

**“WE FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHT REASONS AND GOD WAS ON OUR SIDE”:
COMBAT, FAITH, AND PERSEVERANCE DURING THE 28TH INFANTRY
DIVISION’S ENGAGEMENT AT THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE**

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Abstract

In December 1944, Hitler's Germany was besieged on every front. Germany was working on super weapons and needed to buy some time to fight off the Red Army and the Allies. Until his super weapons could turn the tide, Hitler opted for a major counteroffensive in the west to split the Allies. Hitler would launch his last military reserves in a desperate gamble aimed at driving to the port of Antwerp through Luxembourg and Belgium. Such a blow, Hitler believed, would wreck the Allied Coalition. One of the divisions facing the main German offensive was the American 28th Infantry Division, occupying a twenty five mile front that extended along the Belgium and Luxembourg borders with Germany. The actions by the soldiers of that division combined to slow and finally stall the German offensive, robbing it of its momentum and, most of all, the precious time upon which the operation relied for success.

This dissertation examines the reasons why the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division fought so fiercely, in some cases to the last man, to delay the German advance. This research explores first-hand accounts left by the men who fought, the efforts of the U.S. government to inspire men to fight for the American way of life, and the chaplains who attended to their religious needs. It identifies how significant the delaying actions of the 28th Division were to the Allied success in the Battle of the Bulge, how faith factored into the nexus of ideas that inspired the perseverance of the soldiers and identifies the forces beyond camaraderie and cohesion that influenced soldiers to resist the German offensive in the Ardennes. For the men of the 28th Division, fighting for the American way of life meant that they were fighting to preserve freedom to worship, freedom from oppression, and freedom of movement.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine what motivated the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division, in the face of overwhelming odds, to take actions during the first few days of the Battle of the Bulge (Ardennes Offensive) to delay the German plan of attack. Challenging the conventional ideas about the contribution of the 28th Infantry Division and the motivations that cause men to fight, this study concluded that the soldiers fought for the American way of life. The aim of this study was to answer three research questions:

1. What forces beyond camaraderie and cohesion influenced soldiers to resist the German offensive in the Battle of the Bulge?
2. How did faith factor into the nexus of ideas that inspired the perseverance of the soldiers?
3. How significant was the delaying action of the 28th Division to the Allied success in the Battle of the Bulge?

The Allies thought the end was near for the German Army by mid-September 1944. The success by the Russians in the east added to their optimism. In an attempt to secure the Roer River and a complex of dams on the same river near Schmidt, Germany, the U.S. command transferred a number of units to include the 1st, 8th, 9th, and the 28th Infantry Divisions and the 4th Armored Division, into the Hürtgen Forest. The 28th Division moved into position on the 26th of October, replacing the weakened 9th Infantry Division. While the 28th Division was promised lavish air and artillery support, the weather virtually negated close air support and the terrain prohibited observed artillery fire. After bitter fighting from November 2-14, the Division was withdrawn from the Hürtgen Forest and was moved to Luxembourg. The division battle losses were 248

officers and 5,452 enlisted men. The division needed a rest and a chance to refit. The Ardennes Forest in Belgium and Luxembourg was thick, and the Allied Command believed it to be impenetrable.¹

The 28th Division was stretched over a twenty-five-mile front facing the German lines. Since the entire front could not be occupied, the three regiments of the division established strongpoints at various villages and at key road intersections. By mid-December 1944, the division had been recuperating in Luxembourg for several weeks. A little after 5:00 a.m. on the morning of December 16, 1944, their recuperation ended as the German attack began. The 28th Infantry Division was the only major fighting force that stood between the German onslaught and Bastogne, Belgium and a key road network that lead to the deep-water port of Antwerp. Taking the brunt of the German assault were three regiments of the division – the 109th, 110th and 112th. The actions taken in the first days by the soldiers of the division combined to slow and finally stall the German offensive, robbing it of its momentum and, most of all, the precious time upon which the operation relied for success.

The acts of the soldiers represents an element often overlooked by historians and exemplified in the fighting spirit exhibited by the soldiers in delaying the German armies and buying time for the Allies to send reinforcements to Bastogne. Despite overwhelming odds, the soldiers managed to hold out as German assault forces began to work their way into and around the soldier's positions. Many of the defenders recognized that they were surrounded and that no relief or escape, save as prisoners, was possible. Yet despite this realistic assessment, they continued to resist until there was simply no other means to resist. In two days of heavy fighting,

¹ Hugh M. Cole, "The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge." *The U.S. Army in WWII*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, U. S. Army, 1965), 57.

the men of the 28th Infantry Division had inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking German forces and upset the German timetable.²

History is full of desperate historic battles that are idolized and provide lessons for future soldiers and military leaders. Once such battle was the Ardennes Offensive, or Battle of the Bulge. It took place from December 16, 1944, to January 25, 1945, and stands as a testament to resolve against a determined enemy. Movies have been made and books written about the stand of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne, Belgium, and their relief by General Patton's 4th Armored Division. The Second World War would probably have produced more casualties and lasted longer had it not been for the strong resolve of Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe and the men of the 101st Airborne and other units around Bastogne. While the achievements of the 101st Airborne have been championed, the actions of the 109th, 110th and 112th Regiments of the 28th Infantry Division during the first few days of the Offensive get little attention from historians.

By December 1944, the war in Europe seemed to be drawing to a conclusion. Beginning in the fall of 1943 the Soviet Army had launched a relentless advance which, by the fall of 1944, had permitted their armies to occupy East Prussian soil and to be poised for a final advance to Vienna, Prague, and Berlin. The western allies, after landing in Normandy, France on June 6, 1944, had broken through German defenses, and pushed the German border for a final thrust into the heartland of Hitler's Germany. By this time, the question was not so much could the allies win the war, but how much longer could the battered German armies hold out. Hitler's Germany was besieged on every front. Germany was working on super weapons and needed to buy some time to defend against the Russian Army. Until his super weapons could turn the tide, Hitler

² *Ibid.*

opted for a major counteroffensive in the west to split the Allied Coalition. Hitler believed the allied alliance to be weak.³

Throughout his political and military career, Adolf Hitler had shown an uncanny knack for surprising his opponents, confounding them by launching an unexpected offensive at the most unlikely place or moment.⁴ For example, one of Adolf Hitler's first major foreign policy initiatives after coming to power in 1933 was to sign a non-aggression pact with Poland in January 1934. On September 1, 1939, Germany conducted a surprise invasion of Poland.⁵ In another example, on August 23, 1939, Hitler signed the German-Soviet nonaggression pact. Nazi Germany conducted a surprise invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.⁶

Hitler launched his last military reserves in a frantic gamble aimed at driving to the port of Antwerp through Luxembourg and Belgium. If successful, the Allies could lose over thirty divisions. Such a blow, Hitler believed, would destroy the Allied Coalition and cause them to negotiate an agreement with Germany to end the war. The area chosen by Hitler for the offensive was the Ardennes, that area of Belgium and Luxembourg which in late 1944 was considered to be a quiet sector by the Allied Command.⁷ This was an area where the troops were sent for rest and refitting. Standing in the way were four U.S. divisions – two green units placed in a quiet sector to gain experience, and two badly shot-up units that were resting and training replacements, occupying a front that extended along the Belgium and Luxembourg borders.

³ Carl Wagener, "Fifth Panzer Army (2 Nov 1944 – 16 Jan 1945)." *Foreign Military Studies, MS#A-858. Historical Division*. U.S. Army, Europe, 1945. (Washington DC: National Archives and Record Administration), 2.

⁴ David Jablonsky, *The Paradox of Duality: Adolf Hitler and the Concept of Military Surprise*. U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Second Annual Conference on Intelligence and Military Operation, May 1987.

⁵ "The Invasion of Poland, Fall 1939." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. (Washington D.C.: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

⁶ "The Invasion of the Soviet Union, June 1941." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. (Washington D.C.: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

⁷ Jablonsky.

One of the badly shot-up divisions facing the main German offensive was the American 28th Infantry Division. This veteran division, originally a Pennsylvania National Guard unit, had been engaged in combat since arriving in France on July 22, 1944. It had participated in the breakout at St. Lo, fought through northern France, liberated sections of Belgium and Luxembourg, and then moved into Germany in early September, attacking the famous Siegfried Line, or West Wall.⁸

It was exceptionally cold, foggy, damp, and snow covered when the Germans attacked on the morning of December 16, 1944. Without any sleep, often without food, the soldiers of the 28th Division fought nonstop, frequently until the last bullet and last man, to stop the German drive. Overall, the 28th Division would identify elements of nine German divisions in its sector before the battle was over.⁹ The men fought like they were defending their own homes. The achievements of the 28th Infantry Division soldiers, while facing overwhelming forces in the early days of the Battle of the Bulge, provide lessons for future soldiers and military leaders.

The questions of why men fight, and what factors motivate them to fight even when death seems certain, are ancient, and complex. Despite the lack of a single unifying theory of combat motivation, military leaders strive to study, understand motivational factors, and cultivate them in their people to achieve the greatest chance for victory. Understanding combat motivation provides probable benefits to those who understand these factors and can instill them in soldiers. Both military historians and social scientists have studied how soldiers behave on the battlefield, including how they handle the stress of combat and what motivates them.

⁸ “28th Infantry Division Historical Summary.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 87.

⁹ *Ibid.*

These studies have helped in understanding how war affects soldiers. One such motivating factor is camaraderie. Camaraderie is most socially expressed within military culture. It is a deep and abiding bond amongst soldiers within a small, interdependent unit. Other than being in the general vicinity of one another as in an aggregate social group, soldiers need to be organized toward a concrete, common goal. The military organization, with its bureaucratic objectives, lends itself to forming such concrete goals for the units.¹⁰ “The goal is the survival and close teamwork with others in the outfit. The life of each depends as much on the feeling of close mutual dependence which has been seen to be so important as a basis for other aspects of combat motivation,”¹¹ argues Samuel and Edward Stouffer.

The literature about combat motivation also supports the general belief that soldiers exclusively fight because of cohesion. For example, William D. Henderson, retired U.S. Army Colonel, believes cohesion is the primary motivational factor.¹² A similar finding was found in *Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II*, by Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz. They studied the motivation of German soldiers during World War II and also concluded that cohesion, as a combination of organizational integrity, fighting effectiveness, and tenacity is what motivated the German soldier.¹³

In a contrasting view, Omer Bartov maintained that the German soldier was motivated by ideology.¹⁴ Bartov maintains that ideology and indoctrination were really soldier’s prime

¹⁰ Charles H. Coates and Roland J. Pellegrin, *Military Sociology: A Study of American Military Institutions and Military Life*. (University Park: Social Science, 1965), 162.

¹¹ Samuel Stouffer and Edward Suchman, *The American Soldier: Adjustment During Army Life*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 169.

¹² William D. Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat*. (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1985), xi.

¹³ Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, *Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 12: 280-315 (Summer, 1948).

¹⁴ Omer Bartov, “Daily Life and Motivation in War: The Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 12: 200-214 (1989).

motivating factors. The key point, according to Bartov, is that unit cohesion was not maintained throughout the war, especially on the Eastern Front, and therefore could not have been the main reason the Germans fought desperately until the end of the war. The story of the German Einsatzgruppen offers insight into a fundamental Holocaust question of what made it possible for men, some of them ordinary men, to kill so many people so ruthlessly. The members of the Einsatzgruppen had developed a special motivation to kill. The Einsatzgruppen grew out of a Germany that was economically crippled by World War I reparations, global depression, and a national sense that the Jew was significantly to blame for their problems. Fostered by the ideals of National Socialism, the naivety of youth, the sense of pride and accomplishment that military service gave them, the members of the Einsatzgruppen became fully indoctrinated into the beliefs of Adolph Hitler.¹⁵

Unit cohesion and camaraderie undoubtedly were strong motivators when soldiers are together and have a chance to get to know each other and how they can count on each other. As the 28th Division confronted the Germans from one battle to the next, the number of casualties grew. The men who left the training in Wales were not the ones who fought the next major battle. The attrition of war since the division landed in Normandy steadily thinned out the ranks. Lone replacements found themselves among groups of strangers with little chance to get acquainted before being flung into battle, so there had to be other factors that motivated the men to fight as they did.

Understanding what inspired the men of the 28th Infantry Division to fight and how they delayed the Germans is the purpose of this research. This research is significant as it can address the reasons soldiers, faced with overwhelming odds, chose to stand their ground to delay the

¹⁵ Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr., *Beyond Duty: The Reasons Some Soldiers Commit Atrocities*. (Stoudt, UK: Fonthill Media, 2017), 50.

advance of the enemy. The answers can provide military leaders with a better understanding of what motivates soldiers and can fill the gaps in the historiography of the Battle of the Bulge.

To address these issues, research focused on what specific delaying actions the soldiers took, what were the spectrum of religious beliefs and practices soldiers brought with them and experienced during war, and what were other motivating factors that contributed to the actions by the soldiers in the Ardennes. For example, how much did their belief that they were fighting for the American way of life affect the decisions of the men of the 28th Infantry Division to fight so fiercely? For most soldiers, the American way of life meant freedom. That freedom often emphasized the freedom to worship. In *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Sociologist Will Herberg describes the American way of life as, “an organic structure of ideas, values, and beliefs that constitutes a faith common to Americans.”¹⁶

In his book *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz states, “It is the interaction between physical and moral forces that determines the victor in warfare.”¹⁷ Clausewitz goes on to say, “they [moral forces] are the spirits which permeate the whole element of war.”¹⁸ Contained within moral force, most certainly, is the courage, morale, and the religious faith of the soldiers. The literature presented by historians writing about the Battle of the Bulge largely focuses on presenting the physical components of the battle, neglecting the moral aspects.

According to Charles H. Coates and Roland J. Pellegrin, “the only thing rated more helpful than prayer was not wanting to let the other men down.”¹⁹ Their book brings together historical material with detailed organizational charts and tabular data. Coates and Pellegrin

¹⁶ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Revised. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1960), 77.

¹⁷ Carl von Clausewitz and Anatol Rapoport, *Carl Von Clausewitz on War*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 62.

¹⁹ Samuel A. Stouffer, A.A. Lumsdaine, M.H. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams, Jr., M.B. Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, and L.S. Cottrell Jr., *The American Soldier: Volume II: Combat and its Aftermath*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 172.

describe the relationship between military institutions and the American value system. The concept of bureaucracy is used to analyze management theory, leadership, and informal social systems in military organizations.²⁰ In the case of the military, men the soldier sees daily and associate with, tend to fuse together into one force. If the men of a small unit properly blend together and function as a team, the smaller unit's cohesion can become the primary factor influencing a soldier's fighting spirit.²¹

In the years immediately after World War II, historians argued that social cohesion within the soldier's primary group is essential to military effectiveness. William Darryl Henderson considers cohesion a vital aspect of combat motivation.²² Unit cohesion, mutual self-sacrifice, teamwork, and covering for each other contribute to individual bonding, and ultimately creates camaraderie. Camaraderie may have contributed to the fighting spirit of the 28th Division soldiers when they first landed in France. In a November-December 2000 article for *Military Review*, Major Robert J. Rielly, U.S. Army, argues that "The strongest motivation for enduring combat, especially for U.S. soldiers, is the bond formed among members of a squad or platoon."²³ Rielly claims "This cohesion is the single most important sustaining and motivating force for combat soldiers."²⁴

Although in some ways linked to vindictiveness, the soldier's feeling about the enemy as human beings that are evil or subhuman has been offered as motivating factors. There are examples of hatred of the enemy as a motivating factor among some soldiers in combat during

²⁰ Roger W. Little, *American Sociological Review* 31, no. 6 (1966): 870–870.

²¹ Edward A. Shils, "Primary Groups in the American Army," in *Studies in the Scope and Method of The American Soldier*. Ed. Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld. (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), 110.

²² William Darryl Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat*. (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1985), xviii.

²³ Robert J. Rielly, "Confronting the Tiger: Small Unit Cohesion in Battle." *Military Review*, November-December 2000.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

World War II. One such example is contained in the book *Road to Huertgen: Forest in Hell* by Paul Boesch, who was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He had a deep hatred for the Germans. On one occasion he watches a man he shot slowly die. “I could stand there and watch him die and feel absolutely no qualms of any kind.”²⁵ Boesch compares his killing the German to a carpenter hammering in a nail. They both have jobs to do, and Boesch has no feelings for the dying man. Boesch said killing him provoked no more emotion than hammering a nail.²⁶

Another example of vindictiveness can be found in Charles B. MacDonald’s book *Company Commander*. MacDonald was an Army captain who served in Belgium and Germany. While he does not specifically mention any factor as being a primary motivator, his hatred for the Germans is mentioned often in the book. He has no sympathy for the Germans, military or civilian. He blames them for starting the war and does not care when German civilians are kicked out of their homes or stolen from. “These people had asked for it,”²⁷ is his typical response. When a German farmer and his wife cry as their farm is burned down, MacDonald laughs and says, “Thank Adolf.”²⁸ While evidence has been found in the interviews of 28th Division soldiers that were conducted shortly after the war and in 1988 by the 28th Division Historical Section that would indicate many soldiers hated the Germans, this was not found to be a significant motivating factor.

Some men actually enjoyed combat. According to psychiatrist Eli Ginzberg, “many of the outstanding combat soldiers were hostile, emotionally insecure, extremely unstable personalities who might well be termed clinically psychopaths, who fully enjoyed the opportunity of taking

²⁵ Paul Boesch, *Road to Huertgen: Forest in Hell*. (Independently published, 2018), 231.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 232. Note: The word Boesch comes from a French slang phrase *tête de caboche*, which means cabbage head.

²⁷ Charles MacDonald, *Company Commander: The Classic Infantry Memoir of World War II*. (Ithaca: Burford Books, 1999), 219.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 256.

out hostilities directly in a socially acceptable setting of warfare and who in the absence of such an outlet not infrequently end up in penitentiaries.”²⁹ After reports of an SS atrocity, it was not uncommon for American troops to refuse to take prisoners for several days. They had an excuse to take out hostilities. Some would kill any German soldier they could, even those attempting to surrender.³⁰ No evidence in interviews, after action reports, or official documents of 28th Division soldiers indicate that this was a significant motivating factor.

Inherent to war is the apparent contradiction of sacrifice. The impulse to self-sacrifice goes against both what our culture has engrained within us and oftentimes too, the directives of our own human nature. Cultural standards impel us to think of our own well-being primarily, and our natural human instinct for self-preservation tells us to avoid death at all costs.³¹ Yet somehow sacrifice on the battlefield is just as much a reality as are the bonds of camaraderie which form between soldiers.³² Sacrifice did contribute to the fighting spirit of the 28th Division soldiers as they knew it was necessary to defeat their enemy.

Another factor that has been studied is honor. Camaraderie and sacrifice are battle dependent experiences, while honor, according to Martin L. Cook is a virtue which is teachable. Cook proposes that honor, “is most often transmitted through the natural process of socialization.”³³ Children are taught the difference between right and wrong, good, and evil, and learn what is socially acceptable behavior. Furthermore, the standards of right conduct in war are transmitted to soldiers through their training and the leadership of their superiors.³⁴ In *The*

²⁹ Eli Ginzberg quoted in Lee Kennett, *G.I. The American Soldier in World War II*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987), 138.

³⁰ Kennett, 159.

