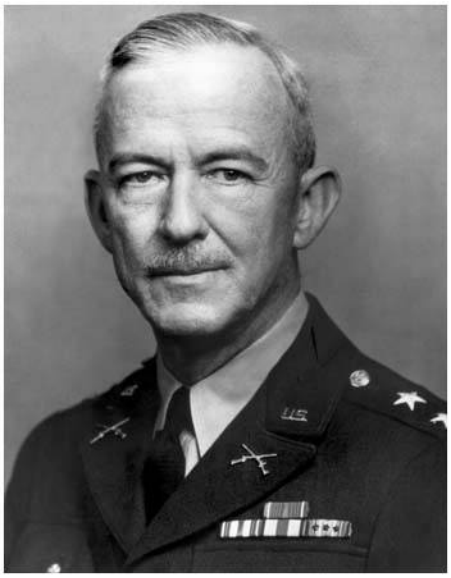
THE OPENING BLOWS

The battle for Hürtgen Forest (or *Hürtgenwald* as it was known the Germans) began in late-September 1944 just days after American troops launched an attack on the fortified city of Aachen on the Siegfried line.

Aachen was supposed to guard the entrances to the Rhine River and it was a formidable obstacle for troops under Lt-General Courtney Hodges's First Army. The city was also the gateway to the Hürtgen Forest considered by Hodges as a place for the Germans to assemble infantry and armor for a counter-attack. For this reason, while the bulk of his command concentrated on capturing Aachen, Hodges sent a spearhead of the experienced 9th Infantry Division, veterans of the Normandy fighting, with the tanks of the 3rd Armored Division, into the Hürtgen, with orders to capture the forest before it could be properly defended. Hodges had high hopes on this penetration. If the 9th and the 3rd Divisions succeeded in their objectives, they would take the First Army to the banks of the sprawling Rhine River, the last natural obstacle before the important city of Cologne on the underbelly of the mighty, industrialized Ruhr valley. With any luck, the Germans might have even decided to leave the forest undefended.



LT-GENERAL COURTNEY HODGES
NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Little suspected by Hodges, however, the Germans had decided to hold. Occupying the Hürtgen sector of the front within the hard-boiled Field Marshal Walter Model's Army Group B was the 7th Army commanded by General Erich Brandeberger. Brandenberger had two understrengthed corps to hold Hürtgen and Aachen. In the north covering Aachen and Stolberg was LXXXI Corps with four battered divisions. But the important left flank was held by just one division, the 353rd, with five Landsschutzen (security troops) several second-line Luftwaffe fortress battalions, an infantry replacement training regiment and other minor forces. But the 353rd, already bruised in weeks of fighting, had the responsibility of holding the entire front from Schevenhutte to Lammersdorf in the south, a formidable task.

Further south, near the important town of Monschau, near the Ardennes forest, Brandenberger had positioned LXXIV Corps which had only two divisions. The stronger of the two, the 89th Infantry Division had only one infantry regiment left but had been reinforced with a grenadier training regiment, one Landsshutzen and three Luftwaffe fortress battalions. For artillery, it had only eight guns.

Still, the Germans had decided to hold because the forest favored defense, because it could be held by a relatively small force, and because holding it meant that the Americans would be denied further access into the *Heimat* (roughly translatable to homeland). Furthermore, a series of dams in the Roer River were of critical importance — something that the Americans initially failed to grasp. They could be used to flood the Roer plains if ever the Allies appeared close to breaking through.

None of these developments reached the minds of the 9th Division, which entered the forest on the 14th in high hopes. A veteran of North Africa and Sicily and having seen near non-stop combat since Normandy, the division, under the command of Maj-General Louis Craig, envisioned a swift victory. Their orders were simple: break through the tangled mass of trees and capture a vital cross-road at the town of Schmidt. The capture of this unremarkable town, tactically important only because it was on the highest ridge in the area, would give the Americans an important vantage point from which they could

observe and build-up before the main push to the Rhine River. Again, divisional planners saw no importance in the main dam at Schwammenaeul, only two miles beyond.

Hodges wanted the forest taken at the earliest and his intelligence officers assured him that it could be had in a few weeks. The few German troops in the area, they believed, were both weak in numbers and spirit and largely made up of reservists and old men. Intelligence informed divisional commanders that the area was manned only by "second-rate German troops in rudimentary, rather than deliberate positions." In reality, the area itself was a natural defensive position for the enemy. US officers should have realized that the terrain was a formidable obstacle — A thick forest overgrown with thick snarl of firs and other evergreens covering the flatlands and the steep ridges. Occasionally open plateaus and farming hamlets broke up the forest expanses, but they were almost always defended by man-made obstacles. For months, the German Todt labor organization had packed the area with pillboxes (both concrete and log), positioned to create interlocking fields of fire, and they had laid miles of booby-trapped concertina wire and mine-fields. Then there was the unsettling reminder of the prowess of German troops in battle.

GENERAL ERICH BRANDENBERGER BUNDESARCHIV

Already, by Friday, September 15th, the 9th Division found its progress gradually slowing. Initial advances had been promising. On the 14th, the division's 47th Regiment had cleared the town of Zweifall from enemy troops, but on the following day, by now slogging through the thick, misty forest, the regiment ran into a battalion of Germans marching into combat from the other side. Almost immediately, heavy firing broke out, pinning both sides as bullets and shrapnel plunged into the trees and men. German tanks made a terrifying appearance and for the first time since its entry into the forest, the 9th Division found itself losing ground.

At a roadblock set under the towering firs, Staff Sergeant James La Barr spotted another enemy column of troops and tanks. He managed to kill the lead officer before a formidable hail of gunfire shattered the stillness. Private First

THE FIRST ATTACKERS Task Force Lovelady from the 3rd Armored passes into Germany near Roetgen on 15 September. These troops were probably the first US forces to enter Germany. US ARMY

Class Luther Roush leapt up on a nearby US tank destroyer and opened up against the German infantry with a .50-cal Browning machine-gun. He was struck almost immediately in the shoulder by a bullet and knocked off the tank. He climbed back up and continued firing. Some of the Germans managed to outflank the roadblock and made their way into the regimental rear. At the regimental cookhouse, to everyone's shock, a 60-ton Tiger Tank appeared and started to shoot up the place. The cook, T4 Sergeant Clarence Ed Coombs, scrambled for a bazooka and fired. The round struck the Tiger with a loud clang and penetrated the side armor. The hatches opened and the crew staggered out with blackened faces only to be gunned down by a merciless Coombs. Those who witnessed the event would later joke: "What a man, now if he could only cook..."

On the 16th, after clearing out Vicht, the 47th Regiment made a spectacular advance to take the village of Schevenhutte. But that same day as the German 353rd Division threatened to disintegrate in the face of the attacks, the German 12th Infantry Division arrived by train from a training ground in East Prussia armed with Hitler's personal order to stabilize the front. A heavily-armed outfit, the 12th Division numbered nearly 14,800 men, and in what was a rarity for a German division at the time, possessed all of its artillery and anti-tank guns. Sent straight into action, the division probed forward in an attempt to retake Schevenhutte, and for the next six days the Americans tenaciously held on to this village against repeated German attempts to dislodge them.

Meanwhile, Craig's reserve, the 60th Infantry Regiment in the center, finally went into action in an attempt to push through and seize the road between Hürtgen town and Kleinhau. Repeatedly encountering mines, pillboxes and road blocks and frequently brushing off bloody confrontations with attacking Germans, the regimental gains started to become measured in yards. The pillboxes proved a tremendous headache. Time after time, engineers were forced to crawl forward into a minefield, carefully clearing it out and booby-traps under fire before they using high explosives to crack open the

ARMORED ENTRY Tanks of the 3rd Armored move through Schevenhutte on 22 September after a bloody stalemate. US ARMY

bunkers. Often the Germans held out until the end until the weight of explosives and heavy bazooka fire flushed them out.

By the 20th, the regiment had managed to reach the narrow highway leading to Hürtgen town. But when US troops became poised to take the town itself, the regimental commander, Colonel Jesse Gibney postponed the attack until the following morning to give his men a short breather. It was a bad mistake.

When the next day came, the regiment found itself under siege from an enemy force belonging to the 353rd Division. Instead of attacking, the Americans spent nearly the entire day repulsing one raid after another as staff officers desperately tried to bring up supporting tanks and tank destroyers on churned and muddy trails. As dusk settled after a day of heavy combat, Gibney hoped that next day would be more favorable. But when dawn came, a terrific artillery bombardment struck the regiment's 3rd Battalion. It was the first massed use of enemy artillery that the Americans had the unfortunate honor of witnessing. At least seventeen 150mm howitzers, nine 105mm guns, several 210mm guns and other 120mm and 80mm mortars blasted Gibney's positions.

The earth quaked for fifteen minutes. Shrapnel and tree bursts swept the air, felling any man foolhardy enough to raise his body. Then as abruptly as it had begun, the barrage lifted to an ethereal, ghostly silence broken only by the

shrieking wounded. The silence was short. Hoarse cries in German materialized, accompanied by the ominous clatter of tank treads. As the Americans watched, an entire enemy regiment appeared. The Germans overran the American right flank, split the 1st Battalion in half and started to move in on the regimental headquarters. Colonel Gibney desperately called his divisional CO, Craig, for help only to be told to stand firm. As the rapidly fluidic situation began to overwhelm observers, one by one, incidents of individual heroism began to materialize. A senior NCO, Staff Sergeant William D. Clark, wounded in both legs but facing a horde of enemy infantry, almost single-handedly managed to hold the Germans back with heavy fire. Another man, Sergeant Albert Moses, braved enemy fire to bring 1,000 rounds of ammunition from a dump 150 yards away. Moments later he would be killed while trying to drag his commander to safety.

The Germans overran a canon company and captured several howitzers. Nearby artillery men took up rifles and other small arms to repel the attackers. The continued resistance allowed Craig to send in an entire tank battalion, the 756th, with M10 Wolverines from the 899th Tank Destroyer battalion to help his beleaguered troops. Facing these American reinforcements, the enemy attack petered out.

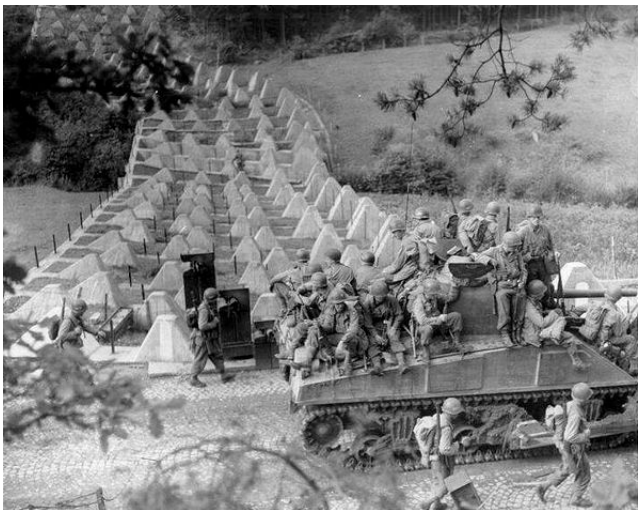
As US troops caught their breath, they wondered what had prompted such a voracious counterattack and at this point in time. Wary of American advances into the forest, General Brandenberger had been itching to mount a counter-attack for some time. But reinforcemnts had been

lacking until the arrival of an under-strength assault gun brigade from LXXXI Corps. Transferring the brigade immediately to the 353rd Division, Brandenberger had ordered the assembly of a scratch force of a battalion of infantry and engineers, supported by an artillery battery and five anti-tank guns, to be used against the Americans. In facts these reinforcements had been so important and the existing German troops so depleted that after their arrival and despite the failure of the counter-attack, close-combat continued to ring the woods for the next three days.

Meanwhile, to the south, Craig's first regiment, the 39th under Colonel Van H. Bond had been battering itself against more pillboxes near Lammersdorf. Bond hoped to link up the 47th Regiment near Düren but this ambitious goal was being thwarted by the German 89th Division and in particular, the 1055 regiment which would become an enduring component of the German defense in the forest for the months to come. Using tanks to blast open the pillboxes at point-blank range, Bond's men made slow, painful progress. By the 30th, the regiment's advance had stalled, its body intersecting the Siegfried Line at an open ridge near Rollesbroich, its strength exhausted. At about this time, Colonel Thompson's 1st Battalion from the beleaguered 60th Regiment had managed to cut the Lammersdorf-Hürtgen highway at a hunting lodge known as the Jägerhaus. This was one of the few shaky successes by the division. The Americans had discovered the hard way, to which the extent the Germans were able to utilize the terrain to their advantage. Even worse the elongated frontline had proved too much for American regiments to handle and the cost of dealing with the pillboxes too heavy a price. Mistakes in tactical training had also cost dearly.

Unlike the Germans who were experienced in forest combat, especially on the Eastern Front, the 9th Division, which the famed war reporter Ernie Pyle had called the "best of our infantry divisions," had none. In the unusually thick forest with its great depths of foliage and blackened lines of sight, where firs often interlocked and formed a wall of impenetrable foliage, men's nerves started the fray. Groups of soldiers cut off from their chain of command and even their comrades for hours or days were the first to feel the strain. The official divisional history would later recount that "with adverse weather conditions and the impossibility of continued and accurate artillery or air support, many soldiers felt that they were fighting in the dark. More than any other time, GIs and officers experienced the tension that makes men victims of combat fatigue."

Under these conditions, the men of the 9th were the first to experience what a later wave of US troops would nickname the "Death Factory." ➤



THE DRAGON'S TEETH Men from the 39th Infantry pass German anti-tank defenses of the Siegfried Line. US ARMY

CONFIDENT DEFENDERS Awaiting American troops were Germans like these, resplendent in camo garb and certain of their grasp of the terrain. BUNDESARCHIV

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THE RESUMPTION OF HELL

By now, it had become clear to high command that the optimistic hopes of the war ending by December were turning sour. True, the Germans were being pushed back everywhere; withdrawing faster than the allies could advance. But this was largely due to the former's heavy losses and the latter's lack of supplies. By September chronic shortages had hit every allied army. Still Hodges and his superior, US Lt-General Omar N. Bradley of the US Twelfth Army Group, were confident of pushing deep into Germany by December.

But a nagging source of consternation were the reports of stiffening German resistance everywhere. In late-September, a major British airborne and armored assault by the British 2nd Army in Holland was thwarted by the shattered remnants two SS Panzer divisions and other depleted Wehrmacht (Land Army) units. During the assault of Aachen, meantime, the preliminary bombardment had created more problems than it had solved. Troops from the 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions found rubble hindering their progress into the city and the resulting debris giving the defenders ready-made defensive points. The city would only fall on October 21, and only after costly street fighting. South of that, US troops had approached the Ardennes Forest in Belgium where thick woods prevented further progress — or so it was believed. Beyond that, in France, US Lt-General George S. Patton's Third Army was being frustrated in Lorraine.

Back in the "Green Hell" of Hürtgen, as ordinary GI's were starting to call it, planners intended to go back and take Hürtgen town and Schmidt. On paper, the objectives seemed easy enough, especially for a division used to swift and gratifying victory. After all, the 9th had fought its way up the Cotentin peninsula, facing some of the worst hedgerow fighting to be had in Normandy, before taking Cherbourg.

The offensive was scheduled to resume in the first week of October, as the tentacled iciness of approaching winter crept into the damp forest. On the maps, the planners congratulated themselves on their fine details, of objective X and of Objective Y marked out in clear fashion on the maps with careful, textbook-like allowances for battle. Despite all their prior experiences, one staff officer even boasted that "nothing can go wrong on that day."

The plan called for the 60th and 39th Infantry Regiments to clear out a three mile front towards Germeter and Vossenack, while the 47th Infantry secured the left flank and remained in reserve. In the meantime, the Germans attempted to make do with their heavy losses of the past weeks. By the 23rd, the 12th Division posted its

BOMBARDMENT Amercan troops of the 117th or 119th Infantry blow up a German bunker astride the Geilenkirchen-Aachen rail line.
US ARMY (CAPTION CORRECTED BY NORBERT ROSIN)

combat strength as 1,900 — down from 3,800 — a state it would never fully recover from in the heavy autumn fighting to follow. The 105th Panzer-Grenadier regiment had fallen from 783 men to 115, but the 116th Panzer Division, the famed "Greyhounds" in the Aachen sector had survived relatively intact. This would allow the division to enter the Hürtgen fighting in several weeks. In the interim, other German reinforcements rushed to the front. On the first day of October, the 275th Infantry Division under Lt-General Hans Schmidt took up the defense of the sector and the town which bore its commander's name. The 275th relieved the badly mauled 353rd Division in the sector and after incorporating several units from the latter unit into its own ranks, boasted of 7,000 men organized into three *ad-hoc* regiments. Aside from this, General Schmidt also had thirteen howitzers, one 210mm gun and six assault guns as its artillery, while his infantry armed themselves with Panzerschreks (an 88mm version of the bazooka) and Panzerfausts for anti-tank defense.

FIELD MARSHAL MODEL
BUNDESARCHIV

On October 6, at the early chilly dawn of anticipation, the 9th Division's offensive began again. As fog crept low over the moist ground, the infantrymen waited tensely for a preliminary strike from US P-47 Thunderbolts. This was delayed, adding to the consternation of the anxiously waiting troops. When the planes finally came, the sun had appeared overhead in strength and the Thunderbolts swept low over the trees, fat, gleaming silver, speeding towards the German frontline and dropping their bombs before pulling up and speeding away. Altogether, in thirty-seven minutes, seven entire squadrons of Thunderbolts bombed and strafed the enemy positions. As the noise of their engines faded, the infantry still remained in place. The brass, unwilling to take any chances had also authorized an artillery bombardment and the division's entire compliment of artillery, backed up by three additional battalions, opened up.

The barrage went on for three minutes and as the silence descended on the battlefield, shrill whistles heralded the advance. The 39th and 60th Infantry left their positions and walked out into the blasted landscape. It was nearly 11:30 in the morning. Back at headquarters, Craig received word that the advance had begun. His intelligence officer optimistically voiced that "should the infantry make a breakthrough, the enemy might withdraw to the Rhine."

Back on the field, the advance had almost immediately run into still-intact pillboxes and defensive networks. Slowed by heavy opposition from the enemy's 942nd Infantry Regiment and 275th Fusilier Battalion, the US troopers were all but stalled in the 39th Infantry's sector. In the 60th Infantry's area, things were a little better, despite running into a minefield and zeroed-in German Nebelwerfers (multi-barrelled mortars). But the going was tough. Such was density of the mine-fields that in one area that US engineers estimated that a Teller mine occupied eight paces for three entire miles.

By mid-afternoon, the advance had slowed to a crawl. On the second day, the American regiments somehow managed to take possession of the woods overlooking Germeter and Richelskaul but here they stayed, fearful of being chopped up in the open by enemy defenses. Behind them, their supporting armor and supplies crept along hopelessly small tracks and firebreaks but would not reach the infantry until the third day. When they did arrive, the 60th Infantry finally stormed Richelskaull, killing sixty of the defending garrison and capturing 100.

Field Marshall Model, alarmed at this turn of events, decided to employ the last of his immediate reserves, a 2,000-strong Kampfgruppe (Battlegroup) under the command of Colonel Wolfgang Wegelein. Meantime, on the further prodding of General Schmidt, LXXIV Corps also released two infantry companies from the 89th Division, but these units would not arrive until mid-day on October 11. Kampfgruppe Wegelein

would take a little longer. Embarking his battle-group on cargo trucks bound for the Hürtgen, his men all tried veterans and almost all of whom were officer candidates, the virtual elite of the Wehrmacht, Wegelein wondered at the cost.

Unlike the US Army which trained green officers straight out of college or special brackets, in the Wehrmacht, many officers were heavily-experienced combat veterans, previously with the rank of corporal or sergeant, who often spent six months on the front in order to prove themselves. If Kampfgruppe Wegelein was sacrificed needlessly, it would prove a bitter blow to the German army.

Wegelein planned on entering combat positions at midnight on October 11, but his force did not reach the Hürtgen-Germeter front until the following morning. General Schmidt wanted them attack right away but Wegelein asked him for a postponement as his communications equipment had not been set up. Accusing Wegelein of cowardice, Schmidt goaded him into the attack, and at 6:50 a.m., artillery fire began landing on the US 39th Infantry. Ten minutes later, the regiment found itself under siege by the attacking Germans.

Wegelein's troops drove a wedge between the 39th's F and G Companies and began to threaten the 2nd Battalion's headquarters. They also cut the supply line to Germeter. But as reinforcements from the US 47th Infantry rushed to save the scene and this coupled with the fact that Wegelein was rapidly losing control over the movements of his troops, the German attack was called off at 11 a.m. Captured Germans later told the Americans that the attack had petered out because communications with headquarters had failed.

Faced with the loss of nearly 500 of his valuable men, Wegelein decided to temporarily retire from the field. All of this was unknown to Colonel Bond of the 39th Infantry, who spent several nervous hours fearing the disintegration of his command. Jittery stragglers who had managed to evade the German attack had sown his troops with panic. "The Krauts are just behind us," one terror-struck straggler had told other GI's, "We haven't a chance…they are everywhere."

The following morning, when Bond's resolve had improved, the 39th attacked again. By now several of his companies were little more than platoons. One company had about thirty men out of the original 120. Privates and corporals often found themselves leading platoons into combat. In Company K, just two officers would survive the day, and both were raw with just two days worth of experience. A third day was required before they could unofficially acquire the title of "experienced." Worse, cloudy weather and dim conditions gave the forest a blackness that made men wonder if they would ever see the outside world again. As one man said, "All we ever saw was wild deer, Jerries, and trees, and firebreaks and more trees."

The combat continued but then the strangest thing happened. Colonel Wegelein decided to take his German Shepherd for a walk near the frontline. One of his men, Lt. Bernd Marzhauser, saw the colonel approach the frontline and called a warning: "Take cover Herr Oberst. You are observed by the enemy. There are snipers."

For whatever reason, Wegelein continued on for another fifteen meters even as an adjutant who had decided to accompany him, dropped to the ground for cover. At this point a gunshot rang out. Wegelein fell, shot by an NCO from the 39th Infantry's E Company. Unable to rescue him because of the dangerous conditions, his men posted a recovery patrol that night convinced that they would find a body. Instead, Wegelein had disappeared. American propagandists would later claim that they had the colonel captive and called on the Germans to surrender. The offer was not taken.

Instead, bloody battlefield conditions prompted the end of combat in the 39th Infantry's sector on the 14th. As both sides took up static positions, the detrimental life of foxhole combat took over. In the icy cold, trench foot cases started to sprout. Standing for days in freezing water and without a change of clothing or socks, the level of hygiene fell. When the socks were removed, feet showed an ghastly color of gray with the skin peeling off in ungainly, smelly layers. Nutrition also fell. With a limited supply line, the men consumed mostly K or C rations, with much of the food coming from cans. In an effort to supplant their diet, the Americans, on one instance, even arranged a deal with the Germans not to attack on particular house containing beer and cheese. Both sides

took turns helping themselves to the goods but the arrangement finally ended when the Germans mortared one group of Americans. As Stars and Stripes would later write: "Furious with the display of poor sportsmanship, [the Americans] re-arranged the furniture and that night, the house, the cheese, the beer and the Jerries all went up in smoke."

As the stagnant situation continued, death came swiftly, mostly from artillery, snipers or a well-concealed machine-gunner. Life took on a wretched quality. The morning came wet with dew and winter moistness, the cold leaving the soldiers groggy and irritable and unwilling to move lest they disturbed that carefully harnessed position of warmth that had accumulated over the night. Adding to their miseries were the constant day-time rains. Still, nightfall was worse. One man, Private Don Lavender would write later that, "The dark of the night in the forest was almost beyond recognition. A man could not even step out of his foxhole to relieve himself with any certainty that he would find his way back. Trees less than five feet were not visible. It was not possible to throw a grenade at night without fear that it would bounce off a tree and come back."

Much of the talk in that miserable environment revolved around being evacuated and rosy reminisces of the ZI — the Zone of the Interior — GI slang for the United States which now seemed a million miles away. Then, finally on October 24, after long last, word came through the division was being relieved. In just one month of combat, the 9th Division had suffered 3,836 casualties — all for the gain of only 3,000 yards into enemy-held territory. The 60th Infantry alone had suffered a one hundred percent turnover rate. German losses, although harder to gauge probably amounted to 3,300 with about 1,500 killed or wounded, 1,300 captured and the rest falling to disease and the elements. Still some lessons came out of the fiasco.

On the 31st, divisional staff officers wrote

WINDSHELTER Three American soldiers shelter against the oppressive weather using an army tarp. US ARMY

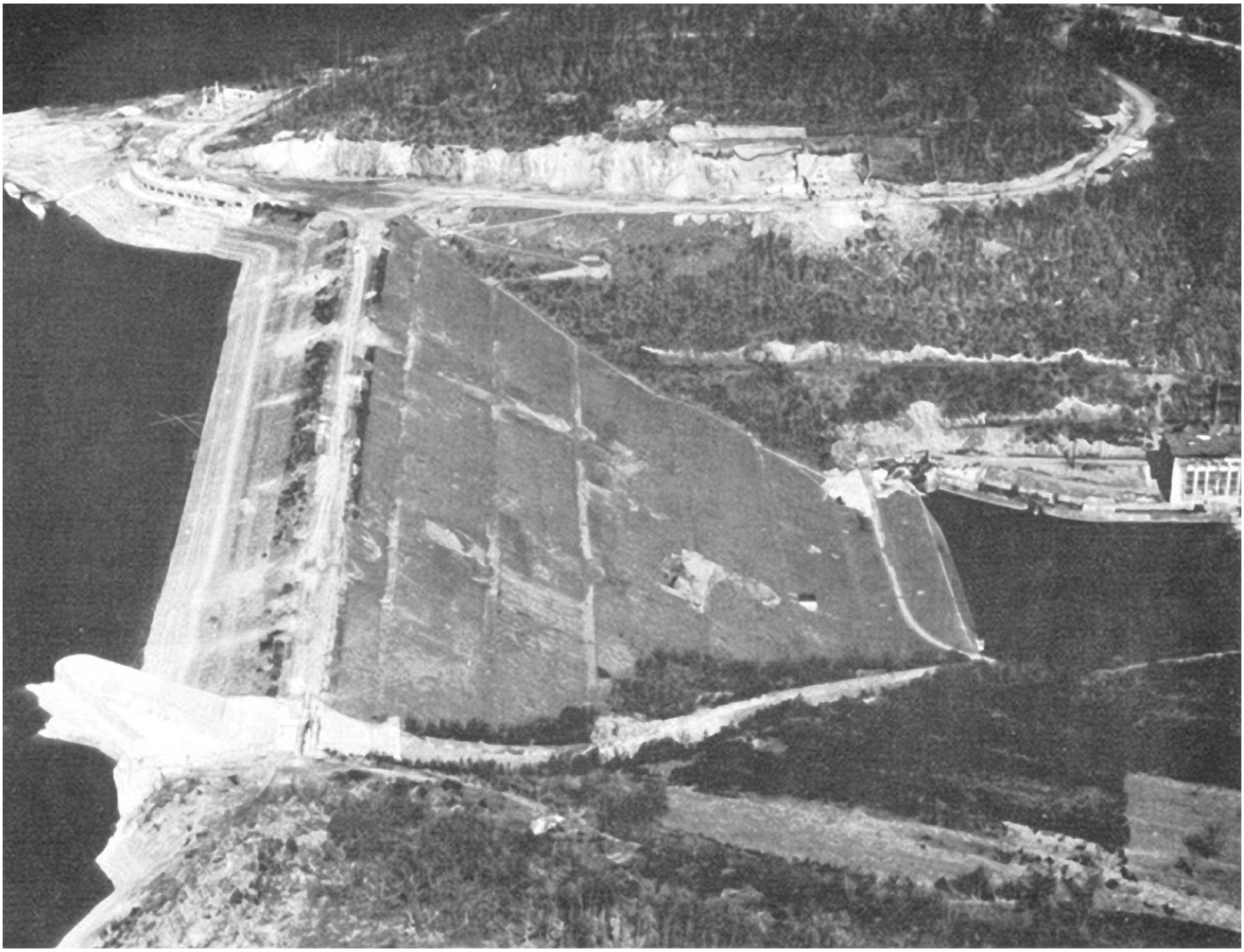
a five-page report on the hard-wrought lessons of forest combat. Below follow some of these observations:

- *Strongly recommend that units be given prior training in these type of operation.*
- *Individual protection against enemy shell fire in dense woods a problem. Lying prone exposed greater part of body to fragments.*
- *Night operations are impossible.*
- *Unless a route has been definitely established, do not travel at night without compass.*
- *Never send replacements to a company in the heat of battle.*

These recommendations were almost certainly overlooked by senior leaders who held a high-level conference to establish allied moves over the coming months. Once again, all the old objectives started to come out — to capture Schmidt, to gain a large foothold inside Germany, to keep up the advance. The crucial dams again failed to garner enough attention, although one intelligence officer, Major Jack Huston, the G-2 of the 9th Division had recognized their strategic importance. Not only did the dams produce electricity for the great Rhine cities, Huston wrote in a report

dated October 2, he also acknowledged the power commanded by the dams over the area, writing that "bank overflows and destructive flood waves can be produced by regulating the discharge from the various waves. By demolition of some, great waves can be produced which could destroy everything in the populated valley as far as the Meuse into Holland." Six days later, the chief engineer of the US XIX Corps added to this by writing: "If one or all dams are blown, a flood would occur in the channel of the Roer River that could reach approximately 1,500 feet in width and three feet or more in depth across the corps front."

But as before, with General Lawton "Lightning Joe" Collin's VII Corps preparing for a big push in the north, the generals once again decided to secure the right flank by proposing a capture of Schmidt. Also on their minds was the thought that with every delay in attack would allow the Germans more time to add to their defenses. To keep VII Corps fresh for its advance, Hodges elected Lt-General Leonard T. Gerow's rested V Corps to take the town. Hodges wanted to attack on November 1 or the 2nd, before the main First Army drive in the north which was scheduled to start on the 5th. Faced with these orders, Gerow positioned his four-division strong corps along his 27-mile front, but only one unit, the ill-suited the 28th Division, an old Pennsylvania National Guard unit, would actually move into attack against Schmidt.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE The Schwammanauel Dam became the ultimate American objective after US commanders finally acknowledged its importance. Aside from producing power for the Ruhr Valley, the dam commanded 22 million gallons of water. US ARMY

On October 26, the 28th Division started to filter into the forest to take over the positions left by the 9th Division. Entering the battleground, they could not help but see the scars of war. Broken and muddy trails led down into the dense thickets and God knows where else. They were pockmarked with craters and the relics of war — helmets, tools, tin cans, blood-stained field jackets, and loose mines. And then there were the dead — both Germans and Americans, lying where they had fallen; some in pieces, others with dirty blankets over their bodies, most enmeshed in the perpetually muddy earth as if they were some macabre offshoots of the forest. In this hellish landscape lurked an air of despair, and the GI's were quick to feel it. The division had barely entered battle but morale had already started to slip away.

One witness would later write that the "clean shaven files of the 28th were met by other files emerging from the forest, bearded men in torn and caked uniforms, stumbling along like sleepwalkers…the eyes bloodshot, and holding the unmistakable look of those who had fought… and had seen death in many forms."

It was far from an encouraging prelude for the 28th Division which would endure far worse. ➢

LT-GENERAL LEONARD GEROW
VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

HEMMED IN M10 Wolverenes of the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion move up a typical forest road. US ARMY

FRESH FODDER The US 60th Infantry marches into the forest and to their fates. It would fight on in the forest in two separate occasions, losing heavily both times. US ARMY

DEVILS The inside illustration of the 60th Infantry's official history, "Follow Through" depicted a demonic creature piercing Nazi Germany. The regiment had fight hard to achieve its reputation as a veteran combat formation. US ARMY

4

THE KEYSTONE DIVISION ENTERS THE FRAY

Called the "Keystone" division, because of its Pennsylvanian heritage*, the 28th Division could trace its history to the revolutionary era. Three of its artillery regiments had served under George Washington and years later, the division became the first militia unit to take on the title of "National Guard," inspired by the *Garde National* of France's own revolution. Later a veteran of Mexico, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the Philippines conflict and World War I, the division's reputation found itself on a downhill slide during the Second World War. The bloody bocage combat of Normandy proved the division's first setback and was a shocking introduction to modern war for the old hands of the division who were used to running things their own way.

Faced repeatedly with tactical setbacks, commander after commander was sacked until the divisional head, Major-General Lloyd Brown followed after just a single month of frontline operations. His successor, Brigadier General James E. Wharton survived in command for just a few hours on August 13 before being shot in the head by a sniper during a frontline visit. His replacement was a quiet, unassuming man named Norman Cota, immortalized by Robert Mitchum in the post-war epic *The Longest Day*. Unlike his big-screen avatar, Cota was not trim and rugged, but corpulent, with a genial, fatherly face that exuded a faint air of toughness. But one factor of Mitchum's portrayal had been accurate: during the fighting for "Omaha Beach" on D-Day, Cota had rallied his troops by standing up under enemy fire and shouting for them to move off the beach.

A graduate of West Point in 1917 where his intriguing nickname, "Dutch,"† had solidified, Cota's first brush with war came in North Africa late-1942. Later sent to England, he became the assistant commander of the 29th Infantry Division, a paranoid unit with a morbid fear of casualties. He would later lead this same division off Omaha Beach. His feats on D-Day won him a Silver Star and a British Distinguished Service Cross pinned on by British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery himself. His heady combat experience on the frontline had given Cota a keen understanding of the plight of the average infantryman. He often fraternized with the rank and file, quietly sharing a joke with them. But for all of Cota's sympathies towards his men, he did not believe in combat fatigue.

As he confessed later to William Huie after the war: "I didn't pay much attention to psychiatry at war, but I began giving it some thought in England when I heard them refer to combat fatigue as a 'disease.'" This impression that combat fatigue was nothing more than a shallow communicable disease would prompt Cota to nearly drive the 28th to the breaking point. Such became the trials of the division that all notions of "Keystone" and such peacetime pleasantries of title were thrown out the window.

* The state was known as *Keystone* because of its central location in the original thirteen colonies.

ALL SMILES Dutch Cota (left) treats himself to some fraternization with the men. Although popular with his men, Cota would badly loose their respect during the Hürtgen forest fighting. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

† Cota had no Dutch blood in him. The nickname was possibly an early, childhood concoction of his friends on Chelsea Square, Massachusetts.

In their stead appeared a far grimmer name, a far sterner handle borne out of heavy combat: "The bucket of blood division." Indeed, the ordeal of the 28th Division would go on to epitomize the struggle of the US Army in Hürtgen Forest.

Faced with orders to capture Schmidt by November 5, Cota later admitted to having "grave misgivings" on the operation. Intelligence fed the division the same facts as before: Hürtgen is "manned by second-rate troops, who are the remnants of some battered German divisions, especially those in the Germeter-Hürtgen area who are in thinly held positions with a series of field fortifications rather than deliberate defenses."

