





# The BLOODIEST BATTLE

**The Battle of the Bulge  
Loomed Large 70 Winters Ago**

Men of the 83rd Division move toward the front in the Houffalize sector, Belgium, January 15, 1945.

# SITUATION 1200 HRS 25 DECEMBER 1944 TWELFTH ARMY GROUP

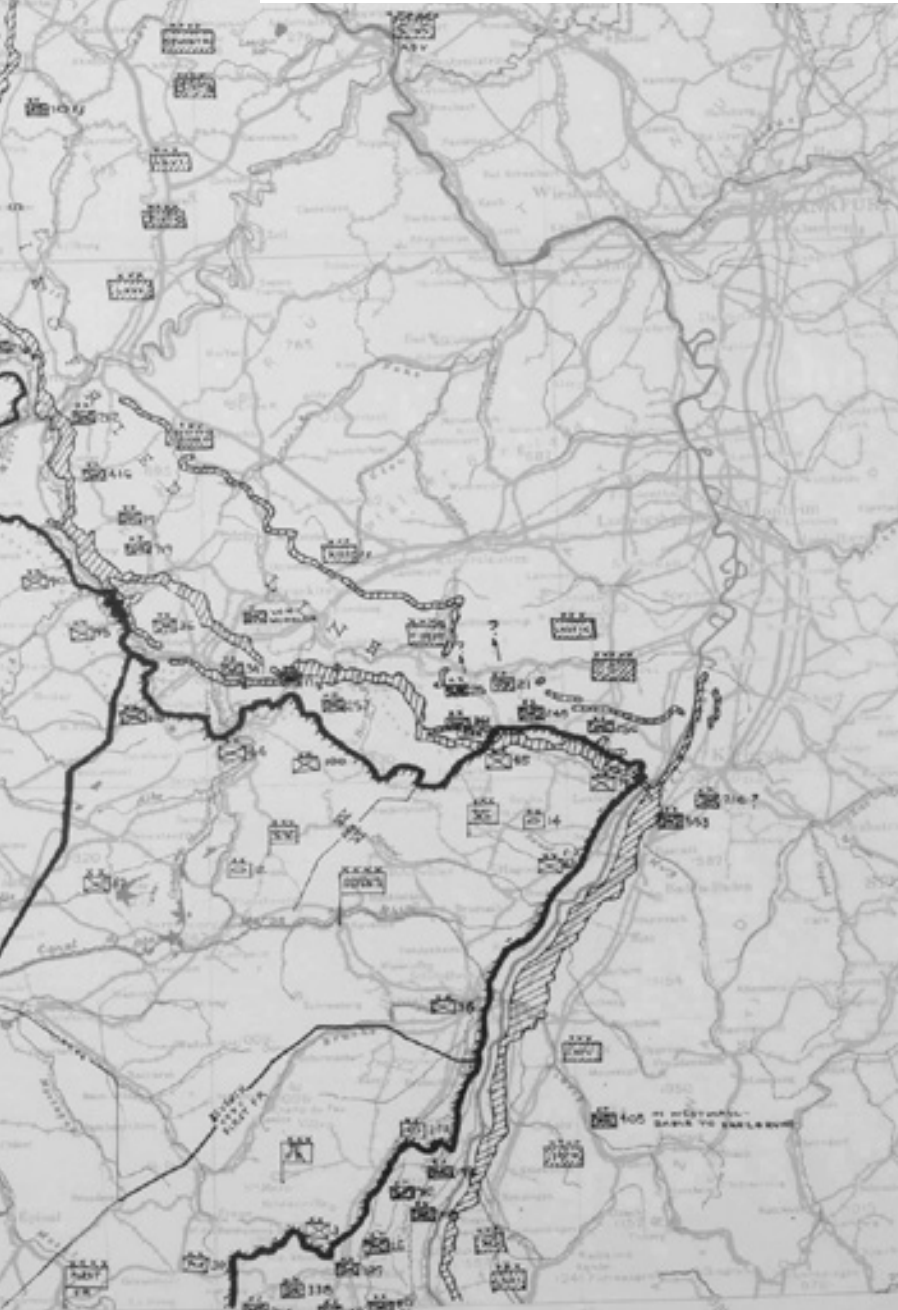
UNCLASSIFIED



- ☒ U.S.
- ▣ BRITISH
- ▤ ENEMY
- FRONT LINE.



Above: German infantrymen run across a Belgian road strewn with Allied armor and artillery. Left: The German advance along American lines in Belgium's Ardenne Forest in December 1944 created a dangerous "bulge," as shown in this Army map.