³¹ Henderson, 63.

³² Glenn J. Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1959), 49.

³³ Martin L Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military*. (New York: State University of New York, 1954).

³⁴ Henderson, 64.

Greatest Generation, Tom Brokaw argues that “the World War II generation developed values of personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith. These characteristics helped them to defeat Hitler.”³⁵ Honor certainly contributed to the fighting spirit of the 28th Division soldiers.

American soldiers found comfort and motivation through prayer on the front lines of World War II. Despite witnessing horrific acts, most soldiers remained steadfast in their religious beliefs. In his book *Serving God and Country*, Lyle W. Dorsett relates a story by Chaplain William R. Thierfelder. The chaplain wrote, “today I’m crawling from foxhole to foxhole, and the men gobble up every word of encouragement. Some were reading their Bibles, others their prayer books.”³⁶

Originally administered in the immediate aftermath of World War II, The ‘American Soldier’ studies were conducted by the Army's Information and Education Division. They included 163 surveys and records of the attitudes and behaviors of American soldiers during World War II. In 2013, Brian Wansink and Craig S. Wansink, using data collected during the American Soldier surveys and records, published their findings in the *Journal of Religion and Health*. They concluded that as combat became more frightening, the percentage of soldiers who reported praying rose from forty-two to seventy-two percent. The results suggest that near the time of combat, the more fear infantry men felt, the more they were likely to rely on prayer as a motivation to continue to fight.³⁷ Religious behavior was generally high among the veterans of World War II and the men of the 28th Division were no different.

The value and importance of religion was promoted at the highest level of the U.S. government. President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated in his Labor Day Address on September 1,

³⁵ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*. (New York: Random House, 2001), xxxvii.

³⁶ Lyle W. Dorsett, *Serving God and Country*. (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2012), 144.

³⁷ Brian Wansink and Craig S. Wansink, “Are There Atheists in Foxholes? Combat Intensity and Religious Behavior.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, 768–779 (2013).

1941 that the "...preservation of these rights [rights of free laboring men and women] is vitally important now, not only to us who enjoy them, but to the whole future of Christian civilization."³⁸ Religion played a part in helping individual soldiers survive terrifying combat situations. Chaplain William R. Thierfelder recalled being called to a soldier lying on a litter shaking so violently he could not stand up. He had received no physical wounds. The chaplain helped the man up, took him by the lapels of his jacket and asked him if he was a Christian and did he believe in God's help for those who believe in him. After a few minutes, "I told him to repeat my words. And we recited the 23rd Psalm together. The man learned the Psalm and eventually returned to duty."³⁹ Belief in God did help to prepare young men for battle and helped them during the stress of combat. Henderson points out that religion can promote cohesion.

Regarding Christianity in America, Henderson writes, "The broad umbrella of Christianity that covers most religions in the United States and followed the 28th Infantry Division soldiers to war offers some basis for common religious values, which in turn promote basic values."⁴⁰ Many American soldiers said that prayer helped them in combat. However, no specific religion or belief was identified as being helpful. According to Anthony Kellett, "Prayer is not of itself a sufficient indicator of religious faith; it may have been adopted as an instrument of psychological self-defense in much the same way as belief in talismans (e.g., a rabbit's foot) or in fatalism."⁴¹ However, interviews of 28th Infantry Division soldiers suggest otherwise and insist that religious faith may have contributed to the fighting spirit of the men of the 28th Division.

³⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Labor Day Radio Address." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209922>. Accessed August 3, 2022.

³⁹ Dorsett, 145. Note: One line in the 23rd Psalm reads, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

⁴⁰ Henderson, 84.

⁴¹ Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle*. (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1982), 195.

Ideology includes nationalism, racism, and or political convictions. According to Henderson, “ideology is effective for getting men to join the military or enter battle, but during the battle, ideology appears to have significantly less influence in controlling a soldier's behavior.”⁴² “The American soldier was typically, without deep personal commitment to a war which he nevertheless accepted as unavoidable. He gave little concern to the conflicting values underlying the struggle,”⁴³ submits Samuel A. Stouffer. In several books, Stephen Ambrose has always presented the theme that the American soldier fought for their comrades due to the strong cohesion that developed between them.⁴⁴ Sociologist Charles Moskos has proposed that latent ideology plays a role in soldier motivation, albeit a secondary one.⁴⁵

There are many examples of 28th Division soldiers performing heroic actions and displaying courage in demanding situations or in the face of imminent death and receiving the Silver Star, Bronze Star, or Distinguished Service Cross. Some soldiers even received battlefield promotions for their bravery and leadership. While displaying eagerness to participate in a worthy cause “at any cost” can inspire peers, it might also be inspired by peers.⁴⁶ Marshall argued that “for some, heroism may not involve risk-taking for the sake of excitement as much as it involves the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of the cause.”⁴⁷ That cause was fighting for the American way of life. This cause reflected the values of the society from which the soldiers came from. To understand what compelled the soldiers to fight, it is important to

⁴² Henderson, 110.

⁴³ Samuel A. Stouffer, A.A. Lumsdaine, M.H. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams, Jr., M.B. Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, and L.S. Cottrell Jr. *The American Soldier: Volume II: Combat and its Aftermath*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 149.

⁴⁴ Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldier: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Battlefields to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945*. (New York: Touchstone, Simon, and Schuster, 1997), 14.

⁴⁵ Charles A. Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man: The Rank and File in Today's Military*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970), 147.

⁴⁶ Samuel L.A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947), 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

look at their involvement with the American national socio-political system, national identity, and acceptance of the national ideology. Each contributed to the action of a military unit on the battlefield, and also to the enlisting and sustaining of the force.⁴⁸

Many Americans viewed the issues at stake during World War II in terms of clearcut right and wrong, democracy against fascism, defense against aggression, good against evil. The soldiers who left the shores of America to fight did not define what the American way of life meant, but their understandings of it reflected the overall views of American society. They knew they were fighting for, what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called in his Address to Congress in 1941, four freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, freedom from want, which meant economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants, and freedom from fear, meaning a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation would be able to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor. While the soldiers may not have repeated Roosevelt's words, or invented the ideas, they did, by their comments and actions, demonstrated that they knew what the American way of life meant. Stephen Ambrose captured these feelings:

Although the GIs were and are embarrassed to talk or write about the cause they fought for...they were the children of democracy and they did more to help spread democracy around the world than any other generation in history. At the core, the American citizen soldiers knew the difference between right and wrong, and they didn't want to live in a world in which wrong prevailed.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Sam C. Sarkesian, *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress and the Volunteer Military*. (London: Gage Publications, 1980), 244.

⁴⁹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Battlefields to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945*. (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1997),

The overarching beliefs and values that unified Americans during World War II revolved around the ideology of the American way of life. This encompassed political, economic, and social elements. Politically, freedom and democracy were the guiding principles that appeared on virtually every war poster. These catchwords served as easy phrases for the public to rally around and an ideology for the soldiers to commit to. Stephen Wesbrook argued that the great majority of individuals exhibited a commitment to the national socio-political system. He wrote:

Although the person with such a commitment is not an ideologue, ideology still plays a major role in his motivations. From the individual's point of view, the significance of the national ideology is not that it directly causes him to do what is demanded, as in the case of the ideologue, but that it gives him a cause for doing.⁵⁰

To fully understand what the American way of life meant to the American soldier, we have to examine the historical context of the society from which he came. Americans of the World War II generation experienced the full brunt of the Great Depression, and many harbored cynical memories of the unfulfilled idealism of World War I. Roosevelt's freedom from want resonated with many who had struggled during the Great Depression and were just beginning to work and recover when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Roosevelt's freedom of every person to worship God in his own way resonated with many Americans as children born in the 1930s were raised during a time in which Americans were more rooted and less mobile. Tradition and institutional loyalty were important. People tended to go to church, they tended to continue going to church as the years wore on. By the time the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor over seventy percent of Americans identified themselves as Christians or Jews.⁵¹ Roosevelt's

437.

⁵⁰ Stephen Wesbrook, *The Potential for Military Disintegration in Sam C. Sarkesian, Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress and the Volunteer Military*. (London: Gage Publications, 1980), 255.

⁵¹ "Religions in America," *Religious Landscape Studies*. (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2021).

freedom from fear resonated with many Americans as they had seen and read what the Nazis and done in Germany and in the countries they conquered. Roosevelt's freedom of speech and expression reverberated with many Americans as they witnessed the burning of books and the censorship of Jews in Germany.

The examination of the historiography about the Battle of the Bulge yields significant gaps in the scholarship. Historians have generally focused their attention on the events in or around Bastogne, Belgium. While many briefly mention the holding actions of the 28th Infantry Division, accounts typically shift to the Bastogne area forces. The specific details of actions taken by the 28th Division soldiers are limited, and the reasons the soldiers took those actions are not identified. For example, little is written about the placement of gun positions, roadblocks, barricades, etc., that delayed the German soldiers. There are little or no references in these writings to soldiers' religious beliefs, camaraderie, honor, sacrifice, or other reasons that may have affected their performance and motivation.

This research fills the gaps in the historiography by illustrating the comments made by soldiers while they were fighting and after. Those comments reflect their understanding and commitment to fight for the American way of life cause. This research follows the combat narratives of the 28th Infantry Division units which demonstrate the soldier's commitment to the cause by acts of heroism and stubborn resistance to the German attacks. The soldier's experience fighting across France, at the Siegfried Line, and in the Hürtgen Forest is a testament to their willingness to endure against demanding circumstances. This research fills additional gaps in the historiography by recording the determined effort of the 28th Division to delay the Germans from achieving their goals during the Battle of the Bulge and buying time for the Allies to re-position forces to eventually halt the German advances.

There are several books that assist this research in determining what the overall situation was prior to the German attack, the disposition of forces, and the specific actions taken by the men of the 28th Infantry Division. Some examples include *Bastogne: The Story of the First Eight Days* (1946). In it Samuel Marshall describes the beginning of the German attack, briefly mentioning the 28th Division. This book provides a combat history of the critical battle during the Allied liberation of Europe in World War II. After a brief discussion of the events of 16-18 December, he jumps to the encirclement of Bastogne and the deployment of the 101st Airborne Division to Bastogne.⁵²

At the time John Toland was researching *The Story of the Bulge* (1959), the official after-action reports and documents of the battle were just becoming available to scholars. As a result, his book was based largely on interviews rather than official documents. His book describes the events that occurred at Clervaux, Luxembourg with the 28th Division's 110th Regiment.⁵³

First published as CMH Pub 7-8-1, *The Ardennes: Battle of Bulge* (1965) by Hugh M. Cole was written for the U. S. Army Center of Military History. His publication tells the story of how the Germans planned and executed their offensive, how the Allies planned to defeat them, and some stories of the soldiers involved with the battle. Cole's work provides significant details about the 28th Infantry Division's maneuvering, artillery support, and movement of equipment to delay the German advance. This volume represents an exhaustive collection of personal memoirs by leading participants of the campaign. The memoirs contain interviews with American participants and written accounts prepared immediately after the end of the war by the German officers who took part in the Ardennes Campaign.⁵⁴ In determining the German plan for the

⁵² Samuel L.A. Marshall, *Bastogne: The First Eight Days*. (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1946).

⁵³ John Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*. (London: Bison Books, 1959).

⁵⁴ Cole.

Battle of the Bulge, the study looked at works from the U.S. War Department collection, U.S. Army Center of Military History, *Bundesarchiv* (German Federal Archives) and the Imperial War Museum.

Napier Crookenden's *Battle of the Bulge 1944* (1980) presents some enlightening photographic and documentary information. The book provides more details about the German Fifth Panzer Army attack of the 28th Infantry Division, including counterattacks and door-to-door fighting. Napier's work looks at the German strategy, Allied positions, and tactical maneuvering that took place during the battle, with an explanation of the weapons used.⁵⁵

Charles B. MacDonald's *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (1985) presented the most definitive account of the Ardennes Offensive. His book incorporates personal accounts, and official documents to examine the plans and preparations for the attack, the first days, the American resistance, the German penetrations, the American stand at Bastogne and American counter attacks. Regarding the 28th Infantry Division sector, MacDonald offers more details about the stationing of troops, the movement of armor, emplacement of mortars and the maneuvering of squads than previous writing.⁵⁶ MacDonald's work is a traditional military history of the battalion level. The author attempts to demonstrate the valor of American troops and rebut the contention that some fled in disarray.

Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Battle of the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany (1997) by Stephen E. Ambrose is about the junior officers, and enlisted men of the European Theater of Operations. Ambrose covers the period from D-Day through the German surrender. *Citizen Soldiers* includes maps and many accounts of the soldiers

⁵⁵ Napier Crookenden, *Battle of the Bulge 1944*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980).

⁵⁶ Charles B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985).

involved. Ambrose incorporates the most information to date of specific actions taken by soldiers to delay the Germans, but what he includes is limited.⁵⁷ Promoted as a story from the perspective of the men and women who fought it, Ambrose talks about the courage of the defenders but does not include any information about religious beliefs or why the soldiers were courageous.

Sir Antony James Beevor does not offer a new interpretation of the Battle of the Bulge. He provides a look at the ordinary soldiers on both sides of the battle in his book *Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge* (2015). The book includes maps of the German and American position throughout the battle and offers a detailed account of the German advance and the maneuvering of American units.⁵⁸ In Beevor's book, we get to see the big picture of grand strategy as generals on both sides devise plans to outwit and outfight their opponents. He does not offer much specific detail about the 28th Infantry Division. What he does offer is more from a macro perspective. The book does not offer any insight into what motivated the soldiers who resisted the German advance or anything about their religious beliefs.

Robert E. Merriam's *Dark December: The Full Account of the Battle of the Bulge* (2017) was first published in 1947 and then in an abridged edition in 2017. It is an account of the Battle of the Bulge, presented from both the Allied and the German viewpoints. Merriam writes a great deal about the advance of the German units and the Allied Command efforts to stop their advance.⁵⁹ The book contains unique and critical information, including details gleaned from interviews conducted by the author with commanding officers on both sides, some of which are

⁵⁷ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Battle of the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

⁵⁸ Anthony Beevor, *Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge*. (New York: Viking Adult, 2015).

⁵⁹ Robert E. Merriam, *Dark December: The Full Account of the Battle of the Bulge*. (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Press, 2017).

the only reports gathered from these sources. However, the 28th Division is barely mentioned, and no mention of the religious beliefs or other motivating factors are offered.

If You Survive (1987) by George Wilson provides little information about motivation in combat. Wilson did not participate in the D-Day invasion of France. While not as popular or well-known as many other WWII memoirs, Wilson's work covers nearly the entire campaign from Normandy to VE-Day through the eyes of an infantry officer. Wilson's story describes his experiences through the Normandy Campaign, Siegfried Line, Hürtgen Forest, and the Battle of the Bulge. His memoir tells of ambushes and close calls, with a tone of detachment that showed how many officers had to separate their feelings from many of the events in order to command effectively.⁶⁰

In *The 110th Holds in the Ardennes: The Blunting of Hitler's Last Gamble and the Invasion of the Reich* (2017) by me, contains many of the after-action reports and personal accounts of soldiers and civilians who lived through the Ardennes Offensive. The book also contains excerpts from the publications from the U.S. Army Centre of Military History and research conducted by *Cercle d'études sur la Bataille des Ardennes* or Study Group on the Battle of the Bulge in Luxembourg. Incorporated are previously unpublished accounts of the last stand of the 28th Division's 110th Infantry Regiment, and many previously unpublished personal accounts and stories.⁶¹

Most of the above mentioned writers and historians end up with attributing the stopping of the German advance to the heroic stand of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and other attached units and the relief of Bastogne by General George S. Patton's 3rd Army punch behind the German lines to relieve the Bastogne fighters. As time went on and more reports, interviews

⁶⁰ George Wilson, *If You Survive*. (New York: Ivy Books, 1987).

⁶¹ Zapotoczny, 62.

and accounts became available, scholars and authors still have not given credit to the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division for delaying the Germans long enough to influence the outcome.

Research for this dissertation in the 28th Division archives, located at the Fort Indiantown Gap Military Museum, uncovered interviews of soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Bulge with references to their religious faith and in many cases, how their faith sustained them. The interviews were conducted by the 28th Division Historical Section in December 1988. Other interviews, located at the National Archives, were conducted at Moosburg, Germany and Buzancy, Hachinette, Lapoutroie, and Montfaucon, France between January and June 1945 by the 3rd Information and Historical Services, Headquarters III U.S. Corps. These beliefs and experiences have been excluded from the writings about the Battle of the Bulge and are historically significant as scholars examine the reasons why soldiers fought so courageously. An examination of soldier interviews and memoirs offers an intriguing look at why soldiers fought.

During an interview in 1996, George Durham, Company A, 109th Infantry said, “We all knew we had to fight. We were all part of the same generation. When we grew up, everybody’s father had been in the war [World War I], I mean, having veterans around was about like having trees in a forest, there wasn’t anything unusual.”⁶² In his memoir Charles Haug, Company B, 112th Infantry writes, “Six small German tanks headed out of Lutzkampen in our direction. Behind the tanks came hundreds of Germans on foot. We bit our lips and prayed. We were scared and shaking, but we knew God would protect us.”⁶³ In a 1988 interview when asked why he fought Private First Class Robert Pocklington, Special Troops, 28th Division, stated, “Well, you know in the military we were always to fight and to hold. We were never to retreat. My dad

⁶² George Durham, Company A, 109th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by Roger S. Durham*. Pontiac, Illinois. August 12, 1996.

⁶³ Charles Haug, *As I Remember It: Courageous Defenders, Unpublished Memoir, November 1994*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum)

said if you come home and you get beat up, I'm going to beat the hell out of you. So that was always on my mind.”⁶⁴

Norman Forde carried a copy of the New Testament in a pocket of his uniform and wore a cross with his dog tags as he fought the Battle of the Bulge as an 18-year-old Army private. “I was never afraid for my soul,” the World War II veteran said. “My body could’ve been blown up at any time, but my faith didn’t waver.”⁶⁵ William Smith always wrote in his letters to his Grandma a prayer. He asked that she share the prayer with others. He recalled, “We certainly didn't have an altar in the Ardennes. The Padre served communion from the hood of his jeep.” Another veteran said, “There wasn't usually a priest around, so I prayed and confessed directly to God.” Yet another veteran commented that a chaplain had once used a tree stump and wasn't even Catholic, but it didn't stop them from praying along with him. The priest wasn't there. “It was just me and God in that foxhole. I prayed for God to spare me, and he did. I had a direct hotline to 'the Man' and believe me; I used it. We were scared!”⁶⁶ More detailed analysis of eye-witness accounts are included in subsequent chapters.

The following sources were examined for statements about what motivated the soldiers: Official records of the 109th, 110th and 112th Regiments of the 28th Infantry Division and German military units involved in the Ardennes Offensive, letters and personal diaries of soldiers, historical studies, oral histories, biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs, literary writing, newspapers and other periodicals, archives, eye-witness accounts, official records of the

⁶⁴ Robert Pocklington, *Interview by 28th Division Historical Section, Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, Pennsylvania, December 1988*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁶⁵ Norman Forde, *Interview by Katharine Goodloe, Dallas Morning News, May 29, 2004*.