When bad weather postponed VII Corp's advance to the 10th, Cota hoped that his division would be allowed to stand down, but orders did not change. The unit was scheduled to jump off on the 2nd. But despite his reservations, at no point did Cota express his doubts to Hodges or Gerow. Instead he told them he would take Schmidt even if he "had to use every medic in the division." Cota's officers were not so accommodating. When observers asked them about the operation they were told that "none of the officers were the least bit optimistic. Many thought that if the operation succeeded, it would be a miracle."

Worse still, aside from taking Schmidt, the division's orders involved securing Vossenack Ridge and the woods leading to Hürtgen town. One regiment was to be used against Schmidt while the others engaged German reserves which could be used against VII Corp's now-delayed offensive in the north. But Gerow, a man known for micro-managing, set aside further orders: the armor and mechanized infantry of Combat Command A (CCA, a bridge-strength formation) of the 5th Armored Division was to secure Kesternich and Simmerath in the south as Cota's men attacked Schmidt. The optimistic thinking was that once Cota had

LT-COL. RICHARD RIPPLE
US ARMY

A BETTER BREED American Army Shermans were a better class of machines by 1944-45. The 76mm cannon-armed M4A3E8 "Easy Eight" below was the culmination of the type in the Second World War. COPYRIGHT JEAN RESTAYN

Main Gun	76mm M1A1 or M1A2
Hull Armor	140-25 mm
Other Guns	2 x .30 cal MG & 1 x .50 Cal HMG
Crew	5

DESTINATION DEATH FACTORY Men from the 28th Division move past the blasted remains of the Siegfried Line towards their objectives. Note their light garb. NATIONAL ARCHIVES 208-YE-193

secured Schmidt, he could assume the defense of Simmerath and the surrounding towns while CCA pushed on to Monschau beyond.

In typical Gerow style he specified missions for each of the 28th's three infantry regiments rather than leave it to Cota. Lt-Colonel Daniel Strickler's 109th Infantry was to attack towards Hürtgen Town to block any counterattacks on the division's flanks while Lt-Colonel Theodore Seeley's 110th was to strike south from Germeter to form a defensive corridor near Simonskall, an important re-supply route. The final regiment, Lt-Colonel Carl L. Peterson's 112th, was given the daunting task of taking Schmidt. But to do this, the regiment had to first capture Vossenack with its 2nd Battalion, while its 1st Battalion pushed on for several miles down the narrow and muddy Kall River trail to take the village of Kommerscheidt on the other side of the river gorge. This would allow for the 3rd Battalion to move on to Schmidt where enemy resistance was bound to be stiff.

Cota, for his part, did what he could for his troops. Even though his division was at full strength with 825 officers and 13,107 men, he bolstered his command with attachments amounting to another 2,200 men. One of the key attachments was Lt-Colonel Richard Ripple's 707th Tank Battalion. But as Captain Bruce M. Hostrup from the battalion's A Company would later say: "We did know as we entered Hürtgen forest that we were to relieve the 9th which had

been battered…This did disturb Colonel Ripple and I for we knew that this was not tank country and…that the German held the high ground."

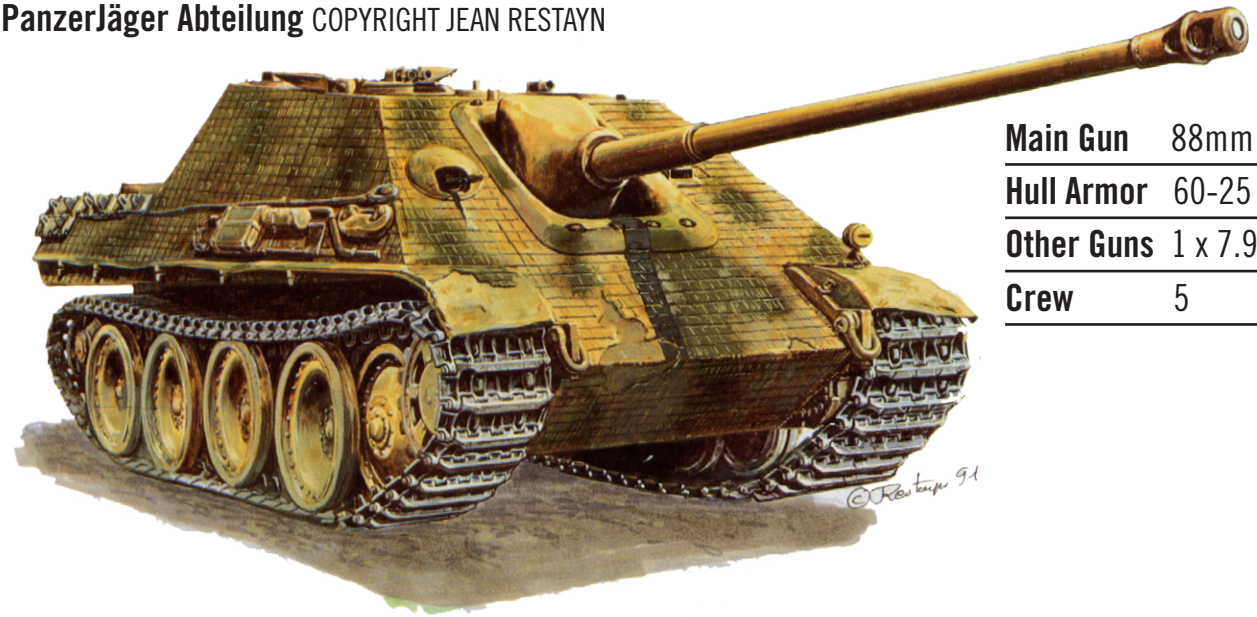
On the German side, preparations had been modest with what little forces were available. Most of the senior officers erroneously believed that the American intention was to push on to the Ruhr valley from here, but they also knew that the primary American objective was to capture the commanding heights of Schmidt and Bergstein, further north.

The dams must be an objective, they thought, unaware the Americans still did not think them important. Still defending the forest was the bruised 275th Division with the 984th Regiment covering the Weisser Weh Creek, the 2/985th Regiment and the 73rd Engineers Battalion (with some Luftwaffe troops from XX Fortress Battalion) covering the southwest sector from Hürtgen Town to Wittscheidt and the 983rd Regiment defending the area south of Vossenack to Rafflesbrand. A mixed bag of the 275th Engineers Battalion, the 253rd Grenadier Training Regiment and other units were dug in at Germeter, holding the sector to Simonskall. In all, the 275th had about 5,500 men ready to face the 28th. This by itself was not all that daunting for Cota's men, but a second German division — the 89th, under Maj-General Walter "Papa" Bruns had also occupied part of the line.

Its chief components included the XIV Luftwaffe Fortress Battalion, the 1055th, the 1056th and part of the 860th Infantry Regiments, the 189th Artillery Battalion which still had fifteen 105mm guns and more importantly, the 341st Sturmgeschutz Brigade. Even more daunting, two tank battalions, 1/24th Panzers Regiment and 2/16th Panzer Regiment would later appear in the area with about fifteen tanks each, along with the 519th Schwere PanzerJäger (Heavy Tank Destroyer) Battalion with had over a dozen heavily-armored Jagdpanthers and a brigade of self-propelled 155mm gun Hummels.

Although US intelligence officers had known that the forest was held by these troops, they failed to detect the presence of a third division — the 272nd Völksgrenadiers. Furthermore, they had also failed to take into the account that the 89th Division had recently been reinforced, notably by the 1023rd Reserve Grenadier Regiment, the 189th Fusilier Battalion as well as 1403rd Festung (Fortress) Infantry Battalion. The 28th Division was now outnumbered four to one. Bitterly disappointed by the cancellation of VII Corps' advance, which could have bled away from the forces mounted against him, Cota reluctantly ordered his regiments into attack. ➤

HARD NUT TO CRACK A Jagdpanther tank-destroyer of the Schwere 654th PanzerJäger Abteilung COPYRIGHT JEAN RESTAYN



Main Gun	88mm PaK 43/3
Hull Armor	60-25 mm
Other Guns	1 x 7.92 mm MG
Crew	5

NO RESPITE Men of the 13th Infantry walk towards the frontlines. US ARMY

HARD TERRAIN The rugged nature of the Hürtgen ensured that most of the wounded had to evacuated by hand. US ARMY

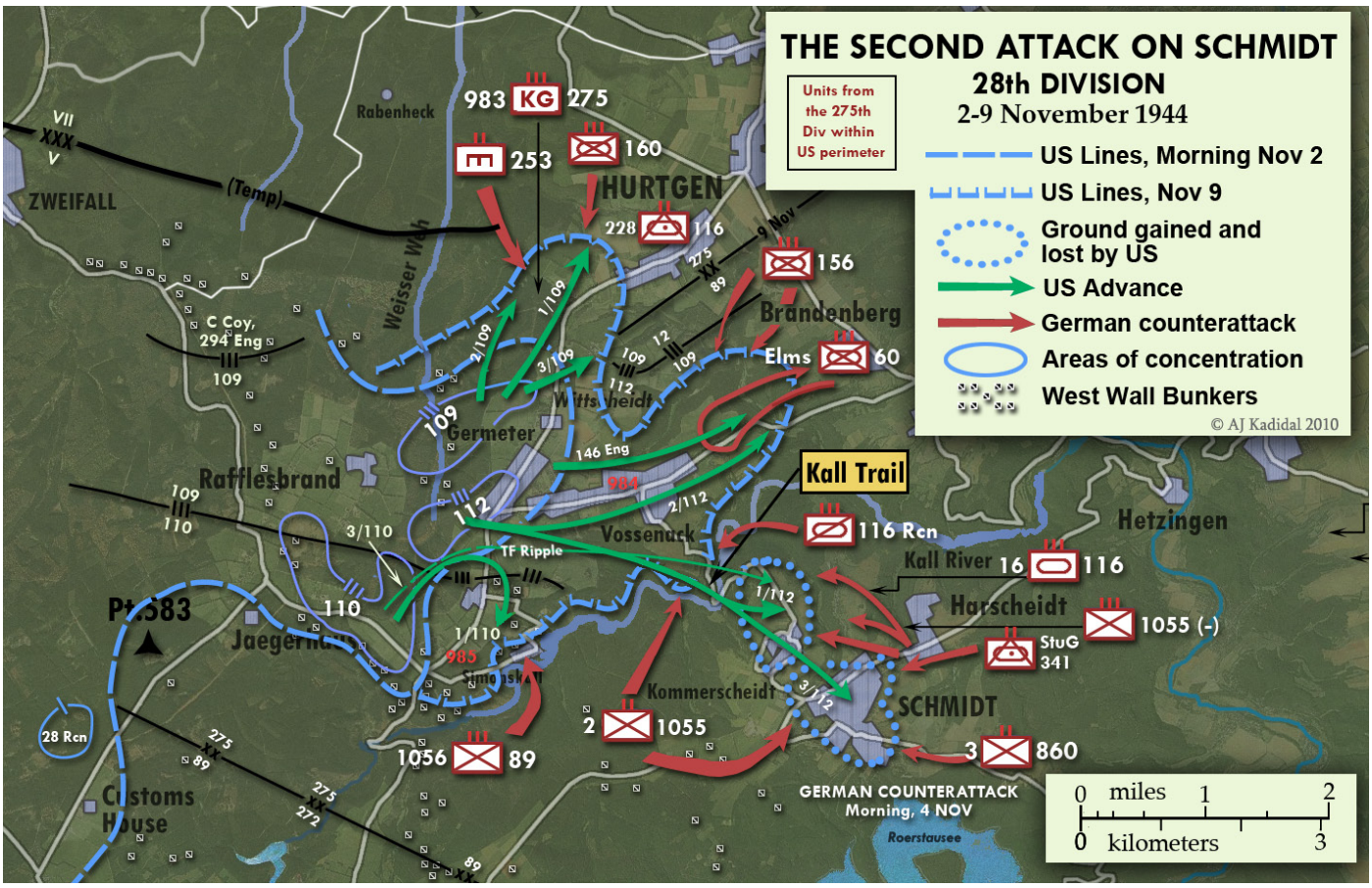
5

THE SECOND BATTLE FOR SCHMIDT

Early on the morning of November 2, at the fateful hour of 9 a.m., the 28th Division shuffled past its starting positions and headed into enemy lines. The weather, already bad, now turned into a cold misty, driving rain that blocked out the sky and worse, obviated the tactical air support.

The thundering but ineffective artillery barrage that had preceded them brought a surreal silence to the march, as the men trudged warily on the recently snow-flaked ground towards their objectives. The fact that Gerow had planned for all three regiments to be employed and in different directions would play a major hand in the division's ultimate fate. Air support was to cover the advance but the fog and weather kept the planes at bay and when they were able to attack that afternoon, they accidentally shot up an American artillery unit, killing seven men and wounding seventeen others.

Meantime, Strickler's 109th Infantry walked in the forest towards Hürtgen town. Within minutes, the entire regiment had been swallowed up by the trees. Officers had little help in locating their commands even when separated by no more than a few feet of foliage. Then they discovered that their maps were inaccurate. Lost and bewildered, many platoons abandoned the attack and dug-in. Others moved on in the face of heavy fire from pillboxes and machine-guns towards what they believed was Hürtgen. One battalion actually fought its way to its objective overlooking Hürtgen town but was thrown back by German counterattacks on its flanks. Another battalion, which was rushing through a sparser part of the forest struck a minefield and took a beating. K Company was especially hard hit when it stumbled into a minefield that the Germans had nicknamed *Wilde Sau* (Wild Boar) set within the woods north of Wittscheidt.



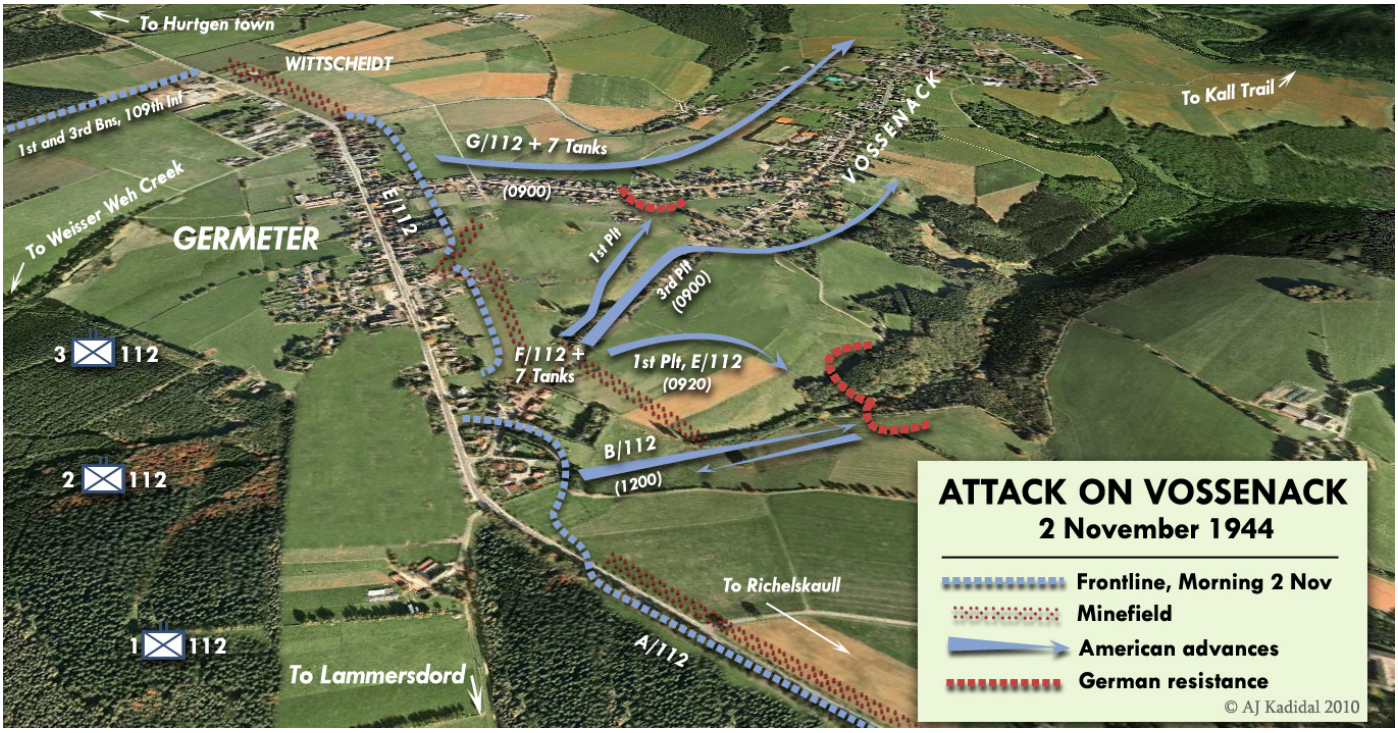
When engineers were sent in to clear the way, German mortar and machine-gun teams homed in, ripping through their ranks. There was little else to do except pull back. Those wounded who could not be retrieved were left behind and they were a great many that day. Few would survive the cold night to see daylight again. But the Germans had just as much of a harrowing time. Losing cohesion over his forward units, General Schmidt attempted a counterattack in the Germeter sector only to his forces suffer heavy losses.

In the center, Peterson's 112th U.S. Infantry had slightly better luck. Its 2nd Battalion under Lt-Col. Theodore S. Hatzfield made a successful run from Germeter and captured Vossenack and started to dig in on the northeast slopes under the watchful eyes of the Germans on the Brandenberg-Bergstein ridge. But further south, the 110th Infantry's drive on Simonskall had stalled against heavy enfilading fire coming from a network of minefield-concertina wire and pillboxes near Raffelsbrand. Like the 109th, the regiment became dispersed. Men became separated from their units in the woods and their feeling of isolation turned into despair. Feeling forgotten, their orders were substituted by a higher call to survive. Many GIs fled to the rear in deep agitation. By nightfall, the 110th Infantry was struggling to hold on to its gains. Losses had been heavy. Several companies had lost nearly two-thirds of their strength and frontline troops were forced to arrange local truces with the Germans to retrieve their wounded. Cota was furious but could do little.

Then, two hours before midnight, RAF bombers appeared over the 110th Infantry's positions during their nightly sojourn into the Reich and triggered the local enemy defenses. To the awe and horror of the Americans, they watched as lines of tracers and heavy ack-ack fire pummeled the sky, all coming from the darkened knolls and valleys which were supposed to take. Two RAF bombers were shot down. Two crew-members, Pilot Officers Walter McKay and Albert Howe, landed atop the 110th's positions and attempted to persuade Private Spike Malloy from Brooklyn that they were not enemy infiltrators.

Unconvinced, Mallow called the company command post and said: "There's a couple of guys here speakin' broken English. We think they're Germans."

On the next day, Cota's fortunes rose. Two



NARROW SUPPLY ROUTE At this spot, Lt Fleig's Sherman threw a track. Although this photo was taken in 1946, well after the battle, the debris of war still litters the trail. US ARMY

LOCAL INITIATIVE Because of Captain Bruce Hostrup's initiative, tanks were able to traverse the Kall Trail and join the infantry on the other side of the gorge. US ARMY

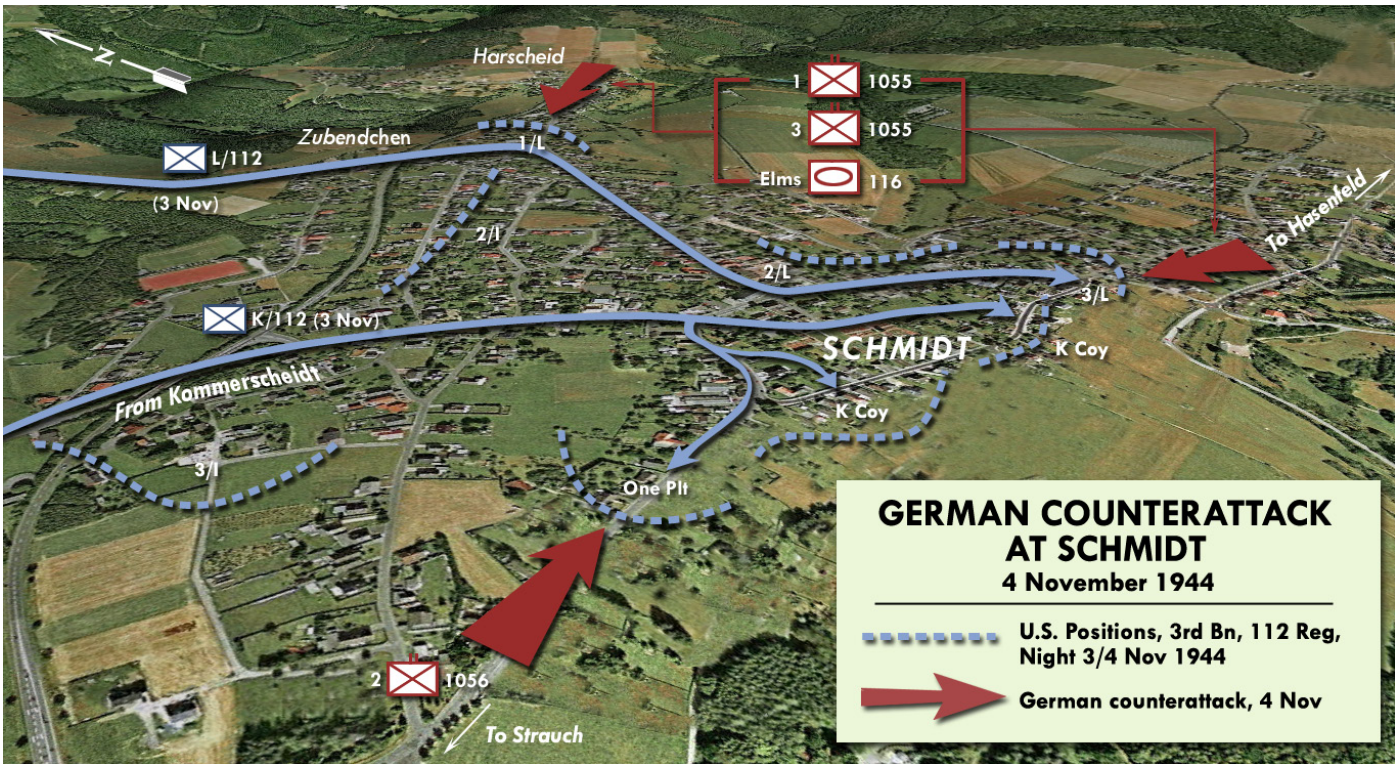
battalions of the 112th Infantry had managed to ford the cold, swollen Kall River and occupied Kommerscheidt. Patrols now went out to probe a path towards Schmidt less than half a mile away. But the situation with the other regiments remained precarious. In the 109th Infantry area, Major Howard Topping's 3rd Battalion attempted to flank the *Wilde Sau* with two companies. Progress was slow but then Topping received word that Major Ford's 1st Battalion was under an attack. Ordered to abandon his advance and change direction, Topping did so reluctantly. Reaching the first battalion at noon, they were horrified to see four Panzers and several hundred German infantry firing directly into the 1st Battalion positions. A tremendous battle broke out between Topping's men and the enemy. The Germans eventually pulled back. Topping had completed his mission, but

now, to his shock, he discovered that no order diverting his advance had ever been sent. It was one of those baffling mysteries of war. It is possible that the diversion was a German signal intent on causing confusion. But more likely it had been a garbled radio message that had been misunderstood.

Back on the other side of the Kall gorge, the 112th's 1st battalion commanded by Lt-Colonel Albert Flood found itself in the ruined timbered houses of Schmidt town. German soldiers were captured drunk, playing cards or eating, and the earlier intelligence reports of second-rate troops seemed justified. It was 3:30 in the afternoon and hindered only by sporadic fire from snipers, an elated Lt-Colonel Flood declared the town secured and quickly set about erecting defenses. Meantime, the last battalion under Major Robert Hazlett had followed over the gorge and split into two forces to defend both Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. With these reinforcements, Flood set up machine-guns posts, points of defilading fire and mines but the Americans dug-in only superficially. Although they laid out an anti-tank minefield to thwart enemy counterattacks they failed to properly bury or camouflage the mines. They were simply too tired, and after all they had accomplished their mission. Moreover, they were certain that relief was just hours away.

But without tanks or supporting weapons, Flood could not construct a contiguous perimeter and the battalion nervously waited for their heavy equipment to catch up, fully aware of strong German forces milling in the area. Thankfully the enemy did not counterattack that evening although the mood at 1st Battalion HQ remained tense all that night. In contrast, back at Divisional HQ, Cota and his officers were jubilant. In just two days, the 112th regiment had done what the 9th Division had failed to. Cota was overcome with happiness. He would write that he "felt like a little Napoleon."

This sense of jubilation filtered down the line. Engineers examining the Kall Trail (little more than a muddy cart track) that night were slipshod in their efforts. After all, they reasoned, Schmidt had been taken. All that remained now was to mop up. At about this time, the tanks of Captain Hostrup's A Company appeared on the track, intent on getting to Schmidt. To Hostrup's alarm, he found the path so narrow in places, with curves and rocky outgrowths, that his Shermans were unable to proceed. Finally, after nearly losing his tank to a steep tumble along the trail's left shoulder he called on the engineers



ARMORED SUPPORT This Sturmgeschutz IIIG assault gun belongs to the 341st Brigade.
COPYRIGHT JEAN RESTAYN

Main Gun	75mm Stuk40
Hull Armor	50-16 mm
Other Guns	2 x 7.92 mm MG
Crew	4

to strength the trail. The 20th Engineers took their time getting there and when they did, all they brought were hand tools, a bulldozer and a solitary air compressor. It was nearly morning when the engineers reported that the track had been fixed.

Hostrup gave the order to go and his column started up. Almost immediately the lead Sherman hit a mine and lost a track, blocking the route. Its commander, First Lt. Raymond E. Fleig took command of the following tank and attempted to round around his crippled Sherman with little success. The track edge started to give way again. By using a tow cable from the stuck Sherman and using it as a pivot, the Americans somehow managed to get four Shermans across. Fleig took over the lead tank and led his platoon towards Kommerscheidt. They quickly ran into another problem: a rocky outgrown that protruded into the trail at a crucial corner. One of the Shermans lost a track here and valuable time was spent trying to reset the track. Using another tank as an anchor, Fleig's platoon overcame the outgrowth but at the bottom of the gorge another Sherman lost its track and only three tanks were able to continue on towards Kommerscheidt.

Some of the infantry openly cried when they saw the Shermans. One of them told Fleig: "There are a lot of Heinies with lots of tanks over there."

Hiding his alarm, Fleig told the infantry: "Okay, but I'll do what I can, boys." Then he deployed his platoon.

Fleig had good reason to be worried. Enemy strength near Schmidt was indeed daunting. Less than forty miles away, on November 2, Field Marshal Model had been conducting a map exercise near cologne when news had come of the American attack towards Schmidt. Model had deftly dispatched units from the 116th Panzer Division from Hürtgen town to counterattack the probe. Near Schmidt itself, the elements of an entire regiment, the 1055th, had quietly taken up positions around the town and lay poised for a counter-attack. Joining them were several tanks from the 116th Panzer Division and the dangerous Jagdpanthers of Schwere Panzer-Jäger Abteilung 519 (a heavy tank destroyer battalion) under the temporary command of Hauptman Erwin Kressmann.

The first indication of the German counterattack opening up that morning was a surprise artillery barrage. Almost as soon as the shelling died the 3rd Battalion started to hear shouts in German and the ominous clatter of armor. The forward positions reported seeing several tanks with about 150 infantry. Lt-Colonel Flood deftly got on the radio to ask for artillery support. Nothing was available. The German 1055th Regiment with assault guns from the 341st StuG Brigade struck Schmidt simultaneously from the south and southwest, overrunning the forward American positions. A smaller force of

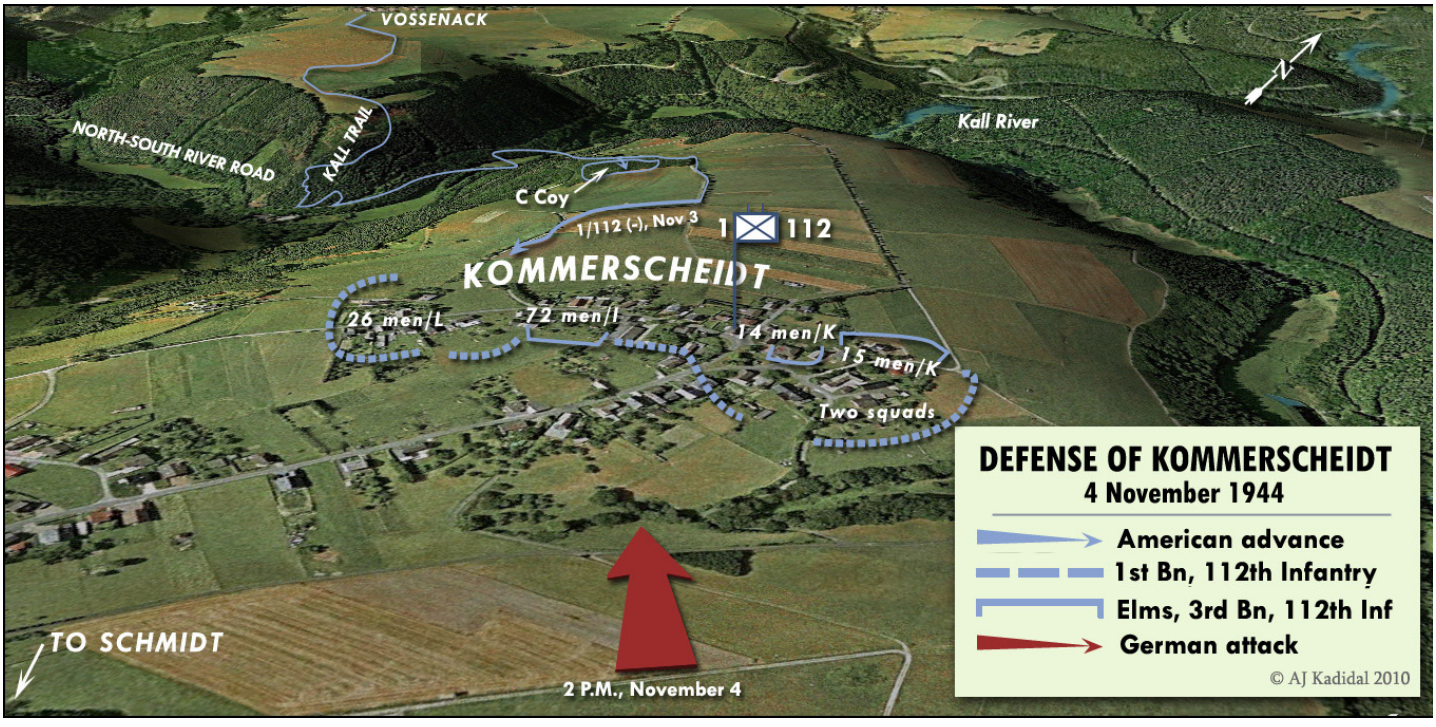
Jagdpanthers, Panthers and Mark IV tanks from the 116th Panzer, impervious to the bazookas of the infantrymen rolled through the sloppy minefield put up by the battalion the night before, and overran position after position, firing on the hapless Americans as they abandoned their foxholes. A Jagdpanther approached the Schmidt church which being used a command post and pushed its muzzle up on the front door. The defending Americans came out waving white flags.

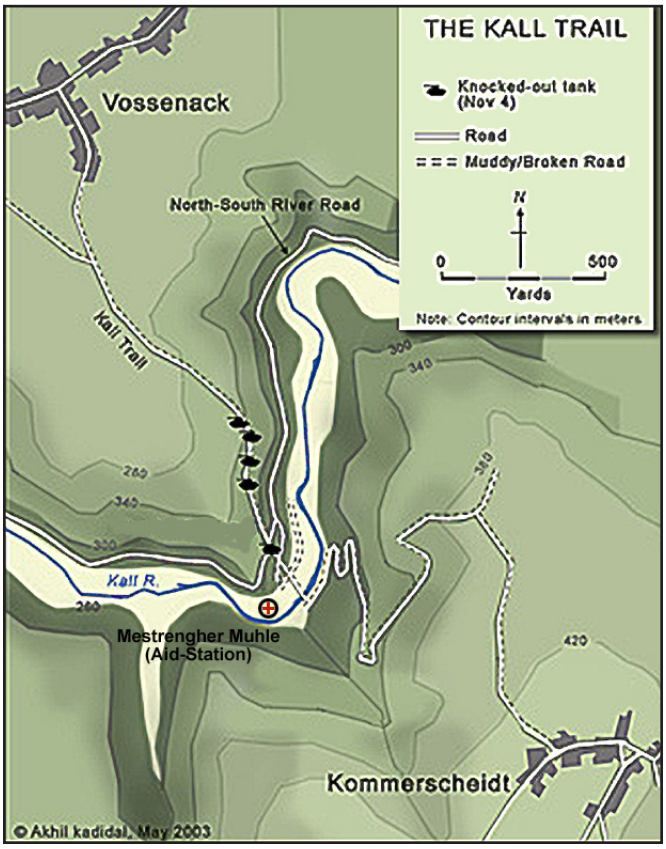
LT. RAYMOND FLEIG
US ARMY

As other American troops watched on with alarm, a rumor abruptly spread that an order for withdrawal was about to come. The next thing, as one officer recalled, "Four columns of ragged, scattered, disorganized infantrymen streamed back ... in low morale. We managed to stop some but most streamed back to the rear." One company in its panic headed the wrong way — into enemy lines and was wiped out. K Company was the first to be affected. An entire platoon gave up its position without orders and fell back, exposing L Company's left flank.

American commanders at the town of Kommerscheidt frantically attempted to block deserters. Some were partly successful, stopping at least 200 from fleeing any further. But hundreds more got through the blockade, retreating to Vossenack and Germeter.

