

THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

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It was December 1944 and Hitler was weary of being kicked around by the upstart Americans and Englishers. We were still making progress eastward in the Ardennes forest in spite of record cold and snow when he hit us with everything he had left. Twenty-four divisions including ten Panzer (tank) against our six divisions strung about over a hundred miles. That is all I know about details, location, etc. but I have read the casualties were well over a hundred thousand killed and wounded, and thousands of us taken prisoner. You can get on the net for details, I'll tell you about the cold.

This was Germany, not Alaska, about the same latitude as Michigan. Even in November, we figured a halt in the war would be a good idea. And maybe get together with the Germans over Christmas with good wine, and a cooked goose, singing around a blazing fire. Even before the attack, we were soaked with rain, frozen stiff by thirty below wind, so cold we dared not shut off the vehicle engines when we stopped. Half the time we did not know where we were but kept heading east as though we did. As combat engineers we had no duties to perform, just waiting for instructions from the static filled radio we protected from the cold by insulating the jeep and burning oil near the radio in a tin can.



We were not as equipped for the cold as the Germans and Russians; they had thick parkas and lined boots. Our best was an Eisenhower field jacket...the thick wool overcoats were too wet and stiff to put on. Gloves were woven cloth that once wet stayed wet and were too thick for most activity. You might say we were in a shut down state. If we had been told to build a bridge we couldn't have managed...the snow was too deep to move most of our vehicles and heavy equipment. We slept where we could in our wool blanket under the trucks, or on the bed of the truck huddled together to get warm from the other guys. Then, without any warning, trucks and even tanks rushed by us heading west...no one told us anything, they just kept moving, each truck making it easier for following vehicles to push through the snow. Then soldiers on foot, some running, streamed by hollering that we better get moving, the Germans are coming. Our captain stopped a jeep struggling by and demanded to know what the hell was going on. A stuttering sergeant told him, as quickly as he could that we would be attacked within the hour, they were that close behind him.

Then we did what apparently everyone else was doing, packed up and got going. I could not have told you if we were in Germany or Belgium but Belgium was where we headed. I am not ashamed to say that much equipment was left behind and that a few from our outfit were too. It was chaos, a panic, and apparently what the military is supposed to do when overwhelmed by the enemy...it was our first and only retreat. We just kept going until it was obvious that was far enough when we encountered a wall of American troops and equipment aimed toward the direction from whence we had come.

We heard that Patton had cut the Germans off and that their final offense had run out of gas and supplies. Now our boys were mopping them up. And we heard about General McAuliffe telling the Germans, "Nuts." It warmed the cockles of our hearts.

Photo source: U.S. History-com