⁶⁶ “Interviews of Battle of the Bulge Veterans,” *28th Division Historical Section*. Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, Pennsylvania, December 1988. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

military units involved, and other peer-reviewed articles, unit histories, personal accounts and stories, and unit reports.

Additionally, secondary sources that assist in explaining the spectrum of religious beliefs and practices soldiers brought with them to war and the factors that motivated them to fight include Thomas W. Bohn's *Why We Fight* film essay explaining the assumption that servicemen would be more willing and able fighters if they knew the events that led up to, and the reasons for our participation in the war. Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* that tells the stories of individual men and women the story of a generation, America's citizen heroes and heroines who came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War and went on to build modern America.

The religious beliefs of the soldiers are examined by looking at several publications. *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* by Alton E. Carpenter and A. Anne Eiland paints a vivid picture of the daily reality Chaplain Carpenter and his fellow chaplains experienced during their three years of serving along the front line. It provides a first-hand account of an army chaplain who kept a diary, making entries before battles, in the midst of battles, and afterwards, recording the joys, the humor, and the tragedies unfolding around him and his fellow soldiers. Written at the time the events occurred, the author shared his observations, and expressed his opinions.

Lyle W. Dorsett's *Serving God, and Country: U.S. Military Chaplains in World War II* tells the story of chaplains armed only with Bibles, Torahs, and the tools of their holy trade, these men of God went wherever the troops went. They prayed over men about to march into combat and they guided fallen fighting men of every faith as they breathed their last and gave up their lives in the fight against tyranny.

Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II (1994) by Donald F. Crosby offers a look at soldiers from the chaplain's perspective. Father Donald Crosby chronicles the little-known but crucial wartime role of Catholic chaplains and celebrates their compassion, courage, good humor, and humility. Their wartime efforts saved lives, provided comfort and hope, and renewed lost faith in a dark time.

Glenn J. Gray's *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (1998) is a philosophical meditation on what warfare does to us and an examination of the reasons soldiers act as they do. Gray explains the attractions of battle, the adrenaline rush, the esprit de corps, and analyzes the many rationalizations made by combat troops to justify their actions.

Michael Snape's *God, and Uncle Sam: Religion and America's Armed Forces in World War II* (2015) shows how religion played a crucial role in helping more than sixteen million uniformed Americans through the ordeal of World War II. Snape explains how America's armed forces were the products of one of the most diverse and dynamic religious cultures in the western world and were the largest ever to be raised by a professedly religious society. He explains how religion played a crucial role in helping more than sixteen million uniformed Americans through the ordeal of World War II.

The research methods employed in this study involved locating and analyzing appropriate sources for the reconstruction of the first few days of the Battle of the Bulge. Each source was examined and their value to the study determined. Eyewitness testimony is problematic and sometimes inaccurate, especially decades after an event. Therefore, the outlook of the source is considered when using it as evidence. It is recognized that statements made by veterans long after the event must be corroborated by comparing them to after action reports, official documents of the period and interviews conducted shortly after the event.

Most of the interviews used in this study were conducted by members of the historical sections of Army organizations while the soldiers were still in Europe. The accuracy of the interviews conducted decades after the events and other oral interviews many decades after the war were corroborated by comparing them to the unit histories, unit journal entries and accounts written during the Battle of the Bulge. The major types of sources used for this study can be classified as archived, primary published and unpublished, secondary sources and scholarly articles.

Primary sources such as memoirs, diaries and interviews are the earliest available accounts of the Battle of the Bulge which have been used by later writers to interpret that event. They are the raw material used by other writers to provide them with information and data. In using primary sources, the value judgement was made by the people who wrote them and the intent of the author in writing the original document is analyzed. Secondary sources provide interpretations and make judgements about primary sources. When using secondary sources, this study considers that the account they give, even when it involves lengthy quotations from primary sources, may not be accurate. Secondary sources are used to understand primary sources and provide supporting information.

In the early 1940s, America stood between the struggles of the Great Depression and the storm clouds of war in Europe and in the Pacific. The American people began to understand the magnitude of the challenge, the importance of an unparalleled national commitment, and the certainty that only one resolution was acceptable. The nation turned to its young to carry the heaviest burden, to fight the enemies of freedom in their own lands to keep the home front secure and free. The overarching beliefs and values that unified Americans during World War II

revolved around the American way of life. This encompassed political, economic, social elements, and religious freedom.

Fighting for freedom was a popular refrain in letters and interviews of veterans. While unit cohesion and fighting for one's buddy certainly were a factor in why soldiers fought, it is clear from interviews and personal accounts that the overriding reason why the men of the 28th Infantry Division fought so fiercely to delay the Germans during the first days of the Battle of the Bulge was to insure the American way of life.

While soldiers may not have used the exact words "fighting for the American way of life," their diaries, journals and interviews shortly after the Battle of the Bulge and years later contain common threads that reflect the refrain. The veterans comments echo President Roosevelt's appeal to the sensitivities of Americans as defenders of freedom. They clearly understood and stated the need to defend their own liberties, while simultaneously defending and restoring the liberties of other victims of the Nazi onslaught in Europe. They knew there would be sacrifices and repeatedly stated they knew what they were fighting for. The soldiers frequently commented that they had to beat the Nazis and they knew why they were there. Many reflected on writing home about stopping the Germans and having confidence that God was on their side and would protect them. They stated the reasons they went to war was to defeat a monstrous animal, a Nazi Dictator, enslaving the people of Europe, who had his eyes on enslaving Americans. They commented that the Germans could not be allowed to strip anyone of their freedom, and if left unchecked, they would bring their terror to American shores. Some exhibited extreme bravery that earned them battlefield promotions and awards for valor. They felt so strongly about their convictions to fight for the American way of life that they were

willing to risk all for the cause. Their bravery motivated others to continue to fight and exemplified their commitment to fight for freedom and stopping the Germans.

This research was intended to analyze the factors that contributed to the actions of the 28th Division's 109th, 110th and 112th regiments during the first days of the Battle of the Bulge and add to the historiography by offering a comprehensive explanation of why they fought so bravely in delaying the German advance. Although well-motivated troops would be expected to perform well in battle, assuming all other factors (like weapons technology) were equal to the enemy's, motivational factors also influenced or predicted casualty rates and can explain the reasons for unit success. The result of this research will provide military leaders and soldiers with the source of motivational factors and good military strategies that can be applied to a tactical situation like defensive positions using less strength to overcome superior numbers.

Subsequent chapters analyze and explain the results of examining the research questions. Chapter Two analyzes the American culture and the definition and promotion of the American way of life by the U.S. government, civilian organizations and by military leaders and trainers of recruits. It provides an understanding of the concerted effort that was taken to promote the idea of fighting for the American way of life. Chapter Three looks at how churches, chaplains and the military promoted and supported the religious practices of soldiers. It identifies the efforts that were taken to promote and support the religious beliefs and practices soldiers brought with them and experienced during war and how much they influenced them to fight. Chapter Four describes the training the soldiers received and how that training prepared the men to fight for the American way of life. Chapter Five outlines the Allied and German strategic setting, and the combat experience of the 28th Infantry Division and their movement across France up to and including their attack on the German Siegfried line. It shows how the soldiers confronted the

Germans and continued to fight for their values. Chapter Six is a description of the 28th Division involvement in the First U.S. Army plan to launch an attack aimed initially at the crossing of the Roer River, the capture of Duren, and then drive to Cologne and into Germany, and the 28th Division's fighting in the deadly Hürtgen forest. This chapter identifies the struggles the soldiers faced in one of their deadliest battles and how their resolve was tested. Chapter Seven answers one of the research questions describing the specific delaying actions the soldiers took to delay the German advance between December 16 to December 18, 1944. The tactics used by each of the elements of the three division regiments, beginning with the unit operational reports, after action reports and eye-witness accounts to determine the specific measures that were taken to delay the German troops are examined. Chapter Eight contains vignettes in the words of veteran describing answering the third research question identifying the predominant reason the soldiers fought so fiercely to delay the Germans advance. Chapter Nine concludes the dissertation by summarizing the results of the research and answering the research questions of why the soldiers of the 109th, 110th and 112th Regiments of the 28th Infantry Division fought as they did during the first days of the Battle of the Bulge. It discusses the research contribution to the historiography and provides recommendations for future military leaders and soldiers as they consider the actions that will bring a successful outcome to defense against stronger force.

As far as can be determined, no studies have been conducted to identify motivational factors that contributed to the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division action during the Battle of the Bulge. Therefore, this is original research intended to show that specific factors played a significant role in the motivation of the soldiers. This research proceeded in several phases. In the first exploratory phase, a literature review was conducted to produce a list of accounts of the Battle of the Bulge. An attempt was made to determine if there was any research done on the

factors that motivated the 28th Infantry Division soldiers in combat. The second exploratory phase involved selection of the combat narratives to be analyzed. Autobiographical accounts, memoirs, diaries of the soldiers involved were considered. In the third exploratory, all books and documents were analyzed for references to factors that motivated the soldiers to fight. In the fourth explanatory phase, the conclusions of the research were developed.

As the last major German offensive of the war, and the United States largest land battle of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge is frequently examined in literature. Despite this, historians continue to focus primarily on physical aspects, suggesting that physical forces were the single influence on the final result. This research employs primary and secondary sources to conduct the historical analysis and provide an interpretation of the motivating factors that caused the soldiers of the U.S. Army 28th Infantry Division to delay the German advance during the Battle of the Bulge. By analyzing the various interpretations presented in the literature and personal accounts, this research produces a re-interpretation of the first days of the Battle of the Bulge through the perspective of combat motivating factors.

Chapter Two

American Culture and the American Way of Life

As war raged in Europe and the Pacific theater in the years leading up to Pearl Harbor, many Americans suggested that what had happened politically in Germany might also happen in the United States. Educating American citizens in the ways of democracy, many felt, was an important response to the world crisis. In the late 1930s the National Education Association inaugurated its Educational Policies Commission, a Washington-based group that devoted much of its time to pondering the role of education in democracy and the actions American educators could take to improve citizenship and save the American way of life from foreign and domestic foes.⁶⁷ An appeal to American military history or the insistence that the United States fought only because it had been attacked were frequently invoked in educational materials.⁶⁸

The invasion of Poland had not yet happened when, in his 1938 State of the Union Address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt outlined the threat posed by Germany and its allies as an attack on religious freedoms. In the speech, he associated the defense of religion with the defense of democracy. He explained, “There comes a time in the affairs of men when they must prepare to defend, not their homes alone, but the tenets of faith and humanity on which their churches, their governments and their very civilization are founded. The defense of religion, of democracy and of good faith among nations is all the same fight.”⁶⁹

Soldier’s attitudes undoubtedly reflected American culture, as officials, private and public often spoke of the need to preserve the American way of life. In Roosevelt’s annual State

⁶⁷ Joy Elmer Morgan, “The Significance of Citizenship Recognition Day,” *Journal of the National Education Association*, 28 (December 1939), 257.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress, January 4, 1939,” Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. *The American Presidency Project*. (University of California, Santa Barbara).

of the Union Address to Congress on January 6, 1941, he presented his reasons for American involvement in the war, making the case for continued aid to Great Britain and greater production of war industries at home. He told Congress:

In the future days which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms: the first is freedom of speech and expressing – everywhere in the world, the second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way – everywhere in the world, The third is freedom from want, which translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peace time life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world, and the fourth is freedom from fear, which translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against ant neighbor – anywhere in the world.⁷⁰

President Roosevelt appealed to the sensitivities of Americans as defenders of freedom. Roosevelt, who was an Episcopalian, believed religion was a distinct strength of America, and emphasized faith in the nation’s war effort and especially in the armed forces. Under his leadership, the military incorporated religion into the fabric of soldiers’ lives by assigning clergy to the troops based on percentages of the religious affiliations of the nation’s population. The goal of this strategy was to have soldiers’ religious needs served by ministers of their own faiths. During the course of the war, American soldiers increasingly found motivation through prayer, especially at times of combat engagement.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “1941 State of the Union Address to Congress.” *FDR Library and Museum*. <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms>. Accessed September 17, 2022.

² “A Special Role.” *St. Paul's Church and World War II*. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/st-paul-s-church-and-world-war-ii.htm>. Accessed August 20, 2022.

One fact determining soldiers attitudes was the idea that the United States was forced to go to war as a matter of self-defense. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Adolf Hitler's decision to declare war four days later put an abrupt end to the isolationist notion that the United States could remain out of the global conflict. Judging from the history of Nazi aggression and subjugation, the American public realized war was a necessity for national self-preservation.⁷² Faced with a direct threat, all men contemplated the same reality: Germany and Japan were the aggressors that had to be defeated.

Samuel Stouffer proposes that “the American public understood the need to defend their own liberties, while simultaneously defending and restoring the liberties of the other victims of the Nazi onslaught.”⁷³ With all aspects of American life devoted to victory, there was a constant personal and communal urging that all citizens play some part in the war effort. It was socially unacceptable for men to refuse service and those very few that did were effectively ostracized.⁷⁴

The creators of comic books encouraged their readers to contribute to the American war effort and fostered a sense of patriotism and political obligation. “Captain America” burst onto the American comic books stands in March 1941. The cover of Issue #1 featured Captain America mid-fight, punching Adolf Hitler squarely in the nose. In Figure 1, Hitler is shown in his German headquarters surrounded by Nazi soldiers. Plans to destroy a United States munitions factory are in plain sight.⁷⁵

⁷² Samuel Stouffer, *The American Soldier: Adjustment During Army Life*, Vol. 1. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 81.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 149.

⁷⁴ Roy Hoopes, *Americans Remember the Home Front: An Oral Narrative of the World War II Years in America*. (New York: Berkely Books, 1977), 169.

⁷⁵ Mia Sostaric, “The American Wartime Propaganda During World War II: How Comic Books Sold the War.” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 38, no. 1 (2019), 17.



Figure 1 - Captain America, Issue 1, March 1941 (National Archives)

Among the initiatives to foster a sense of patriotism and obligation was the *Why We Fight* film series. The films were developed to win the confidence of the citizen soldiers. Intended as a series of orientation films for all Army troops before they went overseas, the *Why We Fight* series consisted of seven separate films produced between 1942-45 by the U.S. Army Signal Corps with the task of maintaining morale and instilling loyalty and discipline into the civilian Army.⁷⁶ *Prelude to War* (1942) explains the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy as well as Japan's aggression in the Far East. The film examines the differences between the United States and the fascist Axis states of Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and Hirohito by portraying the latter

⁷⁶ Thomas W. Bohn, "Why We Fight." *Film Essay*. (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1977).

countries working together as gangsters to conquer the world. That is done by footage from Nazi's *Triumph of the Will* film but with different narration designed to support the Allied cause. It is emphasized that after the Nazis smashed the opposing political parties and labor unions, they turned their attention to their last remaining obstacle, the church. In one scene, a stained glass window is shattered by several bricks to reveal a "Heil Hitler!" poster behind.⁷⁷

The Nazis Strike (1943) covers appeasement, the Munich Crisis and the years leading up to the German invasion of Poland. This second Army orientation film in the series focuses on Adolf Hitler's early political and military achievements. After first describing Germany's inborn "love of conquest," manifested by such leaders as Otto von Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II, the film discusses Hitler's specific scheme for reshaping the world through the spread of National Socialism. Recalling the twelfth century invasions of Genghis Khan, the film defines Hitler's strategy in terms of geopolitics.

Divide and Conquer (1943) focuses on the Blitzkrieg of Europe in 1939 and 1940. The film begins immediately after the fall of Poland. Of the two major Western Allies of 1940, the United Kingdom is first to be mentioned. The role of the Royal Navy in blockading Germany is highlighted, in that it means that Germany must overcome British resistance in order to clear the way for its world conquest. Hitler's treachery towards the small neutral countries of Europe is exposed.⁷⁸

The Battle of Britain (1943) explores the lethal contest for the skies above England. This fourth documentary in the *Why We Fight* propaganda series, shown in theaters across America during World War II to inform the public and rally support for the Allied troops, focuses on the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Note: *Triumph of the Will* is a 1935 German Nazi propaganda film directed, produced, edited and co-written by Leni Riefenstahl. It became a major example of film used as propaganda.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

harrowing bombardment of England by the Nazis in 1940. Using a combination of staged and real footage, director Frank Capra details the exploits of the heroic RAF (Royal Air Force) pilots who fought the German Luftwaffe over the skies of London and celebrates the courage of the British during their darkest hour.⁷⁹

The Battle of Russia (1943) covers Hitler's 1941 attack on the U.S.S.R. The film stitches together newsreel and archival film to explore relations between Russia and the United States. The film also recounts Russia's military history through the use of stock footage and clips from Sergei Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*. Particular attention is paid to the Battle of Stalingrad, during which Soviet forces fended off Nazi troops attempting to seize control of the Russian city.⁸⁰

The Battle of China (1944) shines the spotlight on Japan's genocide in Manchuria. This documentary examines the full and rich Chinese culture and history, while highlighting the Japanese invasion of China and the reasons Japan seeks to conquer the country. Depicting numerous atrocities inflicted upon the Chinese people, the film brings to light the need for U.S. involvement in the war effort. Capra also captures the determined will and spirit of those already fighting for freedom.

Produced in 1945 and not available to the soldiers during their training before the Battle of the Bulge, *War Comes to America* is the climax of the series and depicts the United States' entry into the war.⁸¹ "*Why We Fight* series stands among the most ambitious and successful film projects ever undertaken by the United States government. Over the course of seven films, released from 1942 to 1945, director Frank Capra and his team argued forcefully for American

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

military people and civilians to unite in the massive labor of defeating the Axis Powers and defending American values,”⁸² wrote Ashley S. Behringer for the National Archives Blog *The Unwritten Record*. The films played a positive role in mobilizing millions to fight for freedom and tolerance against brutal enemies. The film series offers original images of Americana and the things worth fighting for. They also draw a strong contrast between American values and those of the Axis powers. These films highlight the reasons soldiers should fight to defeat the powers that would change America.

The 28th Infantry Division soldiers had read news accounts and seen films about life in Nazi Germany and military leaders reminded them of what and who they were fighting against before they even started the first days of training. The reasons they were fighting were emphasized by their military leaders. Eddie Pfannenstiel joined the 130th Field Artillery, Kansas National Guard on September 25, 1939. In August of 1940 he was sent to training camp at Camp Ripley, Minnesota. He remembered his superiors talking about what was happening in Germany. Officers would lecture the men about how the Nazis seized Austria, the campaigns against the Jews, the campaign to destroy all Jewish business, the Japanese war in China and the Spanish Civil War. “They would remind us of what we would be fighting for,”⁸³ wrote Pfannenstiel in his *Wartime Log*.

The soldiers could envision what life would be like under Nazi rule. Philip K. Dick would capture this fear years later in his 1962 novel, *The Man in the High Castle*. In Dick’s novel, America lost the war and were subjugated to their Japanese and German occupiers. Their

⁸² Ashley S. Behringer, “Why We Fight: Prelude to War, America’s Crash History Lesson.” *The Unwritten Record Blog*, September 1, 2020. The National Archives. <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2020/09/01/why-we-fight-prelude-to-war-americas-crash-history-lesson/>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

⁸³ Eddie Pfannenstiel, *A Wartime Log*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum). Note: Eddie was eventually assigned to the 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division.

freedoms were greatly restricted including their freedom of movement and their freedom to worship.⁸⁴

American's attitude toward getting involved in war slowly began to change. In his 2007 article for *Diplomatic History* David Zietsma wrote, "Whereas American foreign policy before 1938 emphasized a more passive good neighbor approach rooted in the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, Americans increasingly interpreted international events in terms of good and evil. Thus, Americans concluded that the United States should intervene as a righteous nation."⁸⁵ Many propaganda posters, such as the one in Figure 2, show a soldier, a factory worker, and a sailor. Published in 1941 by the Office of Emergency Management, it stressed the continuity between civilian employment and the military.