As word started to filter out to divisional headquarters of a gathering collapse, Cota sent Lt-Colonel Lockett from the 112th Infantry to investigate. Lockett never made it. Ambushed en-route, he was captured. As the wild, panicked retreat moved past Kommerscheidt, the remaining defenders from the 1st and 3rd Battalion waited here with wide-eyed horror. A few from the Kommerscheidt garrison attempted to pull out only to be stopped by their commanders who shamed them with kicks and cuffs. Many officers were even forced to draw their pistols on several occasions. Several deserters were persuaded to take up positions within the town but when five Panzer IV's and Panthers from Oberst (Colonel) Johannes Bayer's 16th Panzer Regiment appeared at two in the afternoon, these men were the first to flee into the woods. Other panicked Americans tore





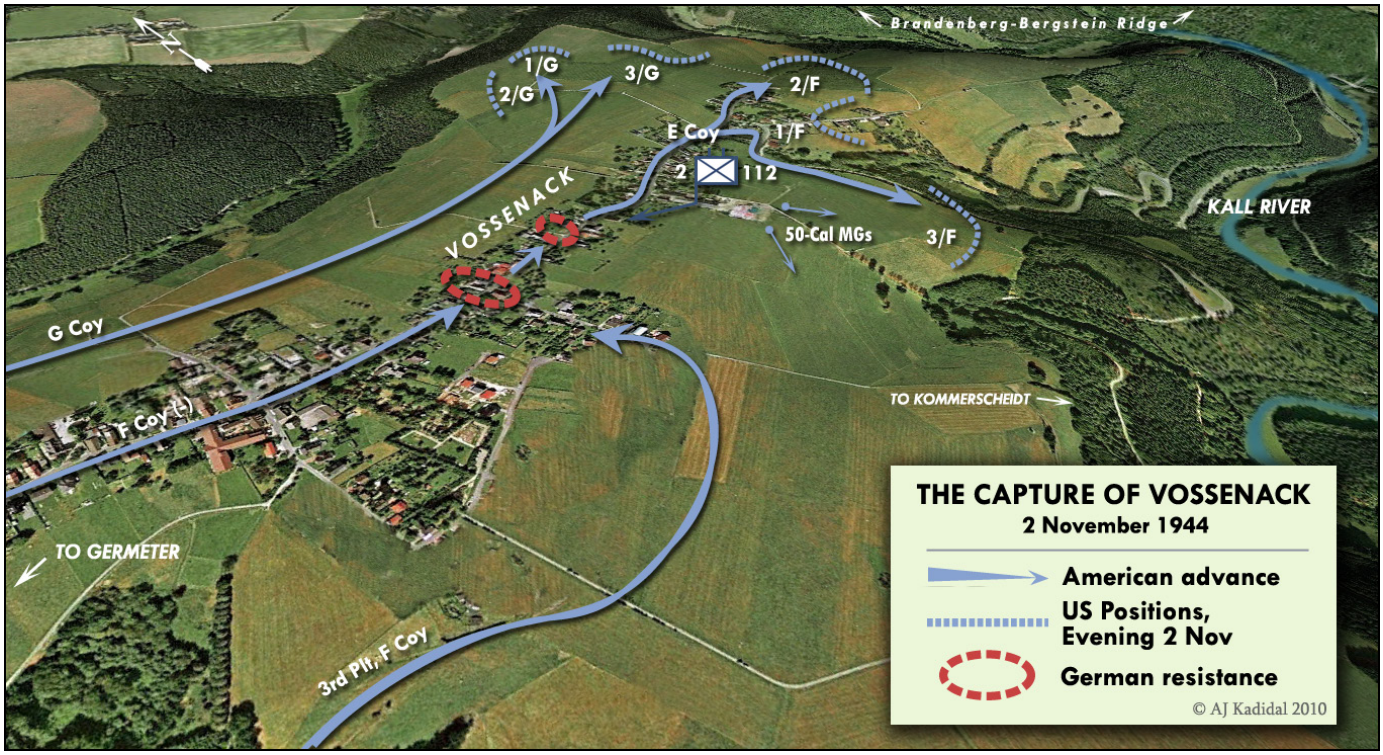
all the way back to Vossenack carrying wild tales of a rout with them.

The German tanks halted, just out of bazooka range and pummeled Komerscheidt with heavy fire. Major Hazlett called on the Lt. Fleig's platoon of three Shermans and the tankers went into action. A Panther trundling over a forward American position near an orchard on the east flank. Fleig opened fire. The high-explosive round bounced off the Panther's heavy armor and the German tank stopped, looking for its assailant. To his horror, Fleig remembered that his armor-piercing rounds had been stowed in the sponson rack. As he turned the turret to get at them, the Panther fired. The shell missed. Working feverishly, Fleig's crew loaded an Armor-Piercing round into the gun and pulled the trigger. The volley cut apart the Panther's main gun. Crippled, the larger tank attempted the back out clumsily only to be stopped by three more rounds that tore into its hull. As the Panther went up in flames, another enemy tank, a smaller Panzer IV appeared and Fleig knocked it out with a single shot. By 4 p.m., the Panzers started to pull back, leaving behind five smoldering wrecks, three of them knocked out by Fleig, one by a bazooka and one by a P-47.

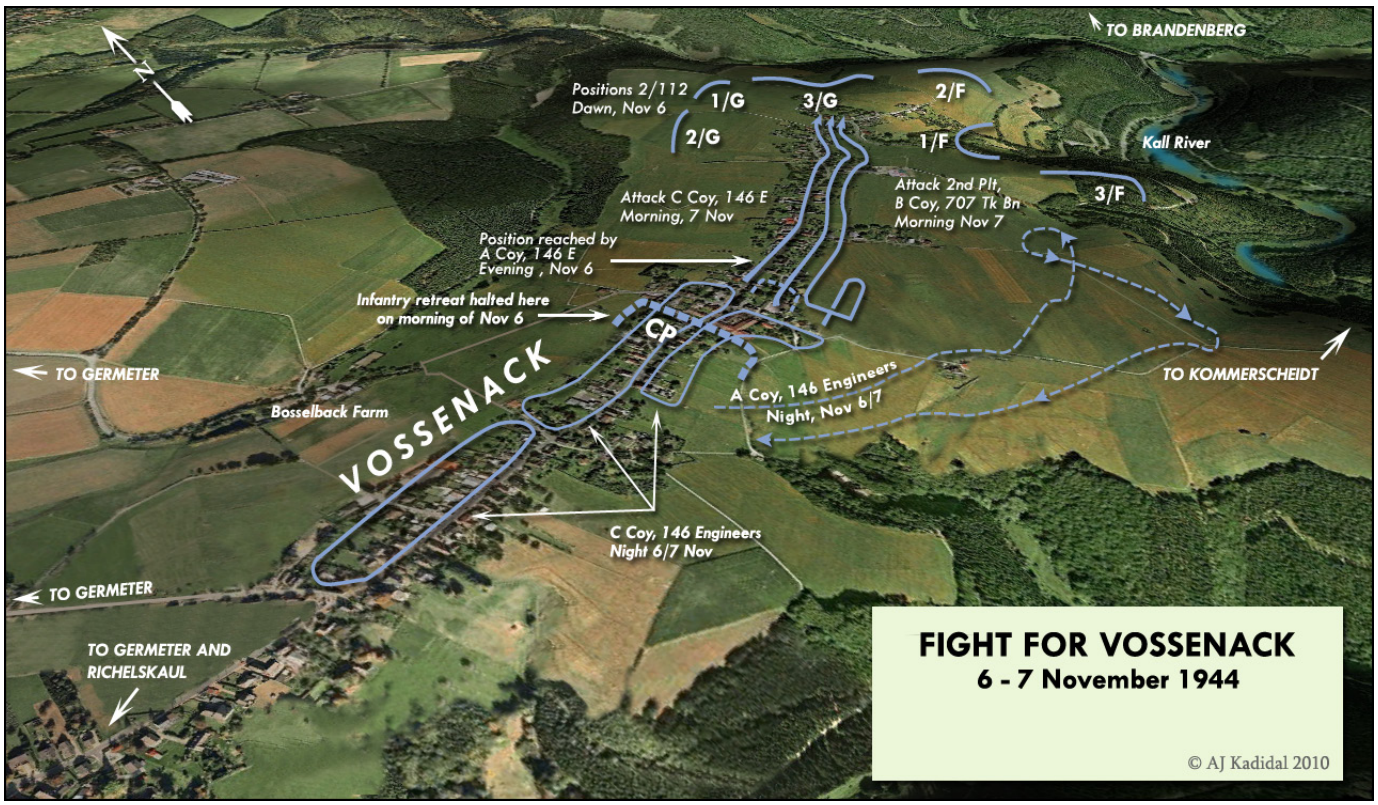
The admiring infantry began to call Fleig, "General Fleig" — his was one of the few divisional highlights of that day. Cota allowed the defenders to dwell on that success for the night but on the following morning, the 5th, he sent fresh orders to the 112th Infantry: "It is imperative the town of Schmidt be secured at once," he wrote. "Task Force Ripple under the command of Lt-Colonel Ripple is attached to your command…It is imperative that no time be wasted in getting this attack underway. I again caution you that men defending road blocks or terrain feature must dig in…Great care will be exercised to prevent any recurrence of the episode of 3rd Battalion."

But Ripple's force (which consisted of only a weakened battalion from the 110th Infantry, a company of Shermans, a light tank company and a company of tank destroyers (C company, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion) had yet to make its way through the treacherous Kall trail to Kommerscheidt. What prompted Cota's callously objectified orders? One element could have been a planned visit to his command post by Generals Eisenhower, Hodges, Collins and Gerow. Cota likely needed something concrete to give them. But back at Kommerschiedt, the orders were received by the 112th's regimental CO, Colonel Peterson with some disbelief. In a fuming rage, he detailed one of his adjutants, Lt. Simon to go back to divisional headquarters at Rott to inform Cota that two battered battalions and seven tanks (by now, Captain Hostrup had arrived with some reinforcements) were not enough to act against strong German forces in the area.

As Simon departed for Rott, in Rott, Cota sent his assistant commander, Brigadier-General George A. Davis westwards to Peterson's command post to make sure that his orders were being followed. When Davis miraculously arrived at Kommerscheidt, somehow managing to avoid German patrols, a fierce row broke out at the regimental command. Colonel Peterson told Davis that he intended to attack Schmidt only after all of his reinforcements had arrived. Davis ordered him to attack immediately. Despondent,



EASY VICTORY The 3rd Battalion of the 112th Infantry captured Vossenack easily enough, but the troops, exposed on a near bald plateau came under observation by Germans across the gorge.



THE ROUT Under constant enemy artillery bombardment, guided to precision by German observers on the Brandenberg-Bergstein ridge, the 3rd Battalion's spirit finally broke. The majority of its men fled their positions. The 146th Engineers were then sent in to reclaim the lost positions.

Peterson readied his meager force to attack. Sporadic fighting with the enemy had gone on all day. In the morning, Fleig and his men had immobilized another German tank, causing the rest to retreat, but movement in Kommerscheidt was restricted. Under observation from Germans in Schmidt, even the slightest movement heralded a terrific artillery and mortar barrage. At this time, just when the situation looked as though it could not get any worse, the Germans penetrated the Kall Trail and cut off the 112th Infantry from its supplies. As night descended desperate reports of heavy fighting came in from all along the trail, mostly by US engineers encountering German infiltrators.

The designation of the narrow and muddy Kall trail as the main supply route for the 112th Infantry had been a major blunder by Cota and his staff. The trail meandered from Vossenack to Kommerscheidt, winding down perilously steep gorges in the thick of forest. It was hardly suited to support a regimental attack, and as the Americans discovered, it could barely be defended.

Sometime that evening, after a day of scattered combat against German soldiers on the trail, Colonel Edmund K. Daley of the 1171st Engineers and his men heard the ominous clatter of approaching armor. Fearing the worst, Daley ordered his men to ready arms. To everyone's relief, the clattering turned to be

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET As the situation in Kommerscheidt worsened, four M10s from the 893rd Tank Destroyer's B Company, loaded with ammunition and supplies, headed for the Kall Trail. Crossing the open plateau between Vossenack and the wooded trail, three were destroyed by accurate artillery fire while the last skidded and crashed into the wooded slopes as it sped to escape the shelling. US ARMY

A LIABILITY An M10 Wolverene. The Tank Destroyers were the product of a flawed US Army doctrine which believed that enemy tanks were best tackled by fast, mobile "tank destroyers" wielding a larger caliber gun. Unfortunately, the machines had to forsake armor in favor of speed, leaving them vulnerable in combat. COPYRIGHT JEAN RESTAYN

Main Gun	76.2mm M7
Hull Armor	51-13 mm
Other Guns	1 x .50-Cal HMG
Crew	5

Sherman tanks from Lt-Colonel Ripple's Task Force. Meanwhile, German infiltrators from the 116th Panzer's reconnaissance battalion had occupied an aid station set up on the trail at the Mestrenger Mühle (then a water mill) capturing its extensive food and medical supplies, and then re-mined the trail. The engineers went in again and hand-to-hand fighting broke out in places. Finally, Ripple's Task Force decided to use a firebreak to cross the Kall gorge under heavy fire and unwittingly forced the Germans off the trail. They managed to fight their way through to Kommerscheidt but losses had been heavy. Only several infantry platoons reached Peterson's perimeter and Ripple's tank destroyers, although engaged in the heavy fighting along the firebreak, never actually crossed the gorge.

Ripple's men had succeeded in keeping the trail open for only a few hours. Before long, it had sealed again. To make matters worse, Ripple's force was not strong enough to make a difference at Kommerscheidt. By mid-day on November 6th, Ripple had only six tanks operational and three out of the original nine tank destroyers. Seeing the state of the reinforcements, Peterson saw little hope in attacking Schmidt.

ERWIN KRESSMAN
PRIVATE COLLECTION

In the meantime, events were overtaking the 112th's 2nd Battalion under Lt-Colonel Hatzfeld at Vossenack. Although Vossenack had been taken easily enough on the 2nd, the Americans there found themselves pitted against the 275th Division which brought artillery and twenty-one Stug Assault guns to bear against them from the Brandenberg-Bergstein Ridge. American tanks rumbling forward towards the Kall Trail found themselves running the gauntlet of artillery. The open-top tank destroyers proved especially vulnerable and many were knocked out even before their crews had realized what had happened. Milling past the burning hulks, Hatzfeld's infantry had proceeded to secure Vossenack and the surviving American armor hid among the shattered buildings of the town. Hatzfeld then made the monumental mistake of ordering his infantry to dig-in on the bald northern slope of the ridge.

German observation officers on the Brandenberg-Bergstein ridge could clearly see them deploying and called in artillery and mortar strikes. Shell after shell had pounded the ridge until it was a treeless disfigured hump. The Germans methodically targeted each individual foxhole until it was destroyed before moving on to the next. This sort of clinical persistence began to have its effect on the men. Repeated pleas by the exposed men to pull back into Vossenack town were obstinately refused by staff officers who had little firsthand understanding of the situation. By dawn on the 6th, the 2nd Battalion had already been broken in three days and four night of incessant shelling. Hatzfeld's company commanders informed him that the nerves of their men had become unraveled. Many of the men had fallen in an apathetic stupor and had to be ordered to eat. A few wept unashamedly when told to remain at their foxholes. Hatzfeld himself sat in his basement command post at the town church, muttering and mumbling, his nerves gone, his head held by his hands.

A report came that the Germans would probably attack that morning. Indeed when the morning lengthened it did so without the customary German artillery wake-up call. Hatzfeld's men, instead of being relieved, wondered what the matter was. The dawn itself was unusually peaceful. There was an abrupt smattering small-arms fire. Someone screamed shrilly but the silence descended again. Half an hour later, as the daylight grew, the German artillery finally opened again.

As if a powder-keg had been ignited, one entire company panicked. Haphazardly grabbing their equipment, they abandoned their positions and fled for the rear. Another company, seeing its flanks exposed, watched in horror. Its commander hastily ordered his men to pull back to the battalion reserve. But seeing this massed flight of troops, the reserve company pulled out too and soon what had been an initial frazzled flight turned into a unanimous retreat. As groups of fear-crazed GIs streamed to the rear, the panic-stricken mob absorbed more and more men, until it snowballed, sucking anyone

COLD STEEL A German SdKfz. 251/3 half track of the 116th Panzer Division trundles past a knocked-out Wolverine in the ruins of Schmidt. BUNDESARCHIV

who chanced on its path. Some men who fled were simply terrified but others joined in the belief that an order to withdraw had been given.

"It was the saddest sight I have ever seen," Lt. Condon of E Company later said. "Down the road from the east came F, G and E Companies, pushing, shoving, throwing away equipment, trying to out-race the artillery and each other in a frantic escape."

Finally at 10.30 a.m., a group of seventy armed Americans formed a line and attempted to stem the retreat, but several small groups got away. At this point not a single German had yet entered Vossenack. In fact, a platoon of US tanks and a platoon of tank destroyers continued to remain in the northeastern edge of Vossenack and remained there for half an hour after the infantry's pullout. Neither platoon would record seeing any Germans during this time. The American officers attempted to point this fact to their men but few listened. Captain James Nesbit, the battalion personnel officer wrote that "those we saw were completely shattered...There was no sense fooling ourselves about it. It was a disorderly retreat. The men were going to pell-mell."

To plug this unexpected gap, Cota and Davis hunted for reinforcements. Finally they sent in the newly-arrived 146th Combat Engineers Battalion. The engineers, armed with heavy weapons, including flamethrowers and mortars advanced in short, leapfrogging spurs, and re-occupied the the town. By now, Hatzfeld was in shambles. His command gone, he finally collapsed into tears early that afternoon. His pleas for reinforcements had gone unanswered and in a state of irreconcilable shock, he told his staff that he was heading back to Germeter with the affirmed intention of returning with help. It was the last time that his officers saw him. Stumbling into Germeter dazed and suffering from a broken ankle, Hatzfield was tagged by the medics as a battle casualty, but the damage was greater than the medics could have realized. Hatzfield had suffered a complete mental breakdown. Cota finally realized that something had gone tremendously wrong at Vossenack. To hold on to the town, he attempted to provide the 146th Engineers with reinforcements. One wounded lieutenant volunteered to take seventy slightly-wounded men back to Vossenack but by the time they reached the town most of the "volunteers" had slipped away. Cota, meantime, sent a company of the 1340th Engineers.

These forces had some time to prepare. The Germans who had watched this amazing retreat only acted that following morning. At 5 a.m. on the 7th, the 156th Panzer-Grenadier Regiment attempted to move in. By this time, the 146th Engineers had decided to mount their own attack and at 8 a.m. got off first by bombarding the German positions with artillery. When the barrage ended, the engineer's charged just as the retaliatory German artillery shrilled through the air. One company was badly mauled

ARMED TO THE TEETH Holding his dugout against American armor such as the ones opposite, a young grenadier fields a formidable arsenal in the form of an Stg.44 assault rifle, a Gewehr 43 rifle and a Panzerfaust anti-tank rocket. BUNDESARCHIV

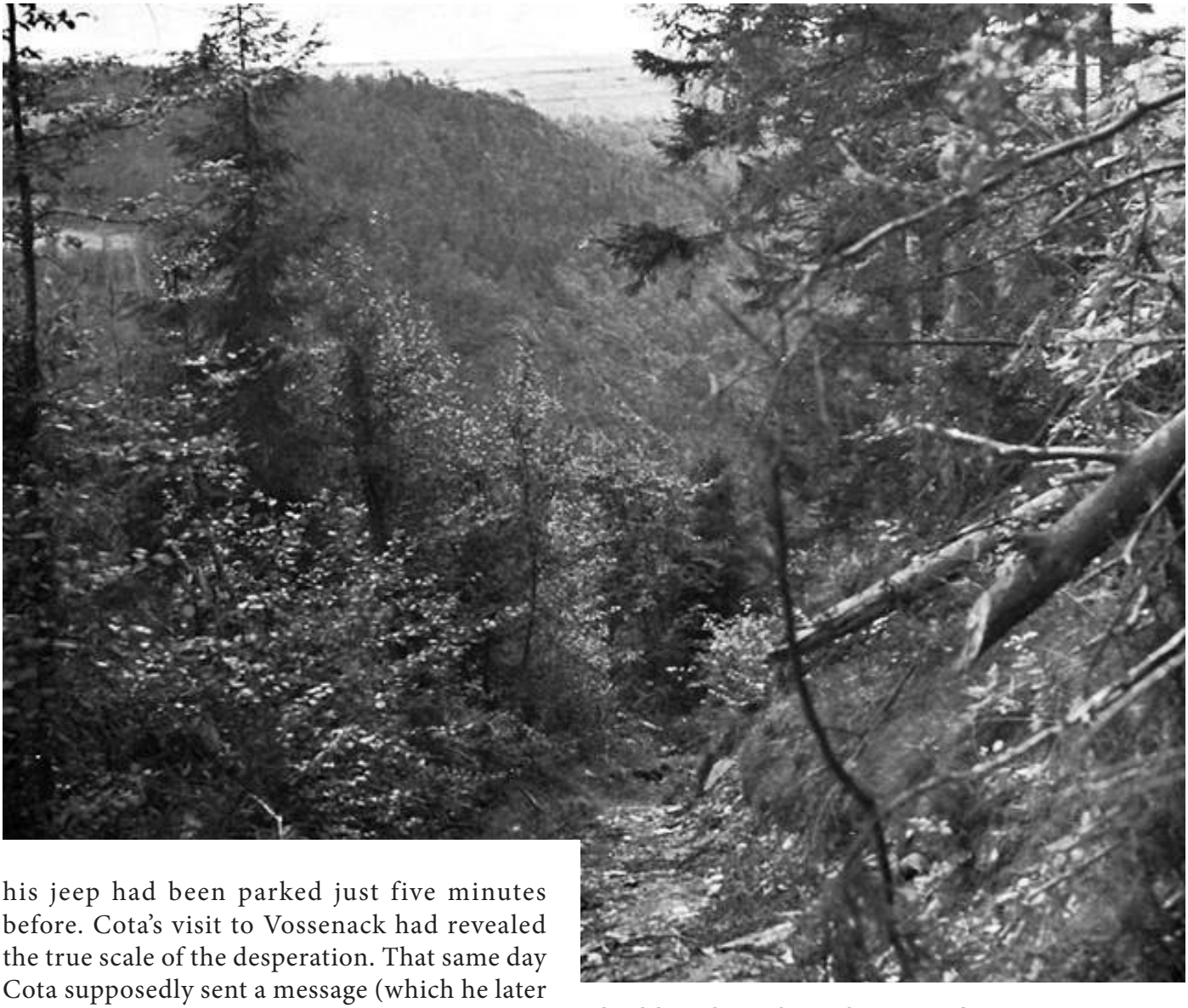
RUMBLING TOWARDS THEIR DOOM Pictured by a signals corps photographer while en-route to Vossenack, these are M10 Wolverines from the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Only one company crossed the Kall gorge into Kommerscheidt. US ARMY

in the advance but the other company managed to retake almost all of the lost positions on the northeastern ridge before the Germans could get them. The Germans were so impressed that the commander of the 116th Panzer, Maj-General Siegfried von Waldenburg would tell American interrogators after the war that the engineers had done an "excellent job," taking the town as they did. Vossenack was saved but just barely and for only a moment.

Back on the other side of the gorge, at Kommerscheidt, the situation was grimmer than ever. Repeated German artillery and infantry assaults on the 112th's positions were creating terrific problems for Colonel Peterson. His men were short on ammo and food, and their damp foxholes were freezing over each night. Morale stood on a razor's edge, and Peterson feared for the worst. He did not have long to wait. On the morning of November 7, a company of twelve Jagdpanthers from sPzJäger Abt 519 attacked. They spotted Fleig's small group of Shermans and took shots at two, jamming their turrets. The third Sherman, commanded by Fleig, nosed around the corner and spotted the fearsome Jagdpanthers advancing. He deftly reversed and moved back into cover. But Kressman had been watching. He aimed the main gun in Fielg's direction and pressed the trigger. Nothing happened. Not even the emergency firing mechanism worked. Fuming, Kressman ordered his driver to take them out of the fight. Battle damage had jammed the main gun.

But other tanks, combined with German infantry caused chaos amidst the American ranks. Dazed and terror-crazed soldiers fled from the enemy, refusing to take orders from their officers. Almost 260 fell into captivity. Those that still hung out grimly awaited the inevitable German assault tomorrow or the day after to finish them off for good. Kressman, meantime, would be awarded the Knight's Cross for his company's successful actions at Schmidt and Kommerscheidt.

Cota decided to get a first hand review of the situation, and that afternoon, he made his first and only visit to the front by visiting the 112th's second battalion at Vossenack. The general seemed to carry a guardian angel upon his shoulders for all the time he was at Vossenack, not a single artillery shell fell. The moment he left, a shell planted itself right where



NO ROOM FOR MISTAKES A view of the Kommerscheidt side of the gorge from the Kall Trail. US ARMY

his jeep had been parked just five minutes before. Cota's visit to Vossenack had revealed the true scale of the desperation. That same day Cota supposedly sent a message (which he later denied) to Peterson in Kommerscheidt to report back to divisional headquarters immediately.

At first, Peterson took the message calmly enough. Over the last day a rumor had started to fly that he was about to be sacked and that a fresh colonel had appeared at divisional headquarters ready to assume command. But now faced with Cota's terse message recalling him to divisional command, Peterson slowly found his patience drawing to an end. For this career officer who had served in the army for twenty-eight years, mostly with the 112th Infantry, and who had watched it methodically break and shatter at the orders of callous staff officers in the rear, the last straw had finally come. Handing over command to Ripple, he set off with a two-man team for Rott, intent on confronting Cota. ➢

Schwere PanzerJäger Abteilung 519 Badge

6

PULLING BACK FROM THE TRAIL

Even as Colonel Peterson departed in a jeep, enemy shelling began again. As he drove away, despairing for the future of his regiment, his replacement, Colonel Gustin M. Nelson had already started to make his way to the Kall. Thwarted repeatedly by enemy infiltrators along the trail, he tried four times to get through to Kommerscheidt and finally succeeded.

Meanwhile, Peterson and his companions, Private Gus Seiler and a driver made the perilous journey down the gorge in heavy rain which they hoped would camouflage their passage. Their luck ran out as they turned into the second elbow of the trail and blundered into a German ambush. Heavy firing shattered the jeep's windshield. Abandoning the jeep, the three Americans opened up with their guns, and after a short exchange, ran for the trees as bullets struck the ground behind them. Cutting back onto the trail up ahead, Peterson had a grand stand view of the tremendous suffering undergone by the division. Wrecked M29 Weasels lay all along the narrow track and dead bodies protruded out of the muddy ground everywhere he looked. Two bodies had been flattened by a tank.

FLUDIC AID STATION Situated at the base of the Kall gorge, the Mestrenger Mühle (a water mill) became a forward American aid station. It changed hands several times but the Germans allowed the Americans medics to keep working. The owner of the mill, Peter Dohr, died on 5 April 1945 when he stepped on a landmine. Today, the place is a restaurant. PRIVATE COLLECTION

Deciding that it was safer to travel in the trees, Peterson and his escorts moved westwards towards the general direction of Vossenack taking great care to avoid marauding parties of Germans. They reached the fast-flown Kall River and crossing this with great difficulty, ran into an enemy squad on the west bank. Returning fire, the Americans killed two Germans but then a burning sensation broke out over Peterson's left leg. He had been hit. At the time, however, he thought that it was merely the tingling of an old wound from World War I.

After giving the rest of the Germans the slip, Peterson and his group moved deeper into the forest. By now, Peterson's now-smarting wound started to bleed badly and he went along limping. The driver volunteered to take up the point but was quickly swallowed up by the thick forest and vanished from the pages of history. Abruptly, a submachine gun blasted in their direction. Seiler was hit. With moan he crumbled onto the wet forest floor. Peterson hit the dirt, crawled towards Seiler and put an ear on the private's chest. There was no movement. Seiler was dead.

Mortar fire began to land nearby and this spurred Peterson to heed his own safety. Crawling along the filthy, muddy ground, his face cut by twigs, his fingernails black with mud, Peterson then felt a sharp pain in his right leg. He attempted to stand up but found himself unable to do so. By now completely disoriented and feeling helpless he somehow made it back to the river and after crossing this again, spotted three Germans approaching.

He held his breath and hoped to go by unnoticed. But one of the Germans saw him. Peterson quickly opened up with his Tommy gun and almost certainly killed one man. He turned his gun on the other two but at this critical moment, found his vision dimming because of the blood loss. Fortunately the remaining Germans fled and Peterson crawled forward until he was eventually picked up by an American patrol some time later. Transported to the divisional aid station, he

demanded to see the general. Cota came quickly and was shocked to see a bedraggled Peterson lying in a cot. Automatically assuming that Peterson had abandoned his regiment, Cota became furious. He accused Peterson of desertion and another fierce row broke out. Peterson was almost incoherent with rage. The general denied sending the message summoning Peterson to headquarters and finally after all this had been done, Cota, his nerves already shot by the events of the last few days, his mind tired and his body weary, felt himself unable to take any more and simply collapsed.‡

After this bizarre event, Cota finally accepted that the Kall trail had been lost. But already, events had been set into motion that would cost more lives. Earlier that day, he had formed Task Force Davis, under his assistant commander, to return to Schmidt. He had also ordered the already battered 109th Infantry to re-open the trail. Demoralized, the 109th went to its task with a heavy heart but became lost in the woods and ended up in the wrong place — to the rear of the 110th Regiment. One company came back with just 81 of its 193 men, while other companies were picked off or taken prisoner. Fortunately, the Germans had allowed the American litter-bearers and wounded to use the Kall trail, so at least most of the wounded that would have otherwise died were able to get to safety.

Later that day, Hodges finally recognized the plight of the 28th and approved the retreat of all US forces from beyond the Kall. To help the division, he authorized the deployment of the 12th Infantry (from the 4th Division) and the elite 2nd Ranger Battalion, into the sector. It was too little too late. By now the Kommerscheidt perimeter was being relentlessly hammered by enemy artillery and probing attacks. Cota, on Wednesday, November 8, told the remains of the 112th Infantry to "fight your way out." This was no easy task. Strong German forces encircled the regiment but as nightfall arrived the regiment pulled out in driving rain. Their retreat along the Kall trail was covered by artillery and all heavy equipment was sabotaged quietly so that the Germans would not know about the evacuation. In small groups or alone, about 400 men pulled out (of the original 2,200). Their new CO, Colonel Nelson walked back with them. Halfway through, enemy mortars began to fall. The men scattered but about 300 managed to get through to safety, including Nelson, Lt. Fleig and his men (but without their tanks) and Lt-Colonel Ripple. Their A Company of the 70th Tank Battalion had lost 15 of its 16 Shermans and 32 men.

Gerow, still living in a castle in the air, hoped to salvage the situation and told Cota to reconstitute his forces, convinced that when this was done, the 28th, with help from the 5th Armored could go back and recover the lost ground. Cota, who had lost all sense of his dignity, preeningly told Gerow that his virtually broken division could be combat ready in three days if "replacements came through satisfactorily."

Hodges would none of it. The state of the division had alarmed him. He decreed that the 28th division would largely pull out of its commitments, but were to hold on to Vossenack and provide troops to help the 12th Infantry attack towards Hürtgen town. Another regiment was also ordered to join the 5th Armored for a drive south to Monschau. ➤

‡ Cota was found to be a diabetic after the war. It is possible that this condition coupled with stress had caused him to faint.

CHILLY GATHERING Meeting with Eisenhower (left) and Generals Bradley, Hodges and Gerow at his divisional headquarters on November 9, a Cota (right) found himself at the sharp end of a "short sharp conference." Hodges was especially belligerent, drawing Cota aside to tell him that divisional HQ seemed to have little idea of where its units were and worse, was doing little to find out where they were. US ARMY

ENEMY PROPAGANDA The Germans were quick to capitalize on the failures of the 28th Division. This leaflet was dropped during the Battle of the Bulge as the division held the bridges on the Sauer River. LEAFLET: PENNSYLVANIA MILITARY MUSEUM, BACKGROUND: NATIONAL ARCHIVES 111-SC-198240)

7

ATTACKS ALONG THE MONSCHAU CORRIDOR

The unit which drew the short hand to accompany the 12th Infantry was Seeley's 110th Infantry. Although bolstered by five hundred replacements, large gaps still showed through this mutilated regiment. C Company's 1st battalion for example, had only one officer with three NCOs and nineteen men.

The 12th Infantry, itself of the famed 4th "Ivy" Infantry Division was in better shape. A veteran of D-Day, the regiment had spearheaded the division's actions at "Utah" beach and the division itself had led the way into the Cotentin peninsula. The formation became something of a celebrated force and its men and officer wearing the finely tuned, four-pointed clover badge that was their heritage, something of celebrities. Of all the units within the 4th, the 12th Infantry is possibly the oldest and most highly-decorated. Interestingly, this was also the same formation in which Jerome D. Salinger, then a virtually unknown writer, served in during the war. Salinger actually took the liberty of visiting Hemingway at the *Paris Ritz* when the 4th Division was on furlough (Hemingway famously haunted the *Ritz* for several weeks after the liberation of Paris). In 1946, using this visit as a pretext, Salinger, by now disillusioned with the army and still a struggling writer, would write Hemingway, possibly to forge some connection with the famous man or possibly to find a literary friend to combat a discontent with himself and the world. In the letter he made flattering allusions to Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, wryly writing: "Dear Papa, I'm writing from a General Hospital in Nürnberg. There's a notable absence of Catherine Barkleys§ is all I've got to say," ending the letter with: " I hope the next time you come to New York that I'll be around and that if you have time I can see you. The talks I had with you here were the only hopeful minutes of the whole business [World War II]."

There is no record of Hemingway having ever responded to this letter. Possibly thwarted, Salinger would later remember *A Farewell to Arms* in his own *A Catcher in the Rye* with the some derision.

After Cotentin, the regiment had been responsible for destroying the still-formidable remnants of the 1st SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler Panzer Division between August 9 and the 12th. After Normandy, it had fought it was through northern France, Belgium, and Luxembourg. In November 1944, it could be found occupying a quiet corner of the Hürtgen sector. All that

§ Catherine Barkley was the sexually attractive heroine of the novel and was based on Hemingway's own Great War love, Agnes von Kurowsky, a nurse.

MUDDY LOGISTICS
Travelling within the forest was an arduous affair especially in November when constant rain turned dirt tracks into slush.
US ARMY

changed when its CO, Colonel James Luckett was handed orders to seize Hürtgen town.

With one battalion from the 110th Infantry, Luckett's 12th Infantry moved up against Hürtgen town, while the bulk of the Seeley's men advanced south into the so-called "Monschau Corridor." For five days, Seeley's men attempted to reduce enemy pillboxes in the Rollerbroich area, and experienced wholesale slaughter. An NCO later recalled "forging ahead against grenades, small arms fire, mortar rounds and machine guns." Their platoon commander was killed along with several enlisted men but the NCO and the other managed to take the pillbox only to lose it again two hours later after Germans counterattacked.

Operations were set to continue until Brigadier-General Davis visited the regiment on November 13 and found it in such a pitiful state that he called off further actions. By this time, 1st Battalion, although reinforced at the start of the battle had been reduced to 57 men out of 870. In the rifle companies, none of the original officers had survived and only two NCOs were still around.

The 12th Infantry, meantime, had gone through its own ordeal. Although at full strength at the start of the operation on November 8, in five days of continuous operations, the regiment had lost 500 men. Luckett had already engaged in a series of arguments with Cota over the flaws of the plan to take Hürtgen town but pressed with Cota's repeated admonishments to use "fire and movement," he had reluctantly kept up the attack. Then on the 10th, the regiment had run into the tanks of the 116th Panzer Division. By nightfall, two entire companies had been cut off. Reduced further into five isolated groups, the regiments attempted to break out.

Making their escape from the pocket with several prisoners was one small group led by Lt-Colonel Franklin R. Seibert of the 2nd Battalion.

"Luck was not with us," Seibert would later

IVY COMMANDERS 4th Divison CO, Maj-Gen Raymond Barton (driving) in his personal jeep "Barton Buggy" visits one of his regimental commanders, Colonel Charles Lanham. CENTER FOR MILITARY HISTORY

say. "We flushed three krauts out of a hole right on our path. We started them across a firebreak, a tank fired at us down the firebreak. The prisoners started to run and the patrolmen opened up on them and the prisoners were kaput. Our men went far as to pump lead into their heads to stop them from shouting. It made me a little sick."