The Germans called it the "Operation Watch on the Rhine." The French named it the "Battle of the Ardennes." And the Western Allies termed it the "Ardennes Counteroffensive."

But because of the way the map of Western Europe looked at the height of the battle, it became known to history as the "Battle of the Bulge."

It was the winter of 1944–1945, months before the war in Europe would end.

Despite the protestations of his generals, Adolf Hitler decided on one final attempt to turn World War II in favor of his German Third Reich. For this, he ordered resources diverted from other battle fronts—including his losing campaign against the Russians in the east.

The Allies were caught off guard, as Hitler had hoped. Thousands of U.S. troops were surrounded at one point. In the end, the Allies committed enough troops that the tired, ill-equipped German army was overwhelmed.

Indeed, the Battle of the Bulge was an important turning point in the war in the Allies' favor, but it was not without its cost. The Battle of the Bulge is considered one of the bloodiest battles of World War II.



From D-day on, the Allies had swept quickly across Europe—sometimes getting too far ahead of their supply line and grinding to a halt. Nonetheless, they pushed hard toward the German homeland, liberating Paris and much of France along the way.



Above: U.S. troops march behind tanks somewhere in the Ardennes. Below: An American soldier holds his rifle on German prisoners taken in the "Bulge."

By December 1944, the Allies had pushed inland from the French coast to the German lines. They were ready to cross into German territory and move toward Berlin to deliver the final blow to Hitler's Third Reich.

Although the Canadians and the British anchored the front in the north and the Americans in the south, in between was only a thin, weak line of troops. U.S. commanders counted on the Ardennes Forest to help them block any German offensive.

But the thin line and the forest were no match for German troops and tanks. Hitler had brought in troops and weaponry from other locations in an attempt to burst through the thin Allied lines and create a path to Antwerp, Belgium, an important harbor for his Third Reich. Along the way,



Nazi troops would disrupt the Allies and their supply lines.

Early on the morning of December 16, 1944, the German army began a heavy attack on the Allied troops in the Ardennes—surprising the troops there as well as their

commanders, including Supreme Allied Commander Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower.



The battle was joined. It would last for more than a month. Americans would read

their newspapers, listen to their radios, and flock to newsreels in movie houses for the latest reports from the Battle of the Bulge, where so many of their cousins, uncles, sons, husbands, and fathers were fighting.



Pfc. Gargerum walks through a peaceful forest near Bastogne as he returns to the front lines, December 27, 1944.



Bomb damage, the result of a 10-day siege of the 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne, Belgium, December 26.

As the fighting wore on, some Allied units were pushed back, while others held their ground.

Eisenhower met with his top staff. It included his old friend from West Point, Gen. Omar Bradley; British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery; and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. Patton had been listed as commander of an imaginary army, created to make the Germans think there were more Allied troops than there really were.

Now, Eisenhower gave him the Third Army, about 230,000 men strong, and now, he ordered it to head for the “Bulge.” Even before Eisenhower unleashed him, Patton, champing at the bit to command an army,

was ready for just such an assignment. He had already seen to it that the troops were ready to go.

One of the places where German and Allied troops clashed was the small Belgian town of Bastogne. Soon, thousands of Allied troops in Bastogne were surrounded by the Germans. Eisenhower sent more troops to rescue those encircled. He ordered the famed 101st Airborne Division and other units to Bastogne.

When the Germans sent a message demanding the surrender of the 101st on December 22, they got a one-word response from its commander, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe: “Nuts!”

This was interpreted by German officers as a more colorful—and negative—response to their demand.

(To hear McAuliffe’s account of his response to the German demand for surrender, go to <http://research.archives.gov/description/2326663>.)

The day after Christmas, units of Patton’s rapidly approaching Third Army finally arrived, broke through the German lines, and rescued the troops.