Figure 2 - Men Working Together (Northwestern University Library)

⁸⁴ Philip K. Dick, *Man in the High Castle*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1962).

⁸⁵ David Zietsma, "Sin Has No History: Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1937–1941," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (2007), 531–565.

Chapter Three

Churches, Chaplains, and the Military Promoted Religious Practices of Soldiers

One of the research questions was to explore how faith factored into the nexus of ideas that inspired the perseverance of the soldiers. In 1941, President Roosevelt argued for the escalation of American involvement by supplying allies with munition. He maintained the aid was necessary to defend freedom. By including worship in his definition of freedom, Roosevelt provided an avenue by which Americans could think of the war in terms of a potential threat to religion. By defending the nation, one could also defend one's faith. Military leaders also adopted such language. For example, General Douglas MacArthur described the war as a "crusade of personal liberty" in a speech in Australia soon after leaving the Philippines in March 1942.⁸⁶ In Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower adopted similar language. On the eve of the D-day invasion into France, Eisenhower released a statement in which he proclaimed the start of a "Great Crusade" and urged troops to "beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking."⁸⁷ Religion and faith were tremendously important to American soldiers in World War II. Religious beliefs and practices and ideas of freedom of religion were basic elements in American culture and this ethos naturally extended to the U.S. military.

Fighting for the American way of life was an idea that was promoted by churches, chaplains and the military. For most, the American way of life meant freedom. That freedom often emphasized the freedom to worship. It also meant fighting so good would prevail over evil.

In *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Sociologist Will

⁸⁶ Tom Yarbrough and Associated Press, "MacArthur Vows Victory or Death in Freedom Fight," *Lewiston (ME) Daily Sun*, March 27, 1942; *Reports of General MacArthur*, vol. 1, Facsimile Reprint (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1994), 29.

⁸⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "D-Day Statement to the Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force," *Collection DDE-EPRE: Eisenhower, Dwight D: Papers, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952*, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

Herberg describes the American way of life as, “an organic structure of ideas, values, and beliefs that constitutes a faith common to Americans.”⁸⁸ This common faith was influenced by the organized religions in the United States during the war. In March of 1941, Congress authorized the expenditure of over twelve million dollars to build chapels for army personnel.⁸⁹

The challenges of helping keep morale strong and courage high required that the religious and spiritual needs of military personnel be met. During World War II, a Jewish and Christian world view exercised a dominant influence over American thought and behavior. Military leaders recognized that training men to kill the enemy and sustaining them in this dreadful task required chaplains who could help combatants maintain their humanity and religious convictions in the worst of times.⁹⁰ It also required churches to emphasize to their congregations that fighting for the American way of life included freedom to practice religion.

Prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, there was a strong anti-military and anti-war sentiment among Episcopalians and Quakers. The Presbyterian Church’s General Assembly had declared that “war was a violation of human personality and is repugnant to the Christian conscience.”⁹¹ In the immediate wake of Japan’s attack, many of America’s young men stood in long lines to volunteer for military service. Eighty percent of Americans before December 7, 1941 believed America should stay out of the war. Public opinion shifted nearly 180 degrees by early 1942 and religious institutional leaders quickly, albeit cautiously, joined the American public in changing their attitude toward war.⁹²

⁸⁸ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Revised. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1960), 77.

⁸⁹ “Fourth Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act of 1941,” Public Law 13, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 55 (1941): 34.

⁹⁰ Lyle W. Dorsett, *Serving God and Country: U.S. Military Chaplains in World War II*. (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2012), 21.

⁹¹ Robert L. Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Times: The U.S. Army Chaplaincy, 1920-1945*, Vol. IV. (Washington, D.C.: Chief of Chaplains Office, 1977). 79.

⁹² Dorsett, 23.

In 1942, a partnership between civilian producers, the War Department, and the Army Chaplain Corps resulted in *Chaplain Jim* - a weekly radio show that followed the adventures of a fictional and religiously ambiguous chaplain. As Ronit Stahl has argued, “the show served to unite Americans under an umbrella of generic monotheism.”⁹³ Civilian organizations such as the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Anti-Defamation League promoted the idea of interfaith cooperation. For example, in early 1941, an official with the Jewish Welfare Board proposed that the Army Chaplain Corps should cooperate with the National Conference of Christians and Jews to sponsor a program in army camps promoting interfaith cooperation and to support the ideas of fighting for religious freedom.⁹⁴ Kevin Schultz noted, “this partnership flourished during the war.”⁹⁵ Catholic priests, Jewish rabbis, and Protestant ministers maintained regular contact with the men and women in uniform and could also assure families and friends at home that their sons and daughters were attending worship services and finding spiritual guidance and counseling.”⁹⁶

Lyle Dorsett argued, “Chaplains were absolutely essential to America's victory because they cultivated courage and morale among U.S. troops that allowed them to make needed sacrifices.”⁹⁷ According to Dorsett, chaplains filled a very practical role for the U.S. military. They helped develop more effective soldiers and built support at home. For example, Dorsett explained that during training, chaplains functioned to “help civilians become combatants, adjust

⁹³ Ronit Stahl, “Chaplain Jim Wants You!: The Boundaries of Religion in the Warfare State.” *Paper presented at the World War II and Religion Conference*, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2012).

⁹⁴ Nathan C. Belth to Aryeh Lev, January 15, 1941, 000.3 Religion: Religious Ministration in the Army, v. 2, *Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45*, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247. (College Park National Archives).

⁹⁵ Kevin Michael Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44–50.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Dorsett, 6.

spiritually and psychologically to a radically different way of life, and at the same time assure families and communities back home that military life would not destroy the moral values and souls of their loved ones in uniform.”⁹⁸

The sheer number of U.S. troops and the nature of military deployment made formal religious leadership challenging in the U.S. Army during the course of World War II. Consequently, “military chaplains sought to encourage lay leadership to expand religious coverage for smaller religious traditions as well as those located in remote locations,”⁹⁹ reasoned Karl H. Hertz. “Recognizing the challenge of providing religious coverage, the U.S. military cautiously encouraged lay leadership as an extension of the religious work of chaplains.”¹⁰⁰

For lay leaders, the Army included basic worship aids for them in their official songbooks. In 1941, the U.S. military printed a revised edition of the *Hymnal, Army and Navy*, first published in 1920.¹⁰¹ Designed for use in chapels, this hymnbook included distinct sections devoted to Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish worship, but it was too bulky for common use when deployed overseas. Consequently, the U.S. military developed a second, shorter songbook in 1941 titled *Song and Service for Ship and Field*.¹⁰² This book contained worship services with responsive readings divided among the three dominant traditions followed by a selection of popular hymns.

In addition to materials produced by the military, civilian organizations provided resources designed to equip soldiers and sailors for lay leadership. For example, four cooperating Protestant agencies launched the Service Men’s Christian League in November 1942. Designed

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁹ Karl H. Hertz, “The Role of the Laity in American Christianity,” *Mid-Stream* 22, no. 3–4 (1983), 326–341.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Ivan L. Bennett, ed., *The Hymnal, Army and Navy*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941).

¹⁰² Ivan L. Bennett, ed., *Song and Service Book for Ship and Field*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941).

to supplement and support the work of chaplains, the Service Men's Christian League published the *Link Magazine*, a monthly periodical for soldiers and sailors that included daily devotional Bible readings as well as plans for weekly discussion meetings intended for use by self-organized lay people.¹⁰³

Chaplains distributed the *Link Magazine* widely with over 2.6 million copies printed during the first year alone. Similarly, the Jewish Welfare Board distributed over one million copies of an abridged prayer book that included dozens of services and prayers. The preface explained that the book was “designed to be used where the exigencies of life in the army or the navy do not permit attendance at regular synagogue services.”¹⁰⁴

Many soldiers during World War II practiced a private spirituality. One of the most private, but also devoutly religious soldiers in the American military, was General Matthew B. Ridgway, commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps. The Corps helped stop and push back German troops during the Battle of the Bulge. In his memoirs he wrote about what many felt. He admitted that in the darkness, after he had gone to bed, alone with his God, his thoughts inevitably turned inward and whatever resources of the spirit he possessed, he prepared himself as best as he could for whatever test may lie ahead. He found great comfort in the story of the anguish of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Ridgway figured that if Jesus could face anguish with calmness of soul then surely he could endure.¹⁰⁵ Ridgway's biographer George C. Mitchell, claims that “Ridgway's fearlessness in the front lines was founded on his solid religious base.

¹⁰³ “Bible Bits and Topic Talks,” *Link Magazine*, February 1943, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Jewish Welfare Board, *Prayer Book: Abridged for Jews in the Armed Forces of the United States*, revised. (New York: Press of the Jewish Publication Society, 1943), iv.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew B Ridgway, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway*. (New York: Harper, 1956), 3. Note: The events at Gethsemane are discussed in the Bible, Matthew 26: 36–56.

Ridgway reads the Bible and firmly believes that God will not permit him to be hit before Germany is totally defeated.”¹⁰⁶

In an essay for *Link Magazine* stating what he was fighting for, Private Henry Johnson mentioned freedom of worship and freedom from fear. He concluded, “I am fighting for what I consider to be the American way of life. That great ideal is high enough and fine enough to challenge me to fight, and, if need be, to die to guarantee its realization.”¹⁰⁷ There were many who believed as Johnson did. In a letter to his mother, Morris B. Redmann wrote about the death of his brother on Tarawa. “He died fighting for an ideal, the American way of living,” Redmann reflected. “He died so that the squealing babies I saw baptized in church this afternoon may live in peace, speak their mind, and worship God in the true religion.”¹⁰⁸

While military chaplains and religious organizations sought to encourage and equip chaplains and lay leaders, some soldiers took initiative to fill what they perceived as a vacuum of religious leadership. For example, Louis Gehr reported to the editor of *Wheaton Alumni* that “I actively participated in a unit of the Service Men’s Christian League that met on Wednesday nights when I was training in England.”¹⁰⁹

Because of the tough conditions that prevailed during the war, chaplains and others had to compromise on some traditional worship practices.¹¹⁰ Jewish chaplains concluded, for example, that dietary laws may be violated in extenuating circumstances, but they encouraged

¹⁰⁶ Clay Blair, *Ridgway’s Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II*. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 21.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Johnson, “What I Am Fighting For,” *Link Magazine*, September 1943, 27. Note: *Link Magazine* was a Protestant Devotional magazine designed for U.S. military personnel.

¹⁰⁸ Morris B. Redmann, “Letter to His Mother, February 20, 1944.” in *Unfinished Journey: A World War II Remembrance*, ed. Kerry P. Redmann (Guilford: Lyon’s Press, 2006), 117–8. Note: Redmann died in the Battle of the Bulge less than one year after this letter.

¹⁰⁹ Louis Gehr, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, October 1944, 1.

¹¹⁰ Albert Isaac Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History*. (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 92–97.

troops to obey them whenever possible.¹¹¹ Similarly, “the Roman Catholic Church reduced and eventually omitted the required time of fasting before one could participate in the Eucharist under pressing conditions.”¹¹² Because of the limited number of priests and the very real potential for death, Catholic chaplains occasionally practiced general absolution where they would absolve entire group from their sins.¹¹³

Aside from spiritual edification, some soldiers and sailors turned to religious readings to remain connected to familiar aspects of home. In letters to his mother, Private Roger Houtz, a committed Presbyterian, often mentioned reading his Bible regularly while in the army. “The act of reading seemed to comfort me both spiritually and emotionally in that it sustained a connection with mother.”¹¹⁴ From basic training, he sent home a pocket testament exactly like his own as a Mother’s Day gift, hoping that it would make up for his inability to get anything else. Five months later, he reflected on the significance of he and his mother reading from duplicate testaments commenting, “God joins us together tho we are miles apart.”¹¹⁵

Soldiers participated in organized programs for religious study when the circumstances permitted. The Service Men’s Christian League made available information for weekly Bible lessons in the *Link Magazine*. While the Service Men’s Christian League was essentially a product of the Protestant establishment, other organizations emerged. Most significantly, the ‘Navigators’ provided templates and resources to equip soldiers to study the Bible both alone and with others. Organized by Dawson Trotman in the mid-1930s, ‘Navigators’ focused on military

¹¹¹ “United States, Report on the Army Chaplain in the European Theater.” *Report of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater Study No. 68*. (Bad Nauheim, Germany: The General Board, U.S.F.E.T, 1945), 41.

¹¹² Scott M. P Reid, *General Sacramental Absolution: An Historical, Canonical and Pastoral Perspective*. (London: Saint Austin Press, 1998), 18–19.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, May 11, 1943, *Personal Correspondence, December 1942-November 1943, Roger L. Houtz Papers*. (Carlisle: U.S. Army Military History Institute).

¹¹⁵ Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, October 3, 1943.

personnel, initially as an outreach to sailors.¹¹⁶ Evangelistic in nature, the organization sought to help new Christians grow through intensive Bible study.

The soldiers of the 28th Division, like most other soldiers in World War II, took with them their religious beliefs and practices. Civilian organizations and the military provided materials and support for soldiers to practice their faith. Some men gained revelations and strengthening of their religious convictions. Still others believed that pleading to God provided a sense of calm and strength in an otherwise difficult situation. Jon Butler suggests that “Many believed that God would protect them in battle. Regardless of perceived effectiveness, some soldiers sought supernatural intervention in order to preserve their lives and the lives of those around them. Many made such appeals out of desperation or as something they could do when nothing else could be done. Some solidified their commitment to a faith they had previously held only loosely.”¹¹⁷ The soldiers drew from the religious beliefs and practices they brought with them to petition God for protection as they fought for the American way of life.

As the federal government and military leaders celebrated the idea of interfaith cooperation and religious practices, soldiers believed that the freedom to practice their religion as they saw fit was an integral part of the American way of life and were willing to and ready to fight for it. The spiritual mindset of the 28th Infantry Division soldiers who entered combat can be reflected and summarized in a poem written by an anonymous World War II soldier:

No shell or bomb can on me burst,
Except my God permits it first.
Then let my heart be kept in peace,

¹¹⁶ Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: The Story of Dawson Trotman, Founder of the Navigators*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

¹¹⁷ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 21.

His watchful care will never cease.
No bomb above, nor mine below
Need cause my heart one pang of woe
The Lord of Hosts encircles me,
He is the Lord of earth and sea.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Arthur F. Glasser, *And Some Believed*. (Chicago: Moody, 1946), 109.

Chapter Four

The Military Trained Men to Fight for the American Way of Life

Fighting for the American way of life was an idea that was promoted by military leadership. Prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the general attitude about America getting involved in war was passive. Michael Snape suggests, “Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall had a shrewd understanding of the character of America’s non-professional soldiers. He was also acutely aware of the likelihood of political and public relations problems arising from the idea of America becoming an army of democracy.”¹¹⁹

The United States plan was to annihilate the enemy. “The prevailing view was that victory would be accomplished through the utter destruction of evil, often going beyond moral boundaries and evoking moral qualms,”¹²⁰ argued Thomas W. Zeiler. The was a necessary fight against genocide and aggression. Military leaders would defend fighting a supposedly ‘good war,’ as commentators later called it, against murderous ideologies.¹²¹ There was no broad national plan of using military threats to effect political ends, engage in international politics, or base military strategy on national security, principles, values, and defense interest. Rather, for the United States, “war was the strategy. Its objective was to eviscerate the enemy, military and civilian alike, through industrial technology and an insistence of unconditional surrender that amplified the killing by promising total defeat,”¹²² notes Russell F. Weigley. World War II

¹¹⁹ Michael Snape, *God, and Uncle Sam: Religion and America’s Armed Forces in World War II*. (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2015), 42.

¹²⁰ Thomas W. Zeiler, *The American Way in World War II from Part III - The Perils of Interdependence*. Cambridge University Press Online. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-history-of-america-and-the-world/american-way-in-world-war-ii/879D823F1F695D2F92677D66A5D6AB99>. Accessed October 3, 2022.

¹²¹ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13.

¹²² Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 149.

permeated every aspect of American life, including the government, the economy, entertainment, and society. Before the new recruits even got to basic training, the Office of War Information's Bureau of Motion Pictures assumed responsibility for making sure that moviegoers left those theaters only with government-approved thoughts in their mind. In *Hollywood Goes to War*, Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black assert that the Office of War Information's supervision of Hollywood filmmaking was "the most comprehensive and sustained government attempt to change the content of a mass medium in American history."¹²³ The Office of War Information wanted movies to extol the virtues of the American way of life and to portray the Allies as models of righteousness and the Axis as embodiments of evil.¹²⁴ This was the exposure the new recruits faced as they entered the military. The ideas of fighting for the American way of life were continually promoted by the soldiers' leaders.

In training and morale materials for American soldiers and in representations of soldiers created for civilian audiences, depictions of the military emphasized the continuing individuality and autonomy of each American serviceman. By describing the most regimented elements of military life as analogous to civilian life, by emphasizing the moral autonomy of men even in a military situation, and by attempting to train Americans to fight for empirical, rational reasons, the military leadership attempted to construct, in word and action, an army ready to fight for the American way of life. The military leadership realized, as Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel argued, "In order to become an effective soldier, he must learn to adapt himself to a completely undemocratic group, which required of him submission and fixation in a dependent position and

¹²³ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. (New York: University of California Press, 1987), 324

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

ideology”¹²⁵ The potential soldier and sailor was constantly reminded of what America had to do to protect freedom.

Government representatives saw knowledge as essential to the morale of American troops. Troop morale had to be based on a knowledge of the facts if this was to be a war against fanatical belief systems. Thus, from very early in the forming of military strategy, key figures stressed the importance of knowledge of the truth to the morale of the troops. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, addressing a conference of army public relations officers held in Washington, D.C., in March 1941, argued that “The success of the army depends upon its morale...Nothing can undermine this morale.”¹²⁶ A later memo from the War Department’s Information and Education Division laying out the objectives of the morale program emphasized, among other goals, fostering both a “belief in the cause for which we fight and a resentment, based on knowledge of the facts, against our enemies who have made it necessary to fight.”¹²⁷

Technical Sergeant Glenn M. Girardat, Company C, 112th Infantry Regiment wrote in his diary that he had enlisted on November 11, 1940 after seeing the war movies. He enlisted in the National Guard and was mobilized at the Meadville, Pennsylvania armory on February 17, 1941. He left for training the night of February 27. He said the entire time, “I was itching to get into the fight.”¹²⁸

Staff Sergeant Robert F. Sessoms wrote in his diary that “Uncle Sam interrupted my happy-go-lucky days and inducted me into service at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, along with a

¹²⁵ Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, *Men under Stress*. (Philadelphia: Blakiston Books, 1945), 450.

¹²⁶ Henry Stimson quoted in Thomas W. Bohn, *An Historical and Descriptive Analysis of the “Why We Fight” Series*. (New York: Arno Press 1977), 92-93.