Seibert and most of the group were forced to retreat to their original positions as the German tank and other enemy troops closed in. Here they would stay until the next morning, when most of them used the cover of a gentle snowstorm to get out, even Seibert. The 12th Infantry had been knocked out as a fighting formation. At least 1,600 men had been lost in its short time at the front. In its 1st Battalion alone, only 63 men and four officers had survived. Only one medic still remained alive within the entire battalion.

Watching the survivors limp back, Hodges would mutter to his staff: "I wish everybody could see them." Luckett was sacked. Taking into account the excellent history of the 12th Infantry and the extenuating circumstances of the Hürtgen battle, he was given command over another regiment. That same day, 33 men from 109th Infantry's 1st Battalion slipped back into their lines. They had been fighting in the trees of Teifen Creek woods, separating Vossenack from the Brandenberg-Bergstein Ridge since the 10th. Initially everything had been good. For three days, the Germans had been oblivious of this 190-strong battalion within their lines but on the 14th, their luck ran out. The German 89th Division surrounded the US force and started to whittle it down. With little food and water, the battalion finally decided to break out, losing droves.

The end of this operation spelled the end of the 28th Division's career in the Hürtgen. Their attack on Schmidt, recorded in history as the "Second Battle of Schmidt" which had the ignominious honor of being the bloodiest American divisional attack of the entire Second World War. The 112th Infantry alone had suffered 232 men captured, 431 missing, 719 wounded, 167 killed, and 544 non-battle casualties — a total of 2,093 out of the original 3,000. The division on the whole had suffered 6,184 casualties. American materiel losses included 16 out of 24 Tank Destroyers, 31 out of 50 Sherman tanks and uncountable losses in trucks, small-arms and heavy-weapons. In return,

THE MINIMALIST AND THE SOLDIER Ernest Hemingway arrived at the front official as a correspondent for *Colliers Magazine*. Here he is with Colonel Charles Lanham. JFK LIBRARY

during the period between November 2nd to the 8th, the division had taken 913 prisoners and inflicted about 2,000 casualties on the enemy. They claimed the destruction of 40 enemy tanks but General von Waldenburg of the 116th Panzer Division stated that they had lost only 15.

The fighting had effectively knocked out the 28th Division as a fighting formation. Sent to take over a quiet 25-mile front in the Ardennes forest, its recuperation would be cut short by the Battle of Bulge a few weeks later. In all, it would take three months to reconstitute the division to its full effective strength. Back at Headquarters, staff officers, finally faced with the grim reality of the forest which seemed adept at consuming troops, decided to commit their massive force of arms to bear. A new plan went into effect, allowing for the employment of a force of two armored divisions, a Ranger battalion, and three infantry divisions — altogether about 100,000 troops. This time, they were determined that Hürtgen fall — at all costs. ➤

8

THE DEATH FACTORY, BACK IN BUSINESS

By now, there was a growing realization within the US high command of the importance of the Roer Dams. Hodges wanted to use both of his corps to expand his perimeter in the forest. Collin's VII Corps with America's premier division, the 1st "Big Red One" was to attack north with the 3rd Armored Division and the 47th Infantry from the 9th Division in support, on its right flank, with plans to trundle on through Hürtgen town — or so it was hoped. On the South, Maj-General "Tubby" Barton's 4th "Ivy" Division was to move directly into the forest while Maj-General Donald Stroh's 8th Division and a Combat Command from the 5th Armored Division took over positions held by the now-departing 28th Division on November 13.

Starting in the third week of November, the First and Ninth Armies planned to finally start their much-postponed drive towards to the Roer River, a prelude to another advance intended to take them to the Rhine. In the meantime, bad weather continued to dog Allied hopes. Each day started out gray and unloaded rain well into the crucial hours. Air support found itself unable to operate and without air support, the senior commanders knew that a successful advance was near difficult. A frustrated General Bradley wrote in his diary: "This [the weather] can end the war — with air we could push through to the Rhine in a matter of days."

While the bad weather persisted, the 4th and 8th Divisions remained in their positions for almost a week without orders as the rain hurtled down on the sodden front. Taking this opportunity for escape, several regimental officers decided on a short retreat to Paris. At the swanky Paris Ritz, regimental officers from the 22nd Infantry, including Colonel Charles "Buck" Lanham and his three battalion commanders ran into Ernest Hemingway at a cocktail party. Mary Welsh, soon to be Hemingway's fourth wife was also there and later recalled the regimental officers as being, "Well-groomed, [with] hair and hands and boots cleaned and polished."

When rumors began to fly that the regiment would soon take part in a great offensive in the north, Hemingway, already an admirer of the division decided to join the 22nd in the Hürtgen. He would later describe Lanham as "the finest and bravest and most intelligent regimental commander I have ever known."

True to his intention, Hemingway departed for the Hürtgen and all of the time spent at the front would lead to Hemingway's sole novel of the Second World War, *Across the River and into the Trees*. Although Hemingway wrote an introduction,

STREAM OF MUD Rains in November reduced some of the supply tracks to mud streams. This halftrack is slowly navigating one particularly turgid road. US ARMY

denying that the story had any basis in reality, it is clear that the story's protagonist, a bitter war-weary veteran soldier, Colonel Cantwell, was based partly on Lanham. And although the story itself does not specifically mention the forest or the bitter fighting, it contained innocuous references and often spoke of the acrimony of career soldiers and of the difficulty of maintaining control over one's life, especially in the face of terrible odds.

On the afternoon of November 15, after Lanham and his officers had returned to their regiment, Lt-Colonel Thomas A. Kenan of the 2nd Battalion peered out of his dug-out in the forest and was astonished to see a burly, bespectacled man dressed in a snow-white German camouflaged jerkin and carrying a Thompson automatic staring down at him.

"Hemingway," the man said, grinning, introducing himself, "Ernest Hemorrhoid, the poor man's Ernie Pyle."

Notwithstanding Hemingway's appearance as an armed civilian — something which was accepted at the front with a shade of gray — his arrival as a correspondent could not have been more timely. At 10:45 that night, Lanham received word of a major operation to take place the following morning, the 16th. Two infantry regiments, the 8th and the 22nd were to cross the Roer Weh stream and head east towards Grosshau and beyond. Unlike previous advances which had been almost always aimed towards Schmidt, US commanders had now switched primary objectives to the villages on the Hürtgen highway leading north towards Düren.

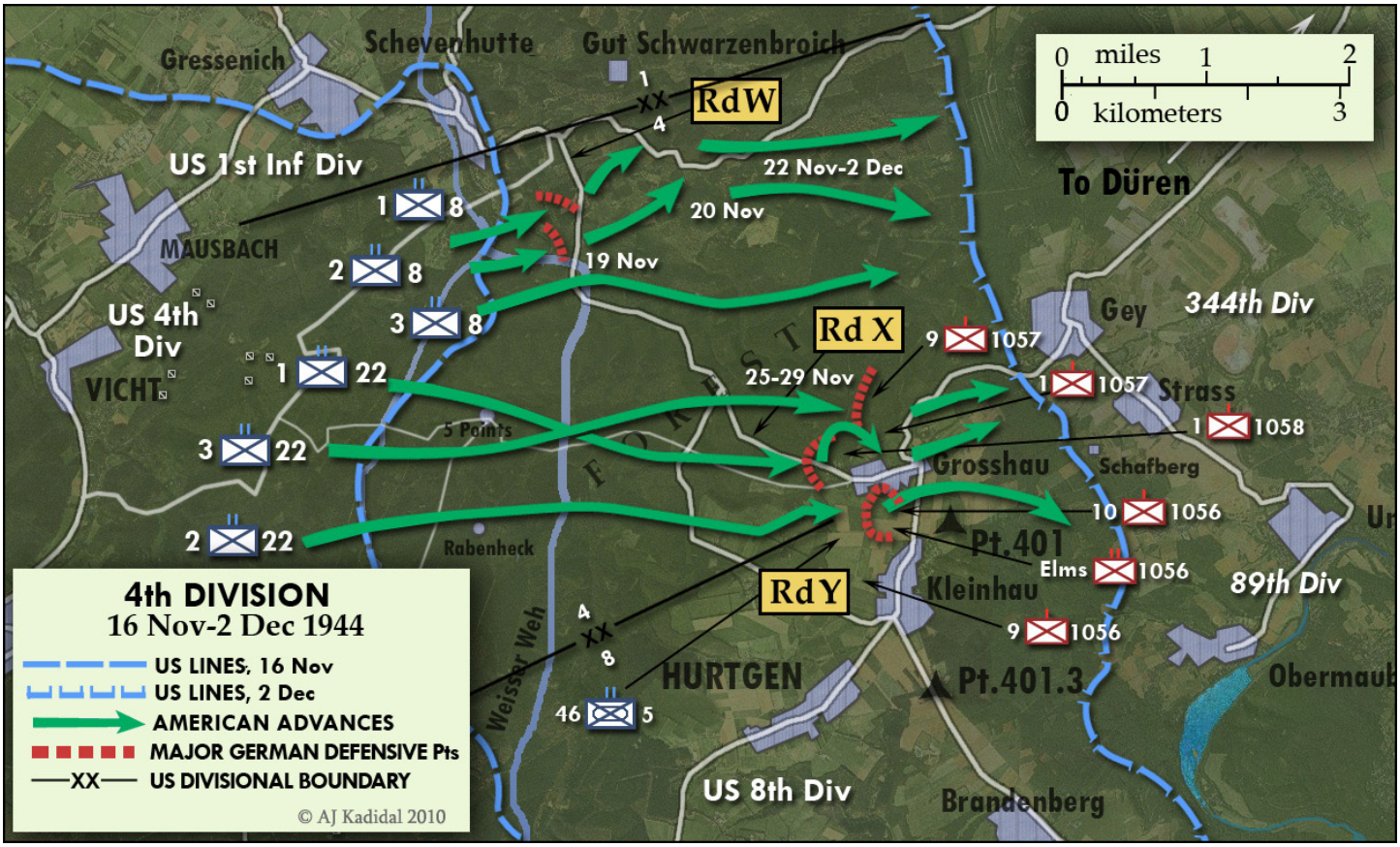
Later, in Lanham's command trailer over a drink, the colonel would confide to Hemingway that he probably would not survive the coming battle and wondered about the fate of his "magnificent command" as he called it.

But the 22nd Infantry's line to its destiny was fast approaching. That same day at US First Army headquarters at the Hotel Britannique at Spa where in another war, Field Marshal Hindenberg had told the Kaiser that it was hopeless to continue, Hodges had come down for breakfast to see rays of sunlight filtering down to the grounds. His chief of staff, General Kean had been smiling at the sun.

Although jubilant, Hodges had told Keen: "Don't look too hard. You'll wear it out."

With the weather brightening, the attack

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT A Graves Registrations unit evacuates American dead just 500 yards from the fighting, while a reconnaissance unit brings up halftracks to hold a position won an hour earlier.
US ARMY



was on with the generals planning to launch Operation "Queen," a gigantic air attack in support of ground forces that same day. Accordingly, that late morning of Thursday, the 16th, 2,400 British and American heavy bombers, 80 medium bombers and 350 fighter-bombers hurled themselves on the entirety of the 9th Army's front. In the Hürtgen sector, Duren took a plastering and Hürtgen town was dive-bombed. The 12th Division (now renamed the Völksgrenadier), had been in the process of being relieved by the 47th Völksgrenadier Division near Grosshau when the raid took place. Although the bombing was tremendous, it failed to soften up the Germans.

In the VII Corps sector, Collin's divisions advanced against the industrial towns around Eschweiler. On the V Corps front, Maj-General Barton, having largely lost his 12th Infantry, had to rely on his two remaining regiments and one of these, the 8th Infantry, under Colonel Richard McKee, was to operate along the flank of the 1st Division moving north. From a point near the town of Schevenhutte, McKee was to attack through the forest to take a high ground known as Gut Schwarzenbroich whose most prominent feature was a forest manor on the grounds of a ruined monastery. In order to maintain the strongest position in the north, Barton ordered Lanham's 22nd Infantry to take the towns of Kleinhau and Grosshau with some help from the remains of the 12th Infantry. After this they were to keep on going and capture the village of Gey.

But even in this late hour, the Americans had shown that they had not learnt from previous engagements. German officers, for one, could not fathom the American fixation with the forest, especially since it was not suitable for their large quantities of armor. Even worse, despite their terrific casualties, the Americans had not altered their tactics. They had apparently disregarded the 9th Division's early reports and worse, had written off the scarred lessons to come from the 28th Division. The essential fact that sending in widely separated columns into the forest invited disaster was one important lesson that had seemingly eluded planners.

Hodges, concerned about this problem visited the 4th Division before it advanced, under the impression that the unit was "about to attack in the wrong way running down roads…instead of

advancing through the woods" in tight formations. But Barton, whose division was meant to cover a two to three mile front had little choice but move up in a thin screen. The opposition was still the veteran 275th Division, which by this time, had absorbed the remains of nearly 37 different units. The Germans had 6,500 men and a hodgepodge of artillery including nine 105mm howitzers, six 155mm guns and ten 122mm guns. They could also count on 105 pieces of field artillery ranging from 105mm to 210mms, not counting mortars, 21 StuG assault guns, 22 Pak40 75mm anti-tank guns and a single 88mm cannon. Facing these were a mere 96 artillery guns of the 4th Division.

Still, the situation was grim for the Germans. They had almost no reserves left and the armor for the sector — the 116th Panzer Division — had been depleted to such an extent that higher headquarters remained unwilling to employ it in further actions. As events transpired, the 116th Panzer would be withdrawn from the sector on the 21st, along with most of the veteran headquarters troops who had combated the 28th Division. Most would soon see combat again in the Battle of the Bulge that December.

22nd INFANTRY BADGE

Strict secrecy before the attack had also prevented Barton's troops from reconnoitering the area directly before them. Still, some strange, silent encounters took place between artillery observers, engineers and small-unit patrols who had been sent out study the assault routes. In one instance, Elliot Johnson, an American artillery observer was on the hunt for a good vantage position when he paused to urinate by a tree. As he went about this business he was shocked to see "a German boy standing not five feet away behind a tree…I'm holding my organ in my hand as I turned towards him – My friends never let me forget this — I pointed my guns at him, I sat him down, took off his shoes and he handed me his gun."

Despite their limited access to the field, the engineers' report was dim: Few roads available, and almost none to accommodate support transports and armor. The 8th Infantry had access to some good roads or tracks, but it was the 22nd Infantry that would feel the effects of the untidy forest the most. In order to take a tactically important point called Rabenheck (Raven's Hedge Ridge), Lanham could only hope to improve a local firebreak so that his men could get supplies. But once past the Weisser Weh, the regiment could count on a good route named "Road X" leading to Grosshau, while another, "Road Y" led to Kleinhau.

Finally, at 12:45 in the afternoon on November 16, the 8th and the 22nd Regiments stepped over the shallow Roer Weh and headed for their objectives. They faced stiff resistance from the outset. On the divisional left wing, the 8th Infantry attempted to penetrate the German side of Weh creek, several hundred yards from a good track called "Road U." They ran into a concertina of heavy fire nearly eight to ten feet high, a minefield with the dreaded wooden *Schu* mines (a weapon that almost always crippled the victim permanently) and heavy machine gun fire.

One unfortunate soldier stepped on a mine. The blast tore apart his foot, sealing the severed arteries with heat. As he lay there moaning and crying, American medics watched helplessly as enemy machine gun fire prevented them from moving forward in his aid. Later, when darkness came, Germans appeared to loot the still-conscious American of his cigarettes and jacket. Then they rigged a spring-loaded explosive booby trap under his back and left.

Lying out in the cold for seventy-two hours, bleeding from his missing leg, the soldier somehow managed to remain conscious. When help finally came, he told his rescuers of the explosives under his body. Engineers defused the booby trap and the soldier, although crippled, lived.

Elsewhere, the fighting raged on. Lt. Bernard J. Ray from Brooklyn had volunteered to blast a path through a line of wire that was holding up the regiment. Dragging a Bangalore torpedo to the wire under heavy fire, he had just reached the wire when a mortar blast riddled his body with shrapnel. Still conscious, he pulled the detonator cap from his pocket and attached it to the primer cord that had become wrapped all around his body. Fixing the cord to the torpedo, he calmly blew himself and the wire to oblivion. He was later awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

The fighting was merciless. Medics, chaplains

and support personnel on both sides were targeted ruthlessly. The diary of a dead German medic who had studied to be a doctor for two years had this entry: "It is Sunday, My God, it is Sunday. With dawn the edge of our forest received a barrage. The earth trembles. The concussion takes our breath. Two wounded are brought to my hole, one with both hands shot off. I am considering whether to cut the rest of the arm off. I will leave it on. How brave these two are. I hope it is not all in vain."

McKee lost 200 men in twenty-four hours and on the 19th, sent in a platoon of Shermans with a platoon of Stuart light tanks and three tank destroyers to blast the still-intact wire despite Ray's heroic sacrifice. With the tanks blasting the enemy incessantly, McKee's men were able to take a thousand yards but then hit a second line of defense where they were stopped again.

Meantime, in the south, the 22nd Infantry had a slightly easier time advancing through the forest but by nightfall they were still 300 yards from the Weisser Weh. On the next morning, Lanham

WILDE SAU HEROISM On 12 November, Lt Friedrich Lengfield of the 275th Division heard an American from the 22nd Infantry crippled in the dense minefield (dubbed *Wilde Sau*) above. He and his men waited for US forces to retrieve the man but when no help came, decided to take the task themselves. Arming a squad with Red Cross vests, Lengfield led them towards the cries. He never made it. Halfway through, a mine stopped his progress. Badly wounded, he died in a German medical station eight hours later. The American's fate is unknown. The 22nd Infantry later erected a memorial to Lengfield in 1997. ABOVE: US ARMY, RIGHT: ARIZONA REPUBLIC

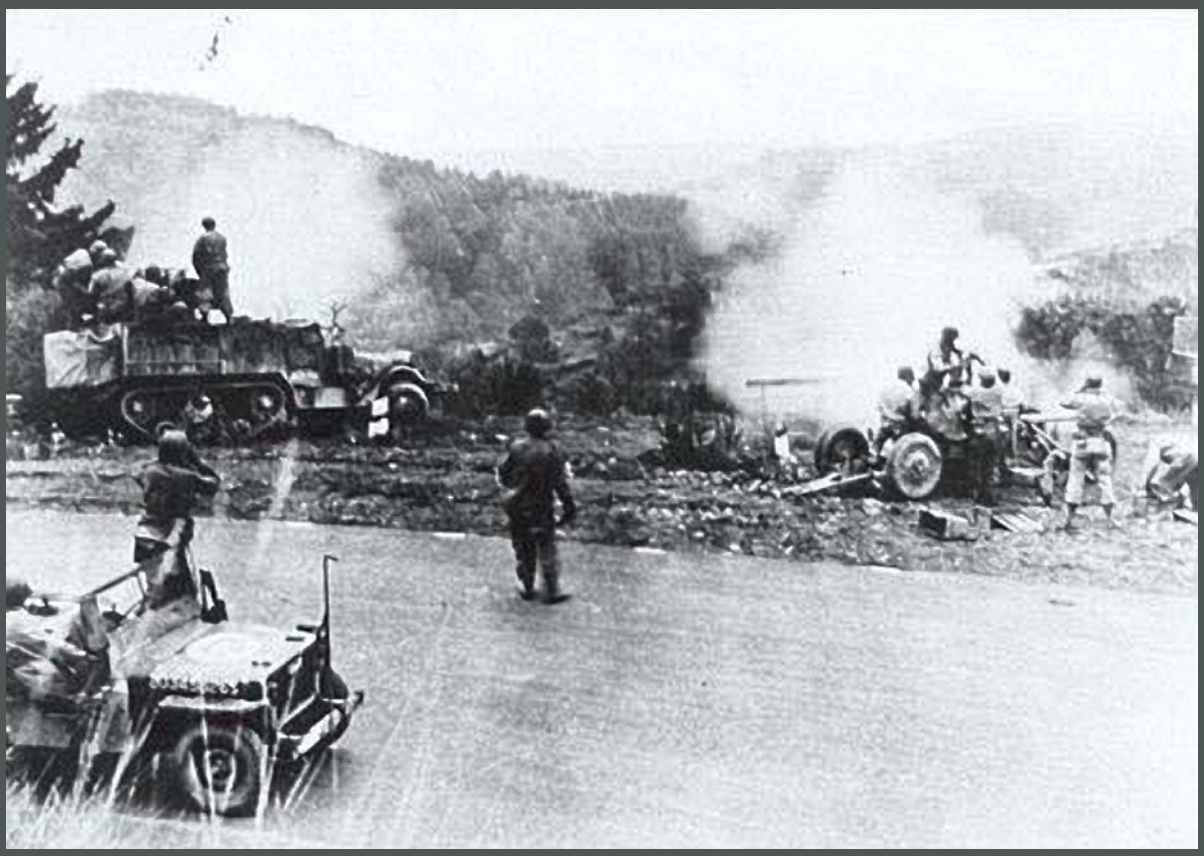
ordered a battalion to move up the northeastern ridge along a firebreak hoping to make good progress. German shelling killed about fifty men in the lead company on this firebreak near a section called the five points. They knocked out the battalion communications and even killed the battalion commander. In desperation, Lanham tried to send in a platoon of light tanks to help his besieged troops but two of the tanks hit mines and blocked the trail. By the next day, the regiment had started to despair. Technician 5th Grade George Morgan irately told a correspondent who had decided to accompany the regiment that "You can't get fields of fire. Artillery slashes the trees like a scythe, everything is tangled. You can barely walk. Everyone is cold and wet. When we attack again only a handful of old men will be left."

By the 19th, the 22nd Infantry had lost 300 men, including all three of Lanham's battalion commanders, several important staff officers, about half of the company commanders and several NCOs. Lanham's southern flank had become exposed and because of a gaping hole that had developed between them and the bruised 12th Infantry two miles away, his northern flank had become gravely weakened too. Desperate for supplies, Lanham attempted to repair the broken bridge over the Weisser Weh at the junction of the Road X and W, but for two days, the Germans shelled the engineers before the infantry, suspecting something afoul, flushed out the German artillery observer calling in the strikes and killed him.

That night the regiment advanced another hundred yards but more became difficult as the Americans found their hands full hunting down German infiltrators and protecting the exposed flanks. Equally bad, only a trickle of supplies were getting through to the frontline, but the engineers fixed this by finally building a new bridge in sections over the creek on the night of the 20th. By this time, the division had at the most advanced only a mile and a half, but the cost had been great. Several rifle companies were down to fifty men. The worst affected was reserve battalion holding the south flank which had been reduced to the size of the company. Total casualties for the division at this amounted to 1,500 with several hundred others evacuated with respiratory diseases. Obviously the men needed a respite.

Lanham took the matter up with Barton who decided to give his troops a two day pause. Hodges ordered the 8th Division to finish occupying the positions of the evacuating 28th Division, hoping that the influx of this fresh division would take away some of the pressure facing the 4th Division. ➤

ALL-AMERICAN GIs of all colors and creeds pose near the front. The two men at the left of the picture are armed with Garand M1 semi-automatic rifles. The man in the center has an M3 "Grease Gun" and the man on the right hefts a .30-cal Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). US ARMY



VOSSENACK BALD PLATEAU The 8th Division assumed the responsibility for holding Vossenack after the departure of the 28th Division. Here, heavy anti-aircraft units, including a 40 mm Bofors fire at enemy positions on the Brandenberg-Bergstein Ridge. US ARMY

9

REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE

The 8th Division was a veteran formation, having seen heavy combat in Normandy and then Brittany. The division itself could trace its history to the 19th century and commanding it was General Donald Stroh, a veteran officer who had seen much combat in North Africa and Italy. But Stroh had suffered a personal blow earlier in the war. During the siege of Brest, he had seen his son, an air corps Thunderbolt pilot, shot down and killed. The incident had arguably left his *espirit d'corps* waning.

In the meantime, troops from the division had already started to enter the forest on the 16th, led by its reconnaissance troops and the men of the 13th Infantry. On the 19th, the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 2nd Rangers Battalion followed. The units had barely settled in when orders came from V Corps. General Gerow, still intent on interfering with divisional operations, specified orders for Colonel John R. Jeter's 121st Infantry. The orders called for the regiment to capture the Hürtgen-Kleinhau Ridge — considered by the Germans as the key to the defense of Duren. Stroh took these orders somberly. He saw no real problem with them, although he recognized the difficulty of the terrain. The real problem was that the 121st Infantry was still in Luxembourg, 107 miles away. The regiment would not arrive at its appointing position until three hours before H Hour on November 21. There would be hardly any time for its troops to familiarize themselves with the terrain.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the lines, the Germans had fortified the area and had committed into the sector, *Kampfgruppe Wegelein* (now renamed *Weinen* and with an effective strength of only 400 men), along with elements from the 985th and the 1056th Grenadier Regiments. Furthermore, the German 344th Division had started to replace the weary 275th.

Back at the 8th Divisional headquarters in Rott, staff officers studied their plans. The

121st Infantry had orders to seize the wooded terrain west of Hürtgen town before attacking and overrunning the town itself. The nearby village of Kleinhau was to fall next. Following that, the regiment was to clear the roads leading to and exiting Hürtgen town from mines and obstacles to allow Sherman tanks from Combat Command R (belonging to the 5th Armored Division) to use them.

Since Jeter's advance was expected to be heavily contested, he was given the 12th Combat Engineer Battalion — swelling the regiment to over four thousand strong. In addition, almost all of the 8th Divisional artillery was to support the 121st's drive. Other organic and inorganic attachments to the regiment included A Company of the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and B and C Companies of the 86th Chemical Mortar Battalion. The fortifying of a single infantry regiment with such massive forces had been an unprecedented step in the campaign thus far, but it was a measure that would be amply justified in the weeks to come.

When morning came on November 21, Jeter deployed his three battalions in a line abreast formation and told his men that they had nowhere to go but forward. When the jump-off time came at 9 a.m., after the usually preliminary artillery bombardment, the regiment advanced and ran into opposition almost immediately. GI's advancing through the muddy undergrowth, leapt for cover as German artillery shells began smacking into the towering firs. Trees began falling, showering sharp, lethal tree burst splinters down on the men. In their scramble for safety, other Americans touched off mines. Casualties began to mount, and the advance slowed to a crawl. No unit made any gains that day except for Lt-Colonel Roy Hogan's 3rd Battalion on the right flank which reached its objectives before nightfall. Within this battalion Staff Sergeant John W. Minick, won the 8th Division's third Medal of Honor of the war.

A swarthy, moon-faced man, aged 36 – a virtual grandfather to the teenagers of his unit — Minick stood 5'8" and grew a straggly moustache

GRIZZLED VETERAN Private First Class Thomas W. Kilgore of the 121st Infantry shows the dim, glazed-eyed appearance of bloodied men from the front. Kilgore, from Macon, Georgia, was a member of D Company when this photo was taken on December 12. Interestingly, another photo of Kilgore, carrying a bazooka over his shoulders like a crucifix created a sensation in the United States. Dubbed "Man of the Year," his photo was used for the Victory Bonds Drive. His unexpected distant fame reached across the border. A Canadian woman wrote to him saying that she and her two children would pray for him that Christmas "because you look so tired and weary." NATIONAL ARCHIVES

on a worried face. He hardly fit the model of a hero. In fact he had cried during his first battle when faced with the possibility of dying and of killing another human. Still, over the dry reservations of his company, he had gone on to win a Distinguished Service Cross in France.

On the morning of the 21st, as the 3rd Battalion became blocked by the large *Wilde Sau* (Wild Boar) minefield, forcing it to languish in the open at the smoldering end of heavy artillery and mortar fire, Minick volunteered to lead a party of four men to clear a path through the mines.

Combat engineers had been requested but still had not arrived and his CO acquiesced. Taking his squad, Minick crawled for 300 yards through barbed-wire and debris only to be spotted by a German MG42 post. Signaling his men to take cover, the sergeant flanked the MG42 and closed in on the enemy post. Opening fire, he killed two Germans and took three others prisoner. Moving forward again, he came upon an entire company of Germans. It took a brave man to take on even a squad, but Minick single-handedly killed twenty of the enemy and captured another twenty. Rallied by his actions, the rest of his platoon overran the surviving members of the German company.

Moving forward, again, and inadvertently spearheading the battalion's advance, Minick once again drew machine-gun fire. Another man, Sergeant Hays would hear him shouting to the Germans: "Come on, come on out and fight." After blazing away with his Thompson, Minick crawled forward again, destroying the machine-gun post and its crew with grenades. But there still another minefield to be crossed and it proved one too many. Advancing alone, and in the face of intense German fire, Minick stepped on a land mine and was killed.

Notwithstanding the sacrifices of its men, by day three of the assault, the regiment's morale had been completely lost. Although men in the forward positions could clearly see the Hürtgen town, they could do little to seize it. Once again, the old evils of the campaign started to resurface: Besieged by enemy artillery one company lost its nerve and could no longer be counted on; men became routinely lost in the tangle of forest and unit cohesion became something only possible in the textbooks. Casualties started to mount for seemingly insignificant gains. Furious at the events overtaking his command, Jeter sacked the company and the battalion commander but on the next day, the new company commander was killed during a German barrage. Frustrated at the ill luck besetting his regiment, Jeter sacked another two company commanders and a second battalion commander. These measures did little to alter the situation.

The 1st Battalion in the center made only slight advances while the 2nd Battalion was brought to a complete standstill by the enemy.

UP-ARMORED SHERMAN This was a M4A3(76) W HVSS "Easy Eight," the many alpha-numerial combinations indicating that it was armed with the new 76mm cannon, better armor and improved cross-country flotation. Still, this improved Sherman could only punch through a Panther's frontal armor at ranges of 100 yards or less. US ARMY

Pinned down in the open and pummeled by artillery, the Americans took punishing losses. Three times, the regiment attempted to renew its advance on November 23, and three times it was thwarted. The Americans decided to use armor. Since medium tanks could not operate in the muddy terrain, Stuart light tanks from the 709th Tank Battalion were brought up. But the lightly-armored Stuarts were easy prey for German anti-tank teams. A stalemate set in.

For a week, the Americans had stayed in their exposed positions, suffering from enemy fire and psychological trauma. Infuriated with the pathetic progress of the 121st Regiment, Stroh finally sacked Jeter, replacing him with one of his staff officers, Colonel Thomas Cross. Then on November 24, the regiment went on the attack again.

As before, progress was extremely slow. In an effort to get the initiative, Stroh threw in the

whole of the 709th Tank Battalion — but to no avail. By nightfall, the 121st Infantry had recorded its 600th casualty. This settled matters. In a conference at First Army headquarters, Hodges decided that it was time that armor went in on a massive scale.

German reinforcements were pouring into the area and the Americans badly needed the firepower of Colonel Anderson's Combat Command R. Stroh ordered Anderson to move up his force up the Germeter-Hürtgen highway on the morning of November 25 and assault the town at 7:30 a.m.

Anderson, a veteran tanker knew the difficulty of his mission almost at once. For one, the road was exposed and had not been secured. Even though a company from the 121st Infantry had reached the woods flanking the road, the enemy held large tracts of the forest which itself held perfect sites for anti-tank guns or infantry armed with Panzerschrecks and Panzerfausts (a throw-away German anti-tank rocket). Then there was another problem. A relic of the allied bombing of Hürtgen town — a large crater now divided the road near the southern edge of the town. This would have to be bridged before the tanks could proceed.

That night, as Anderson contemplated his orders, a heavy rain fell which would turn to sleet by morning. Cross-country in this madness was far from capable.

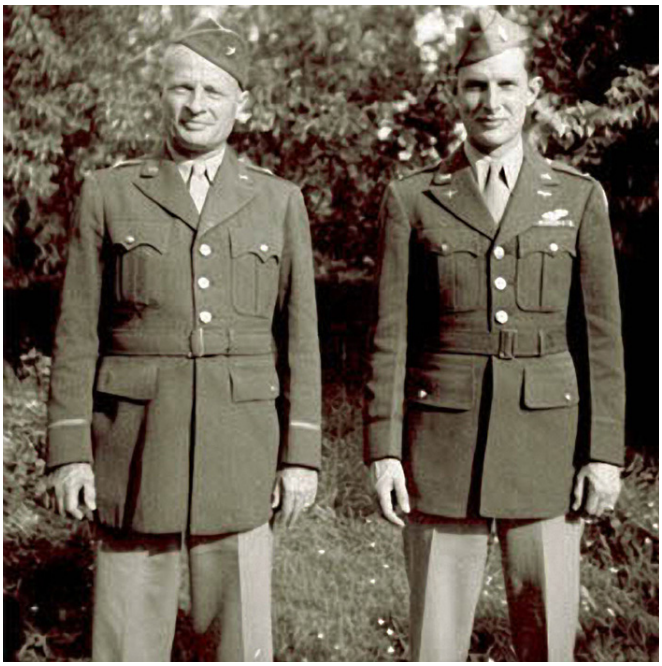
Yet all that night, the engineers and the 121st Infantry did their best to secure the road and sweep for mines. At 1:55, intelligence officers within the 8th Division received word that the road was ready to go. Although the bomb crater had not been bridged, the 8th Divisional engineer chief personally assured Anderson that it would be taken care of before CCR reached the scene.

The Shermans began to roll. Accompanied by four companies of infantry from the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion to deal with anti-tank screens and enemy infantry, the tanks of the 10th Battalion reached the crater just as dawn broke. It had not been bridged.

The commander of the lead tank, First Lt. Jack A. McAuley decided to jump the rift. Gathering speed, his Sherman bound up the muddy road and flew off a make-shift ramp. The heavy tank sailed through the air but its momentum was hardly enough. Hitting the crater's far wall with a terrific clatter, the Sherman rolled on to its side and lay there like a motionless beast of prey.

The din of American activity on the road had kept the Germans on edge all night. Now

CLOSE COMBAT Heavy fighting at Hürtgen Town. US ARMY



FATHER AND SON Maj-General Stroh with his son, Captain Harry Stroh, who was killed as a Thunderbolt pilot on 27 August 1944. Harry had been flying close support for his father's division on that day. COURTESY ROBERT STUMPF JR, IMOGENE STROH STUMPF

WINDBLOWN TROOPS Americans entered Hürtgen town in frigid weather. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

as the sky lightened, they had been alarmed to hear the loud clang of McAuley's tank hitting the road. Forward patrols reported that the Americans were massing for an attack. Certain that the Americans were about to break through, the Germans bombarded the road with mortar fire. From the woods surrounding the road — which had been reportedly cleared by the 121st Infantry, small-arms firing broke out — causing heavy casualties to the 47th Armored Infantry. One company suffered 60 losses in less than an hour. By now, the 12th Engineers had appeared with urgent orders to fill in the crater and get the advance moving again. The chief engineer was hit, prompting Captain Frank M. Pool from the 10th Tank Battalion to take over his job. Hit by machine-gun fire as he stood on his tank directing operations, Pool refused to be evacuated. He disembarked from his mount to direct operations from the ground, only to be wounded again.