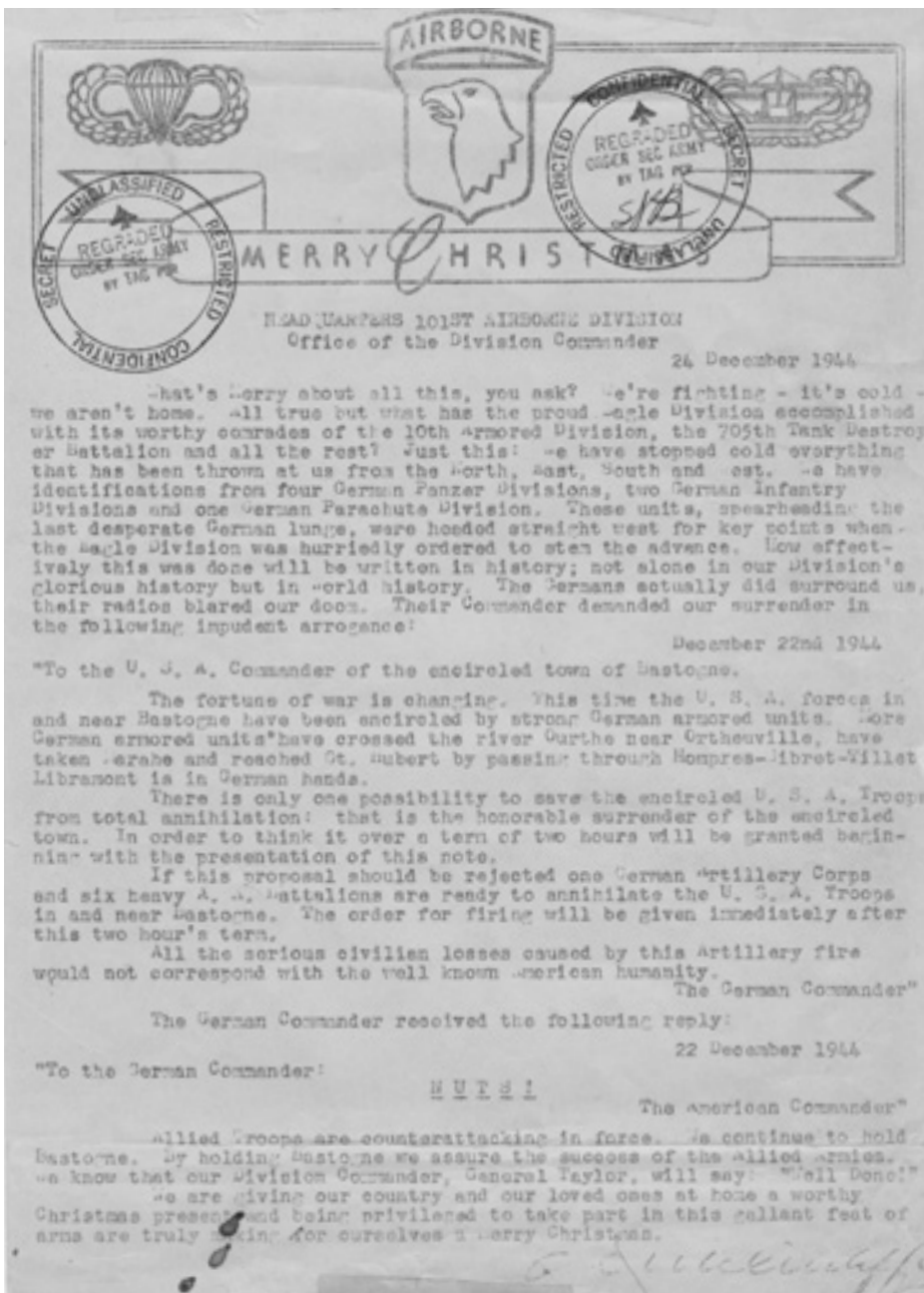


The fighting would continue for another month, but Hitler’s last chance at stopping the Allies advancing from the west was lost.

The 26th Division Engineers return to their normal assignments after a brief tour of duty as infantry, January 15, 1945.







Left: Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe relayed to his troops his response of "NUTS!" to the German demand for surrender, stating that "[B]y holding Bastogne we assure the success of the Allied armies."

Above: Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. (left), pins the Distinguished Service Cross on Brig. General McAuliffe, commander of the 101st Airborne Division under siege at Bastogne, Belgium.

canal, and Iwo Jima. Overall, the United States had 75,000 casualties, while the Germans had 80,000 to 100,000 casualties, according to the Army Center of Military History.

"The Ardennes campaign of 1944–45 was only one in a series of difficult engagements in the battle for Europe," wrote John S.D. Eisenhower, son of the supreme allied commander, in his 1969 book, *The Bitter Woods*, noting that there were other campaigns in the war against the Nazis that required extraordinary efforts from commanders and their troops.

"Nevertheless, it can be said that the Ardennes campaign epitomized them all," he added. "For it was here that American and German combat soldiers met in the decisive struggle that broke the back of the Nazi war machine." **P**

By the end of January 1945, the Allies had retaken all the territory lost to the Germans and were headed toward Berlin.

Meanwhile, the Russians pushed toward Berlin from the east. The war was essentially lost for Hitler, and he committed suicide on April 30. The war in Europe was officially over on May 8, 1945.

The United States suffered 19,276 fatalities in the Battle of the Bulge, more than in any other battle in the war, such as those in the Pacific, including Okinawa, Guadal-

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- Requesting your military service record, go to [www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/](http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/).
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