¹²⁷ Memo quoted in Carl I. Hovland et al., eds., *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, vol. III: Experiments on Mass Communication. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 24.

¹²⁸ Glenn M. Girardat, Company C, 112th Infantry Regiment. *Unpublished Diary*. 28th Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

group of sad-faced guys. We were not slackers and put our shoulders to the wheel and pushed forward our aims for victory, just as we had seen in the movies.”¹²⁹

Mrs. Mabel Smith wrote about her son Staff Sergeant Robert L. Smith, Company C, 112th Infantry Regiment. She said he was training at Camp Lee, Virginia when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He was sent to Company F, 112th Infantry, 28th Division. Robert was 19 years old then. He came home on furlough and that was the last time his mother saw him. He was killed on September 19, 1944. While he was home, he told her that he wanted to fight. He had seen the movies and read about what the Germans and Japanese were doing. He knew it was his duty to fight.¹³⁰ Staff Sergeant Smith received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions near Percy, France.

General Marshall knew that duty/honor/country encompasses feelings of duty, both to country and fellow soldiers, a sense of honor, patriotism, and a love for the individual's home country and all it represents. Richard Holmes defined honor as “concerned with the obligation of a soldier, and in part it is a reflection of the manly honor which encourages so many young men to enlist and buoys them up before their first battle.”¹³¹ The concept of honor for soldiers is based primarily upon moral standards of his culture and what values and virtues his society upholds. Martin L. Cooke argues that it is the value system of his culture which will form the soldier's concept of honor and will inform the soldier's conduct in battle.¹³²

General Marshall understood that the army had to motivate men who were highly individualistic, democratic, and even anti-military. In 1942, the U.S. government established the

¹²⁹ Robert F. Sessoms, Company D, 112th Infantry Regiment, *Unpublished Diary*. 28th Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

¹³⁰ Mabel Smith. *Personal History of Robert L. Smith*. 28th Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

¹³¹ Richard Holmes, *Acts of War*. (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 301.

¹³² Martin L. Cooke, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military*. (New York: State University of New York, 1954), 22.

Office of War Information to serve as the United States propaganda branch during World War II. The office created thousands of posters (like the ones in Figure 3), books, pamphlets, radio broadcasts films, and other media that were used at home and abroad. Enlistment and worker posters were placed in public places.



Figure 3 - Recruiting Posters (U.S. Department of Defense)

“The soldier’s idea of honor is based upon the training he has received to instruct him in the right conduct of war,” argues James Johnson.¹³³ In the Army, fresh recruits soon realized physical training was focused on the survival and psychological training was focused on why they were fighting. The purpose of the transformation from a civilian into a soldier was to teach men what they needed to know to stay alive on the battlefield. They also needed to be reminded

¹³³ James Turner Johnson, *Morality and Contemporary Warfare*. (New York: Yale University Press, 1999), 18.

of the reasons they were fighting. Along with instilling teamwork, and learning the basics of survival, drill sergeants stressed the importance of winning to preserve the American way of life. The Germans and the Japanese could not be allowed to win or America would be a different place.¹³⁴ New recruits were issued *FM 21-100 - War Department Basic Field Manual: Soldier's Handbook, July 23, 1941*. It covered everything from how to assemble a field pack and address officers to how to react in a mustard gas attack. The first paragraph of the forward reads:

You are now a member of the Army of the United States. That Army is made up of free citizens chosen from among a free people. The American people of their own will, and through the men they have elected to represent them in Congress, have determined that the free institutions of this country will continue to exist. They have declared that, if necessary, we will defend our right to live in our own American way and continue to enjoy the benefits and privileges which are granted to the citizens of no other nation. It is upon you, and the many thousands of your comrades now in military service, that our country has placed its confident faith that this defense will succeed should it ever be challenged.¹³⁵

Along with movies produced exclusively for the military, such as training and orientation films, the *Why We Fight* films were shown to American soldiers during basic training. Beyond basic training, about 160 technical bulletins were produced with combat footage. These movies played a significant role in the lives of American soldiers from the moment they entered the military.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Joseph Greene, *The Infantry Journal Reader*. (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.), 271.

¹³⁵ "FM 21-100 - War Department Basic Field Manual: Soldier's Handbook, July 23, 1941." *Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy. Jack L. Kuhl Papers* (TMD96) Box 1, 1941-1944.

¹³⁶ William Friedman Fagelson, "Fighting Films: The Everyday Tactics of World War II Soldiers." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Spring 2001), 94-112.

Senior military leadership understood that if soldiers could believe that America was the place for them to practice Judeo-Christian traditions, they would die to defend it. Military leaders and chaplains emphasized that Communism in the Soviet Union, Fascism in Italy, National Socialism in Germany, and the rise of the Showa in Japan represented totalitarian regimes that limited freedom, particularly, religious freedom.¹³⁷

A speech was delivered during an *I am an American Day* gathering in New York's Central Park on May 18, 1941 by Harold L. Ickes, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior serves to define what it meant to be a free American and is indicative of the message the government wanted to get out to its citizens. It came at a perilous moment in history, May of 1941, when Adolf Hitler and the Nazis seemed headed toward possible world domination. Ickes said:

....what constitutes an American? Not color nor race nor religion. Not the pedigree of his family nor the place of his birth. Not the coincidence of his citizenship. Not his social status nor his bank account. Not his trade nor his profession. An American is one who loves justice and believes in the dignity of man. An American is one who will fight for his freedom and that of his neighbor. An American is one who will sacrifice property, ease and security in order that he and his children may retain the rights of free men. An American is one in whose heart is engraved the immortal second sentence of the Declaration of Independence. Americans have always known how to fight for their rights and their way of life. Americans are not afraid to fight. They fight joyously in a just cause.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Robert Nay, Chaplain, *Leadership and Transformation of the Army Chaplaincy During WWII*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 2020.), 19

¹³⁸ Harold L. Ickes, "Speech during an I am an American Day, May 18, 1941." *Harold L. Ickes Papers*, I.D. No.: MSS27011. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress).

During his fireside chat on December 28, 1941, President Roosevelt warned, “at this moment the forces of the states that are leagued against all peoples who live in freedom are being held away from our shores. The Axis powers represented the revival of the oldest and the worst tyranny. In that there is no liberty, no religion, no hope...”¹³⁹ In effect, Roosevelt framed the war as a momentous struggle for the preservation of human liberty and the American way of life. Roosevelt shared his “profound conviction that the American people are now determined to put forth a mightier effort than they have ever yet made to meet the threat to our democratic faith.”¹⁴⁰

The messages from the leaders of the United States were not lost on the men who would be part of the 28th Division. They entered the military with those messages fresh in their minds. While the United States was still neutral at the start of World War Two, and as the war clouds gathered over Europe, in August 1940, all U.S. National Guard regiments were called into Federal service for 12 months to bolster the strength of the Regular Army. The *28th Infantry Division Historical Summary* provides some information about the beginning of the Division. Before being federalized, the 28th Division was a unit of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and is the oldest division-sized unit in the Department of Defense. Some of the units of the division can trace their lineage to Benjamin Franklin's battalion, the Pennsylvania Associators.¹⁴¹ The Division's storied history was not lost on many of the men who served in its ranks. When soldiers joined the 28th Division they were given a card that outlined a brief history of the division.

¹³⁹ Josh Zeitz, “The Speech That Set Off the Debate About America’s Role in the World.” *Politico Magazine*, December 29, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “28th Infantry Division Historical Summary.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 22.

The road to the Battle of the Bulge for the 28th Infantry Division began on February 17, 1941, when they were called into federal service at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. By June, enough replacements were expected to bring the division strength to 12,947. The division remained there until August 1941 when it was relocated to A.P. Hill Military Reservation, Virginia to continue training. The soldiers of the 28th participated in maneuvers in North Carolina from September to December 1941. In January 1942, the division was sent to Camp Livingston, Louisiana and in March came under control of U.S. Army Ground Forces and was placed under the IV Corps of the Third Army.¹⁴²

According to Sergeant Albert W. Burghardt, Company K, 110th Infantry Regiment, “the basic training was very tough at Camp Livingston, especially when most of the troops came into the army without knowing what exercise was. It didn't take long to weed out the fellows who could not take the training.”¹⁴³ The obstacle courses and the marches were tough on most soldiers. The calisthenics for forty-five minutes without stopping were very difficult, but most of the trainees made it.

In January 1943, the division moved to Camp Gordon Johnson, near Apalachicola, Florida, where the Amphibious Training Command was set up. This was a training school for all weather, shore to shore assault training. The tempo of the training increased. They went on many speed marches that consisted of four miles in forty-five minutes and five miles in an hour. Almost daily, the division participated in mock landings on islands in the Gulf of Mexico and beach landings on the coast of Florida. At that time, they did not know where they were going - the Pacific area or the European Theater of Operations. They did a lot of patrolling in the

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁴³ Albert W. Burghardt, “My Tour with the 28th Division.” *Unpublished Manuscript*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

swamps and long marches in the sand. It looked like the South Pacific for the division. Frequent lectures reminded the men that they were going to fight for the American way of life.¹⁴⁴

The barracks floors were sand. They slept on cots. Every morning the soldiers would hit the heel of their boot against the side of the cot to see what would fall out. Overnight scorpions, giant ants, etc., crept into them. The men did a lot of swimming in the Gulf as part of their training. Everyone was expected to learn how to swim. During one of the night training exercises, the 112th Regiment lost several men when the ramp on an LCP (Landing Craft Personnel) was lowered on a sand bar in the Gulf, instead of on land.¹⁴⁵

Howard J. Friedman talked about the living conditions in a 1975 interview. He said, “The winter of 1942-1943 proved severe, and the barracks lacked adequate heating. The Army did not build mess halls for some time, requiring troops to eat outside with mess kits for several months. A permanent chapel was not completed until a month after the men arrived, and no recreation center existed for several months.”¹⁴⁶ The men of the 28th Division did not realize it at the time but, they would experience these conditions many times as they fought their way across Europe.

At Camp Gordon Johnson the tempo of the training continued to increase. To add realism to the training in the use of the bayonet, the instructors had the men leave the scabbard in place. The soldiers would pair off and go at it until one of the contestants was slashed, jabbed, or was touched with the scabbard over the bayonet. One of the more important parts of their training was street combat that took place in an abandoned town called ‘Schicklgruber Haven.’ The men went through the town one at a time. Cardboard dummies popped up, and they fired at them,

¹⁴⁴ 28th Infantry Division Historical Summary, 45.

¹⁴⁵ “History of the 112th Infantry Regiment.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

¹⁴⁶ Interview of Howard J. Friedman by Virginia Perkins, December 16, 1975. M77-164, *Junior League of Tallahassee, Oral Histories, 1976-1977*. Florida State Archives.

learning to fire from their hips.¹⁴⁷ In May 1943, while at Camp Gordon Johnson, the division went by truck to Camp Rucker, Alabama, for both qualification and familiarization of their weapons.

The men of the division were reminded of their mission by their leaders and in their unit newsletters. For example, in the May 30, 1943 issue of the *Trumpeter*, the 110th Infantry newsletter, there was an article entitled “Memorial Day 1963?” It read:

Each year on May 30th, the nation honors the dead of the various wars. In later years some of us may be among those honored dead. Will we have accomplished the objectives for which another crop of carnivorous Caesars be trying to dominate the world, subjecting minority groups and allegedly inferior peoples to Machiavellian abuse? To observe Memorial Day 1963 peacefully we have a big job to do. The war, which should be called a Peoples Revolution, must be won! The war is being fought to secure for men everywhere the freedoms which Americans have been taking for granted for many generations.¹⁴⁸

On June 10, 1943, the Division arrived at Camp Pickett, Virginia from Camp Gordon Johnson by train, where the training continued. Troops were taken to an area, where there was a large platform, which was a replica of the side of a ship, about two and a half stories high. They had cargo nets secured to the top. The men went up one side hand over hand, with full pack and down the other side the way they would on a regular ship.¹⁴⁹ In August, the division moved by rail and trucks to Norfolk, Virginia, where they participated in ship-to-shore amphibious training

¹⁴⁷ Burghardt. Note: Alois Hitler (born Alois Schicklgruber) was an Austrian civil servant and the father of Adolf Hitler.

¹⁴⁸ “The Trumpeter, 110th Infantry Unit Paper,” Vol. IV, No. 7. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum). Note: The unit paper was distributed to every man in the regiment.

¹⁴⁹ Division Historical Summary, 23.

at the Solomon Islands in Chesapeake Bay, Virginia. While at Camp Pickett, the 45th Infantry Division was alerted for an overseas assignment. The 28th Infantry Division was assigned to furnish 1,500 replacements to bring the 45th Division up to strength.¹⁵⁰

The soldiers were able to get a short break from the grind of training. At Camp Pickett, they were able to visit the Red Cross Hospitality Center, participate in religious services, and leave the post on a three-day pass. Many went to Washington, D.C. Some of the men whose hometown was close, went home for a couple of days. This was the last time the soldiers would leave the confines of their camp before leaving the United States. The men had some time to think about why they were there. In his diary, Tom Hickman wrote, "I do believe that the war against Hitler was a proper one, but we were subject to a great deal of propaganda. We were told that Hitler was stamping out religion."¹⁵¹

On September 28-29, 1943, the Division moved from Camp Pickett to Camp Miles Standish, near Taunton, Massachusetts. This was a type of security camp. No one was permitted to leave the area. Some of the men went to the wire fence that surrounded the camp and gave some kids money to get liquor for them. The soldiers were not at this camp very long. They had inspections and got ready to leave for their overseas assignment to the European Theater of Operations. On October 6 and 7, they boarded troop trains and went to the port of Boston where they boarded the *SS Cristobal*. In October, the Division set sail arriving ten days later at Newport, Wales.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Thomas W. Hickman, "Unpublished Diary." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum). Note: Hickman was a Battalion Scout with the 1st Battalion of the 109th Infantry.

¹⁵² 28th Infantry Division Historical Summary, 40.

The training continued in Wales, and none of it was easy. While they trained, they were exposed to hedgerows, long, deep walls of hedges that reached fifteen feet in height. Little did they realize that these tremendous obstacles awaited them in Normandy, France, where they would cost the lives of so many men. During their stay in Wales, they were out of camp more than in. Rumors circulated that the camps may be the targets of German air raids. The more time spent in the field, the less likely the unit would suffer casualties from such raids before embarking for Normandy. There were German planes overhead most nights.¹⁵³

While in Wales, the men went to the Assault Training Center near Barnstable, Devonshire. The English had a large area set up to resemble the type of fortifications that the soldiers would encounter when they hit the beach. The Division also used the same tactics when they got to the Siegfried Line. They formed into assault teams. Each team consisted of sergeants, riflemen, flame throwers, demolition teams, bazooka teams, light machine gun squads, 60mm mortar squads, and men with Bangalore torpedoes. Each assault team was assigned a pillbox to attack and destroy. Umpires judged their efforts.¹⁵⁴

On one of the amphibious exercises, they went by troop transport to the Irish Sea. They disembarked down the cargo nets into small assault crafts, and after circling around, made for the beach. The surf was very high, and one could look over the side of the boat and see the sand in front. Albert W. Burghardt recalled, “the waves in the surf must have been around twenty feet high. The surf was deep, and as usual everyone was wet. There was never a change of clothing.”¹⁵⁵ The Irish Sea was very cold, but after the original shock, the woolen long johns

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁵ Burghardt.

gave them a measure of warmth. Later, when the Division landed on Omaha Beach after D-Day, they saw the same type of beach that they had practiced on in the Irish Sea exercises.

In June 1944, Lieutenant General George S. Patton was given command of the Third United States Army, a field army which had newly arrived in the United Kingdom and which was composed largely of inexperienced troops. Patton began delivering speeches to his troops in February 1944. The speeches were made available to other units training at the time. Patton's Speech to the Third Army was a series of speeches given by Patton to troops prior to the Allied invasion of France. The speeches were intended to motivate the inexperienced Third Army for its pending combat duty. In the speeches, Patton urged his soldiers to do their duty regardless of personal fear, and he exhorted them to aggressiveness and constant offensive action. Patton's profanity-laced speaking was viewed as unprofessional by some other officers but the speeches resounded well with his men. This an excerpt from one of his speeches:

...Sure, we all want to go home. We want to get this war over with. But you can't win a war lying down. The quickest way to get it over with is to get the bastards who started it. We want to get the hell over there and clean the goddamn thing up, and then get at those purple-pissing Japs. The quicker they are whipped, the quicker we go home. The shortest way home is through Berlin and Tokyo. So keep moving...¹⁵⁶

When the men had a break during their training in the field, they collected watercress. There were many streams in this mountainous area, and the watercress was fresh and crisp and a change from what was offered in the company mess. The occasional break in training gave the soldiers a chance to attend religious services and to write letters to loved ones at home. Although

¹⁵⁶ Terry Brighton, *Patton, Montgomery, Rommel: Masters of War*. (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2009), 262.

chaplains were not readily available everywhere in 1942, or present in all combat areas, by 1943 almost no soldier in uniform was without benefit of clergy care if he wanted it. The soldiers were able to go to the local town and frequent the pubs, which usually had better food than the mess halls. During the religious services, chaplains and lay personnel emphasized that the men were fighting for the freedom of all oppressed peoples.¹⁵⁷

Infantry soldiers were not the only ones who experienced hardships and died for their beliefs. Chaplain Captain Clyde E. Kimball, who would die in combat in the Battle of the Bulge, left behind a diary that provided a glimpse of a chaplain who willingly made rounds in England to serve as many troops as possible. Chaplain Kimball blessed many men by tirelessly traveling, speaking about why they were fighting, and passing out Bibles, stationery, and other useful items he would purchase in the Post Exchange. For his later actions during the Battle of the Bulge, he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for displaying great personal bravery, volunteering to pass through fierce German machine gun fire in an effort to render treatment and evacuate the wounded.¹⁵⁸

On April 17, 1944, the 28th Division moved from Wales by motor transport to Chiseldon Camp and Rackley Park in Wiltshire on Salisbury Plains. The men were back to primitive living, assigned to pyramid tents that held between four and six men. They were not issued army cots, so they made stakes out of tree branches, drove the stakes into the ground and laced twine between the stakes. This gave them a sort of hammock and kept them off the damp ground. They were issued mattress covers which were filled with straw. Training continued with marches and firing various weapons, including the bazooka antitank rocket.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Burghardt.

¹⁵⁸ Dorsett, 131.

¹⁵⁹ 28th Infantry Division Historical Summary, 64.

While at Rackley Park, the word came down that another move was imminent. On July 18, 1944, the Division left Rackley Park and moved sixty miles south to Moorhill Camp, near the port of Southampton. Moorhill Camp resembled a security camp, because it was surrounded by barbed wire, and security troops were on patrol everywhere. No one could leave the camp, and the soldiers were billeted in very close quarters. Their stay in this camp was short. Equipment was checked and some replaced. They were issued items for combat, cigarettes, candy rations, water purification tablets, and pocket Bibles.