Back in the disabled tank, McAuley and his crew stirred. Seeing the situation, they manned their guns as best could in order to cover the engineers. Another Sherman trundled up a small bridge set up by the engineers and approached McAuley's tank to give them more firepower. Instead they hit a mine and lost a track. A third Sherman under Staff Sergeant Lawrence Summerfield tried its luck and edging past its two immobilized companions on the road, rounded a corner and came into the direct sight of an anti-tank gun. The Germans got off the first but missed. The Americans did not. Summerfield's luck lasted five more minutes, then his Sherman was knocked out by a second anti-tank gun. By two o' clock as the pelting rain continued, 47th Armored Infantry's B Company had only 85 men out of the original 225. Other attempts to keep the advance moving met with disaster and CCR finally pulled out; effectively ending their part in the battle for Hürtgen town. ➢

10

LITTLE RESPITE

As the bloody combat was scarring the 8th Division on their right, the 4th Division had resumed their attack on November 22. The opening blow was not direct assault but a ruse. Each regiment sent a decoy battalion to the east while another battalion made the real attack using a flanking maneuver. These tactics were a tremendous success. On the north wing, the 8th Infantry advanced through a thousand yards to finally take Gut Schwarzenbroich before the weight of German fire stopped them. The regiment's reserve battalion had also managed to capture an important forest junction which had roads leading to Duren and Grosshau.

While all this was going on, the decoy battalion from Lanham's 22nd Infantry swept through at least a mile of enemy territory without encountering a single German. By nightfall they had dug-in 700 yards from Grosshau. By the 25th, when the Anderson's CCR had attempted to break into Hürtgen town, the 22nd Infantry was still holding its positions. Hoping the profit from the confusion of Anderson's attack in the south, Lanham's men attacked Grosshau. Initially the gains were good and the 3rd Battalion managed to close to within 800 yards of the town before their fortunes took a downturn. Their armored support was late and when the tankers did show, four Shermans and two tank destroyers were knocked out by enemy anti-tank guns and StuGs.

This attempt finished off the strength of Lanham's command. His companies had lost so heavily by this point that General Barton was forced to usher in another three day's pause from operations. As this undeclared truce went into effect the Germans, on November 27, took the opportunity to relieve the 344th Division, spent and nearly bled white in just eight days of operations. Their replacement was the 353rd Division, now reclassified as a Völksgrenadier formation. This new classification was a popular if ineffective attempt by Hitler to tie in the population's sympathies with the plight of the army. "Völksgrenadier" literally translated to "People's grenadiers." But this measure achieved little except to change the labels on tired, worn out formations.

Scattered clashes still took place, mostly as American patrols brushed against the defenses. One such patrol on the night of November 26/27 involved a platoon led by Lt. Murray which triggered machine gun fire from Grosshau. Bullets smacked all around the hapless platoon and only Murray managed to get back to the safety of the trees. B Company's 3rd Platoon attempted to give them covering fire but started to draw fire themselves. In the meantime, another platoon, the 2nd, used this opportunity to try and work around the defenders sheltering in a part of the woods. Instead they encountered a machine gun and were pinned down.

One of the soldiers, Private Marcario Garcia, a Mexican immigrant, finally had enough. Moving on alone, he wiped out machine-gun nest with grenades but had barely returned when another machine gun opened up.

"Goddam," he cried and got up again, "I killed three Germans and knocked out the machine gun." Although wounded he went back into the woods and stormed the enemy position,

HAGGARD CAPTIVE This prisoner from the 272nd Division shows that the Germans were no more immune to the terrible battlefield conditions than the Americans. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

killing three Germans and taking four prisoner.

As he emerged from the woods with his prize, he declared to the rest of the platoon, "That's all of the bastards here."

By when the news of this feat reached Lanham's headquarters, Garcia had already been evacuated and no one knew his first name. Lanham was adamant that they find the man. "That soldier is going to get the best medal I can give him," he said. Garcia later received the Medal of Honor.

LT. PAUL BOESCH from his pre-war wrestling days.
RING MEMORABILIA

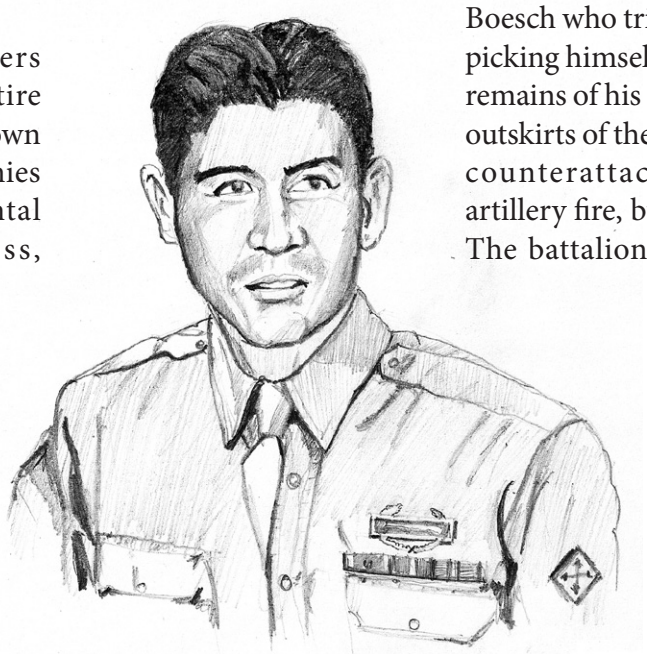
Meantime, in the 121st Infantry sector of the woods, Lt. Paul Boesch, a burly, ex-professional wrestler of some fame was given command of G Company which had just thirty men. Boesch's elation at this new command was short-lived. He was told almost immediately afterwards that his company, in concert with another (F, under Captain Cliet) were to advance south and capture Hürtgen town.

Boesch took his orders with silent disbelief. If the entire regiment had failed to take the town how could two meager companies be expected to? The regimental commander, Colonel Cross, calmly informed Boesch that Hürtgen was probably clear of enemy troops by now and all it probably had were only snipers. Boesch and Cliet, un-swayed by this argument, prepared to execute their orders. But Cross had been right to a degree. An intelligence report had indeed arrived that the Germans had probably pulled out of the town, but this was of little immediate consolation to the two company leaders who looked warily at the gaunt, broken town.

Supported only by a preliminarily artillery barrage, the two companies went forward. At first, to everyone's relief, there was no firing, but soon enough the startling acerbic sound of an MG42 broke the still night air. The men hit the dirt but goaded by Boesch shouting at them "like a man possessed," they shuffled to their feet and ran towards the town.

One of the junior lieutenant sat in a shell hole cowering. Boesch saw him. "Come on boy," he shouted. "Let's get the hell into that town before we are shot to pieces."

"Just a minute," the junior lieutenant muttered but then remained rooted to his place. Boesch left him and sprinted with the rest of the men for the town. One man beside him was shot and fell on Boesch who tripped and also fell. Quickly picking himself up, Boesch hurried to the remains of his company digging in on the outskirts of the town. When the Germans counterattacked, Boesch called in artillery fire, but the firing quickly faded. The battalion commander, Lt-Colonel Henry B. Kunzig came on the radio. "Boesch," Kunzig said severely, trying to explain why he had halted the artillery, "Don't knock down those houses too badly or we won't have any place to put the CP." Boesch stared at his



MARCARIO GARCIA Private Garcia was not even an American citizen when he won the Medal of Honor. A month after President Truman personally tied the award around his neck, he was denied service at a restaurant in his adopted town of Sugarland, Texas for being a Mexican. In fact the sign outside had said "No Dogs, No Mexicans." The waitress had hurled racial epithets at Garcia who was outraged at this treatment after risking his life overseas. Arrested for assault, his case went on for a year until an acquittal.

handset with amazement. He shifted heavily on the snow-covered ground and felt like crying.

On the morning of the 29th, to coincide with V Corps' offensive on nearby Kleinhau, Lanham received orders to take Grosshau "regardless of cost." There was to be an immediate assault. The event that had spurred this ultimatum had been the capture of Hürtgen town the day before.

On the 28th, outside Hürtgen, Boesch and his men had been still clinging to their positions when a runner had come up to tell Boesch that an American colonel had showed up, demanding to speak with him. Boesch was amazed, wondering how a colonel intended to talk to him with all the firing going on. He carefully made his way to the man, Colonel Phillip D. Ginder¶ who tersely informed him to withdraw his company. "I'm in charge of a task force attacking this town," Ginder told him. "Get back with your men. Keep them moving and don't stop. We're going to take this town."

Boesch had again stared in a daze but he had nodded mutely and sprinted back to his positions. He recognized that the balance was rapidly tipping towards the American camp. Already that morning, other US forces from the 13th Infantry with the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion in support had managed to seize the Kleinhau-Brandenberg road, an important strategic objective. Hürtgen town had now been cut-off from enemy supplies and reinforcements. But the cut-off enemy troops, bolstered by the 31st Machine Gun Battalion and other small forces, intended to fight till the end.

The 2nd battalion of the 121st Infantry with the C Company of the 13th Infantry launched an attack from the northeast. By this point Hürtgen town was little more a collection of two-stored houses, their roofs and walls blown away by artillery and aerial bombardment. The 1st Battalion of the 121st in the meantime closed in from southwest. Riding into the town on the tanks of the 709th Tank Battalion "Russian-style," the US infantry were sucked into bitter street-fighting. By late-afternoon, German resistance had been broken. Three hundred and fifty Germans were captured. They were the lucky ones. Many more had died in the fighting. The scars of deadly battle were present everywhere. Debris floated in waterlogged roads chocked with American and German dead. One historian would late write that the place "smelt of death." At 6 p.m., Cross announced to his superiors that the town was theirs.

With this symbolic victory General Stroh wasted little time in remaining at the front. Still suffering from the memories of his son's death, he was finally granted a leave of absence and returned to his bereaved family (he would later return to Europe to command the 106th Division in 1945). His place was taken by the craggy-faced Brig-General William G. Weaver, a former deputy commander of the 90th Division. Weaver's first move was to re-order Anderson's CCR into Hürtgen. CCR moved quickly through the wrecked town, passing the scene of their earlier fighting. They had orders to prepare for an assault on Kleinhau and nearby Pt.401 at daylight on the following morning, the 29th. ➢

THE FACES OF WAR Three war-weary veterans of the 8th Infantry rest on November 18. They are, from left: Private Maurice Berzon, Sergeant Bernard Spurr and Sergeant Harold Glessler. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

¶ Ginder, a rambunctious type, was widely disliked by his peers who thought him pedantic, incompetent and completely ignorant about "infantry organization or combat." (McManus p. 98)

11

VICTORY ALONG THE HÜRTGEN ROAD

The 29th, a Wednesday, would prove a landmark day for both the 4th and the 8th Divisions. Grosshau and Kleinhau, the last two of the three critical towns on the Hürtgen highway would finally fall.

Unwilling to risk another direct assault, Lanham sent one battalion through the woods to interdict the Grosshau-Düren road and occupy the heights north of the town. As the 8th Division moved on Kleinhau and started to encounter more fire from Grosshau, Lanham finally received orders to stop his diversionary move and mount a direct assault. Fearing for the safety of his men, Lanham sent in tanks and tank destroyers as support. At the tip of the attack was C Company.

To observe the attack, Lanham with his staff and the Life correspondent William Walton, stood at the edge of the woods and peered out at the streams of men sprinting for the gray, broken houses on the outer edge of the village. A group of American fighter bombers appeared, in the words of Walton, "tobogganing out of the western sky... Each cracking explosion fountained smoke and debris into the still air. In foxholes scooped from the rotting pine needles the foot soldiers watched approvingly."

The advance started up again only to draw heavy fire. Several tanks were knocked out and the infantry was pinned. Using covering fire and fast sprints, some of the American infantry spanned the open spaces to the town. Heavy street-fighting broke out. A small group of US soldiers entrenched

ANOTHER BROKEN TOWN The men of the 121st Infantry trudge wearily into Kleinhau. Their prize? A motley collection of shattered homes and stores straddling the single main road that bisected the small village. Artillery fire from both sides had reduced all three towns on the Hürtgen highway (Grosshau, Hürtgen town and Kleinhau) into rubble. US ARMY

themselves on the outskirts, and struggled to hold. The Germans counterattacked twice, nearly overrunning Lanham's forward command post. Cooks, signalers, headquarter clerks and other rear-area personnel were forced to take up arms and hold the regimental line. At this stage, in what is a controversial subject, Hemingway entered the fighting. With his Thompson automatic, he joined the rest of the rear-area personnel in fighting off the Germans. As Lanham himself stated after the war: "A brisk firefight was going on. Men were firing and advancing and dropping and firing…And then I saw ER [Hemingway] who had not yet reached our CP. He was standing bolt upright watching the fight with intense interest. He [started to] move with the wave but I never saw him hit the ground, and at this time there was no question at all that he was armed and using those arms."

Hemingway would move his experiences to *Across the River*, writing that "it was a place where it was extremely difficult for a man to stay alive even if all he did was be there. And we were attacking

MUDDY WINTER As the roads within the forest turned into a coagulated sea of heavy mud, traversing these treacherous paths became an ordeal, especially for tracked vehicles which often lost their treads as has happened to the Sherman on the right.
US ARMY, BOTH PHOTOS

all the time and every day." After the war, Hemingway claimed that he had killed 26 Germans in eight months of travelling the frontlines of Europe.

"I was in the back of the pillbox," he would say of one jarring encounter in the Hürtgen, "And I shot the one in back of us across the road about 15 yards. I had to shoot at him three times before he stopped. He was lying in the middle of the road and when the [tank] came up he sort of scrounged up and it went over him and flattened him out."

Days before, he had killed another German who had turned out to be a seventeen-year old conscript on a bicycle. The boy, he said, had been shot sideways through the kidneys and had died a slow death. Ashamed, Hemingway had laid out the boy as best he could and gave him a shot of morphine. But the boy would haunt him for years afterwards and arguably affected his post-war psyche. For all of the grotesqueness that he found, Hemingway was nevertheless proud of his unofficial war record. He would later inflate his tally to 122 kills. But as his friend, William Walton said about the matter: "He was a storyteller. He didn't know when the truth and fiction stopped."

By nightfall, Lanham's flanking battalion had finally cut the highway and the German route of escape. When a fortuitous column of tanks joined them, they erected an unmovable dangerous roadblock. Back in the village, street-fighting continued but the Germans resistance collapsed. More than 100 enemy soldiers surrendered. Two hundred and fifty Americans, meantime, had died.

The Chaplain of the regiment, William Boyce, wrote after that war that "hundreds of men had lost their lives for a patch of woods and the heap of rubble that was Grosshau. Perhaps in the final analysis, the sacrifice demanded in the Hürtgen will be deemed worthwhile —but we didn't know about that. We were just the men who fought the battles, who hugged the earth as our hearts dropped within us when the shells came screaming by, who lay in the slime and the mud night after night, who froze our feet, who did not come out of our foxholes long enough to eat Thanksgiving dinner, for life was more precious than food. A part of us died in the forest and there is part of our mind, heart and soul left there. We will never forget. We are incapable of forgetting."

SUPPORTING FIRE Shermans based at the edge of the treeline near the Hürtgen Highway, bombard enemy positions. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

But the sacrifices of that day were not merely limited to the 22nd Infantry. Just a mile to the south, the 8th Division had fought a terrific battle for Kleinhau.

At 7:30 that the morning, a task force from Anderson's CCR composed of two companies each of Shermans and armored infantry under Lt-Colonel William Hamberg (the CO of the 10th Tank Battalion) moved forward. Initially the advance had been led by the armored infantry walking at the point on foot but when German fire started to inflict casualties, Hamberg threw in the weight of his tanks.

Intelligence had warned that the Germans had probably mined the village approaches but if this was the case, the Germans had failed to plant the mines properly and the Shermans, led at the fore by Captain Francis J. Baum, had penetrated the outer enemy perimeter and secured the center of narrow, one-street village at 9 a.m. Almost immediately, a lone Panzer IV appeared and knocked out one Sherman before it was destroyed, in turn. Mopping up began and by mid-afternoon, Kleinhau had been captured. Fifty-five prisoners

VANTAGE POINT The tactically important town of Bergstein as it appears today from Hill 400.
PRIVATE COLLECTION

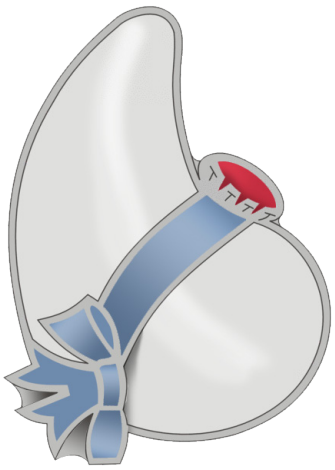
were taken. Later in the afternoon, Task Force Hamberg pushed on to Hill 401.3 and established roadblocks there. The cost for all this had not come cheap. Eight tanks had been destroyed (two to anti-tank weapons and six to mines), 13 half-tracks had been hit, although most of them were recovered and one tank destroyer had been knocked-out. Sixty Americans had died.

Later, after Grosshau had been secured, Hemingway pushed into it before moving on to Kleinhau where he witnessing the terrible carnage of war for the last time in the campaign. At Kleinhau, he saw a dead GI squashed by a tank, a dog eating a burnt body and a cat feasting on the same body later. The enter ordeal of the Hürtgen-Kleinhau-Grosshau battles would again enter *Across the River and into the Trees*, spoken by his protagonist, the aging colonel:

> *"…There were soldiers, so most of them got killed in those woods and when we took the three towns that looked so innocent and were really fortresses. I can remember just how he felt, lifting him, and how he had been flattened and the strangeness of his flatness….We had put an awful lot of white phosphorus on the town before we [had] got in for good or whatever you would call it. This was the first time I ever saw a German dog eating a roasted German kraut. Later on I saw a cat working on him too. It was a hungry cat, quite nice looking, basically. You wouldn't think a good German cat would eat a good German soldier…"*

Lanham, in the interim, had been stunned by the heavy loss of life suffered by his men. In a mere two weeks of action,his regiment had lost 2,774 soldiers – 84 percent of its pre-battle strength. The 4th Division in total had lost 4,053 men and would be withdrawn to Luxembourg to refit on December 3.

Among the other troops trying to take Hürtgen and Kleinhau, meantime, the nine-day engagement had cost the 121st Infantry, CCR and the 13th Infantry a total of 1,247 casualties. German casualties were probably about the same with another 882 men captured. ➤



121st INFANTRY BADGE The history of this regiment dates back to the Confederate Army

12

A BLOODY SLOG IN THE NORTH

Unwilling to loose momentum, Hodges, on November 28, ordered V Corps to continue its advance and take the Brandenberg-Bergstein ridge. The capture of the Hürtgen-Kleinhau ridge had already given the Americans control of the road network to Düren. The plan allowed for a few days of preparation before it was executed, but in the meantime, the fighting continued as before. During the nights following the Grosshau-Kleinhau battles, the Germans launched several hit-and-run raids on the US positions. The Americans held on, waiting until daylight before rooting out enemy stalwarts from their last hideouts in the town and the adjoining woods.

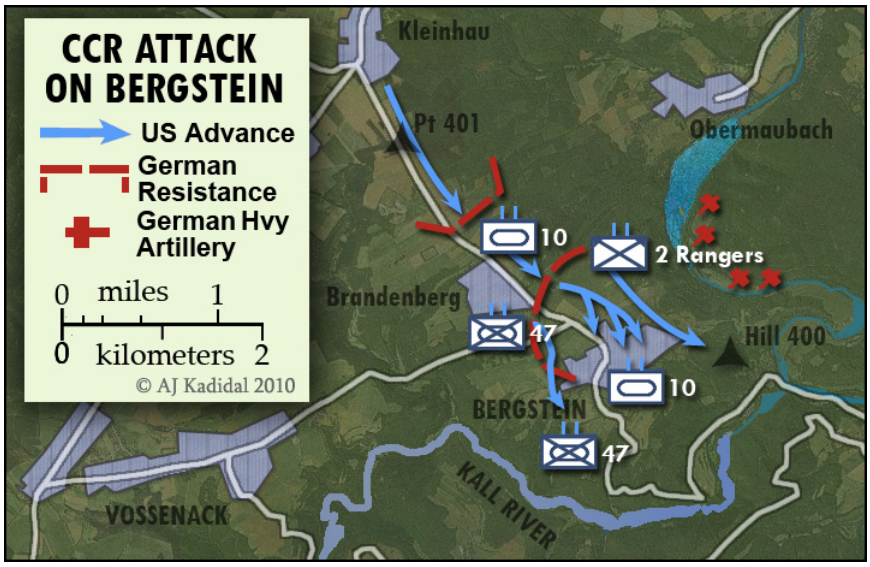
Finally, on November 30, divisional headquarters sent out Field Order No. 19 calling for the 121st Infantry with the 1st Battalion of the 13th Infantry to capture Pt. 401 northeast of Kleinhau while elements of the newly-arrived 28th Infantry probed towards Brandenberg from Hürtgen town. Anderson's command was to remain in Kleinhau, ready to exploit any developments at Brandenberg.

Attacking as ordered at 7:30 a.m. on December 1, the men of the 121st and the 13th Regiments party gained their objectives but came under heavy defilading fire from enemy pillboxes on the approach to Pt.401. Elsewhere, the 28th Infantry was making some progress towards Brandenberg despite heavy opposition.

On the following day, just before dawn, a fierce German counterattack materialized against recently-captured Grosshau. Still occupied by the 4th Division and the 5th Armored's Combat Command A, the town nearly fell and forced the the entire 8th Division into the defensive. Units at the front or those earmarked for mobile exploitation were suddenly moved to the rear to protect important areas. For instance, CCR, while on the move to Brandenberg, suddenly lost its 46th Armored Infantry Battalion which was withdrawn to Hürtgen town to defend it from possible enemy attack. The same was the case with 121st Infantry's B Company.

The Germans, mostly from the 1st Battalion of the 963rd Grenadiers had infiltrated between the lines manned by the 2nd and 3rd companies of the 22nd Infantry, punching a cavity 500 yards deep into American lines. US tank support, summoned from the rear to force them out initially did not know where the enemy was and some of the leading elements blundered into enemy troops without having realized it. One Sherman was immediately knocked out by an anti-tank rocket and stood burning while another was immobilized with gray smoking curling out of its hatches. Eventually, the Americans rallied and drove out the Germans by 2 o' clock that afternoon. By now, the 8th Division was strung out all over the forest, holding a curved line fourteen miles long. All its reserves were concentrated at one bag — at Hürtgen town. The generals decided to bring in the elite 2nd Rangers Battalion by trucks, to be committed in case of an emergency. The 117th Combat Engineers Battalion was also dispatched. This foresight would be rewarded days later.

On the morning of December 2, as the German counterattack petered out against Grosshau, the tanks of Task Force Hamberg moved against Brandenberg. Halfway through, the force



blundered into a minefield and lost three Shermans. Shelling from a small anti-tank screen destroyed a fourth. When the armored infantry dismounted to clear out the screen, they started to come under heavy small-arms firing. The Task Force was forced to take cover. That night, the engineers would unearth 250 mines from the road and the surrounding field.

The following morning, after an artillery barrage had "softened up" the area, and as P-47 Thunderbolts milled overhead for close support, Task Force Hamberg tried again. They steam-rolled into Brandenberg where they found the enemy defenses in disarray and captured over 300 prisoners.

But this important success was marred by the rare appearance of about sixty Luftwaffe Me109s which strafed and shot up vehicles in the sector and the front-line positions. The raiders even strafed V Corps headquarters at Eupen. At 2:30 that afternoon, Messerschmitts also appeared over the 10th Tank battalion. The tankers shot down two planes but the rest milled around German-held Bergstein, blasting it with gunfire and bombs. German troops captured there the next day vocally condemned the actions of their air force and in an official US report, were "plenty bitter about it." The attack had been a new experience for the Americans who had hardly seen the Luftwaffe since the spring. Anti-aircraft guns had gone into action and the Americans shot down nineteen planes in total with another ten claimed as probably destroyed. Even more importantly, despite the ferocity of the German raid, not a single American had been killed.

The next morning, Hamberg vacillated on his orders, afraid that he would need more replacements before he could take Bergstein and especially the formidable Burg-Berg, marked on

ADOLESCENT PRISONERS Two young German conscripts give themselves up. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

ROCKET ARTILLERY American forces often used local artillery to stop German counter-attacks. These are GMC trucks near Bergstein with two T27 eight-barrel rocket launchers. Despite its fearsome launch, the M8 rocket was inaccurate and the Americans eventually copied a German version. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

American maps as Point 400 or Castle Hill, a gigantic pimply promontory rising up almost directly east of Bergstein. Under his command, Hamberg had only eleven Shermans, five tank destroyers and 140 infantrymen left.

To his dismay, he was told that all units of the 8th Division had been committed in action (the 4th Division had started to withdraw that day) and that no reinforcements were forthcoming for a few days. Several divisional officers hoped to get the rest of CCR (which had been busy clearing up Vossenack) to Brandenberg as soon as possible. Combat fatigue and trench foot to the increasingly cold weather had also started to take its toll. The state of the nearest friendly unit, the 121st Infantry was particularly telling. One particular battalion staff officer had this to say of his unit:

667th STUG BRIGADE BADGE

"The men of this battalion are physically exhausted. The spirit and the will to fight are there; the physical ability to continue is gone. These men have been fighting without rest or sleep for four days and last night were forced to lie unprotected from the weather in an open field. In some instances men were forced to discard their overcoats because they lacked the strength to wear them. These men are shivering with cold and their hands are so numb that they have to help one another on with their equipment. I firmly believe that every man up there should be evacuated through medical channel."

The Germans were far from immune from the conditions themselves. One German officer would recall that "great losses were occasioned by numerous frostbites. In some cases, soldiers were found dead in their foxholes from sheer exhaustion."

With what little they had, Hamberg's men conducted a light probe a thousand yards east of Bergstein to test for a possible enemy reaction. They were hindered by fire coming from enemy pillboxes and by small amounts of white phosphorous artillery, which was (and still remains) one of the most devastating forms of conventional ammunition. White phosphorous, coming into contact with air will burn and will not stop burning. It can only be smothered. Water only inhibits the flames temporarily. The Americans were forced to withdraw.

As matters stood, Bergstein was a tactically important town. Held by about four hundred men from the 980th Grenadier Regiment and several anti-tank cannons, it covered the southern exits out of the forest. The only high points in the area were Pt.401 in the northwest which the 121st and the 13th Infantry had orders to take by December 5 and Pt.400 to the east which would become the site of another great human feat of arms.

Finally reunited with the rest of CCR and the 28th Infantry on the 5th, Hamberg and his men moved on Bergstein. But even with the bonding of CCR in its entirety, Anderson and Hamberg could only count on 22 Shermans and 200 infantrymen. Attempts to get USAAF air support were less than successful with the planes being constantly directed at the wrong town.**

The ground attack was heavily resisted but a ferocious drive by CCR forced the Germans south of the town. The Americans then blocked all the roads leading southeast and southwest with tanks and prepared to hold their positions for the night. Camping with the tankers were infantrymen from the 1st Battalion of the 121st on the left and the 3rd Battalion of the 28th Infantry on the right. Their deployment completed, the Americans then positioned artillery to guard the gaps between the 121st and CCR in Bergstein and the rest of the 28th Infantry still deployed near Vossenack ridge. They were just in time. Field Marshal Model, determined to recapture Bergstein sent out a dispatch promising a Knight's Cross and two weeks leave for any man who took part in the successful recapture of the town. The greatest fear was that the Americans would cross the Roer River in this sector and "jeopardize the execution of the Ardennes Offensive," which was being prepared with the greatest secrecy.

To this end, General Brandenberger of the 7th Army committed the remains of his 47th Völksgrenadier Division into the Bergstein sector on November 29 and added the only unit that still had

** An Air Controller in the 8th Division for one, repeatedly sent the planes in the wrong direction, much to the ire of Hamberg and a tank air controller who was with him.

any capacity to attack the Americans – two-thirds of the 272nd Völksgrenadier Division under Oberst (Colonel) George Kosmala, which had previously been holding a quiet sector of the front at Monschau. This division still possessed its Panzer-Jäger battalion and could field a dozen tank destroyers in the form of JagdPanzer IVs, StuG IIIs and Hetzers. They also had other StuGs in the form of Major Ludwig Knüppling's 667th StuG Brigade.

At 7:10 in the morning of the 6th, the 272nd Division attacked. Backed by five StuG assault guns and over three hundred men from the 1st, 2nd and 4th companies of Oberst Ewald Burian's 980th Grenadier Regiment, they crept in through the early morning fog and and nearly entered Bergstein before the Americans knew that they were there.

Moving towards the 28th Infantry's 3rd Battalion and CCR over open ground, the Germans were oblivious to the presence of two whole companies from the 28th Infantry — the riflemen of K Company and the machine-gunners of M Company, who had been deployed in front of them and at the sides. The Americans waited until the Germans were within 25 yards before opening fire. Droves fell, and the survivors, taking fire from all angles, panicked and began to retreat across ground covered by US artillery. The Americans took 35 prisoners. At least 150 had died. One of the StuG self-propelled guns lay smoldering on the moonscape.

Before midday, a second counterattack materialized. Survivors from the earlier attempt, reinforced by other companies from the 980th Regiment and supported with an armor reserve from a new battle group known as Kampfgruppe Türke†† tried to break into Bergstein. Most of the remaining armor within CCR at this time were Shermans with the obsolete 75mm gun and the tankers found most of their shells bouncing off the enemy armor. Still, heavy combat raged for the next twenty minutes and the Germans withdrew, leaving behind most of their armor. But before the Americans could congratulate themselves, another small group of infantry attacked from the northeast at 2 p.m. Again, a pitched battle broke out and the Germans were beaten back.

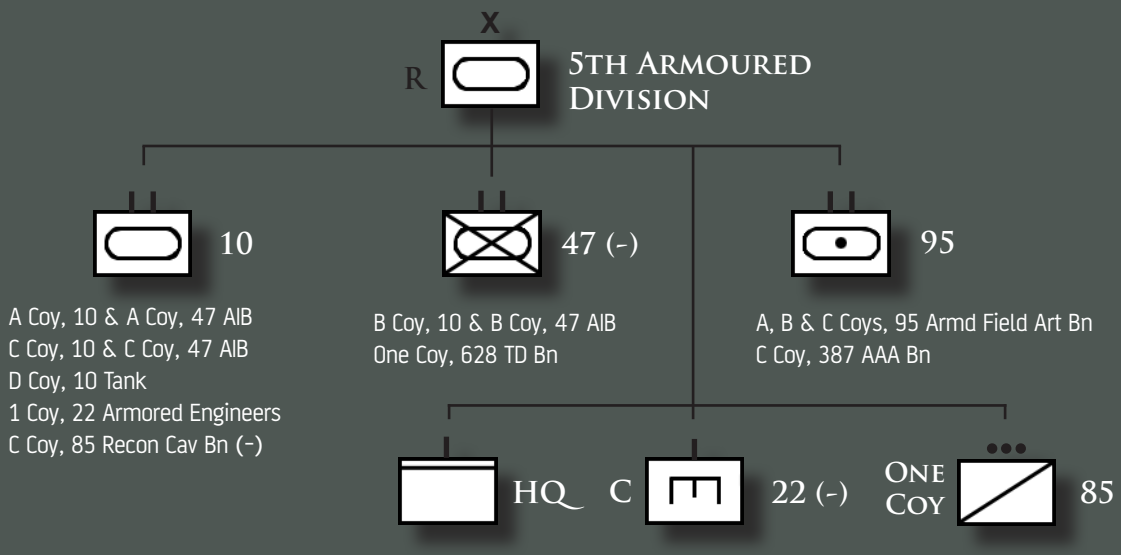
Their infantry assault broken, the Germans sited observers on the perfectly-positioned Hill 400, and took to shelling the town. Far from forcing the Americans out, the shelling prompted the US troops to press on and capture more of Bergstein and the surrounding area.

Weaver, the 8th Divisional commander, requested reinforcements. CCR had been carrying on at minimal strength and there were fears that it would soon cease to exist. By December 8, the unit had only seventy infantrymen out of the original 750, eight Shermans out of 58 and a single tank destroyer. Weaver remembered the 2nd Rangers who were present within his divisional area and asked for permission to use them to capture Hill 400. Considering the gravity of the situation, both Hodges and Gerow agreed. ➢

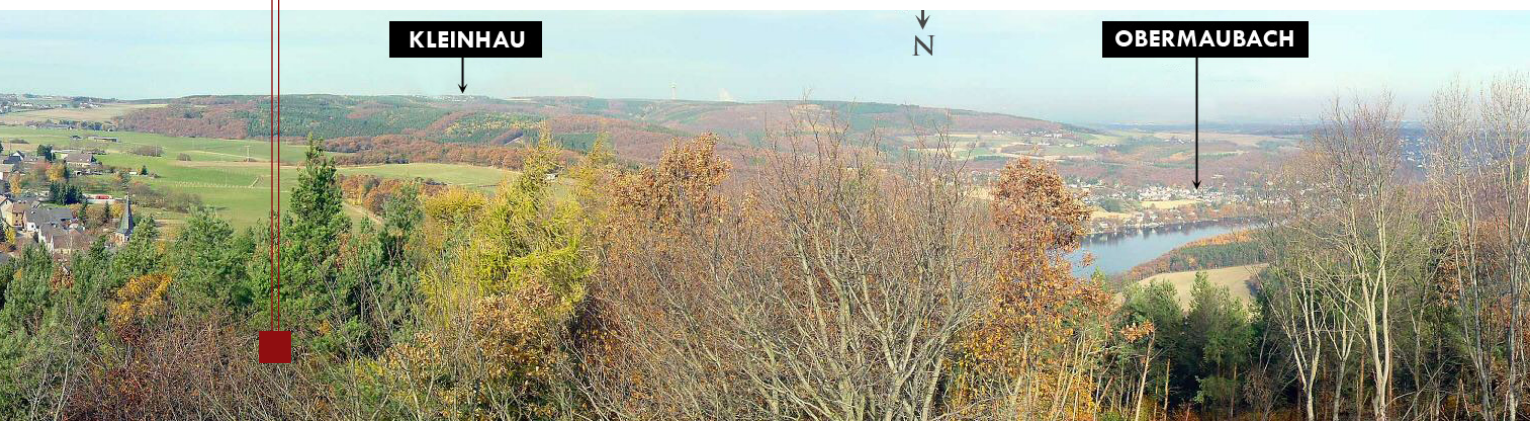
†† Commanded by the CO of the 29th Panzergrandier Regiment and composed of his first battalion, four StuGs from the 3rd Company of 103rd Panzer Battalion, six Panzjägers and three Pak anti-tank cannons from OberLt Moser's 3rd PzJäger Battalion.

VIEW FROM HILL 400

The organization of CCR



CASTLE HILL (Above) View of Hill 400 (or Castle Hill as it was known) from Bergstein. The Rangers occupied the base of the hill easily enough, but the fight to the summit would prove stiff. PRIVATE COLLECTION



13

THE RANGERS AND HILL 400

The introduction of the Hurtgen battlefield for the Rangers had not been easy. Relieving the scarred 112th Infantry at the pitted village of Vossenack on November 14, they had reeled at the sight of the carnage, the ruined houses, the bodies scattered like matchwood and the terrific hulks of burnt out armor and materiel that still dominated the barren landscape. One Ranger officer had been particularly struck by a dead American jeep driver outside the shattered Vossenack church, his lifeless hands now black under the constant cold, his face too, with "a bluish-black metallic cast. His steel helmet cocked quite at a rakish angle, his lips stretched tight in an awful grin. The teeth...very white."