Chaplains accompanied the fighting soldiers throughout their training and into battle. In his book *Serving God and Country: U.S. Military Chaplains in World War II*, historian Lyle W. Dorsett describes the role of chaplains in various theaters of operation and the promotion of religion by military commanders. For example, he cites comments by Brigadier General F. B. Prickett who commanded regular habits of church attendance by soldiers under his command.¹⁶⁰ The general got specific about his expectation of chaplains:

The chaplains are more than morale builders; morale building is every officer's duty. The primary function of chaplains is to be ministers of religion to the officers and men of his command. In order to do this work most effectively, the chaplains are training with the men, going to the field, living with the troops, getting close to them, understanding their psychology.¹⁶¹

Dorsett explains that chaplains were also directed to provide sex and hygiene lectures to soldiers. Many chaplains used the Bible to make their case.¹⁶² Chaplains also distributed steel-covered New Testaments Bibles to soldiers as they prepared to go into battle. "Advertised in newspapers

¹⁶⁰ Dorsett, 39.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 41.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 43.

and magazines as protection from bullets, the small books were designed to be carried in the pocket over one's heart as both symbol and shield.”¹⁶³ On the first page inside was a printed message from The White House, with the printed signature of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Roosevelt’s message encouraged the new recruit to use the Bible as a source of strength:

To the Members of the Army: As Commander-in-Chief I take pleasure in commending the reading of the Bible to all who serve in the armed forces of the United States. Throughout the centuries men of many faiths and diverse origins have found in the Sacred Book words of wisdom, counsel, and inspiration. It is a foundation of strength and now, as always, an aid in attaining the highest aspirations of the human soul. Very sincerely yours, Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹⁶⁴

The American Bible Society was producing 12,000 New Testament Bibles per day for soldiers by the end of 1943.¹⁶⁵ Chaplains were responsible for not only distributing the Bibles, but as Lyle Dorsett pointed out, “Chaplains were absolutely essential to America's victory because they cultivated courage and morale among U.S. troops that allowed them to make needed sacrifices.”¹⁶⁶ Dorsett explained, “during training, chaplains functioned to help civilians become combatants, adjust spiritually and psychologically to a radically different way of life.”¹⁶⁷

Chaplain Alton E. Carpenter’s vivid daily account of his travels with the 20th, 1340th, and 1171st Combat Engineers from November 1942 provides a look at the lives of the soldiers he ministered to and the emphasis and support of the military for chaplains in combat.¹⁶⁸ While records are not available of the number of soldiers who attended services conducted by

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁶⁴ *The Federalist Papers*. <https://thefederalistpapers.org/current-events/the-fdr-bible>. Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Francis C. Stifler, “The Scriptures Go on the Assembly Line,” *Protestant Voice*, December 10, 1943.

¹⁶⁶ Dorsett, 6.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁶⁸ Alton E. Carpenter and A. Anne Eiland, *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain*. (Mesa: Mead Publishing, 2007), 1.

chaplains, many soldiers attended services as they could. Some soldiers practiced their faith in private. Most men who fought in the war were fairly traditional Christians or Jews from childhood, though they expressed their beliefs in a variety of ways. Nicholas Pellegrino concluded that some soldiers faced enemy fire believing that God would protect them.¹⁶⁹ In *The Greatest Generation*, Tom Brokaw argues that “the World War II generation developed values of duty, honor, economy, courage, service, love of family and country, and, above all, responsibility for oneself. Coupled with their faith, these characteristics helped them to defeat Hitler.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Nicholas Pellegrino, “Embattled Belief: The Religious Experiences of American Military Combatants during World War II and Today,” *Journal of Military Experience*: (2013) Vol. 3: Issue 2, Article 10.

¹⁷⁰ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*. (New York: Random House, 2001), xxxvii.

Chapter Five

Fighting across France to the Siegfried Line

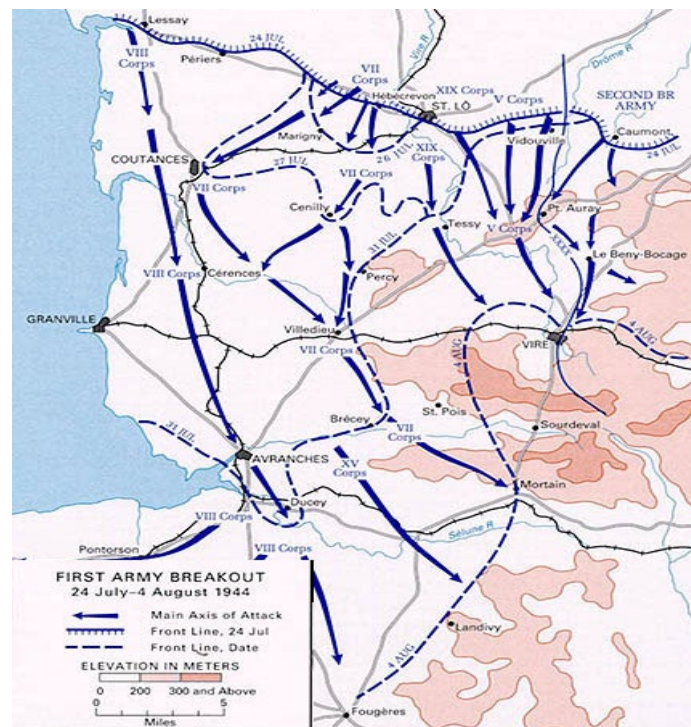
After crossing the English Channel to the coast of France, everyone was apprehensive about what they would see. The 28th Division landed at Omaha Beach on July 22, 1944, where the first American troops landed on D-Day, June 6. The aftermath of the battle was very evident. There was debris everywhere. As the men went from the beach up a road to high ground, they saw to their left what looked like a cotton field in the distance. On putting the binoculars on the area, what they saw was not a cotton field. It was row after row of white crosses. These were the graves of the men of the U.S. invasion force that landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day. The men of the 28th Division would leave the beaches of Normandy and embark on a journey across France and into Germany that would harden their resolve to defeat the Nazis and insure that the American way of life would be preserved.

Once they left the beach area, they began the march inland where there did not appear to be too much damage from the fighting. When they stopped periodically for one reason or another, and there were buildings nearby, they checked them out. The buildings were empty, but the soldiers found traces of bandages and dark stains, and assumed it was from troops that had been injured in the fighting in the beach area.¹⁷¹

While they waited for the orders to replace the 35th Division, there was a delay. During this waiting period, the 28th Division was several miles behind the front lines. They heard hundreds of Allied planes passing overhead. This was the start of the saturation bombing near St. Lo involving over 1,000 planes. This also was the start of the big offensive to breach the German lines, and even though they were miles from the bombing, the ground shook. During this

¹⁷¹ 28th Division Historical Summary, 79.

devastating bombing, some of the planes dropped their bombs short, and they caused many casualties in the 35th Division while it awaited relief from the 28th. During the wait, the men had time to think about their training and why they were in Europe. They thought about what President Roosevelt had told America about fighting for freedom and the American way of life. They thought about their families back home and were determined that the Germans would not set foot on American shores. Private First Class Milton R. Downey, Company C, 112th Infantry, wrote to his mom and dad on July 30, “The American flag means a whole lot to me. I am glad that when I do come home I can say I have a share in it. That is more than some people can say. I hope my son doesn’t ever have to go through what I have and will go through. I am going to have a son when I come back home. That’s what I am fighting for.”¹⁷² Map 1 shows the First Army Breakout, July 24 to August 4, 1944.



Map 1 - First Army Breakout (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

¹⁷² Milton R. Downey, Company C, 112th Infantry. “Letter to his mom and dad, July 30, 1944.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

On July 29, 1944, the men rode trucks through St. Lo. It had been heavily bombed and shelled. There were bodies and parts of bodies visible in the debris, and there was the ever-present smell of death. Bloated bodies of draft horses and cows littered the area. After three and a half years of training, the men of the 28th Division now faced war: stench, decay, devastation, and death. Despite witnessing horrific acts, most soldiers remained steadfast in their religious beliefs and committed to why they were there.¹⁷³

The Division's first attack on July 31 was on the French town of Percy and Hill 210, south of St. Lo. It was a morning attack. The division's regimental assault teams consisted of rifle, machine gun, mortar, and demolition squads, and bazooka teams. The division assault teams took off reminiscent of Picket's charge at Gettysburg, with a lot of yelling and hollering. They entered Percy confused and disorientated. Eventually some of their troops who were in reserve took them back to the original lines. Displaying the usual symptoms of a unit new to combat, the troops of the 28th Division would need several days to overcome a natural hesitancy to advance under fire, to become accustomed to maneuvering in unfamiliar terrain, and to learn the techniques of advancing through hedgerow country.¹⁷⁴

Hesitancy to advance under fire did not stop Staff Sergeant Walter R. Tauchert of Company L, 110th Infantry Regiment from doing what he came to do. During the attack on Percy at approximately 4:00 p.m. on July 31, Sergeant Tauchert, together with the 2nd Platoon, were holding down the right flank of his company when they came upon a crossroad near the town. The crossroad was heavily defended by German machine gun emplacements on either side of the road, by a machine gun and a sniper in the attic of a house on the right front and by a half-

¹⁷³ 28th Division Historical Summary, 92.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Blumenson, "Breakout and Pursuit, CMH Pub 7-5-1." *The European Theater of Operations*. (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 302.

track vehicle on the left-front. This crisscrossed concentration of fire was supplemented by a heavy German artillery barrage that had succeeded in pinning down Tauchert's company.¹⁷⁵

From his position at the side of the road, Sergeant Tauchert opened fire on the machine gun emplacement menacing his right flank, knocking it out with his grenade launcher. Utilizing a machine gun nearby, he turned his fire upon the machine gun emplacement on his left flank and silenced it. Although an airburst from a German 88mm gun exploded with such force as to knock Tauchert to the ground and rip the clothing and equipment from his back, he turned his machine gun on the gun and sniper in the attic and silenced them. He then directed his fire on the German halftrack but its fire forced him to withdraw. For his extraordinary heroism and courageous actions Staff Sergeant Tauchert was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.¹⁷⁶

In an interview by the 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section on September 28, 1945, Technical Sergeant Edward F. Schroder, Company D, 112th Infantry remembered Percy. It was Sunday, August 1, "when my battalion was initiated into combat. We suffered heavy casualties and at the end of that day my platoon had eight of the original thirty-five men left. We knew there would be sacrifices, but we knew what we were fighting for. Those who were left knew what combat was and had gained some knowledge and combat experience at the expense of their buddies."¹⁷⁷

The 28th Division infantry men took their kindergarten training in hedgerow fighting at Percy and Hill 210. Their post-graduate work was at Gathemo and Hill 288, further south. Gathemo was a small town of a population of five hundred. When the battle smoke cleared away

¹⁷⁵ Walter R. Tauchert, Staff Sergeant, Company L, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. *Distinguished Service Cross*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Edward F. Schroder, PFC, Company D, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division. *Personal History of the Men Who Marched in the Paris Parade*, 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section. APO 28, U.S. Army Europe, September 28, 1945. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

German and American bodies lay everywhere. It was hot and dusty when the attack began on August 7. The infantry fought and sweated and clashed in hand-to-hand battle from morning until night for four days.¹⁷⁸ The smell of death was all around when Private First Class Edward J. Sharkey, 109th Infantry, saw that his rifle company was pinned down by flanking machinegun fire. He voluntarily crawled across an open field under heavy fire, leaped into a German emplacement, fired his automatic rifle into the gun crew, killed three Germans and knocked out their weapon. His company advanced a couple of hedgerows. Sharkey was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions but was killed in a subsequent action.

Private First Class Sharkey was not the only man who demonstrated brave action. Private First Class Frank Kielbasa, 112th Infantry, crawled to within forty yards of a German position on Hill 288. Throwing his grenades, he killed six German riflemen supporting the position before he was fatally wounded by machinegun fire. He received the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously.¹⁷⁹ There were many heroes at Gathemo and Hill 288. They fought the Germans so that America could remain free. They battled and fell and sometimes it was days before their bodies were found, surrounded by bodies of the green-gray clad Wehrmacht (German Army). On the afternoon of August 10, Gathemo fell to the 28th infantry men and Hill 288 was cleared of the Germans.

A significant tactical dilemma facing the 28th Division in Normandy was the local terrain, called *Bocage* in French. *Bocage* refers to farmland separated by thick coastal hedgerows. These hedgerows are denser, thicker, and higher in Normandy than elsewhere along the French coast or in the British countryside on the opposite side of the English Channel where

¹⁷⁸ Blumenson, 452.

¹⁷⁹ “109th Infantry Regiment Historical Data.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

the division had trained. From the German military perspective, they were ideal for defense, since they broke up the local terrain into small fields edged by natural earthen obstacles. They provide real defense in depth, extending dozens of miles beyond the coast. The *Bocage* undermined the U.S. Army's advantages in armor and firepower, and the hedgerows gave the German defenders natural shelter from attack.¹⁸⁰ The men persisted and stubbornly fought their way through the obstacles.

After the bitter hedgerow fighting around Percy, and a brief respite to refit and receive replacements for the casualties suffered, the 28th Division continued their advance across France in pursuit of the fleeing Germans. The Germans continued to fire artillery at the advancing Americans, but they continued on, as they had a mission to accomplish – to defeat the Germans. Martin Blumenson recalled, “for protection from German artillery shells, we would dig slit trenches, the length of our bodies and deep enough to protect us from shells that might fall close by.”¹⁸¹

As the men of the 28th Division traveled across France they were not only constantly reminded by their leaders and chaplains of why they were there, they were also bombarded with German propaganda leaflets loaded in artillery shells. The propaganda were meant to test the will of the American fighters. One in particular was entitled *Do You Remember – The Olympic Games in Berlin?* On the cover was a picture of three American athletes who participated in the games. It read, “Have you ever heard or seen in these reports [reports of the Olympic Games] that the German people then was unhappy, oppressed and enslaved by the Nazi bosses? - NO. You have seen a peaceful, sporting, gay people, at work and at festivals and contest. But today

¹⁸⁰ Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*. (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1961), 11.

¹⁸¹ Blumenson, 300.

you are told to liberate the German people...¹⁸² Most of the soldiers used the propaganda flyers for toilet paper or to light small gasoline stoves they used to make coffee or heat cans from their C or K-rations. They knew it was all Nazi propaganda and they were not going to be distracted from their mission of defending freedom.¹⁸³

On August 21, the 110th and 112th Regiments captured Verteuil, Breteuil, and Damville. The next day they liberated Nogent-le-Sec, Bonneville, Conches, Cleville, and Bacquippis. The frantic Nazis put up a short but stiff fight at Le Neubourg on August 24. But a task force composed of the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, the 107th Field Artillery Battalion, Company C of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and a small tank unit stormed and took the town.¹⁸⁴

Technical Sergeant Emerson W. Buckler, Company C, 112th Infantry wrote in his journal that after they landed on Omaha Beach he joined the 1st Platoon. “The platoon looked pretty rough at that point. As they started to push towards Germany, he experienced his first combat, and was plenty shaken up, but knew they were there to fight for the folks back home. They were not going to let the Germans win.”¹⁸⁵

After weeks of slow progress through hedgerows and cities, the men of the division found themselves in a fast advance east, liberating towns as fast as they could move forward. They encountered the occasional German resistance nest, detaching a regimental combat team or a battalion to deal with it, and kept the rest of the division moving. By August 25, the division’s

¹⁸² *Do You Remember – The Olympic Games in Berlin?* German propaganda flyer 081144/8c. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

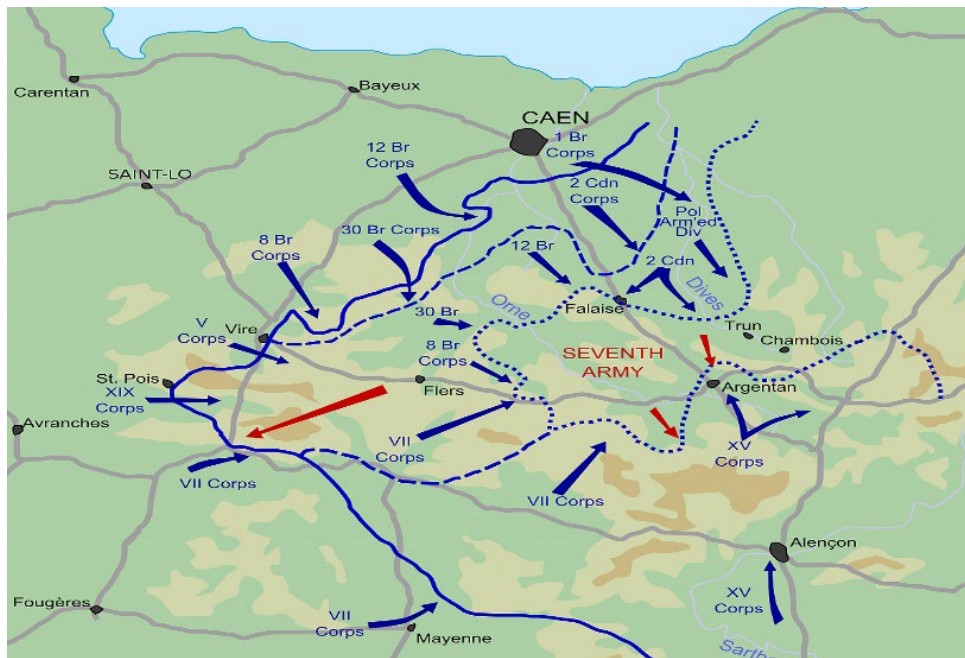
¹⁸³ “U.S. Army K-Rations, 1941-1945.” *Minnesota’s Greatest Generation*. Minnesota Historical Society. https://www.mnhs.org/mgg/artifact/k_rations. Accessed September 1, 2022. Note: The K-ration was an individual daily combat food ration. The K-ration provided three separately boxed meal units: breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

¹⁸⁴ 28th Division Historical Summary, 100.

¹⁸⁵ Emerson W. Buckler, Company C, 112th Infantry. “Personal History of the Men Who Marched in the Paris Parade,” 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section. APO 28, U.S. Army Europe, September 28, 1945. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

110th and 112th Infantry Regiments had placed themselves on the Seine River to cut off German forces retreating from the Falaise Pocket. The 109th Infantry Regiment captured Elbeuf on the Seine and cut off the last of the retreat route of the German army in the area and the regiment took five hundred prisoners of war.¹⁸⁶

The Falaise pocket was the decisive engagement of the Battle of Normandy. Map 2 shows the Allied forces that formed a pocket around Falaise, Calvados, in which German Army Group B, with the 7th Army and the Fifth Panzer Army were encircled by the Western Allies.¹⁸⁷ The battle resulted in the destruction of most of German Army Group B west of the Seine, which opened the way to Paris and the Franco-German border. On August 21, the Falaise Pocket was sealed. Around 60,000 soldiers of German Army Group B were trapped inside, 50,000 of whom were taken prisoner. 10,000 Germans were killed by artillery or air strikes inside the pocket.



Map 2 - The Falaise Pocket (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

¹⁸⁶ 28th Division Historical Summary.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

While they spearheaded across France, every French town and village showed their appreciation for being liberated by bringing all kinds of things to drink - wine, champagne, brandy, calvados (apple brandy), etc. The Calvados was supposedly 180+ proof and was used by the soldiers when there was a gas shortage. Albert Burghardt noted, “it made the jeeps backfire a little, but it worked.”¹⁸⁸ The Americans were proud to have guaranteed the freedom of the French people while they fought to preserve their own.