GATHERING FOR THE ASSAULT Rangers await the order to go. Note that the wartime censor has blackened out their shoulder tabs. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Still for all of their disgust, the Rangers volunteered to stay on, pressed with a desire to enter a meaningful battle of some sort. To this end, they wound up staying for a record 33 days within the forest. Most considered their occupation of Vossenack as some sort of garrison duty and were eager for real action. Their last engagement had been at Brest two months before. When the word finally came that they were take the strategic height of Pt.400 or Castle Hill as it was often called, the Rangers were raring to go.

The unit, composed of six companies each with sixty-five men, had entered history with its famous scaling of the cliff walls at Point du Hoc. Many survivors of that atrocious assault were still in its ranks, including its commanding officer, Lt-Colonel James E. Rudder and his deputy, Major George S. Williams. Williams would actually lead the battalion into combat as Rudder was transferred to lead a regular line regiment‡‡ which had been bled white in the fighting.

The spirits of the men, typical for highly-trained troops sitting out the war in safe duties, were at exuberant levels. One man, Captain Morton McBride of D Company, excitedly told his men that they were going "Jerry hunting."

‡‡ This was actually the 109th Regiment of the 28th Division.

The officers of CCR were just as relieved to hear that the Rangers were coming. Finally, reinforcements were on their way. Three officers of the 47th Armored Infantry remembered the midnight of the 6th when the rendezvous happened. Lt. R.S. Lewis commanding the B Company spoke of seeing "a guy came down the road, then two others, each one five yards behind the other. They were three Ranger lieutenants. They asked for enemy positions and the road to take; said they were ready to go. We talked the situation over with the officers. They stepped out and said, 'Let's go men.' We heard Tommy guns click and without a word, the Rangers moved out. Our morale went up in a hurry."

Major William's orders were clear: strengthen the defense of Bergstein by erecting road-blocks on the three noses of the ridge, at the southwest, the south and the southeast of the village. Reinforced by two platoons of tank

destroyers from the 893rd Battalion, three Ranger companies were to create these roadblocks before dawn on the 7th. Another company was to provide covering fire, and the last two would capture the hill.

At 3.30 a.m. in the early, darkened morning hours of December 7, all six companies of the 2nd Rangers assembled at their jump-off points and fixed bayonets to assault the enemy positions at first light. Charging over hills or cliffs was nothing new to the Rangers, but this time, the Germans had concentrated 88mm guns and mortars at the top and had already thwarted earlier American attempts to scale the hill.

At first light, the two Ranger companies reached the base of the hill only to be spotted. A slow, creeping bombardment began that in the words of the battalion history was the "most horrible barrage of artillery that this battalion had ever been subjected to." Stalled even before they could get started, the Rangers clung to their forward positions. Captain Harold "Duke" Slater commanding Ranger Task Force Slater with D, E and F Companies looked for options. One his forward lieutenants, a new man, proposed to send a scouting party to find a way through. He asked Sergeant Elrod Petty, a D-Day veteran, to take a squad and reconnoiter a path. Petty refused, telling that the lieutenant in ribald terms that it was suicide to cover those slopes under the heavy shelling. The lieutenant ignored him and asked another veteran, Sergeant McHugh, who also refused. Disquieted, the lieutenant ordered a private over the crest only to see the man shot. Disgusted, Petty and a few others crawled out under fire and pulled the stricken private to safety.

The artillery fire crept forward. Ignoring the now helpless lieutenant, the sergeants finally decided that it was better to fight the enemy than to die needlessly in the artillery barrage. Sergeant McHugh stood up to rally the men, shouting, "Let's go get the bastards." A war cry sang over the entire company as it rose and rushed forward into the bombardment. Captain McBride followed with his company but was quickly wounded and knocked out of the fighting.

McHugh's charge took the Rangers to the third of the slopes of the hill before machine-guns at a wooded line near the summit stopped their progress. McHugh and some of the other sergeants were hit. Some of the junior NCO's now looked at Petty and another man, Private Bill Anderson, an ex-sergeant demoted for fist-fighting, for leadership. Anderson called for 81mm mortar forward observers to come up and told his messengers to get everyone at the base of the hill to the top immediately. In the meantime, Captain Slater, still at his command post, had no idea what had happened after his men had disappeared into the morning mist, charging and yelling. Now he was told by returning medics

THE PEOPLE'S ARMY
These sad-eyed, elderly *Völksstrumm* (people's militia) were captured near Aachen. Hitler's attempt to inspire fanaticism and resistance among the late-war civil draftees by calling branding them as a popular militia was a small substitute for poor senior leadership.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES

bring down some of the wounded that his men had nearly surmounted the top.

Slater immediately dispatched two officers to join Anderson and Petty: Captain Masney and Lt. Leonard Lomell, who quickly began to assemble a defensive post near the crest. Following this, the Rangers charged up the crest with guns blazing. They flushed out several Germans from a nearby machine-gun line and scrambled onto the summit with an astounding mixture of gunfire and victory cries.

Here they found well-sited buildings and a bunker network. Hand-to-hand fighting broke out with the remaining Germans, but the Americans battled their way into the bunkers. They had barely gotten in when they felt the earth shudder.

Bewildered, both Germans and Rangers looked sky-wards. Desperate to beat back the attackers, German HQ had called in artillery on their own positions. The screaming of incoming shells drove out all other sounds. Several Rangers and Germans were caught in the barrage and killed. Still, by 8:30 a.m., Hill 400 was decisively in American hands. Twenty-eight Germans were taken prisoner.

LT. LEONARD LOMELL
TENNESSEE WESLEYAN COLLEGE

Model was stunned. Because the hill naturally favored the defender he had preferred to stock it with only limited numbers of over-aged Völksgrenadiers. Realizing now that the only way to beat the Americans off the hill was to drive them out, he ordered a series of armored and infantry counterattacks, and again reiterated his offer of a Knight's Cross for men taking part in a successful attack.

The Rangers quickly tried to sort out their ranks. Captain Masney, the senior officer now at the top realized that he had only about a hundred men left. At about this time another enemy barrage began. According to the official historian of the 2nd Rangers "a dozen shells hit the hill from three directions every time [someone] drew a breath. The hill was in convulsions and seemed to be bursting apart at the rocky seams. Trees, limbs and rocks mixed with dirt and flying steel fragments. The stench of cordite was everywhere."

The numbers of Rangers started to drop. Captain Walter K. Block, a popular battalion

PUMMELING THE ENEMY The infantry gun was a mainstay of a German division's artillery component. They were used with tremendous effect against enemy troops.
BUNDESARCHIV

medical officer was killed almost immediately in the first barrage. Block had prophetically told the men that morning that he would probably not survive the day. Masney's attempts to inform Slater and Major Williams of the precariousness of the situation seemingly fell on deaf ears. In fact, Slater had accurately understood what Masney had been trying to tell him but simply did not have the reserves to spare. Deciding that he would have to speak to Slater in person, Masney — against the advice of his subordinates, started down, only to discover that the Germans had infiltrated the trails. He was captured.

Lt. Lomell, now the senior leader at the top had been badly wounded during the shelling. With one hand mangled and a finger hanging on by a sinew, he attempted to set up enfilading fields of fire just as the Germans attacked. It was 9:30 in the morning and first of five enemy counterattacks reached the Rangers. Using MG42s, automatic weapons and grenades, the Germans fought their way to summit even as an American artillery bombardment shook the perimeter, jarring the ground so much that aiming a rifle became next to impossible.

The fighting was ferocious. One Ranger, Sergeant Secor, took on the Germans with a machine pistol in each hand, chasing several down the slopes. But casualties were heavy. The fist-fighting Private Anderson and his brother, who had volunteered together, were wounded and died together. As the fighting petered out, the ire of the Rangers now turned towards their senior commanders who were still at the bottom of the hill. Lomell wanted to pull everyone back before another counter-attack materialized but was talked out of it by his sergeants who did not want to leave the wounded behind.

Anxious to learn where the Germans were massing, he instead sent out two-man patrols to reconnoiter the most likely staging areas. When news came that the Germans were gathering for another large attack, Lomell made only decision he could make within his intention to hold the hill: He sent Sergeant Petty down to headquarters to beg for reinforcements. Petty circumvented German patrols and reached the bottom but as he approached the company HQ, he was physically accosted by a senior sergeant who kicked and screamed accusations that he had abandoned his post. After officers appeared and stopped the senior sergeant, Petty explained the situation only to be told that the A, B and C Companies were positioned at the base of the hill for a counter-attack — a move which Petty through ludicrous considering that the Germans had already recaptured most of the slopes.

He was assuaged somewhat after being told that the 8th Division was mustering reinforcements to relieve them and took this uncertain news back to the summit. In concession, Slater also sent a litter jeep with him to get some of the wounded out. Halfway up the slope it was destroyed by German artillery. Two other following jeeps, however, survived.

Lomell made it his priority to get as much of the wounded out before the next German attack hit. He started to wonder why, if Jeeps could make it to the summit then why not tank destroyers? What was the point of taking the hill if lives were going to be meaninglessly squandered with half-measures?

That afternoon, at one, the Germans attacked again with about 150 men. They were repulsed when Lomell massed his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) gunners at the approaches. A third attack at 2:50 came in from the north and the Rangers again matched them, at first showering the attackers with grenades before fixing bayonets for close-quartered fighting. By four, as an early dusk descended, Lomell had only 25 men left.

Just when things seemed hopeless, a platoon of six tank destroyers reached the Ranger base camp at seven o'clock that night. Williams immediately committed them on the flank ridges, sending on a token force of a single squad of twelve men from E Company to the summit. But one of these men was a forward observer, First Lt. Howard Kettlehut from the 5th Armored Division, who would later call in strikes from his parent unit, the 56th Armored Field Artillery. Meantime, the enemy shelling had gone on relentlessly and near nine, Lomell was wounded again and this time was forced to evacuate himself. The senior commander now became the recently-arrived Lt. Wintz, the new CO of F Company. For backup, Wintz

had only one sergeant left. At 11:45, to everyone's relief, food, water, ammunition and replacement weapons arrived from the bottom and these were quickly passed out. Even as the enemy artillery continued for the remainder of the night, at 3:33 a company from the 8th Division joined the Rangers at the top. Then bad news followed: Anderson's CCR was being withdrawn from Bergstein. The Rangers were now on their own.

At dawn on the 8th, the combined strength of the rangers stood at a mere five officers and 86 men. Suspecting that the Americans were on their last leg, Germans attacked after breakfast with the full force of artillery and infantry. Again, they were repulsed. At the base, another counter-attack was taking place after the Germans appeared with armor. They overran some of the forward American defense posts and entered Bergstein from over a ridge. The six American tank destroyers were sent into action and succeeded in knocking out all of the German armor while the Rangers's headquarters staff, with no one left to spare, went out themselves to finish off the enemy infantry. After this point, the summit was in a precarious position. D Company had only ten men, while E and F Companies had seventeen altogether. Thankfully the weather cleared at noon and a squadron of P-47 Thunderbolts appeared overhead for support. The Germans mounted one last counterattack that afternoon. But this, their strongest attempt yet, was met by the fighter-bombers and Kettlehut's artillery. The Rangers would later praise Kettlehut as being "the best man that they ever worked with." Those Germans that got through the support shield were taken on in a traditional fire-fight and fell back with heavy losses.

At 1:30, another regiment from the 8th Division mounted the slopes to relieve the defenders. When they reached the top they found the surviving Rangers haggard but proud. Even the dead, still holding their foxholes were found staring with empty eyes at the enemy routes of attack, an arsenal of weapons, both American and German, around them. Only twenty-two Rangers were able to walk down the hill. One hundred and thirty-three men had been killed or badly wounded or captured (107 men wounded, 19 killed, four missing, three captured).

Unfortunately the Ranger sacrifices were squandered a fortnight later when Hill 400 fell back under German control, and the enemy stayed on until February 1945 — to the closing days of the campaign when they were beaten off for the last time. ➢

LT-GEN. LAWTON COLLINS
NATIONAL ARCHIVES

RIDING HIGH German troops of the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division travel to the frontline atop a StuG III.
BUNDESARCHIV

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BITTER FIGHTING FOR SMALL GAINS

Elsewhere, the 8th Division achieved its last objectives. The campaign had started to reach its twilight, but groups of enemy troops hung on desperately. The most prominent was a pocket southeast of Vossenack, held by German engineers. These men were fanatics and believed that their position was the only line of defense against a supposed American armored breakout towards Schmidt.

On December 9, US forces attacked and made a 300 yard salient into the enemy pocket, including a large minefield. Then, on the following day, the 28th Infantry stepped in and wiped out the engineers. This last attack signaled the ended of major German resistance in the Brandenberg-Bergstein area although the town of Bergstein was still the target of counterattacks by Model's troops. For the remainder of December, the Americans mopped-up, and used the pause to bring in the 78th Infantry Division, recently arrived from the States. This division would take up positions on the 8th Division's right flank, and would fight small scale actions in the snow-encrusted landscape, destroying pillboxes and conducting a limited attack against German forces on the Kall River on December 13.

RECRUITMENT POSTER for the US Army Corps of Engineers.
US ARMY

Collins of VII Corps planned further actions for other newly-arrived forces, chief of all, Maj-General Robert Macon's 83rd Infantry Division, a tested formation from the Normandy campaign. The 83rd relieved the 4th Division on the line and had the job of capturing Gey and Hof Hardt. The tired 5th Armored Division was once again tasked with supporting this latest entry into the line.

And once again, the orders were clearly marked as before. Colonel Robert York's 331st Infantry was to seize Gey on the main road to Düren while the 330th Infantry under Colonel Robert Foster went towards Strass. The capture of these two villages would allow the 5th Armored Division to break through to the sweeping Roer plains. But holding the front against them was the 353rd Division which had come in from Luxembourg in November. The terrain fell into categories at this late stage of the campaign – one, a prelude to the open Roer plains while the other, the quintessentially forested Hürtgen. While the US 9th Division, back in action by this stage contained the plains, the 83rd, on its right flank had the misfortune of facing the forest front.

On its four-mile line, the 330th Infantry were to move on Hof Hardt and eventually pinch out the 9th Division's 39th Infantry. Macon's third regiment, the 329th, was to be employed on a completely different track, driving northeast on the division's left flank. Once the heavy road network at Gey and Strass had been secured, one combat command from the 5th Armored had orders to take Hill 211 overlooking the Roer River, while another advanced southeast from Strass to take Hemgen Berg (Pt 253), another bit of high ground overlooking the river.

Macon expected to take both Gey and Strass in a single stroke and before daylight to gain maximum surprise. But each attacking regiment had only one narrow, muddy track to bring up supplies, something that would have horrified earlier veterans of the fighting for Schmidt and even Hürtgen town.

On the night of December 10 under a partly obscured sky, the infantry in a throwback to countless advances, waited in their frigid foxholes and dugouts, waiting for the order to go. When it came, they rose and quickly advanced. The 331st encountered a well-entrenched anti-tank minefield with booby-trapped trenches nearby, but ignoring these, they pushed on to the town just as daylight started to peek over the far, tree-lined horizon. Meantime, the leading 330th Infantry moved on the right flank against Strass, making good time. Leading battalions from both regiments reached their towns easily enough but then the trouble

began. Heavy house-to-house combat broke out in Gey. Strass fell easily. The Germans pulled out only to attack an hour later with a company of infantry backed by assault guns.

The Americans desperately brought up Shermans from the 744th Tank Battalion. On the dirt road to Gey, they ran into the Teller anti-tank mines that the infantry had left untouched. Three Shermans were immobilized and blocked the road. Engineers were sent in but under enemy shelling it took them until the next day to disarm the field. With so many shell fragments on the road, it became virtually impossible to use metal detectors. Finally they declared that the way was clear. On cue, another Sherman trundled forward and struck an undetected Teller.

As this happened, German reinforcements headed towards Gey. Colonel York responded by sending reinforcements of his own. Casualties from the fighting filtered back to a forward aid station of the 5th Armored where two medical officers, Captains Holbert and Tempel, worked all day with red-eyed weariness. By nightfall on the 10th, Strass had been secured but the German still held a half-mile corridor between Gey and Strass, denying the Americans a link-up. After dark, the Germans once against started to infiltrate the wooded supply route to Strass. Near the small hamlet of Schafberg they placed an anti-tank screen of guns and reinforced the village with troops. Although the Americans at Strass did not know it at the time, they had been completely cut-off.

INADEQUATE SHELTER Two Americans taken cover behind a Sherman which itself is a matter of interest. A variety of cooking pots have been hung on its tail as is a .30-cal ammo box which likely contains an external tank communication phone. US ARMY

On December 11, Macon insisted to the 5th Armored chief, Maj-General Oliver that the tanks get moving. "That road is about as open as we can make it," he told Oliver. "We can't keep out the snipers."

Oliver who had been the Hürtgen longer than Macon knew the risks of sending in tanks unguarded by infantry. He decided to take the matter up with Collins who conferred with Macon and told Oliver to proceed as suggested. But at daylight, Macon had decided that more had to be done to secure the roads than he had previously believed, especially after the Germans had attacked Strass that morning. Although the enemy had been checked, the fighting had been heavy and Foster of the 330th Infantry sent in a battalion to clear the road through Schafberg. Oliver, meantime, proceeded with his plans. "Our going down there," he told Macon, "ought to at least complicate their job of going against you severely [at Strass]."

Combat Command B under Colonel John T. Cole was to pass Schafberg a mile to the east, to take a wooded knoll marked as Hill 266 on American maps before taking Hamberg Hill. Unfortunately and tankers and their armored infantry blundered into enemy troops en-route and found themselves sucked into the fighting at Schafberg. The men of the 15th Armored Infantry in particular became so disorganized that despite efforts by their officers and NCOs to lead them onto another trail came to nothing and the fighting raged on. By nightfall CCB had lost 150 men.

At Strass, the trapped battalion from the 330th Infantry struggled to hold on. The Germans had counterattacked for the third time that day and

supplies were running low. Sixty men had been wounded or killed and in two days, the battalion had lost one company commander killed, one missing and two wounded. Only seven American tanks remained within the town but that night a ten-man patrol skirted the German positions, bringing badly-needed supplies. More was needed.

Back at army headquarters that same night, Hodges's intelligence staff had come up with a theory to explain the continuing dogged German resistance: "The enemy's strategy in defense of the Reich is based on the exhaustion of our offensive to be followed by an all-out counterattack with armor between the Roer and Urft supported by every weapon that he is able to bring up."

Although the officers had been reasonably accurate about their identification of German strategy they had identified the wrong sector of the front for the emphasis of the perceived German offensive. Miles to the south, the German were actually massing a quarter of a million troops and armor in the Ardennes forest.

On December 12, the Americans at Gey and Strass continued their efforts to clear out the enemy from the roads in the area. The division's third regiment, Colonel Edwin Crabhill's 329th Infantry went east to take another village, Roelsdorf, on the Roer River. The men, new to forest combat, were shocked by the tree bursts, the dense clumps of foliage, well-planned mine-fields and the forest which as always swallowed by entire platoons of men. But making do, they made brisk progress and actually outran the 9th Division's 39th Infantry on their flanks.

Back at Gey and Strass, a Sherman flail tank cleared some of the mines, allowing other Shermans from the 766th Tank Battalion through this corridor. The tanks reached Gey in the afternoon. At this time, the 330th Infantry was acting against Schafberg, using a mixture of artillery and infantry to clear the village. At nightfall, when they were relieved, the 83rd Division counted its losses: Almost a thousand men had been lost. What later stunned analysts was that even before the two regiments could begin their attacks, 472 men had become casualties to artillery, sniping and the weather. CCB, meantime, had lost 150 men during its brief combat on the 11th. The fighting in this part of forest would continue into Christmas Day, until finally the 83rd and the 5th Divisions moved beyond the forest. The toll in the 83rd Division would amount to 1,600 men. Hemgen Berg would fall on the morning of December 16, the same day that the infamous Battle of the Bulge began in the south. In the center area, another division had started to receive monumental orders that would try its abilities. This was the green 78th Division which was to secure the forest's southern flank before driving for the neglected dams. ➤

LOG CABINS IN EUROPE As the full fury of the unusually cold winter of 1944 descended on the forest, desperate American troops took to building log cabins for shelter.
US ARMY

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AMERICAN STRATEGY FINALLY TAKES SHAPE

Since November the Army Air Force had been conducting daily reconnaissance over the dams for the benefit of intelligence offices. Their most pressing desire was whether or not the dams had been primed for demolition. The appreciation of the dam's inherent value had occurred to the bulk of the First and Ninth Army staffs first on November 11 when they decreed that no unit was to venture into the Roer flood-plains "except on army order." Units were also told to be prepared to evacuate the low-lying part of the Roer valley at a moment's notice. On one instance, when a rise in the river had been noted, Allied fears were calmed only by a reconnaissance which revealed that heavy rains had been responsible. Still, fears that the Germans might blow the dams, especially in mid-December, when the Ninth Army and several units from the First Army had reached the Roer River settled the lingering question of securing eastern Hürtgen. Another report by the 82nd Airborne dated 8 February 1945 declared that in the event of a flood, "the greatest damage would be created by a flood wave which would destroy everything in its path...and bring about as many casualties as possible."

Maj-General Edwin Parker Jr's 78th Division's role in securing these objectives involved attacking through the Monschau corridor and clearing the pillbox-strewn plateaus at the start of the corridor before pushing on the northeast running Strauch-Schmidt road. Once they had taken Schmidt the division was to then to take the Schwammenauel dam from the north.

The corridor was defended by the 272nd Völksgrenadier Division under the command of Lt-General Eugen Koenig, hardly a force desirous of command from someone of that rank. Indeed, the 272nd had been so depleted that it had been occupying a quiet sector of the front so as to take on reinforcements. The situation had been so dire that the division had been scheduled to be relieved by another broken unit, the 85th Division, a battered formation still in the process of withdrawing from Holland.

For its attack, the US 78th Division had only two regiments (the third was detached to reinforce the 8th Division). On the north wing, Colonel Earl Miner's 310th Infantry was to send a battalion from Lammersdorf to Rollesbroich. The 309th Infantry, in the meantime, was to move two battalions southeast from Hill 554 at Paustenbach to take Bickerath and Simmerath. After this, Kesternich was to be seized.

Schmidt was still a long way away, but once this close network of villages had been secured, the task of pushing on in the Schmidt area fell on the 310th Infantry which had orders to secure the Schmidt highway by capturing Strauch and Steckenborn.

On December 13 under snow, the 78th Division left its jump-off positions and went into the eerily silent forest. They had dispensed with the preliminary artillery savagery to take the Germans by surprise. As the dawn mist swirled all around the soldiers, the 310th Infantry's leading battalion climbed past its forward knoll and slid into the valley below, taking up position on the icy fields before their first objective, Rollesbroich. But just when everything seemed to be going according to plan, the forward men stepped into a minefield. As the explosions and the shrieks of the crippled rose, a nearby Pillbox opened up. The raking, heavy fire killed a few men but then the firing died and the Germans came out with their hands up. Its commander told the Americans that they had run out of ammunition.

Before the morning ended, Miner's men were able to take another important ridge looking down into dim lines of Rollesbroich below. The divisional history recorded that they "had taken their first hill." They entered the town itself in the afternoon and gained a foothold as German resistance gradually awoke to the threat. South of them, Colonel John Ondrick's 309th Infantry with the tanks of the 709th Tank Battalion took Simmerath and fought hard for Kesternich

which had eluded them on that first day. Still, as the fighting ended that night, the division was encouraged by their first battle. Nearly all of the objectives had been taken and they had lost just 238 men in the process. But with nightfall, the officers of the 78th learned the hard way that the German were masters of infiltration, and experts at ambushes by day. These harassing enemy forces would divert valuable American forces away from the main drive.

Regardless of these pockets of enemy resistance which sprouted within supposedly-secure areas, much of the American emphasis was spent in fighting for Kestrnich on the following day. Only in the afternoon of the 14th would the division gain a foothold in the eastern edge of the town. But the men at the forward post (from E Company) had barely dug-in when a battalion of Grenadiers from the 980th Regiment attacked. Calling in artillery, the company held on. Near midnight the 980th Grenadiers attacked again, this time breaching the outer perimeter at the thinnest points between companies. The divisional history would record that "grey figures were all about, firing burp guns, throwing grenades." The German cut the already tenuous lines of communication and created havoc before

PARAS WITHOUT AIRCRAFT German Fallschirmjägers of the 6th Regiment march to their objective. Although they are mostly untested, moral is high. BUNDESARCHIV

THE REMAINS Two GIs from the 78th Division's 311th infantry walk past two disabled Hetzers in Kesternich on January 31 following two days of heavy fighting. US ARMY

they were beaten back. The situation was now dire. Their easy curtain opener shot to pieces, the division recorded 358 non-battle casualties (to trench foot and the weather) and 609 combat casualties in its three days of combat. A scrutiny of prisoners taken at this time alarmed divisional officers when ID tags and papers revealed the presence of new German unit in the area, the 326th Völksgrenadier Division. Things looked ominous but just how much so, it would not become apparent for another twenty-four hours. Early morning on Saturday, December 16, the Germans attacked in the Ardennes. In some cases, the Ardennes offensive would escalate the fighting in the Hürtgen and it almost certainly did not mitigate it.

That same morning, on the 78th Divisional front, a forward observer from the 903rd Field Artillery Battalion noted an incoming German assault and called in his batteries. As the Allied shells screamed in, the German broke off and ran for cover but by mid-morning they were back, screaming and yelling. With self-propelled guns and tanks from the 10th Panzer Division, the enemy re-took Kesternich, overrunning the shattered 2nd Battalion holding its positions there. So depleted was this battalion that only a captain and 56 Americans fell into the bag. Assembling a counter-force from the 3rd Battalion of the 309th Infantry with cooks, drivers, anyone who could fight, the Americans returned to Kesternich. For reinforcements, the bruised 2nd Rangers, now recuperating a few miles away were rushed to Simmerath.

Here jittery officers from the 78th Division met the Rangers, telling them to "be careful. Challenge everyone. Jerry paratroopers have been landing like flies in this area. Don't make any noise. The front-line is just three hundred yards from town and they are on three sides of us already."

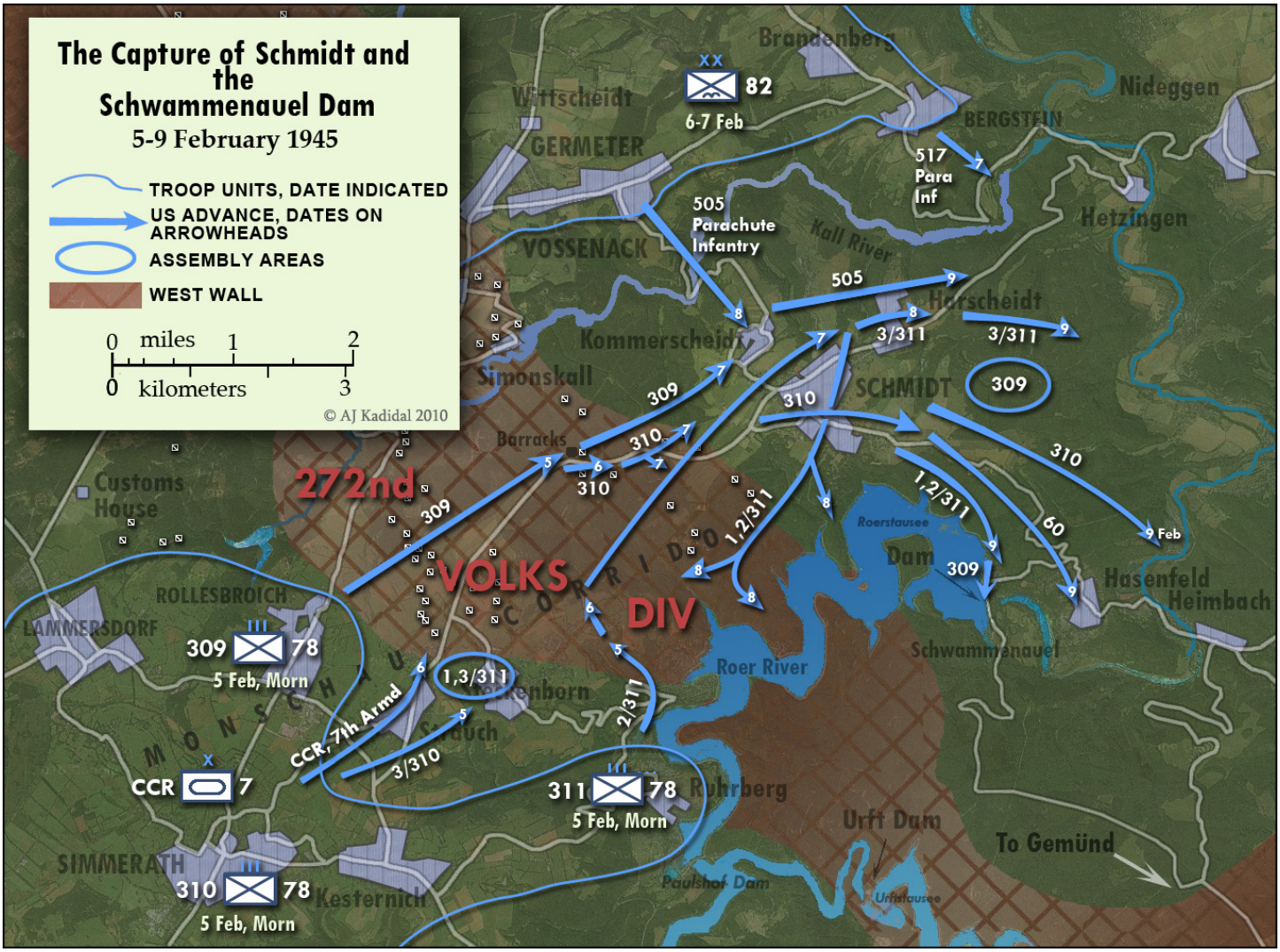
LT-GEN. CLARENCE HUEBNER
NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The Rangers took up their positions with some incredulity but at the time, the fears of enemy paratroopers had been warranted. Before daylight on the 17th, a flight of Junker Ju52's had dropped 200 Fallschirmjägers (Paratroopers) well behind the 78th Divisional lines. Bewildered by the noises of combat all around them, the Rangers held their positions until 2 January 1945, eventually battling infantry attacks and enemy shelling. Scattered action continued for the rest of the month with an icy Christmas spent out in the field in the bone-chilling snow.

Up north, the 9th and 83rd Division holding their lines endured the "most unremitting and concentrated artillery barrage of the entire campaign." Strass was once again under siege as the 83rd Division fought to contain the tide. Partly to relieve the pressure and partly keep the initiative going, Collins decided to take Obermaubach which aside from containing a Roer dam had also served as an assembly area for German troops and reinforcements since the beginning of the campaign.

The attack began on December 20th and involved elements from the 5th Armored Division, the 83rd Infantry Division and the 4th Cavalry Group. The German goal was to hold Obermaubach before joining in a drive to re-take Düren. On December 21st, the 121st Regiment was instructed by VII Corps to take over the battle from the 4th Cavalry Group, which was being withdrawn. The exchange of units took place that very night, and the 121st went into battle almost immediately.

US Intelligence had indicated that Obermaubach's garrison numbered approximately 500 soldiers with elements from the 6th Independent Fallschirmjäger Regiment. There were also men from the 942nd and the 943rd Grenadier Regiments in addition to substantial artillery resources east of the town



itself. Attacking at 11 a.m. on December 22, the 121st advanced to the outskirts of Obermaubach but further progress was quashed by heavy enemy fire. Falling back, the Americans waited for dark. At 11.30 that night, the regiment's C Company with six officers and 70 men attempted to infiltrate into town. Strangely enough there was no gunfire. By daylight however, this company had not returned nor had it radioed of the success of its attack. Only later it was discovered that the entire company had been captured in a German ambush. Disheartened, the regiment ceased all further operation for two days, but on the 25th, attacked with two platoons of tanks in support.

Fighting their way in, the riflemen were startled by the sudden chatter of a machine gun firing from a concealed position. Americans hit the dirt, but were surprised to see the gunfire striking German positions.

Incredibly, a missing machine gun platoon from the missing company had avoided capture, and under the command of an assistant platoon leader, Sergeant Joseph Malenowski, had hidden on a ridge overlooking Obermaubach for 36 hours. Now, the machine gunners covered the advance of the regiment and under the added weight of American firepower, the Germans fell back. Still Obermaubach only fell at 6:58 on the night of the 26th with 93 Germans falling into the bag. Stalwart enemy troops, determined to fight to the end in pockets east and west of the town were subsequently overrun by the US 83rd Division. The enemy artillery, east of the Roer River was also swept over. An unreal peace settled in the area. ➢

A HAPPY MOMENT AFTER BATTLE Men from the 311th Infantry enjoy a light moment among the battered buildings of Kesternich. The fighting around this small town would continue for the rest of winter. US ARMY

THE OPEN COUNTRY BECKONS American troops prepare to pass through a breach in the Siegfried Line defenses in March 1945. AP

16

THE FINAL PUSH TO SCHMIDT

As 1945 dawned, American plans altered. Gerow had gone by now, replaced by Lt-General Clarence Huebner, late of the 1st Division. Although prompted and given command of the 15th Army, the mediocre performance of his corps was likely a cause for Gerow's transfer and as it was, the 15th Army existed only on paper.

Huebner, a veteran soldier, had started his army career in 1910 as a private. He had commanded the 1st "Big Red One" for most the Second World War. A witness to the bloody fighting in Hürtgen since the 1st Division had entered the forest in November, Huebner was determined not to make the same mistakes as before, especially Gerow's methods of piecemeal employment and careless logistics. He had the good fortune of being given a clear strategic target — Schmidt and the large Schwammenauel dam. The task of taking these fell on Parker's still-green 78th Division.

MAJ-GEN. JAMES "JUMPING JIM" GAVIN NATIONAL ARCHIVES

As Parker examined the plans and readied his troops, the 82nd Airborne Division received orders to probe into Hürtgen on the 78th's left from Vossenack. Its famed commander, Maj-General James "Jumping Jim" Gavin decided to reconnoiter the path for himself and in what was an unusually daring move, took a jeep and ventured down the perilous Kall trail. The ride was a tremendous revelation. It was "a shambles of a place," Gavin would write after the war. "A shambles of wrecked vehicles and abandoned tanks. In the bottom of the canyon there were four abandoned tank destroyers and five disabled and abandoned tank destroyers." The trail itself was a charnel vision for Gavin who stared appalled at the dead "all along the sides of the trail just emerged from the winter snow…their gangrenous, broken torn bodies rigid and grotesque, some of them with arms skywards, seemingly in supplication. They were wearing the red keystone of the 28th Infantry Division."

Gavin was not the only man affected. Staff Sergeant Giles of an engineering battalion with the 82nd Airborne recorded the frightening atmosphere of their new positions, writing in his diary: "We are in the middle of the Hürtgen forest. For a long time today we came through the battlefield – nothing but stumps of pine trees, limbs all blown off, upper halves splintered. It…gave you the creeps. I don't see how men ever fought in this mess."

To mitigate Parker's reservations Huebner promised him a combat command from the 7th Armored Division with air support from the US 9th Tactical Air Command. On the other side of the fence, strengthened German units took up positions opposite the Americans — notably the 85th Infantry Division and the remains of the 6th Fallschirmjäger Regiment, both reinforced by an eclectic collection of navy and Luftwaffe men, teenage boys and aging veterans from the Great War. Nevertheless, US intelligence officers promised that these forces were not to their full strength and in the first week of February, the operation was ready to go.

On February 5, at the un-Godly hour of 3 a.m., a predictable artillery barrage heralded the opening American move. A stinging cold rain began and the infantry, their combat jackets wet and blackened to a gloss by the rain, moved out and into the woods looking over the Kall River. Everything went according to plan as it usually did at the beginning of any assault.

The 3rd Battalion (Lt-Colonel Floyd Call) of the 309th Infantry passed at least 35 pillboxes

and bunkers without once taking fire. They were most certainly manned because at least 135 German emerged from them later. Consistently, the message, "no enemy contact," reached headquarters. The staff wondered if a decisive penetration had been made. Deciding that it had, they sent in engineers and reconnaissance troops after the infantry to identify if the roads were actually clear.

Dawn came and went, and fifteen minutes later, Call had reported that his battalion was "advancing toward the final objective," but meeting small-arms fire for the first time. Staff officers back at headquarters braced themselves and several nervous minutes passed until the infantry called back to say that they had overrun the German barracks on the road to Schmidt catching scores of Germans sleeping or eating breakfast.

Elated but frustrated that his other regiment, the 310th was still not ready for movement, Parker considered sending the 309th deeper into enemy territory but his caution got the better of him and he instead decided to build a task force around the 311th Infantry to ford the Roer at Ruhrberg over the Paulushof regulating dam — one of the smaller dams of the area. This task force was to then head into the heavily-wooded country between Urftausee and Roerstausee before approaching Schwammenaul from the south. This side operation was to start on the night of February 6. In the interim, engineers had discovered that mines had blocked the highway leading to Schmidt and Parker sent the 310th through the woods without its heavy weapons.

CHOW Veterans of the fighting take a short break for food as darkness sets. US ARMY

Back at Schmidt, enemy resistance was starting to grow. One US company reported a heavy fire-fight against several German squads intent on holding their ground. Nerves at Parker's headquarters started to frazzle. Parker ordered the 309th to advance as much as possible beyond the barracks and for the 310th to move as quickly as it could into Schmidt. He was almost immediately overruled by Huebner who wanted the 309th to push deeper into enemy lines, maybe even reach Schwammenauel before nightfall. These changing orders frustrated the forward regimental commanders and the men themselves as both regiments jostled for positions in the same tight congested space. As darkness descended, several squads were still attempting to knock out enemy pillboxes in their rear before the fighting ceased.

Then inexplicably, Huebner rescinded his orders. Tomorrow, again at 3 a.m., the 309th was to hold its position while the 310th Infantry passed through it to take the entirety of Schmidt. Both regiments ended the day in low morale and men from one battalion were stunned to hear that brass at divisional and corps headquarters were unhappy with their performance. Wet, cold and tired, the infantry's spirits started to sag and the regimental commander warned Parker that some of his men might not be in tip top condition for the coming day's battle.

At 3, the next morning, the US plan went into effect and the 310th passed through the 309th with two battalions in column. But as soon as they left their lines, the battalions found themselves pinned, taking heavy fire from the defenders. So great was the disorder that the commanders actually lost control over their units for several precious moments. Finally, at dawn, the troops rallied only to be let down by their commanders who, having lost their bearings in the forest,

HEAP OF RUBBLE Troopers of the 505th Parachute Infantry walk past the desolate and now German-free town of Schmidt, finally in American hands after three long months. US ARMY

had little idea of where to go. Finally the leaders discovered where they were and called in armor. But when the Shermans appeared they began to take anti-tank fire and were forced to withdraw.

Hopelessly pinned, the 310th Infantry languished in the woods until the afternoon when they tried a new tactic — to bombard the enemy positions and the forward trees with their own artillery so as to clear a path. This failed miserably. The artillery observers were unable to get good readings on the enemy positions and the felled trees blocked the US advance routes. Just when things could not get any worse, "Able" Company found itself ambushed by the enemy at dusk.

The Germans had allowed the lead platoon to pass before hammering the following units, including the company headquarters. The ambush created a panic reminiscent of the 28th Divisional days. Artillery observers erroneously nearby reported that the entire right flank had disintegrated and divisional headquarters somehow translated this into a signal that a major German counterattack was underway. The reality was that only A Company had been destroyed (there were just seven survivors). There had been no enemy counter-attack, no German breakthrough, only a remarkably effective defense.

The 310th Infantry settled into the night feeling the grim foreboding of doom. Parker, alarmed at the stagnation overcoming his command decided to commit all three of his regiments into the drive the following morning. The 310th was take Hill 493 outside Schmidt, the 309th was push west through woods to Kommerscheidt and the 311th was to take Schmidt. Parker had also counted on his men linking up with troops from Gavin's the 82nd Airborne which had started to deploy on the west bank of the Kall gorge.

When Gavin received orders to send one of his regiments down the stinking cesspool of the Kall trail to cut off the enemy's escape route, he was furious. "It seemed obvious to me," he would write later, "that the regiment could not be supplied across the Kall River canyon, certainly not if the enemy interfered or if artillery fire covered the trail. In addition, the trail was impassable for vehicles. A

catastrophe must have occurred there in the fall of 1944. I could not understand why the bodies had not been removed and buried. Neither Corps nor Army headquarters must have been aware of the conditions in the canyon. Otherwise the bodies would have been buried and the disabled tanks removed."

He went to corps headquarters get the matter of supplies sorted out. There the V Corps chief of staff laughingly asked him: "Have you tried pack mules?"

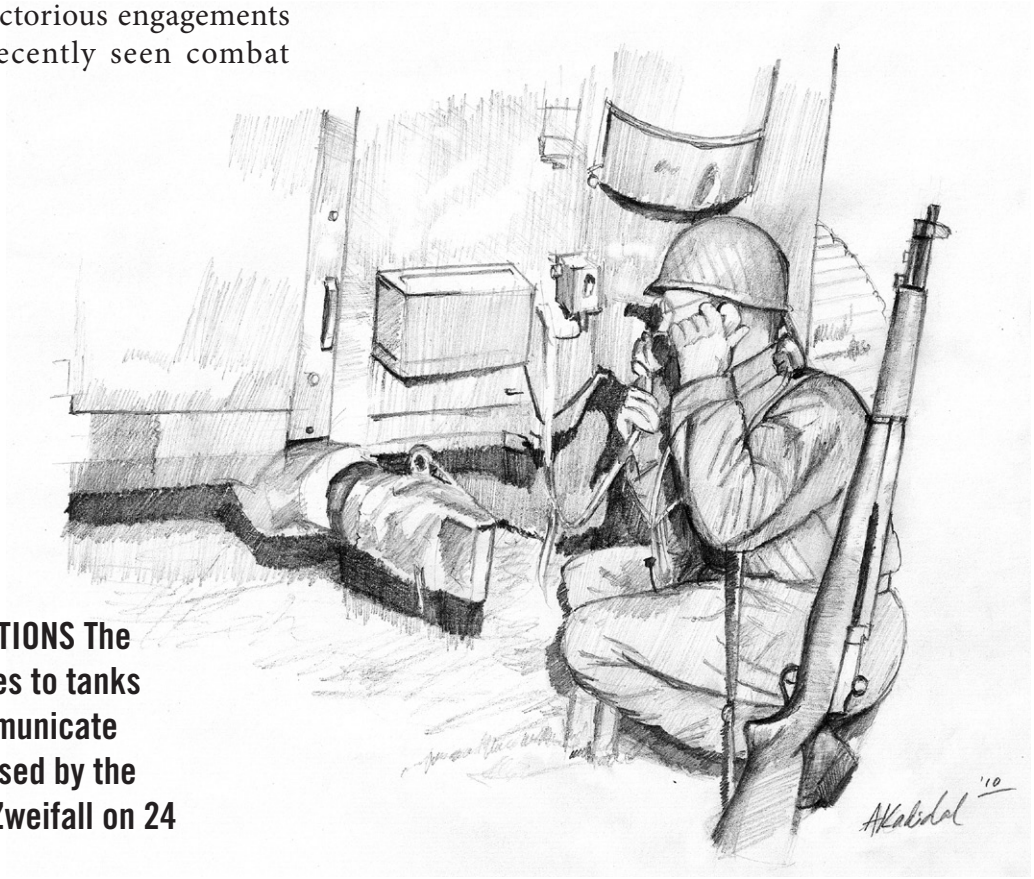
As Gavin left the headquarters, barely containing his rage, he started to "realize how remote the [staff] were from the realities [of frontline operations]."

The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment which had the task of traversing the trail would record in its history that "throughout Sicily, Italy, Normandy and Holland this unit has seen the devastation of war, but never anything to compare with this. There were tanks, tank destroyers, jeeps, two-ton trucks, other vehicles and all sorts of GI equipment as well as countless American dead. It was no wonder the men referred to this as death valley."

The 505th Parachute only reached its jump-off positions on the afternoon of the 7th, having travelled up from victorious engagements in Belgium (it had just recently seen combat during the Ardennes offensive). One man from the unit, Technical Sergeant Chris Christensen of G Company remembered that they had only gone a short distance into the trail when they received orders to dig in.

"This was as far as we would be going that day," he said. "As usual, we would set up a defense for the night. I started checking to make sure this was being done. All this was taking time and when I finally got dug in it was dark. After finishing, I lay down in this shallow trench and stretched out. I could not have been in there but a few moments before I caught a whiff of this horrible odor. There was no mistaking this smell. I had dug in on a decaying corpse. Needless to say I was the one to vacate the hole. The rest of this sleepless night I spent sitting on the ground leaning against a tree."

When morning came, the paratroopers left their dugout and moved slowly up the track. The trail started to get worse. Trees had been cut down as if by a giant saw and most had been splintered and torn apart during the incessant exchanges of artillery fire. Scattered under the trees and beneath the debris were the dead of the 28th Division partly covered by a "blanket of snow."



INTERSERVICE COMMUNICATIONS The practice of attacking phones to tanks so to allow infantry to communicate with the tankers was first used by the 709th Tank Battalion near Zweifall on 24 November.

ASSAULT FORCE Backed by two M4A3E2 Sherman "Jumbos" from the 746th Tank Battalion, men of the 60th Infantry wait at Bath for new orders on February 27. They had helped to capture Schwammenauel Dam seventeen day ago. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Christensen and his party came across the aid station and were aghast to see "hundreds of bodies stacked like cordwood along heaps of amputated arms and legs." When they finally reached a welcome clearing in the trees and spotted the Schmidt valley sprawling below, they were treated to the sight of a large number of burnt out tanks.

Meantime, back at Schmidt, the 311th had been fighting it out all day with the enemy. Unaided by an artillery bombardment that had fallen on empty ground as the defending 272nd Völksgrenadiers Division pulled back into the town to consolidate, the 309th made it to Kommerscheidt before taking fire. As mortar fire began to land all around them, the men dived into shell holes and dug-outs from the 28th Division days, now filled with water. Only the 310th Infantry made a good time of it that day, riding on the Shermans of the 744th Battalion to take Hill 493 by mid-morning.

Knocking out several pillboxes and bunkers, the 311th struggled through the woods and managed to take 117 prisoners by the end of the day. Capitalizing on the gains made by the 310th Infantry, one battalion of the 311th with a company of tanks in tow marched up the road to Schmidt and reached a position from where they could attack by that afternoon. Using the tanks as mounts, the battalion hoped to crest Hill 493 and dash across the mile long stretch of open fields to the town.

It was good plan but as the first tank crossed the crest it was pummeled by three anti-tank shells and blew up. The infantry rushed back for the trees as the remaining tanks retreated. Resorting to traditional tactics, the battalion pushed its light machine gunners to the fore and under their covering fire, sped across the open ground against heavy German opposition. By late-afternoon, the western sector of Schmidt was in their hands. Another company attempted the passage across the open from the south but fell back after taking automatic fire. As night started to fall, the Shermans re-appeared to help with the mopping up. By morning, Schmidt was decisively in American hands.

The original plan had stipulated that once Schmidt had fallen, the 310th was to pass through the town and reach Hasenfeld near the dam and at dawn on February 8, the 310th Infantry attempted to do just that. By now, a sense of urgency had overtaken V Corp's operations. In the north, General Simpson of the Ninth Army — the newest US army on the continent — had deployed his forces along the west bank of the Roer for a river assault and anxiously awaited the conditions to go. But the Schwammenauel was a major problem. If the German blew this structure as his troops crossed, it would transform the normally placid, narrow stream that was the Roer into a turgid lake half a mile wide.

Huebner wanted to Rangers to cross the Roer by night and take the dams in one swift motion. The Rangers thought it a costly undertaking. One NCO from D Company, John Riley said: "This undoubtedly was the most depressing place we ever were in. The other bank was steep and it was wooded to boot. And that damned mist that kept rising off the river made the place seemed haunted…." The history of the Second Ranger Battalion would recount that "situation was serious and the prospects were enough to fill even the old Rangers with dread. If ever the battalion had a drawn a suicide mission, this was it."

Thankfully, the Ranger orders were cancelled and the 78th Division prepared to set off for Hasenfeld. Dissatisfied with their progress, Hodges telephoned Huebner to tell him a get a move on. In no uncertain terms, Hodges wondered aloud why with forty battalions of artillery at hand, Huebner was unable to "Blast a road from our frontline positions straight to the dams."

"I have to have them [the dams] by tomorrow," Hodges warned as Huebner cringed. At this precise moment, General Craig of the 9th Division happened to visit Huebner's headquarters for a friendly visit. Huebner felt a quick stab of hope. If he could use Craig's Division, most of his problems might be solved. "I've got to use the 9th Division," he told Hodges.

Hodges replied tersely, "I want the dams in the morning. How you get them is your business."

Craig, forced to move two of his regiments to the Schmidt front, did so as soon as he could and by midnight on February 9, the forces began to deploy for their morning assault.

By now, Schmidt was still being mopped

DAMAGED OBJECTIVE The Hydro-electric power station at Heimbach was captured intact but the Germans had blown the pressure pipe leading from the Urft dam. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

up but progress was slow. On February 9, the 82nd Airborne's 505th Parachute Infantry had finally linked up with the 78th at Schmidt (Kommerscheidt had fallen on the 5th).

The paratroopers were shocked at the condition of the town. Rubble lay strewn everywhere and the town itself looked as though it had been flattened with bodies strewn everywhere, some flattened by tanks. Knocked out tanks stood where they had been destroyed, charred bodies hanging out of the hatches. Part of bodies could be found scattered everywhere. The incredible waste appalled Gavin. "Hürtgen was one of the most costly, most unproductive and most ill-advised battles our army has even fought," he would later write.

The 82nd Airborne would stay until late February. They were not asked to take part in the dash for the dams but they would remain in the area until February 19 when they were relieved by Craig's 9th Division and returned to Suippes, France. It was their last winter campaign of World War II. Few were unhappy.

In the meantime, the preparations for the dam continued that night. Craig moved his 60th Infantry into the line. In the morning he ordered the 311th Infantry to clear the wooded high ground along the north and northeast banks of the Roerstausee while the 60th Infantry made for Hasenfield. The going was once again tough as the Germans fought bitterly for every inch of ground. It was not until the afternoon of the 9th that the 60th and the 311th Infantry cleared the planned assembly area to allow the 309th to assault the dam's defenses. It would then take Lt-Colonel Schellman's 1st Battalion of the 309th until nearly 6 p.m. — by which time the sun had already set in these winter days — before it crossed the 311th Infantry's forward positions and headed into the enemy territory.

Even though it was dark the ethereal glowing darkness of the snow-covered fields guided the Americans to the bridge. Schellman split his command into two groups, one to secure the top and the other to take the power house. The group destined for the base went forward great apprehension, afraid that the German had had rigged the whole place with explosives.

As the battalion approached their objective at midnight, rifle fire broke out. Braving the gunshots, the top group, with engineers from the 303rd Battalion, swept over the upper paths and began their search for demolitions. Aware that there was an inspection tunnel running through the dam, the engineers hunted for an opening. The mouth was supposed to be near the spillway according to intelligence reports and several anxious minutes were spent looking for this as enemy tracers flashed past. To their dismay, they found the mouth blocked but improvising, they slid down the 200 feet of dam face to get at the other exit at the bottom.

Convinced that the dam would go up in their faces at any moment, they scrambled to uncover the charges. There were not any. Only the outlet valves had been sabotaged and the Germans had blown the sluice gates, unleashing a major cascade of water into the area. Although this did not flood the forest as feared it did transform the normally placid Roer, which was never more than knee-deep, into a swirling torrent over ten feet deep in the Düren area and over a mile wide in other places. On the other side of the dam, US troops and engineers entered the powerhouse only to discover wrecked machinery amid broken empty bottles of Schnapps and half-eaten German army rations.

At 2 a.m. the Americans reported that the dam was theirs. When the last Germans were beaten off, the Americans attempted to consolidate their gains. The 309th Regimental commander, Colonel Ondrick called Schellman's command post to tell him that, "You don't want to get caught around there in daylight. We have to hold. Dig in and hold."

It was sound advice. By mid-day on the 10th, the Germans had started to bombard the US positions with small-arms fire and mortars. It became nearly impossible for men to move out of their foxholes and it was not until nightfall that the wounded could be evacuated to the rear. Although the Germans would repeat their barrages over the next day the Schwammenauel was effectively in Americans hands. In two days of combat from February 9, the 1st Battalion of the 309th Infantry had suffered 50 casualties.

Their successful capture of the dams ended the 78th Division's eight week slog in the Monschau corridor and the Hürtgen Forest.

The taking of the dam itself largely ended the Hürtgen campaign also some fighting still raged

on in the fringes. In five months of operations in the forest, some 120,000 US troops had fought there and 24,000 men had died, been wounded or had been captured there. Another 9,000 had become casualties to exhaustion, pneumonia and Immersion Foot (trench-foot).

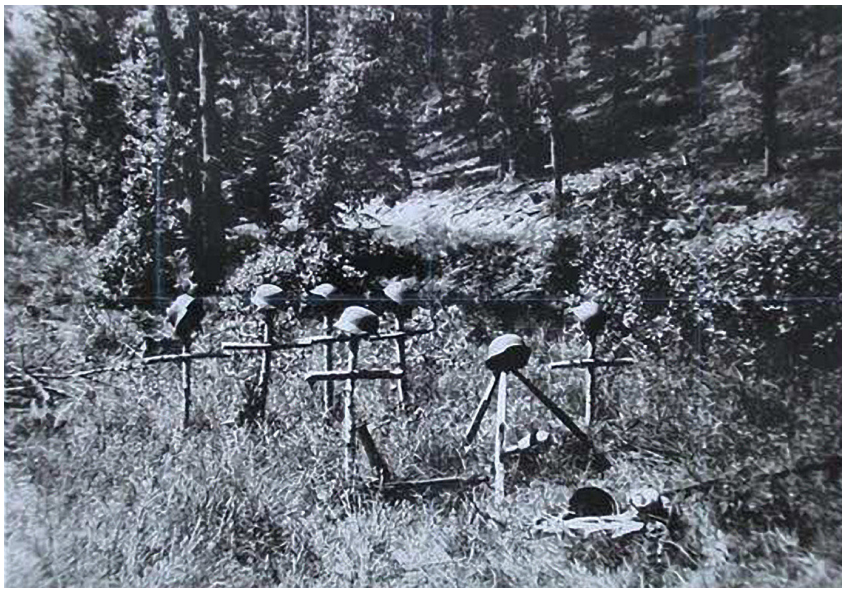
A total of six German divisions, one of them armored had taken part in the campaign along with parts of three others. Four had been completely destroyed. Of the nearly 80,000 Germans committed, an estimated 24,000 men had become casualties. The prize for all of this had been a stretch of land fifty square miles without any great strategic value. Lightning Joe Collins said after the war that the campaign had "been the deadliest of the war." In 1983, he told an interviewer that he would "never pick [the forest] as the place to be. It was assigned my corps sector and reluctantly we had to fight in it."

On the other side, Maj-General von Gersdorff, the chief of Staff of the German 7th Army stated that: "I have engaged in long campaigns in Russia as well as other fronts… and I believe the fighting west of the Roer, and especially in the Hürtgen was as costly to the defending troops as it was to those engaged in the offensive."

Although both sides could claim victory — the Germans for delaying the Americans and the Americans for finally securing the Roer River valley, the campaign remains one of those anomalous chapters of history. For the US Army especially in light of its great setbacks and near defeats, the campaign is little more than a Pyrrhic victory. Then there is sombre fact to consider that the US First Army might have well stayed in Hürtgen, enmeshed in bitter trench warfare if it were not for the success of other allied armies and the failure of other German ones.

Two weeks after the campaign, US forces took the northeastern city of Düren after heavy combat, and reached the banks of the Rhine River on the night of March 6th and 7th. This was the ultimate value of Hürtgen — allowing the survivors of the battle with reinforcements to smash their way towards the last natural river obstacle before the Ruhr. The Rhine would be crossed just days later in March, and the Ruhr occupied after a gigantic Anglo-American pincer encircled and destroyed the German forces within it in mid-April. Following these crippling developments and the relentless onslaught of the Russians from the east, the Third Reich crumbled in a matter of weeks.

After the war, a story is told about a villager who set himself the daunting task of removing the dead from the forest. Every day he went into the woods and stuffing the mutilated, decomposed bodies into sacks, carried them out on his back to a proper burial. The story might be a little spurious, but whatever the truth, it reportedly took him two years to finish the task — and his job was minute compared to the larger work of the Graves Registration Unit. But the scale of the losses can be taken into context by understanding that the dead are still being found in the forest today. And the truth is that a visitor to the Hürtgen today, no matter where they may be in the forest, it is likely within a few square feet of where someone statistically died. ➢



THE CASUALTIES OF WAR In 1946, a US Army study group returned to the forest to study the battle and discovered this German grave. Today, the dead have a more permanent cemetery. US ARMY

THE PARTICIPATING UNITS

AMERICAN FORCES

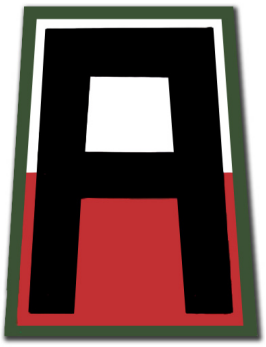
US 12th Army Group

Lt-General Omar N. Bradley

Created on 14 July 1944, The Twelfth Army Group was the largest and most powerful United States Army formation to exist under combat conditions. Headquartered in London it held control over nearly all American Forces in Western Europe and Germany in 1944 to 1945. At its peak it controlled four American armies, the First, the Third, the Ninth and the Fifteenth — nearly 1.3 million men.

US FIRST ARMY

Lt-General Courtney Hodges



Arriving in England in October 1943 to prepare for the cross-channel invasion of France, the First Army initially came under the British 21st Army Group in Normandy in 1944. When Lt-General Omar Bradley's US 12th Army Group was formed in July, the First Army left British command to join this new formation as did the recently-arrived US Third army. It remained under Bradley's authority until the Battle of the Bulge, when cut-off from higher headquarters it reverted to 21st Army Group control on December 20. When the battle was won and the drive into the Rhineland began, the First Army rejoined 12th Group and finished the campaign in Germany. Plans to field it in the Pacific afterwards were forestalled with the end of the war.

US V CORPS

Maj-General Leonard Gerow *(to 15 Jan 1945)*

Maj-General Clarence Huebner

Primary units - 2nd ID, 8th ID, 28th ID, 78th ID, 2nd Ranger Bn, 5th AD

This corps was re-activated at Camp Beauregard in Louisiana in October 1940. Moving to Iceland after Germany's declaration of war on the United States in December, this corps became the first American contingent to deploy to Europe during the Second World War. Later, it went to continental Europe during D-Day and remained largely with the First Army until the end of the war. Exceptions were a brief detachment to the US Seventh Army in the autumn of 1944 and to the US Third Army just before Germany's surrender in 1945.

THE 2nd INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen. Walter M Robertson *2 Dec 44 to end of war*
Assistant CO: Brig-Gen. John H. Stokes, Jr.
Headquarters: St. Vith
Dates: Nov to Dec 1944

Primary Units
9th Infantry (Col. Chester J. Hirschfelder *to 10 Jan 1945*)
23rd Infantry (Col. Jay B. Loveless)
38th Infantry (Col. Francis H. Boos)
2nd Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
2nd Engineer Combat Battalion
2nd Medical Battalion
2nd Division Artillery
15th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
37th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
38th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
12th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer)

Attachments
- 462nd Anti-Aircraft Automatic Wpns Bn (Mbl)
- 741st Tank Bn
- 18th Cavalry Recon Sq
- D Troop, 89th Cavalry Sq (9th Armd Div)
- C Company, 86th Chemical Mortar Bn
- 275th Armored Field Artillery Bn
- 27th Armored Infantry Bn (9th Armd Div)
- 629th Tank Destroyer Bn (Self-Propelled)

THE 8th "GOLDEN ARROWS" INFANTRY DIVISION

COs: Maj-Gen. Donald A. Stroh *to 28 Nov 1944*, Maj-Gen W.G. Weaver
Assistant CO: Brig-Gen Charles D.W. Canham
Headquarters: Wiltz (3 Oct), Rott (19 Nov), Gemeter (17 Dec), Zweifall (27 Dec 1944 to 16 Jan)
Dates involved: Nov 19 - 8 Dec 1944
Division Losses: 5,200 casualties
Opponents: 344th ID, 89th ID and 272nd VGD.

Primary Units
13th Infantry (Col. Numa A. Watson *to 1 Dec 44*, Lt Col Earle L. Lerette)
28th Infantry (Col Merrith E Olmstead, *31 Aug 44 - 4 Mar 45*)
121st Infantry (Col John R. Jeter *to 25 Nov 44*, Col Thomas J. Cross, *to 22 Mar 45*)

8th Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
12th Engineer Combat Battalion
8th Medical Battalion
8th Divisional Artillery
43d Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
45th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
56th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
28th Field Artillery Battalion (155 Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
Staff Sgt John W. Minick, 121st Inf, between Hürtgen and Germeter on 21 Nov 1944 (KIA)

Attachments
- 709th Tank Bn (*13 July 44-26 Jan 45*)
- Combat Command R (from 5th Armd Div) (*20 Nov 44-16 Dec 44*)
- 86th Chemical Mortar Bn *(19 Nov 44-24 Dec 44)*
- 76th Forward Artillery Bn (155mm Guns) (*19 Nov 44-21 Dec 44*)
- 18th Forward Artillery Bn (105mm Guns) *(20 Nov 44-6 Dec 44)*
- 188th Forward Artillery Battalion (155mm guns) *(26 Nov 44-11 Dec 44)*
- 987th Forward Artillery Bn (155mm Guns) *(26 Nov 44-11 Dec 44)*
- 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion *(19 Nov 44-10 Dec 44)*
- 2nd Ranger Battalion *(17 Sep 44-20 Dec 44)*

Known alternately as the "Pathfinder" or the "Arrow" division, the divisional motto was "These are my credentials."

THE 28th INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen Norman D. Cota
Assistant CO: Brig-Gen. George A. Davis *to 1 Mar 1945*
Headquarters: Rott (25 Oct - 19 Nov 1944)
Dates involved: Oct 27 - 20 Nov 1944
Divisional losses: 6,184 casualties
Opposition: 275th ID, 89th ID and 116th PzD

Primary Units
109th Infantry (Lt-Col Daniel B Stickler *to 8 Nov 1944*, Col Jesse L Gibney *to 8 Dec 1944*, James E Rudder)
110th Infantry (Col Theodore A Seeley, Hurley E Fuller to Dec 18 (POW))
112th Infantry (Lt-Col Carl L. Peterson *to 7 Nov 44*, Col. Gustin M. Nelson)

28th Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
103d Engineer Combat Battalion
103d Medical Battalion

28th Division Artillery
107th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
109th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
229th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
108st Field Artillery Battalion (155 Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
1st Lt Turney W. Leonard, 893rd TD Bn, near Kommerscheidt on 4-6 Nov 1944 (KIA) His unit was attached to the 28th Division at the time

Attachments
- 707th Tank Bn *(6 Oct 1944-8 Jan 1945)* – Lt-Col. Richard W. Ripple
- 86th Chemical Mortar Bn (minus 'C' Company) *(28 Oct - 19 Nov 1944)*
- 146th Combat Engineer Bn (minus 'B' Company) *(30 Oct -19 Nov 1944)*
- 'A' Battery, 987th Forward Artillery Bn (155mm Guns) *(7 Oct - 9 Nov 1944)*
- 76th Forward Artillery Bn (105mm Howitzers) *(28 Oct -19 Nov 1944)*
- A Company, 801st Tank Destroyer Bn *(6 to 10 Nov 1944)*
- 2nd Ranger Bn *(14 to 19 Nov 1944)*
- 893rd Tank Destroyer Bn (minus 'A' Company) *(29 Oct - 19 Nov 1944)*

A Red Keystone, the official emblem of Pennsylvania, was the insignia of division, originally a Pennsylvania National Guard unit. The unit later earned the grim name "The bloody Bucket" division with a mixture of contempt and awe by its German adversaries in Normandy. This name became more commonly used during the Hürtgen campaign. The divisional motto was "Fire and Movement."

THE 78th "LIGHTNING" INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Maj. Gen. Edwin P. Parker, Jr
Assistant CO: Brig-Gen. John K. Rice
Headquarters: Roetgen (7 Dec 44), Lammersdorf (8 Feb 45), Schmidt (1-3 Mar 1945)
Dates involved: Dec 13 - 16, 1944 (interrupted by the Battle of the Bulge) & Jan 30 - 9 Feb 1945
Divisional losses: Unclear
Opposition: 272 VGD

Primary Units
309th Infantry (Col. John G. Ondrick)
310th Infantry (Col. Earl M. Miner)
311th Infantry (Col. Chester M. Willingham)

78th Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
303d Engineer Combat Battalion
303d Medical Battalion

78th Division Artillery
307th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
308th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
903d Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
309th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
Staff Sgt. Jonah E. Kelley, 311th Inf, near Kesternich on 6 Feb 1945 (KIA)

Attachments
- Combat Command A, 5th Armd Div *(27 Jan 45-1 Feb 45)*
- 'B' Squadron, British 1st Fife & Forfar Yeomanry (from British 79th Armd Div) *(27 Jan-2 Feb 45)*
- A Company, 739th Tank Bn *(27 Jan-6 Feb 45)*
- B Company, 774th Tank Bn *(3 Feb-8 Feb 45)*
- Combat Command R, 7th Armd Div *(3-10 Feb 45)*
- 774th Tank Bn (minus 'B' Company) *(3-24 Feb 45)*
- One Platoon, A Company, 738th Tank Bn *(6-28 Feb 45)*
- B Company, 774th Tank Bn (13 Feb-24 Apr 45)
- A & C Companies, 86th Chemical Mortar Bn *(3-13 Feb 45)*
- 'C' Battery, 987th Forward Artillery Bn (155mm Guns) *(3-14 Feb 45)*
- 23d Armored Inf Bn (from 7th Armd Div) *(3-10 Feb 45)*
- 517th Independant Parachute Combat Team *(4-7 Feb 45)*
- B Company 814th Tank Destroyer Bn *(10 February 45)*

THE 5th "VICTORY" ARMORED DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen Lunsford E. Oliver
Assistant CO: ?
Dates involved: 24 Nov-24 Dec 1944
Divisional Losses: Unclear
Opponents: 89th and 272nd Inf. Div.

Primary Units
Headquarters Company

Combat Command A (Brig-Gen. Eugene A Regnier)
34th Tank Bn (Lt-Cols Karl L. Scherer *to 7 Nov 44*, William L. Cabaniss *to 30 Jan 45 WIA*, Richard H Jones)
46th Armored Infantry Bn (Lt-Col. William H. Burton Jr)
47th Armored Field Artillery Bn (Lt-Col. John B. Rozenzweig)
A Coy, 22nd Armored Engineer Bn
A Coy, 628th Tank Destroyer Bn
A Battery, 387 Anti-Aircraft Bn

Combat Command B (Col. John T. Cole)
81st Tank Bn (Lt-Col. Leroy H. Anderson)
15th Armored Infantry Bn (Lt-Cols Kenneth P Gilson *to 20 Sept 44 WIA*, Glenn G Dickenson *to 15 Apr 1945*)
71st Armored Field Artillery Bn (Lt-Col. Israel Washburn)
B troop, 85th Cavalry Recon Squadron (Mechanized) (Capt. Kenneth M. Hayes)
B Coy, 628th Tank Destroyer Bn
B Battery, 387th Anti-Aircraft Bn

Combat Command R (Col. Glen H. Anderson)
10th Tank Bn (Lt-Col. William A. Hamberg)
47th Armored Infantry Bn (Lt-Col. Howard E. Boyer)
95th Armored Field Artillery Bn (Lt-Col. James W. McNeer)
C Troop, 85th Cavalry Recon Sq (Mechanized) (Capt. George W. Vasquez)
C Coy, 22nd Armored Engineer Bn
C Coy, 628th Tank Destroyer Bn
145th Armored Signal Company
C Battery, 387 AA Bn

Other Details
387th Anti-Aircraft Autmatic Weapons Bn (SP) -Lt-Col. Elmer I. Kenneweg
22nd Armored Engineer Battalion (Lt-Col. Fred E. Ressguieu)
127th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion
75th Armored Medical Battalion

Attachments
- 628th Tank Destroyer Bn (Lt-Col. William T. Gallagher)

THE 82nd "ALL AMERICAN" AIRBORNE DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen James Gavin
Assistant CO: Col. (Later Brig-Gen) Ira P. Swift
Headquarters: Rott (8 Feb 45), Hürtgen (10 Feb 45), Rott (18-19 Feb 45)
Dates involved: Feb 3-17, 1945
Opposition: 272nd VGD, 6th FJ Regiment

Primary Units
504th Parachute Inf (Col Reuben H. Tucker)
505th Parachute Inf Col. William Ekman)
325th Glider Infantry (Col. Charles Billingsea)

307th Airborne Engineer Battalion
80th Airborne Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
307th Airborne Medical Company
82d Parachute Maintenance Battalion

82d Airborne Division Artillery
319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion
320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion
376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion

Attachments
- 634th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Wpns Bn (Mbl)
- B Company, 774th Tank Bn
- C Company, 90th Chemical Mortar Bn
- 596th Engineers Company
- 460th Parachute Field Artillery Bn *(8-9 Feb 45)*
- 987th Field Artillery Bn (- A & C Batteries) (155mm Gun) *(15 Feb 45-19 Feb 45)*
- 517th Parachute Infantry Combat team (- 3d Bn)
- Two Platoons, 893d Tank Destroyer Bn (SP)

The 2nd RANGER BATTALION

CO: Lt-Col. James Rudder *to 8 Dec 1844*
Assistant CO: Maj George S. Williams Jr
Surgeon: Capt. Walter K. Block (KIA)
Force A (Capt. Arnold)
A Company
B Company
C Company (Capt. Ralph E. Goranson)

Task Force Slater (Capt. Harold K. Slater)
D Company (Capt. Morton McBride)
E Company (Capt. Richard P. Merrill)
F Company (Capt. Otto Masney)

The 2nd Rangers were formed on 1 April 1943 at Camp Forrest, Tennessee along with the 5th Ranger Battalion. Both battalions were officially activated in September 1943 and deployed to England that year where they set about preparing for the cross-channel invasion of France.