The Germans constantly put-up roadblocks of several types. One was to put a two-man machine gun alongside a road, usually in a ditch. They would wait until the division spearhead was close and would then open fire.¹⁸⁹ The men of the division walked and fought the Germans day after day across France. Sometime on August 27, the men were notified of a move by truck, but were not told the destination. The soldiers were surprised when they arrived at *Bois de Boulogne* (Boulogne woodland), a large public park in the outskirts of Paris, where they took their place in formation for the triumphal march through the French capital. The Division marched down the Champs-Élysées and around the Arc de Triomphe as the French people lined the street, several rows deep, and cheered them as they passed, twenty-four abreast. Crowds of French citizens lined the streets cheering the troops in appreciation for their country’s liberation.

The men had only been in combat for five weeks, and they were already being treated as heroes. Many soldiers thought that this war was not so bad after all. There was confident talk among the troops that the war would be over by Christmas, but they were wrong. The Germans still posed a serious threat to be reckoned with in the days to come. It would be no easy task, but

¹⁸⁸ Burghardt.

¹⁸⁹ 28th Division Historical Summary, 112.

the men knew what they had to do. They marched out of Paris, and that night bivouacked near the city dump. The next morning, they were up and after the Germans again.¹⁹⁰

As they got farther from Paris, the division went through beautiful country, and pursued and engaged the Germans in short, sharp skirmishes as the Germans tried to slow the American advance. After clearing the Compiègne Forest, it was dusk on September 2 when the 110th Infantry Regiment stormed into the streets of St. Quentin in northern France. German, overrun by the speed of the American advance, stumbled out of houses and shops and started firing at the Americans. Within minutes the gathering darkness was filled with rifle and machine gun fire and the shouts of officers and the cries of the wounded. While moving through the city, they were suddenly engaged by a column of Germans of about a company size.¹⁹¹

The Nazis, aided by several armored cars, attempted to break the regimental column. Captain Archie W. Stewart's jeep stopped and fired at the Germans coming up the street. The Germans overran the jeep, killed the driver, and shot Stewart, leaving him for dead. The Germans captured the jeep and drove away.¹⁹² The 110th Regimental S-2 (Intelligence Officer), Major Robert Gaynor earned the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day. He pursued the six Germans who were fleeing in the captured jeep, killed or wounded the entire group, and recovered the vehicle. While he was questioning one of the wounded Germans, a German platoon advanced on foot toward his position. Despite overwhelming odds, he killed and wounded several of the German platoon before he was seriously wounded, and the Germans overran Gaynor's position and continued on. Major Gaynor crawled to his vehicle and reported

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Archie W. Stewart, Captain, "A Tall Texan Assigned to the 28th Division, 110th Regiment in France." *36th Infantry Division, San Antonio Chapter Newsletter, February 25, 1991.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

the information to headquarters. Artillery fire was brought on the German platoon and most were killed.¹⁹³

After they left Paris, the soldiers of the division had walked over 195 miles, an average of 18 miles a day. There was more walking and less leap frogging with trucks than before they arrived in Paris. German opposition was very light. There was an occasional roadblock or booby trap. The division continued to advance through La Fère, Saint-Quentin, Laon, Reims, Sedan, Charleville-Mézières, Bouillon and on September 6 crossed the Moselle River.

As they got close to the German border, the word came down the line from headquarters that they were not to accept anything to drink from the German people. On September 10 they arrived at Binsfeld, near the Our River, the geographical border between Luxembourg and Germany. That night a patrol from the 109th Infantry Regiment crossed the border and became the first 28th Division troops to enter Germany. Two days later the entire division dug in on German soil.¹⁹⁴

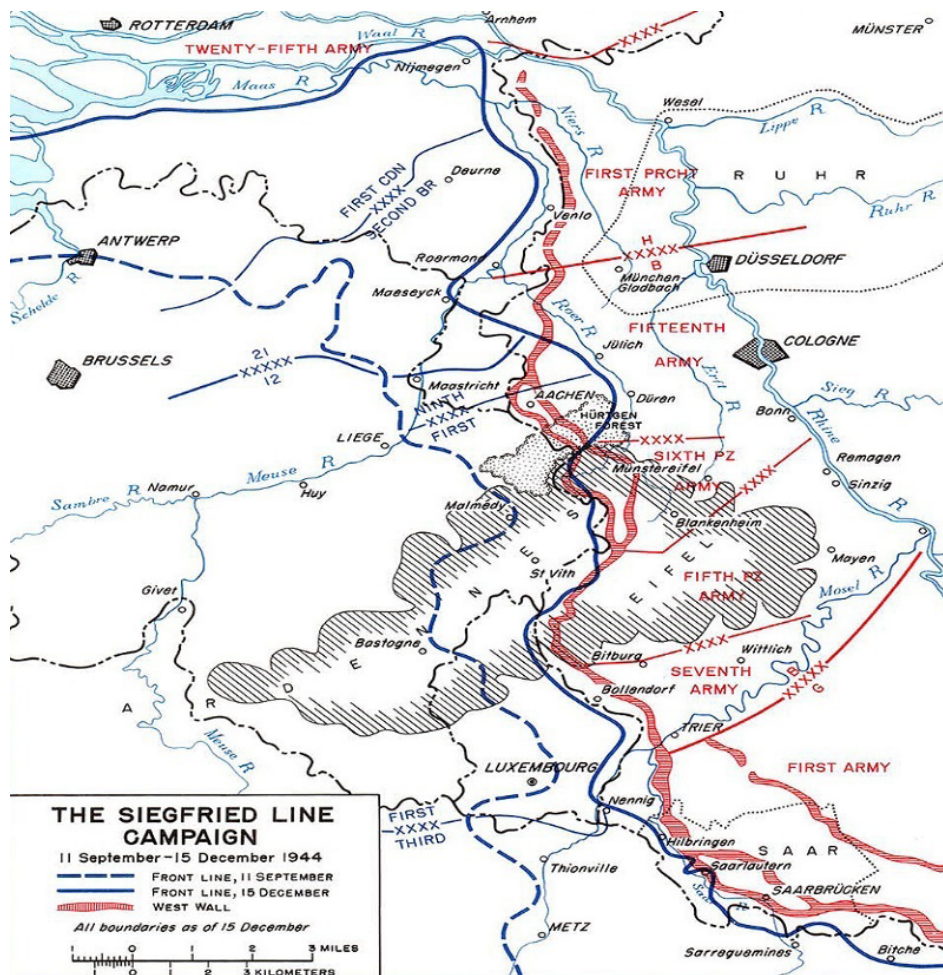
The pillboxes the division soldiers faced were twenty to thirty feet in width, forty to fifty feet deep and twenty to twenty-five feet high with roofs and walls three to eight feet thick of reinforced concrete. About half of the pillboxes were underground. Most had two firing portholes for machine guns or light antitank weapons sited to cover approaches and provide mutual support to other pillboxes. Each structure provided sleeping rooms for five to seven men. Concrete bunkers in the rear were designed to hold and protect reserves, counterattack forces and command posts.¹⁹⁵ Most pillboxes were on the forward slope where they had longer fields of fire

¹⁹³ 28th Division Historical Summary, 121.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Harry Kemp, *The Regiment: Let the Citizens Bear Arms! A Narrative of an American Infantry Regiment in World War II.* (San Francisco: Nortex Publishers, 1990), 112.

and observation. Map 3 illustrates the position of the West Wall and the Allied front lines on September 11 and on December 15.



Map 3 - The Siegfried Line (Defense Mapping Agency)

In this area of the Siegfried line, good tank approaches were protected by lines of “Dragon’s Teeth” that were pyramid shaped blocks of concrete in five rows rising in height from two to five feet. Barbed wire was strung in front of the blocks. There were trenches running between adjoining pillboxes to protect the troops when they moved from one box to another and to provide outside lookout and listening posts.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 113.

Available intelligence gave no reason for concern. The V Corps G-2, Col. Thomas J. Ford, predicted that the corps would meet only battered remnants of the three divisions which had fled before the corps across Belgium and Luxembourg. These were the 5th Parachute, Panzer Lehr, and 2nd Panzer Divisions. It was possible, Colonel Ford added, that the corps might meet parts of the 2nd SS Panzer Division, known to have been operating along the corps north boundary. “There seems no doubt,” Colonel Ford concluded, “that the enemy will defend [the Siegfried Line] with all of the forces that he can gather.” But, he intimated, what he could gather was open to question.¹⁹⁷

On September 11, combat patrols of the 109th and 110th Infantry Regiments, moving under the cover of darkness, pushed into the Siegfried line. Travelling down the roads leading to the Dragon’s Teeth and the German pill boxes, the soldiers came under intense German artillery fire. They reached the Dragon’s Teeth and found that the engineers had blown a path large enough for tanks to go through and they proceeded very cautiously, waiting for the Germans to attack, but they never did. They penetrated a mile or two, clearing empty pill boxes stripped of any guns.¹⁹⁸

On September 12, 1944, two platoons in Company K, 109th Infantry were crossing the Our River near Kalborn, Luxembourg, to get to higher ground on the other side. Thanks to an early morning fog, Technical Sergeant Francis J. Clark and his platoon safely made it across. The fog lifted by the time the second platoon reached shore, though, and they were hit by gunfire, which killed the two men in charge and pinned the rest down.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Charles B. MacDonald, “The Siegfried Line Campaign.” *The European Theater of Operations. United States Army in World War II.* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History), 41.

¹⁹⁸ 28th Division Historical Summary, 124. Note: Dragon’s Teeth were square-pyramidal fortifications of reinforced concrete used to impede the movement of tanks and mechanized infantry.

¹⁹⁹ Francis J. Clark, *Congressional Medal of Honor*. Medal of Honor Monday, U.S. Department of Defense, August 26, 2019. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/Article/1942575/medal-of-honor-monday-army-tech-sgt-francis-j-clark/>. Accessed August 29, 2022.

Sergeant Clark saw what was happening and crawled across a field riddled with gunfire to reach the stuck platoon. He led the survivors to safety, then turned around and went back to rescue a wounded soldier, all while German gunfire continued to try to cut him down. Later, Clark led his squad and the men from the rescued platoon “In dangerous sorties against strong German positions to weaken them by lightning-like jabs,”²⁰⁰ the citation read. During this time, Clark killed two German machine gunners with hand grenades. He continued to put himself in danger, running toward the fight, killing, and wounding several enemies, scattering German patrols, and eventually forcing a full company of heavily armed Germans to withdraw.²⁰¹

Five days later, on September 17, Clark's unit had moved northeast and across the border into Sevenig, Germany. Clark single-handedly killed an enemy machine gunner and forced another to flee before the Germans came at them hard, taking out a lot of the soldiers in Company K. Seeing that they were left without leadership, Clark stepped up and took command. He was wounded the next day, but he refused to be evacuated. By daybreak on the 19th, Clark managed to kill three more Germans, one of whom was trying to set up a machine gun only fifty yards away. Later that day, he braved more gunfire to deliver food and water to an isolated U.S. platoon. Clark assumed leadership when it was desperately needed. His actions were essential to keeping up the spirits of the hard-hit troops of Company K. For his efforts, Francis J. Clark received the Congressional Medal of Honor.²⁰²

As the 110th Infantry Regiment reached Germany they found the outer reaches to be ill-defended. A reinforced patrol from Company I crossed the border and moved on to the town of Harspelt, where it was ordered to return to the battalion area on September 12. The same day, the

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

2nd and 3rd Battalions crossed the border at Stuppach with Company F receiving slight resistance while the remainder of the group met no opposition and occupied the ground short of the Siegfried line. At 8:00 a.m. on September 13, the 2nd Battalion launched an attack with the mission of driving through the Dragon's Teeth and after breaching the fortified area, to assault the town of Kesfeld. The attack was launched without armor support and was not successful. The battalion was held up by automatic weapons fire from pillboxes and by artillery and mortar fire.

On the morning of September 14, the attack was resumed by the 2nd Battalion, this time using a company of medium tanks in support.²⁰³ Staff Sergeant Richard A. Dalton of Company L volunteered to lead a tank through a mine field in the face of German fire. It was necessary to get the tank into firing position against pillboxes, otherwise the pillboxes would have had to be taken without the use of tanks, potentially resulting in many casualties. The pillboxes were taken out by the tank allowing the company to continue its attack. Sergeant Dalton was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions that day.²⁰⁴

At the same time, the 1st Battalion attacked with no armor support. They were unable to make any progress, as the men were slowed down by automatic weapons fire from pillboxes and considerable artillery and mortar fire. Company F was able to get through a gap which had been created by Company E and Company G and succeeded in seizing six pillboxes but was hit by a counterattack supported by flame throwing tracked vehicles. Very heavy casualties were inflicted on the Americans.

²⁰³ "110th Infantry Regiment, Unit History. Headquarters, 110th Infantry." APO Europe, May 12, 1945. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁰⁴ Richard A. Dalton, Staff Sergeant, Company L, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. *Bronze Star Award*. APO 28, U.S. Army. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

On September 15, the 2nd Battalion was unable to advance but the 1st Battalion, supported by a company of tanks, was able to break through and capture a key hill after engineers had blown a second gap out of the Dragon Teeth. The Germans counterattacked on the night of September 15 quickly destroying Company F. A small German force from the 2nd SS Panzer Division, well-armed with automatic weapons and flame-throwers and supported by tanks, made quick work of the company. Units met with some success but fierce German counterattacks quickly erased the gains.²⁰⁵

Staff Sergeant Philip Columbus, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry, was a member of an antitank squad. The squad had moved into a position covering the only road supplying the forward line companies of the battalion. During the night, a German patrol tried to cut off the road, but small arms fire from the antitank squad drove the patrol off after the German patrol leader had been killed.²⁰⁶ The following morning three American tank destroyers moved into the antitank gun position and began firing on German troops on a near-by hill. The tank destroyers drew so much German mortar and 88mm gun fire that the antitank squad was pinned down except for Gunner Corporal Paul G. Woodward, who was on outpost duty, protecting the flank of the gun position.

At about 10:00 a.m. Corporal Woodward told Sergeant Columbus that two Germans were setting up a machine gun about 1,000 yards from the road, apparently trying to knock out the tank destroyer crews. Despite heavy mortar and artillery fire, Columbus led the squad in a rush for the German gun position. Fortunately, the Germans had not had time to put the gun properly

²⁰⁵ Combat Interviews, 28th Division Siegfried Line, 11-16 September 1944, interviews conducted by First Lieutenant John S. Howe. U.S. Army. European Theater, Historical Section. (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army History Institute).

²⁰⁶ 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit History.

into position and the rush caught them unprepared. They fired one burst when the squad was about twenty yards from them, then abandoned their gun and ran.²⁰⁷

On September 16, the 1st Battalion attacked and seized a key hill, after Company A and Company C attacked and seized yet another key hill. The 2nd Battalion was still unable to advance and the 3rd Battalion was committed in the gap created by the 1st Battalion and 3rd Battalion. The 3rd Battalion, with a patrol of tank destroyers, attacked and seized eleven pillboxes with a loss of one man killed and two men wounded. Then they silenced the opposition which had stymied the 2nd Battalion to that point. That same day, the 3rd Battalion closed the gap between battalions and the 1st and 2nd Battalions continued to occupy defensive positions. From September 18 to September 29, the 110th continued to occupy a defensive position in the vicinity of Kesfeld with a tank force of medium tanks to mop up pillboxes, some of which had been re-occupied by the Germans.²⁰⁸

Private First Class Thomas J. Ciccone, Company M, 110th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Silver Star for his action on September 25. Ciccone, ammunition bearer in a mortar squad, and four other men were given the mission to go back three miles to secure food and ammunition for their platoon. After successfully securing the needed rations and ammunition, Ciccone and his party were fired upon by Germans that had infiltrated friendly lines and established a machine gun position. During the intense fire fight that ensued, Ciccone crawled within close range of the gun position before the enemy discovered him. Disregarding the machine gun fire directed at him, he continued to advance and killed three of the German crew with hand grenades, causing the remainder of the Germans to withdraw. After returning to the

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

location of his companions, they secured the rations and ammunition and proceeded to their company lines.²⁰⁹

On October 1, Staff Sergeant Herman B. Leff, Company K, 110th Infantry Regiment, was in a group attempting to re-secure three pillboxes captured by counterattacking enemy forces. He volunteered to take dynamite charges up a rain-soaked hill under intense German machine gun fire. Sergeant Leff ran and crawled two hundred yards to one of the fortifications, only to find that the Germans were holding three American soldiers inside. After a small wet charge failed to explode, he returned for additional explosives, and became seriously wounded on the return trip to the emplacement. Despite his wounds, he continued forward over fire-swept terrain until he placed the explosives around the door of the pillbox. Through his heroic actions, the door of the fortification was demolished, the three Americans were freed, and the pillbox eliminated as a threat. Sergeant Leff was awarded the Silver Star for his actions.²¹⁰

With no appreciable gains the 110th Infantry Regiment received orders that they would be relieved by the 23rd Infantry Division and were sent back to Elsenborn, Belgium for rest and reorganization.²¹¹ While in the Siegfried Line, the men were able to observe the famous German Buzz Bomb. The launchers were about 10 to 15 miles in front of their position. One's watch could be set by when they went over the division positions, exactly every 15 minutes. The range of these weapons was controlled by the amount of fuel they carried. They made a funny sound because they were rocket propelled. When the sound stopped, their nose dropped, and they came down. The Germans employed these V-1 rockets against the division's rear areas.

²⁰⁹ Thomas J. Ciccone, PFC, Company M, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. *Silver Star Award*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²¹⁰ Staff Sergeant Herman B. Leff, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry, 28th Infantry, *Silver Star Award*. APO Europe, April 1945. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²¹¹ MacDonald, 48.

Russell M. Hark, Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, remembered one instance of a soldier's belief that he was invincible. Hark's unit was assigned to the 110th who had taken several pillboxes. Hark had just moved into one when the Germans started to fire mortars at the pillbox. Hark looked out the door and saw Private Stanley T. Masztzak making some hot chocolate on a small gasoline stove. Hark yelled, "You dummy, get in here." Masztzak replied, "Don't worry. They can't hit me. God is on our side."²¹² Masztzak finished making the hot chocolate and shared his drink with the group inside.

Elements of the 112th Infantry, attached to the 5th Armored Division, crossed into Germany capturing the town of Wallendorf on September 15. In a small village near Wallendorf, the commander of Company D, Lieutenant Frank L. Schmidt had the men rounding up all of the German villagers, to look for German soldiers. They herded the people by an L-shaped rock wall for their protection as the Germans were shelling the town. The villagers, not knowing the motives of the Americans, thought they were being lined up against the rock wall to be machine gunned. The women and children were screaming and the men were making gestures to the Americans not to harm them. Lieutenant Schmidt, who spoke German, informed the people that they were not going to be harmed. Sergeant Edward F. Schroder recalled that Lieutenant Schmidt was a quiet man but would constantly remind his men why they were fighting. After the incident with the frightened villagers, Schmidt told some of the men that they were fighting for the villager's freedom too.²¹³

²¹² Russell M. Hark, PFC, Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion. *Unpublished Memoirs*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 10.

²¹³ Schroder.