When D-Day came on 6 June 1944, 225 Rangers from D, E and F Companies assaulted Pointe Du Hoc. One hundred and nienty men scaled the cliff and only 90 were still fit for combat two days later. In the meantime, A, B and C Companies had landed at Omaha beach. After Normandy, they fought at Brest before moving to the Hürtgen Forest that autumn. Casualties were again heavy during the battle for Hill 400 and once again, D, E and F Companies were the ones to suffer heavily. In all, 133 men were lost.

US VII CORPS

Maj-General Lawton "Lightning Joe" Collins

Primary units - 1st ID, 4th ID, 9th ID, 83rd ID, 3rd AD

This formation was first organized on 19 August 1918 at Remiremont, France, and served in the First World War. During the Second World War, it fought in five campaigns: Utah beach, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes and Central Europe. Its actions during the Hürtgen Campaign were classified into the Rhineland section with much of the action taking place on the northern flank of the forest. Finally, with the capture of the Roer dams, the way became open for VII Corps to advance deeper into Germany, towards the Rhine River. After the war, the corps fought in Korea but later returned to Germany.

THE 1st "BIG RED ONE" INFANTRY DIVISION

COs: Maj-Gen. Clarence R. Huebner *to 11 Dec 1944*, Maj-Gen. Clift Andrus
Assistant CO: Brig-Gen. George A. Taylor
Headquarters: Vicht (10 Nov-8 Dec 44)
Dates involved: 16 Nov to 8 Dec 1944
Divisional Losses: 3,993 casualties
Opposition: 12th VGD, 116th Pz Div, 47 VGD, 3 FJ Div

Primary Units
16th Infantry (Col. Frederick Gibb)
18th Infantry (Col. George Smith *to 25 Feb 1945*)
26th Infantry (Col. John FR Seitz *to 9 Apr 45*)

1st Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
1st Engineer Combat Battalion
1st Medical Battalion

1st Divisional Artillery
7th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
32d Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
33d Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
5th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
T/Sgt Jake W. Lindsey, 16th Inf, near Hamich on 18 Nov 1944.
PFC Francis X. McGraw, 26th Inf, Schevenhütte on 19 Nov 1944.
Pvt Robert T. Henry, 16th Inf, near Luchem on Dec 3, 1944 (KIA)

Attachments
- 4th Cavalry Gp (-24th Cav Rcn Sq) (11-30 Nov 44)
- A & B Companies, 87th Chemical Mortar Bn (1 Oct-17 Dec 44)
- 84th Field Artillery Bn (9th Div) (105 How) (10 Nov-1 Dec 44)
- Btry A, 987th Firld Artillery Bn (155 Gun) (1-17 Dec 44)
- 60th Field Artillery Bn (9th Div) (105 How) (6-8 Dec 44)
- 47th Infantry (9th Div) (10-30 Nov 44)
- 2d Bn, 36th Armored Inf (3d Armored Div) (4-7 Dec 44)

Known as the "Fighting First" and the "Big Red One," the 1st Infantry Division is one of the most famous US Army divisions to come out of World War II. The division insignia had its roots in the First World War. When it arrived in France during that conflict, it was usually first at the front, the first to fire and the first to take casualties and the first to be mentioned in the general orders. Thus it became the known as the First Division. The divisional motto was: "Duty First."

THE 4th "IVY" INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen. Raymond O. Barton to 27 Dec 1944
Assistant CO: Col. James S. Rodwell to 7 Dec 1944
Headquarters: Zweifall (7 Nov to 8 Dec 44)
Dates involved: Nov 6 - Dec 8, 1944
Divisional Losses: 5,260 casualties
Opposition: 275th ID, 116th PzD, 344th ID and 353rd VGD.

Primary Units
8th Infantry (Col. Richard G. McKee)
12th Infantry (Col. James S. Luckett *to 21 Nov*), Col. Robert H. Chance)
22d Infantry (Col. Charles T. Lanham)
4th Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
4th Engineer Combat Battalion
4th Medical Battalion

4th Division Artillery
29th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
42d Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
44th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
20th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
1st Lt Bernard J. Ray, 8th Inf, near Schevenhütte on 17 Nov 1944 (KIA)
Major George L. Mabry, Jr., 8th Inf, near Gut Schwarzenbroich on 20 Nov 1944
PFC M. Garcia, 22nd Inf, Grosshau, 27/28 Nov 1944

Attachments
- C Company, 709th Tank Bn *(21 Nov-2 Dec 44)*
- Combat Command A, 5th Armd Div *(29 Nov-12 Dec 44)*
- 24th Cavaly Recon Squadron *(15 Nov-5 Dec 44)*
- C Company, 87th Chemical Mortar Bn *(10 Nov-3 Dec 44)*
- D Company, 87th Chemical Mortar Bn *(23 Nov-4 Dec 44)*
- 298th Engineer Combat Bn *(10-15 Nov 44)*
- 294th Engineer Combat Bn *(23 Nov-5 Dec 44)*
- HQ & HQ Battery, 188th Forward Artillery Group *(8-11 Nov 44)*
- 196th Forward Artillery Bn (105mm Howitzers) *(9 Nov-2 Dec 44)*
- 172nd Forward Artillery Bn (4.5" guns) *(9 Nov-4 Dec 44)*
- 951st Forward Artillery Bn (155mm guns) *(9 Nov-4 Dec 44)*
- 981st Forward Artillery Bn (155mm guns) *(9 Nov-4 Dec 44)*
- 'B' Battery, 285th Forward Artillery Observation Bn (155mm guns) *(9 Nov-4 Dec 44)*
- 803rd Tank Destroyer Bn *(9 Nov-25 Dec 44)*

Known as the 'Ivy' Division, the division inherited its divisonal badge from the orginal WWI-era 4th Division. The badge consists of four green ivy leaves connected at the stem. The word "i-vy", as pronounced, suggests the characters used in the Roman Numeral "IV". The divisional motto was: "Steadfast and loyal."

THE 9th "OCTOFOIL" INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen Louis A. Craig
Assistant CO: Brig. Gen. Hammond D. Birks
Dates Involved: September 13 - 26, 1944 & October 6 - 26, 1944. The 47th Infantry saw action again in Nov 1944, 60th Infantry in Feb 1945
Divisional Losses: 3,836 casualties in first engagements and 4,500 during second.
Opposition: 89th ID, 275th ID, 353rd ID and 12th VGD

Primary Units
39th Infantry (Lt-Col. Van H. Bond)
47th Infantry (Lt-Col. George W. Smythe)
60th Infantry (Lt-Col. Jesse L. Gibney *to Oct*, John G. Van Houten)
9th Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
15th Engineer Combat Battalion

9th Medical Battalion

9th Division Artillery
26th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
60th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
84th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm Howitzer)
34th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
PFC Carl W. Sheridan, 47th Inf, near Frenzerburg-Langerwehe on 26 Nov 1944 (KIA)

Attachments
- Battery C, 557th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Wpns Bn (Mbl) *10 Sep 44-8 Oct 44*
- Battery B, 438th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Wpns (Mbl) *20 Sep 44-4 Oct 44*
- 2d Plat, Battery C, 226th Anti-Aircraft SL Bn *8 Feb 45-12 Feb 45*
- Co H, 32d Armored Regt (3d Armd Div)
- Co B, 87th Chemical Mortar Bn
- Co A, 294th Engineers Bn *26 Sep 44-29 Sep 44*
- 298th Engineers Bn *29 Sep 44-30 Sep 44*
- 298th Engineers Bn *1 Oct 44-19 Oct 44*
- 294th Engineers Bn *19 Oct 44-25 Oct 44*
- Hq & Hq Btry, 188th Field Artillery Group *7 Sep 44-18 Sep 44*
- Btry B, 991st Field Artillery Bn (155mm Gun) *13 Sep 44*
- 188th Field Artillery Bn (155mm How) *19 Sep 44-1 Oct 44*
- Btry C, 195th Field Artillery Bn (8" How) *28 Sep 44-23 Oct 44*
- Hq & Hq Btry, 188th Field Artillery Group *28 Sep 44-23 Oct 44*
- 172d Field Artillery Bn (4.5" Gun) *28 Sep 44-23 Oct 44*
- 981st Field Artillery Bn (155mm Gun) *29 Sep 44-23 Oct 44*
- 76th Field Artillery Bn (105mm How) *12 Feb 45-17 Feb 45*
- 955th Field Artillery Bn (155mm How) *13 Feb 45-17 Feb 45*
- 309th Infantry (78th Div) *8 Feb 45-12 Feb 45*
- 1st Bn, 311th Infantry (78th Div) *10 Feb 45-12 Feb 45*

THE 83rd "THUNDERBOLT" INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Major General Robert C Macon
Assistant CO: Brig. General Claude B Ferenbaugh
Headquarters: Luxembourg (12 Nov 44), Krewinkel (6 Dec), Eilendorf (26-27 Dec 44)
Dates involved: 3-30 Dec 1944

Opposition: 212th Völksgrenadier Division, 47th Infantry Division, 91st Infantry Division, 272nd Völksgrenadier Division, 353rd Infantry Division

Primary Units
329th Infantry (Col. Edwin B. Crabhill)
330th Infantry (Col. Robert H. York)
331st Infantry (Col. Robert T. Foster)
83rd Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)
308th Engineer Combat Battalion
308th Medical Battalion

83rd Division Artillery
322nd Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
323rd Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
908th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)
324th Field Artillery Battalion (105 Howitzer)

Medal of Honor
Sgt Ralph G. Neppel, M Company, 329th Inf, near Birgel on 14 Dec 1944

Attachments
- 774th Tank Bn *(28 Aug-24 Dec 44)*
- A Troop 89th Cav Rcn Sq *(5-7 Dec 44)*
- 4th Cav Gp *(7-11 Dec 44)*
- A Troop 24th Cav Rcn Sq *(7-11 Dec 44)*
- 759th Tank Bn (-Co C) *(7-11 Dec 44)*
- 635th Tank Destroyer Bn (T) (Elms)
- 24th Cav Rcn Sq (-Tr A)
- A Coy 87th Chemical Mortar Bn *(9-21 Dec 44)*
- 297th Engineers Bn
- C Btry 558th Field Artillery Bn (155 Gun)
- A Btry 285th Field Artillery Observer Bn
- 951st FA Bn (155 How), 193d FA Bn (105 How),

25th FA Bn (105 How),
- 629th Tank Destroyer Bn (SP)
- 22nd Infantry (4th Div) *(3 Dec 44-7 Dec 44)*
- 8th Combat Team (4th Div) *(7 Dec 44-11 Dec 44)*
- 29th Field Artillery Bn (4th Div) (105 How) *(7 Dec 44-11 Dec 44)*
- A Company 4th Engineers Bn (4th Div) *(7 Dec 44-11 Dec 44)*
- A Company, One Plt D Company & One Plt 70th Tankk Bn *(7 Dec 44-11 Dec 44)*
- A Company 803d Tank Destroyer Bn (SP) *(7 Dec 44-11 Dec 44)*

Originally known as the Ohio Division, but later identified as the Thunderbolt division while holding positions on the Rhine River in 1945, the 83rd Division used the above badge. The division was first formed during World War I, and as most of its draftees came from Ohio, the unit formed a badge consisting of an inverted triangle with a monogrammatic gold design, spelling out the word 'O-H-I-O".

THE 3rd "SPEARHEAD" ARMORED DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen Maurice Harmon *to 30 Mar 45 KIA*
Assistant CO: Col. John A. Smith
Headquarters: Stolberg (21 Sept), Hotton (20-21 Dec)
Divisional Losses: Unclear

Primary Units
Combat Command A (Brig-Gen Doyle O'Hickey *to 31 Mar 1945*)
Command Command B (Brig-Gen Truman E Boudinot)
Combat Command R (Col. Carl J Rohsenberger *to 24 Sept 1944*, Col. Robert L Howze Jr)
TF Lovelady (2nd Bn, 33 Armed Reg) Lt-Col. William B. Lovelady

32nd Armored Regiment
33rd Armored Regiment
36th Armored Infantry Regiment
83rd Armored Recon Battalion

3rd Divisional Artillery
54th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
67th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
391st Armored Field Artillery Battalion

Attachments
- 486th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Wpns Bn (SP) *25 Jun 44-9 May 45*
- 703d Tank Destroyer Bn (SP) *25 Jun 44-17 Dec 44*
- A Company 738th Tank Bn (Mine Explorer) *6 Dec 44-15 Jan 45*
- 294th Engineers Bn *25 Oct 44-9 Nov 44*
- 1st Plt B Coy 15th Engineers Bn (9th Div) *27 Oct 44-11 Nov 44*
- 298th Engineers Bn 9 *Nov 44-10 Nov 44*
- B Company 15th Engineers Bn (9th Div) *11 Nov 44-1 Dec 44*
- 84th Field Artillery Bn (9th Div) (105 How) *27 Oct 44-11 Nov 44*
- 83d Armored Field Artillery Bn *20 Dec 44-31 Dec 44*
- 991st Field Artillery Bn (-two btrys) (155 Gun) *21 Dec 44-31 Dec 44*
- 188th Field Artillery Bn (155 How) *23 Dec 44-31 Dec 44*

Known as the 3rd "Spearhead" Armored Division, the divisional badge is simply a number emblazoned on the standard American Armored Corps badge, which was used as the standard badge which was the basis for all American armored divisions.
The color displayed on the badge was representative of the army's three primary combat arms. Red for artillery, blue for infantry and yellow for cavalry. The lightning bolt represents shock and action, the tracks, indicative of mobility and the cannon — firepower.

GERMAN FORCES

ARMY GROUP B

Field Marshal Walter Model

This formation had seen action since the start of the war, first in Belgium and Holland in 1940 but as 1942 came, the group went east to take part in the summer invasion of Russia. It remained on the Eastern Front for the next year, eventually being amalgamated with another army group which resulted in the loss of its identity.

Reformed in Italy in 1943, the group subsequently moved to Northern France after the Allies invaded in 1944. The Group remained in this theatre, being progressively forced back towards Germany where it finally dissolved on 21 April 1945.

7th ARMEE

General Erich Brandenberger

Formed at Stuttgart on 25 August 1939. Its war began during the invasion of France. Following victory, it took up the defense of the eastern France, followed by southwestern France. It saw little combat until the Allied invasion of France in 1944, but not immediately. Wary that the real Allied blow would fall elsewhere, German high command initially held the army in reserve. It eventually joined in the attack and remained in this state until narrowly escaping the Falaise Pocket. By autumn 1944, the force had taken up station in Eastern Belgium and Luxembourg, slowly taking a trickle of fresh supplies and materiel to replace its catastrophic losses of heavy equipment in Normandy. It later took part in the Battle of the Bulge. In April 1945, now almost encircled by the US Third Army, the German force narrowly escaped a trap and retreated south. It eventually surrendered in Bavaria on VE-Day, May 8.

LXXIV Korps

General Erich Straube
General Karl Püchler

THE 272nd VÖLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

CO: Oberst George Kosmala, Maj-General Eugen Koenig *(1944-1945)*
Dates: Dec 5 - 8, 1944 and 20 Jan - 9 Feb 1945
Opposition: 8th & 78th Divs

Primary Units
980th Grenadier Regiment
I & II Battalions
981st Grenadier Regiment
I & II Battalions
982nd Grenadier Regiment
I & II Battalions
272nd Artillery Regiment
I, II, III & IV Battalions

272nd Panzer-Jäger Bn

272nd Pionere Bn
272nd Recon Bn

Knight's Cross winner:
Lt-Gen Friedrich A. Schack, Oakleaves to the Knights Cross, awarded on 21 Sept 1944

The division had its origins in the 272nd Infantry Division which was itself formed from the 216th Division on the Eastern Front. The division took part in the Normandy Campaign before becoming a Völksgrenadier unit in the Hürtgen. It later took part in the Battle of Bulge, before being destroyed in the Ruhr in 1945.

THE 275th VÖLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

CO: Lt-Gen. Hans Schmidt
Dates: October 1 to ?
Opposition: 4th, 9th & 28th Divs

Primary Units
983rd Grenadier Regiment
984th Grenadier Regiment
985th Grenadier Regiment
275th Fusiliers Battalion (Majs. Reidel, Ilsemann)
275th Artillery Regiment (Three Bns)
253rd Infantry Regiment
Panzer-Jäger Abt 275
275th Artillery Regiment
275th Pioneers Bn
275th Recon Bn
275th Nachrichten Abe (Signals)

Kampfgruppe Wegelein (later Weinen)

The division was formed in November 1943, and took part in the Normandy campaign although it never fought as a division there. Nevertheless, its regiments, while serving with other divisions,took heavy casualties. In the Hürtgen campaign, the division was the backbone of German defenses for the first three months of the battle.

The strength of the division was as follows (all figures are for October unless otherwise stated)

- The 984th Grenadiers with two battalions had 800 men.
- The 942nd Infantry regiment was renamed the 985th Grenadiers and consisted of the first battalion of the Luftwaffe Regiment 942 and the XX Festung Bn. The unit was poorly trained but had good leadership. Manpower was about 550 men
- The 253 Infantry Regiment was an Ersatz Greandier Regiment and had been put together by amalgamating several half-broke units. The men were mostly poorly-armed older men with physical or health problems. Still, manpower stood at 1,100 men.
- 353rd Artillery Regiment came from the 353rd Infantry Division and had 14 pieces.
- The 275th Fusiliers Battalion had 400 men
- The 275th Pioneers Bn had 150 men
- The 275th Nachrichten Abt had 250 men
- The 275th Panzer-Jäger Bn was badly mauled by later took on replacements.
- Rear-echelon troops (VersRgt 275) within the division amounted to 1,250 to 1,750 men.
- Fieldersatz (Field Replacement) Bn had 200 men.
- 341 StuG Brigade had six StuG assault guns avialble for divisional operations on Nov 4. Three more were with the 1055th Grenadiers of the 89th Division)
- A Hpi Bn under Hauptmann Brückner had 150 men.
- LehrRgt (Kampfgruppe Wegelein) had 2,000 well-armed men.

THE 344th VÖLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

CO: Luftwaffe Colonel Erich Walter *(to 30 Sept 44)*, Colonel Rudolf Goltzech *(to 10 Oct 44)*, Maj-Gen Georg Kossmala (16 Oct 44 to 28 Feb 45 MIA)

Primary Units
1057th Grenadier Regiment (three bns)
1058th Grenadier Regiment (three bns)
832nd Grenadier Regiment (two Eastern bns)
344th Panzer-Jäger Bn
Divisional Troops
405th Völksartillerie Corps (of regimental strength attached to division)

The division was formed in late-1942 as a static infantry division. Situated on the Bay of Biscay just before D-Day, it took part in the battle for Southern France where it completely destroyed. Reconstituted as a Völksgrenadier Division that November from the headquarters of the famed 91st Airlanding Division — able veterans of the Normandy fighting — the 344th moved into the Hürtgen Forest and took over the 275th Division's front on November 21 after the latter unit was withdrawn from combat. As events transpired the 344th Infantry lasted a mere eight days on the line before it was virtually destroyed again and had to be relieved by the 353rd Division.

THE 353rd VÖLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

CO: Lt-Gen. Paul Mahlmann (Aug 44-Feb 45)

Primary Units
941st Grenadier Regiment
942nd Grenadier Regiment
943rd Grenadier Regiment
353rd Artillerie Regiment
353rd Panzer-Jäger Bn
353rd Pionere Bn (Semi-Motorized)
353rd Recon Bn (Semi-Motorized)
Motely collection of Luftwaffe personnel, five security battalions and a infantry replacement training regiment.

The division was formed on 5 November 1943 in Brittany and took part in the Normandy campaign. Much of its combat was in the American sector and at the end of this campaign, the unit escaped from the Falaise pocket and moved north to re-fit. By September, bolstered by several rear-echelon troops it was holding the line again. In November it became a Völksgrenadier division. In the Hürtgen, the division took over from the 344th VGD on November 27.

THE 89th INFANTRY DIVISION

CO: Colonel Ruesler (1944), Maj-Gen Walter Bruns (1945)
Headquarters: ?
Dates Involved: Sept 19, 1944
Opposition: 9th, 28th & 8th Divs

Primary Units
1055th Grenadier Regiment
I, II & III Battalions
1056th Grenadier Regiment
I, II & III Battalions
1063rd Grenadier Regiment
(Contained men from Luftwaffe Festung Bns V, IX, XIV and the Grenadier Ausb Regiment Morscbach 416, Festung Inf Bn 1403 and parts of several rear-echelon units)
89th Fusiliers Bn
189th Feldersatz Bn
189th Artillery Regiment
Signals Company

Kampfgruppe Bayer (Col. Bayer)
Six StuGs from the 341st StuG Brigade
I/24 (Hptm Böhme)
II/16 (Oberlt Adam)
Pz-Jäger Abt 519 (JagdPanthers)
III/860 Grenadiers (Frfom 342 Div)

Knight's Cross Winners
Obert Karl Roesler, 1056 Grenadiers, Knights Cross awarded on 28 Oct 1944.
Fw Kurt Lindner, 1055 Grenadiers, Knight's Cross awarded on 9 Dec 1944

The "Horseshoe" division first encountered Allied forces in small-scale operations in France. It missed most of the Normandy fighting except for a few battles at the later stages. Later engagements along the West Wall left it sorely bruised. Undergoing a reorganization, it took on a secondary divisional badge consisting of a warrior with a spear and shield.

After heavy fighting in the Hürtgen forest, the division's reward was further combat during the Battle of the Bulge. Committed in the Liege sector, the division was soon on the retreat. It was destroyed in the Rhineland and small bands of survivors managed to escape to Kassel.

THE 341st STUG BRIGADE

CO: Hptm Reinhold Ertel, KC *to 22 Jan 45 WIA*
1st Battery (OberLt Siegfried Hesselink)
2nd Battery (OberLt Petzoid)
3rd Battery (OberLt Willi Schaller)

The brigade first entered existence in May 1941 but extensive training would preclude the unit from combat for over two years. Finally in March 1944, the brigade received its full complement of armor, equipment and men. In May, it went to the Narbonne sector in the south of France and was still here when the Allied invasion struck Normandy. The brigade recieved orders to standby for deployment to Normandy but the actual movement order came only on July 27. Heavy combat followed. Withdrawing after losses, the unit re-equipped and found itself in combat around Aachen. By October 21, they had only 27 StuGs left.

The brigade joined the Hürtgen defenders in the first week of November (on the 7th). Here success came in strides. One brigade member, Sergeant Heinrich Feldkamp won a German Gold Cross for his actions, but in December, the brigade was surprisingly withdrawn to take part in the Ardennes Offensive.

At the end of March 1945, the brigade was fighting the Ruhr but losses had been heavy. It was withdrawn to refit at Bad Tolz but the withdrawal broke up when the Americans advanced and the brigade broke up.

LXXXI Korps

Lt-Gen Friedrich-August Schack *(to late Sept)*
Gen. Friedrich JM Köchling

THE 12th VÖLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

CO: Maj-Gen. Gerhard Engel
Dates involved: 16 Sept 1944 to ?
Opposition: 9th & 1st Divs

Primary Units
27th Füsilier Regiment
48th Grenadier Regiment (Col. Wilhelm Osterhold)
89th Grenadier Regiment
12th Füsilier Bn
12th Artillery Regiment (four battalions)
12th Pionier Bn
12th Panzerjäger Bn
12th Nachrichten Bn
12th Feldersatz Bn
Supply Units (Versorgungseinheiten)

Knight's Cross Winners
Maj-Gen. Gerhard Engel, Oakleaves to Knight's Cross, awarded on 11 Dec 44.
Maj. Werner Ripke, 89th Grenadiers, Knight's Cross awarded on 8 Dec 44.
Fw Werner Schwerin, Fusilier Rgt 27, Knight's Cross awarded on 21 Dec 1944.
Fw Walter Knirsch, 89th Grenadiers, Knights Cross awarded on 21 Dec 1944.
Maj. Horst Raemsch, Fusilier Rgt. 27, Knight's Cross, awarded on 24 Dec 1944.
Oberst-Lt Gerhard Lemcke, 89th Grenadiers, Knight's Cross awarded on 12 Jan 45.
Hptm Claus Breger, Fusilier Rgt. 27, Oakleaves to Knights Cross awarded on 1 Jan 45(KIA)

The 12th völksgrenadier Division (originally a Grenadier Division) was formed in August 1944 in Eastern Prussia with the remains of the 12th Infantry Division. Rare for a German division at the time, it was completely outfitted and brought to full strength. Instead of returning to the Eastern Front, it went west to the Roer River front, arriving there in Sept 16.

The divisional commander, Oberst Gerhard Engel had been a former adjutant to Hitler on his first combat command, and under his authority, the division fought hard until its heavy losses knocked it out of the fighting. It was eventually destroyed in the Ruhr pocket in April 1945.

THE 47th VÖLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

CO: Lt-Gen Max Bork *to Feb 45*

Primary Units
103rd Grenadier Regiment
104th Grenadier Regiment
115th Grenadier Regiment
147th Artillery Regiment (Four battalions)
147th (Bicycle) Fusilier Company
147th Pioneer Battalion
147th Panzer-Jäger Battalion (motorized)
147th Sigals Battalion
147th Feldersatz Battalion
Supply Troops

This unit was activated in September 1944 as a völksgrenadier division in Denmark by redesignating the partly-formed 577th Völksgrenadier Division. Committed into the Aachen front and then Hürtgen Forest, it suffered heavy casualties until it was finally destroyed in March 1945.

116th "WINDHUND" PANZER DIVISION

CO: Lt-Gen Graf Gerhard von Schwerin *(to 14 Sept 44)*, Maj-Gen Heinrich Voightsberger *(to 19 Sept 44)*, Maj-Gen. Siegfried von Waldenburg *(to Apr 45)*

Dates involved: 3 Nov - 15 Nov 1944
Opposition: 28th ID, 1st ID and 4th ID

(Each PzGr regiment had two battalions)
16th Panzer Regiment
60th Panzergrenadier Regiment

156th Panzergrenadier Regiment
146th PanzerArtillery Regiment (Three bns)
116th PanzerAufklärungs Abt
281st Heeres-Flak-Artillery Abt
228th Panzer-Jäger Abt
675th Panzer-Pionier Bn
228th Panzer-Nachrichten Abt
146th Panzer Ersatz Bn

Knight's Cross winners:
Maj-Gen Siegfried von Waldenburg, Knight's Cross awarded on 9 Dec, 44.
Lt Johannes Lutz, Begleitkompanie, Knight's Cross awarded on 9 Dec 44.
Maj. Eberhard Stephan, 116 Afkl. Abtl., Knight's Cross awarded on 12 Jan 45.

Also known as the "Windhund" (Greyhound) Division," the 116th Panzer Division was formed in March 1944 from the remanants of the 16th Panzergrenadier Division and the 179th reserve Panzer Division.

Seeing combat in Normandy, it moved north and in October was used in the defence of Aachen. After the town fell on the 21st, the division retired to Holland for a short rest. On November 28, it went into the Hürtgen Forest. Although it hurt US forces tremendously, it also suffered in turn. Most of the losses were caused almost entirely by just a dozen well-sited, towed US 3" guns of C Company, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Later, it participated in the Battle of the Bulge and the Rhineland battles. The majority of the 116th was then trapped in the Ruhr pocket and surrendered on 18 April 1945.

Attachments

Schwere Panzer-Jäger Abteilung 519
CO: Hptm. Erwin Kressman

After heavy combat on the Eastern Front, this heavy tank destroyer battalion reconstituted itself on 25 August 1943 in Germany. In September, it moved to a training area at Oldebroek in Holland. Training was brisk and the unit returned to the eastern Front at Vibetsk, in Army Group Center in January 1944. By July, the battalion had lost its entire compliment of tank destroyers.

In August, an entirely new PzJg 519 formed with a company of fourteen Panthers, two companies with fourteen StuG assault guns and three Jagdpanthers. On October 10, the new unit joined the 1st SS Panzer Korps but was allocated to the 116th Panzer Division in the Hürtgen Forest. The battalion was instrumental in driving US troops out of Schmidt and Kommerscheidt. In fact, it was heavily-engaged in this area from November 3 to 6.

On 12 December, the battalion joined the 246th Völksgrenadier Division, its armor contingent by now consisting of 19 StuGs and nine Jagdpanthers. On 10 April 1945, the battalion, under its commander, the panzer ace, Hauptmann Albert Ernst surrendered at Iserlohn.

SOMBER ACE Albert Ernst served with sPzJg Abt 519 for most of the latter war years of his career. As a platoon commander within 1st Company, he became a panzer ace, earning the nickname "The Tiger of Vitebsk." On 7 February 1944, he received a Knight's Cross for 55 kills.

After a brief rest in 1944, Ernst returned to sPzJg Abt 519 in 1945, this time as commander, but his time at the fore was short. On April 16, he handed over his command, a few Jagdtigers, to the US 99th Division.

THE 3rd FALLSCHMRIMJÄGER DIVISION

COs: Maj-Gen. Walter Wadehn *(to 5 Jan 1945)*
Lt-Gen Richard Schimpef *(to 1 Mar 45)*

5th Fallschirmjäger Regiment
8th Fallschirmjäger Regiment
9th Fallschirmjäger Regiment
3rd Fallschirmjäger Artillery Bn
3rd Fallschirmjäger Flak Bn
3rd Fallschirmjäger Panzer-Jäger Bn
3rd Fallschirmjäger Pioneer Bn
3rd Fallschirmjäger Signals Bn
Supply Troops

The division was formed sometime during 1943-1944 with a cadre from the heavily-experienced 3rd Battalion of the 1st Parachute Regiment. Little secret was made that the division would fight as line infantry (German had little transport planes to spare for airborne operations) but the morale of the green troopers was high. Even better, the division was stocked with a large number of automatic weapons, including 930 MG42s with each company possessing twenty MG42s and forty-three submachine guns. To bring this into closer inspection, each squad of seven to eight men had two MG42s and five submachine guns.

The division's first engagement was Normandy (it arrived there on June 10), and it had 15,976 men. By August, it had been decimated and then wiped out in the Falaise Pocket. Reformed in Belgium with replacements from the 22nd, 51st and 53rd Luftwaffe Field Regiment, the division returned to the line as part of Kampfgruppe Becker at Arnhem. It then fought in the Hürtgen Forest. In April 1945, it surrendered to US forces in the Ruhr.

GLOSSARY

Abteilung: German for Battalion
Kampfgruppe: German for Battle-group
Panzer-Jäger: German for Tank Destroyer
Task Force: A temporary unit composed of infantry, tanks and other organic elements.

MILITARY FORMATIONS

Army Group: A number of Armies grouped together – often over a million men under a Field Marshal or a General.
Army: A number of Corps – usually 240-450,000 men under a General or a Lieutenant General.
Corps: A number of Divisions – usually 75-150,000 men under a Lieutenant or Major General.
Division: A number of Brigades – usually 9-20,000 men under a Major General.
Brigade: A number of regiments or battalions – usually 4-8,000 men under a Brigadier General.
Regiment: A number of Battalions – usually 2-3,000 men under a Colonel.
Battalion: The main combat formation – usually 600-1,000 men under a Lieutenant Colonel. Organized into companies.
Company: Group of soldiers organized into platoons – usually 100-150 men under a Major or Captain.
Platoon: Group of soldiers – usually 25-30 men under a junior officer.
Squad: Smallest fighting formation in an army – usually 6-10 men under an NCO (non-comissioned officer).

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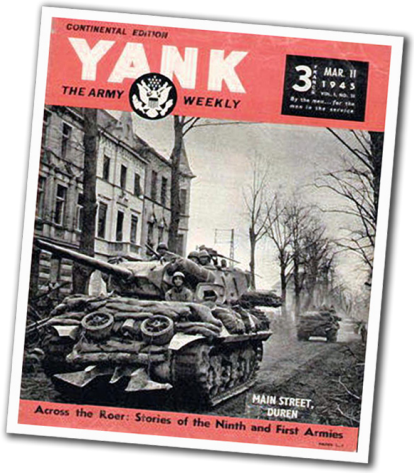

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oscar Wilde once remarked that if he lacked a book on a particular subject he inevitably set about writing one. This is a reason why I chose to write this monograph. Its basis comes from the Hürtgen Forest section of my web site, constructed in 2004, before I went off to college. Now, almost seven years later, I find that information to be inadequate and in some cases misleading.

But why write about this engagement? For all of the literature written on the battle, the vast majority of Americans still remain ignorant about its existence. Then there is the literature itself. Despite the minor profusion of official studies to private memories, much of the major work published on the battle is lacking to my taste, barring Edward G. Miller's narratively excellent *A Dark and Bloody Ground*. The remaining are either too pedantic, too jingoistic or had too much of a bone to pick. By large, the maps are only adequate and so were the illustrations. Some of the best monographs were written by serving US Army officers a few years after the war but most had a narrow focus, choosing to concentrate on particular aspects. With this treatise, I have attempted to provide the best surface impression of the battle (in under 40,000 words) and with the best information at hand. No doubt, there are pockets of information out there, trapped within murky unpublished memories or hidden within some unreachable archive that could have filled out the details. But these are treasures still to be found. In the meantime I have made do with what was available. If you feel that you know better, do not hesitate to contact me, even if only for questions, comments or criticisms.

This document was built using Adobe's Creative Suite, in particular Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. The typefaces used are 28 Days Later, Minion Pro, Trade Gothic Light Standard, Trajan Pro, Twentieth Century Medium and Palatino Linotype. All of the bird's eye view maps were constructed with data from Google maps and photographs found in Charles MacDonald's *Three battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt*.

This project, including research, writing, art work, and construction, took about five weeks (on and off) to complete.

In September 1944, as the Allied armies swept out of Normandy, the end of the war seemed within their grasp. But then American troops from the First Army reached a little-charted forest at Hürtgen and a great opportunity arose. If they could breach this, they would gain the western banks of the Rhine River, the last natural obstacle into Nazi Germany. But almost immediately, what started out as a promising advance became a brutal slog.

Ferocious fighting crippled three American divisions and mauled another. The fighting consumed so much that men didn't even have the energy to bury the dead. Replacements came "bug-eyed, in small, frightened bunches," many soon to join the casualty lists. One American general called it a dreadful place and "one of the most costly, most unproductive and most ill-advised battles that our army has ever fought." Another eyewitness, Ernest Hemingway, wrote a novel on the events. But a myopic focus on other campaigns reduced the Hürtgen fighting to a dim memory. Today it is virtually forgotten. But Hürtgen remains a landmark example of war's inhumanity, of heroism and the limits of human military endeavour.