Sergeant Charley S. Jordan, Company C, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, was captured on September 17 at Bollendorf. In an interview by the 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section on September 28, 1945, Jordan remembered:

Most of the men were green, including myself, in combat. I had only been with the outfit about thirty days. Our company was put out in front that evening as outposts and most of the men had dug in when the Germans opened fire on us. My squad lasted all night until about 8:00 a.m. the next morning. When I was captured, I was completely out of ammunition, but I was not going to retreat.

We had to resist the Nazis. That is why we came.²¹⁴

For the 112th and for the other units of the 28th Infantry Division, a new kind of warfare had begun. Pressed against the border of their home country, the Germans fought desperately, not just the usual combat divisions that had survived the great retreat but new units of former garrison troops, overage men, and youth forced prematurely into uniform. For both sides, including the 112th Infantry, the casualty rate was fearful and defeat bitter.²¹⁵

As the 28th Division fought along the Siegfried Line, the soldiers and their commanders were unaware that Hitler was planning a counter-offensive through the Ardennes Forest. Hitler became convinced that after the Allies had broken out of their Normandy beachheads, he had to regain the initiative in the war or face certain defeat. It appears that the first idea of the Ardennes Offensive was discussed on September 16, 1944, during a second meeting after the daily Fuehrer Conference that took place in the Wolf's Lair, Hitler's East Prussian headquarters. Present at this

²¹⁴ Charley S. Jordan, Sergeant, Company C, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division. "Personal History Of the Men Who Marched in the Paris Parade." 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section. APO 28, U.S. Army Europe, September 28, 1945. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²¹⁵ MacDonald, 51.

meeting were Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel, General Heinz Guderian and General Alfred Jodl.²¹⁶ Hitler is reported to have said, “I have made a momentous decision. I am taking the offensive. Their [the Allies] out of the Ardennes!” And smashing his fist down on a situation map, he shouted: “Through the Ardennes and on to Antwerp!”²¹⁷

As German resistance stiffened, Major General Leonard Gerow, the American V Corps commander, ordered all offensive operations at the Siegfried Line to end on November 13 and for most of the corps forces to withdraw back across the Our River.²¹⁸ The 28th Division crossed into Belgium. After dark, they dug in. In about an hour, some troops came up to them and introduced themselves as Canadian Artillery. They were in the next field behind the 28th Division. They told the men that if they had to fire that night, they would blow their helmets off, so the 28th soldiers moved off to their right and out of their line of fire. After five days of attacks, the 28th Division had run out of steam. Only limited progress was made during the operation, and the cost was very high for the division.²¹⁹

The shock of heavy casualties and tough resistance by a determined enemy had a demoralizing effect on the men. The chaplains had their work cut out for them. The total 28th Division casualties during the Siegfried Line attacks was more than 3,000. Included in this figure were 230 killed, 1,815 wounded, 141 missing, 63 captured, and 961 nonbattle injuries.²²⁰

From the Siegfried Line, the division went to a rest area at Elsenborn, Belgium to receive replacements and equipment and for continuous training. They bivouacked in a tree line with an

²¹⁶ Hugh M Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*. The U.S. Army in WWII. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, U. S. Army), 1965, 1.
“The Fort Point Salvo Newsletter of the Fort Point and Army Museum Association.” Volume 5, No. 2, May 1980.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ U.S. Army, Headquarters, V Corps, *G-3 AAR for September 1944*. (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Research Library), 3-4.

²²⁰ U.S. Army, Headquarters, V Corps, *After Action Report for September 1944*, G-1 Summary, Dated 7 October 1944. (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Research Library), 11.

open field in front of them. Russell M. Hark recalled, “the Red Cross and kitchen trucks were there. They offered the soldiers doughnuts and coffee; the doughnuts were two cents apiece.”²²¹ Rest and recreation activities were extremely limited to the soldiers. Instead, V Corps ordered extensive training. The designated training priorities included: assault of a fortified position, river crossing techniques, personal hygiene for winter months, patrolling, booby trap removal, defensive positions, and weapons familiarization.²²²

The strong personal bonds, comradery, and unit cohesion formed between the soldiers during their training and early fighting had dissolved. The veterans were now surrounded by new soldiers with no combat experience who’s motivation to fight was only to protect the American way of life. On September 29, the division received orders to move into Aachen, Germany in preparation for a planned First Army attack to seize the Roer River Dams. The Division’s involvement in this campaign would take them into the Hürtgen Forest and once again test their commitment to fight for the American way of life.

²²¹ Hark, 14.

²²² *Historical and Pictorial Review of the 28th Infantry Division*. (Atlanta: Love Press. 1946), 29.

Chapter Six

The 28th Division Mettle is Tested in the Hürtgen Forest

The commitment of the men was about to be tested as never before as they entered the dark, damp Hürtgen forest in Germany. War correspondent Ernest Hemingway called it, “Passchendaele with tree bursts.”²²³ Not even Hemingway could quite capture the true description of this awful place. Under these conditions, morale suffered and many found the psychological strain too much. Some soldiers broke and ran to the rear. Commanders were relieved of their command because they refused to carry out an attack or were unable to get their men to follow them. Men were put to the ultimate test. Yet, the majority of the men fought on, confident that they had to fight, not only for themselves, but for the folks back home. They may not have said the words, but they knew they were fighting for freedom, for their religious beliefs and freedom from tyranny.

The 28th Division’s experience in the Hürtgen Forest was characterized by severity, both with regard to the doggedness and determination of the Germans as well as the terrain and weather conditions. After all, the Americans were on the German soil. There were many instances of close combat. The soldiers were dependent only on themselves in this forest with interspersed patches of underwood. The men always had to reckon with surprises. Most of the time they could use their weapons only at short distances. The intensity of the battle exceeded the expectations of the veterans of the 28th Infantry Division.

While the fighting in the Normandy breakout was intense, nothing prepared the men for the Hürtgen Forest. The 109th and 110th Infantry Regiments faced the special problems of

²²³ Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945*. (New York: Picador, 2014), 44.
Note: The Third Battle of Ypres also known as the Battle of Passchendaele was a campaign of the First World War, fought by the Allies against the German Empire.

fighting in woods-separated formations, poor command and control, confusion, and the ability of small pockets of determined Germans to inflict heavy casualties and disrupt American attacks. Across the Kall River, the 112th Infantry Regiment was in Schmidt and on an otherwise open plain. They were simultaneously exposed to German gunners on the plain and isolated from their sister regiments. Many times, success depended decisively on a small number of audacious and bold men who knew they were fighting to defeat Nazism and protect the American way of life.

During the month of October 1944, the 9th Infantry Division, then operating under the VII Corps, attacked through the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Roetgen, Germany. The towns of Rott and Zweifall were among those captured. As the division continued its attack towards Germeter, situated west of Vossenack, and north of Simonskall in the north Rhine-Westphalia area of Germany, it suddenly met with a severe German counterattack from the north and northeast from Hürtgen.²²⁴

At least one battalion was cut off from the main body of the division, which during the entire action had suffered heavy casualties. The line was stabilized toward the end of the third week in October just west of the main road running north and south through Germeter to Hürtgen. As a result of its heavy casualties, plans were made to replace the 9th Division with the 28th Division, who had been resting and re-fitting at Elsenborn, Belgium.²²⁵

On October 10, Private Kensler wrote in his diary to his wife Cindy. He said he had just received a lecture on how to handle prisoners of war. He told her how he missed the things they had back home. He said, "That is the honor and misery of war, I guess. We are here to make sure we keep those things."²²⁶

²²⁴ Headquarters, U.S. V Corps, *After Action Report for November 1944*, G-3 Summary. Dated 5 December 1944. (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Research Library), 2

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Orville A. Kensler, Private, Company B, 112th Infantry Regiment, *Unpublished Diary*. (Fort Indiantown Gap:

“Unrelenting German artillery and mortar fire had twisted the trees in the 9th Infantry Division sector into weird shapes,”²²⁷ wrote Charles Whiting. “Graves registration personnel were completely overwhelmed due to the number of deaths and the terrain. The bodies of 9th Infantry Division soldiers lay throughout the sector. Trash and equipment that had been discarded was everywhere.”²²⁸ The ragged appearance and the experiences related by the 9th Division soldiers were sufficient to unnerve many of the 28th Division men, especially those without combat experience.²²⁹ Private First Class Albert Drapeau, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment recalled, “Approaching Germeter, we were brought into the grim reality of what may lie ahead. Dozens of vehicles were approaching us enroute to the rear. They were loaded with dead and wounded.”²³⁰

In the overall plan, from which the V Corps and 28th Division attack stemmed, the First U.S. Army was to launch an attack aimed initially at the crossing of the Roer River, the capture of Duren, and then to drive to Cologne and into Germany. Preceding it, by about a week, V Corps was to launch a strongly supported attack with the 28th Division to seize the important crossroad town of Schmidt. Upon its capture, the division was to drive to the south and southwest with the aim of clearing the towns of Straunch and Steckenborn.²³¹ In the second phase of the attack, elements of the 5th Armored Division were to launch a coordinated attack from the vicinity of Lammersdorf, and drive to the northeast to meet the elements of the 28th Division driving south.²³² The V Corp plan, called for the attack to begin on October 31. Bad

Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²²⁷ Charles Whiting, *Siegfried: The Nazis' Last Stand*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 58-59.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Albert E. Drapeau, *Dark November, Unpublished Manuscript*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum, 1993).

²³¹ Headquarters, U.S. V Corps, *After Action Report for November 1944*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²³² *Ibid.*

weather prevented its launch until November 2, when under orders from First Army, the attack was launched despite bad weather which almost completely prevented artillery observation and grounded air support until well after the attack had begun.²³³

In the V Corps sector, with a part of the lower portion of the VII Corps sector assigned to V Corps for this attack, the 28th Division entered the deadly forest. The entire western front was quiet when the 28th Division attacked. As a result, the Germans were unhampered in bringing in reserves, additional infantry, artillery, and armor to confront the 28th Division's advance. Opposing the 28th Division was the German 275th Infantry Division, 275th Fusilier Battalion, 1412nd Infantry Battalion, 89th Fusilier Battalion and the Kampfgruppe (Combat Group) Trier.²³⁴

Beginning about five miles southeast of Aachen, the Hürtgen Forest covered about 200 square miles, extending south to the village of Steckenborn. In its midst astride high plateaus cut by gorges of the Kall and Roer Rivers and open farming country. Three high ridges dominated the sector of Germany faced by the U.S. First Army. The entire eastern side of the Hürtgen Forest was faced by a chain of German fortifications stretching in a double line through the trees. Running parallel to one another, these defenses consisted of concrete pillboxes with interlocking fields of fire, camouflaged log and earth bunkers, reinforced concrete command posts, hidden machine gun nests, and tall concrete pylons to prevent armored vehicles from penetrating its defenses. Minefields and booby traps were scattered within the defenses.

On November 1, the 28th Division was in a relatively inactive sector and was almost at full strength, but still attempting to integrate new replacements. The division had been in combat three plus months and had seen heavy fighting in France in August and at the Siegfried line in

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

September. The cumulative casualties to November 1 were 8,775, including 6,130 battle losses.²³⁵ For the attack of Schmidt, the division had been reinforced by the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 707th Tank Battalion. The division also received forth-seven Weasels (M-29 Cargo Carriers) in recognition of the rugged terrain in which resupply would have to be conducted. Eight battalions and a separate battery of V and VII Corps artillery were available for fire support. Map 4 shows the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, November 2-9, 1944.

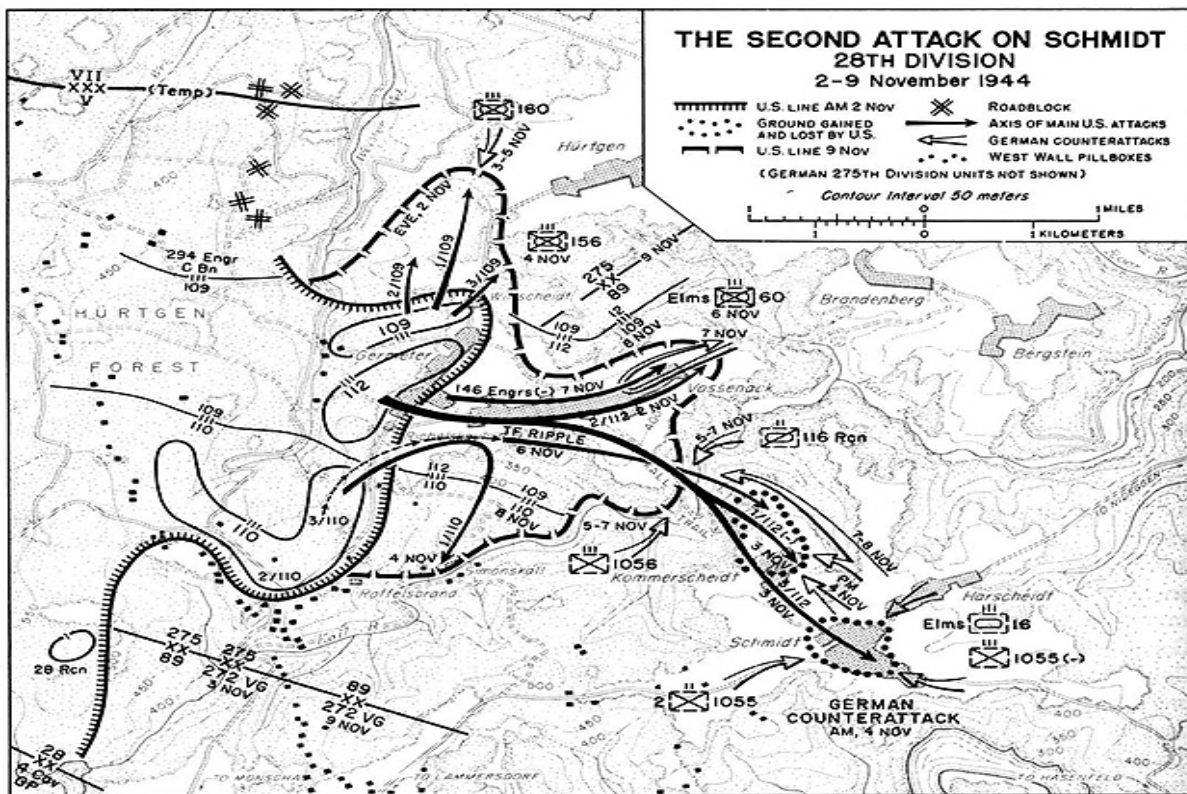


Map 4 - Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, November 2-9, 1944 (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

Upon arrival of the 28th Division in the Hürtgen Forest area an estimate of the supply and evacuation situation showed that the mission assigned to the division could not be accomplished

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

with their organic transportation assets. This left two alternatives: horses with pack saddles, or M29 Weasel cargo carriers or a combination of both. Suitable pack saddles were not available from the Army Quartermaster Class II dump, so the plan for horses was discarded and forty-seven Weasels were requested. Map 5 show the objectives of 28th Division regiments.



Map 5 - 28th Division Objectives (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

For direct and general support, the Corps placed eight battalions and a separate battery of artillery to support the 28th Division attack. Using five fighter-bomber groups and a night fighter group, the IX Tactical Command was to direct its main effort toward air support of the division.²³⁶ Following a heavy massed artillery barrage from six battalions of VII Corps artillery from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on November 2, in misty, cloudy weather, the attack began, with

²³⁶ “Unit Report Number 5, 28th Infantry Division, 6 December 1944 for period 1-30 November 1944 inclusive.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 28.

over 12,000 rounds of artillery fired. The 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry, with Company D, 707th Tank Battalion attached, attacked through Germeter to Vossenack. At the same time the U.S. 1st Division in the north half of the VII Corps sector attempted to feint the Germans into thinking the attack might be along the entire front by firing mortars and artillery. The 2nd Battalion met light resistance in its drive eastward, reaching the northeast section of Vossenack by early afternoon. Two 2nd Battalion attacking companies set up defensive positions on the forward slope of the ridge while the reserve company mopped up the stragglers and snipers that were bypassed.

The German's well observed artillery fire took a heavy toll on the American companies, reducing them considerably. It was already evident that American artillery was unable to effectively neutralize the German observation posts and positions on the commanding ridges because the shells were coming into the town from three major points of the compass. The companies reported German armor in the town of Schmidt.²³⁷

First Lieutenant Eldeen H. Kauffman, Company F, 112th Infantry was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day. While advancing through Vossenack Lieutenant Kauffman personally directed fire of a tank in support of two platoons of infantry that had suffered many casualties and whose advance was slowing by the strong German resistance. Then, armed with a pistol, he stepped into the street, firing as he went and urging his men forward. He entered several houses, assaulted the Germans with his pistol causing twelve of them to surrender, thus clearing the German stronghold. Inspired by his actions, the company moved ahead to accomplish the mission they came for.²³⁸

²³⁷ 28th Division Historical Summary, 149.

²³⁸ "112th Infantry Regiment Awards and Decorations, Kauffman." *28th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 12 July 1945*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

After several days of fighting and crawling in and out of the basements of houses in Vossenack and Germeter, the 109th Regiment was ordered to launch an attack to the northeast of the town of Hürtgen. The attack was through heavy forest all the way so they massed all of their .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine guns to throw interdictory fire on the roads near the town. They even took .50 caliber guns from the kitchen trucks and had them operated by headquarters and kitchen personnel to increase the firepower. They also laid-out a ladder type artillery barrage as they advanced through the forest.

The attack went well for a while and they made good progress in their coordinated attack with the 112th Infantry and succeeded in knocking out fifteen pill boxes and capturing over two hundred prisoners. The 1st Battalion had advanced 2,700 yards in a drive to the northeast toward the town of Hürtgen but the other assault battalion attacking in the same direction could only gain 500 yards due to the thick mine fields and wire obstacles that were covered by bands of grazing fire from German automatic weapons.²³⁹

The 109th Infantry partially succeeded. One battalion secured most of its objective by the end of the day. The other battalion failed to reach its objective because of encountering unexpected minefields and strong resistance from previously unlocated German strongpoints. An excerpt from the diary of Thomas W. Hickman, Company I, 1st Battalion of the 109th Infantry, offers a picture of the situation facing the soldiers:

11/5 – This place is just one big hell hole. You can't move. Death and devastation everywhere. By far this is the worse place we have been in. Our casualties are terrific. These Jerries [Germans] are pure SS.

11/6 – Attacked at 0600 and took battalion objective – Germeter. Replacements

²³⁹ 28th Division Historical Summary, 99.

pouring in. Casualties pouring out.

11/7 – Attacked at 0600 and took the first of our division’s objectives – a crossroad on Cologne-Aachen highway at Vossenack. We are really beat up now. Don’t see how we can possibly hold this ground. Replacements come in and leave within an hour – either as litter cases or basket cases. We don’t even have a chance to assign them to platoons or squads. The poor guys don’t even know what division they are in.

11/8 – Vossenack is leveled. Not a building standing. Wish I could get out of this place.

11/9 – From 1000 to 1800, holding. Counted four thousand rounds coming in. Our dead are all over the place. Can’t waste time with them – too many casualties that need help. No possible way to get them out unless you want to join them. Everyone has trench foot. Been snowing for more than a week now. Holes are full of ice and mud. Can’t help but remain saturated. Have a bad case myself. Feet hurt. We only have shoes. I even lost my leggings.²⁴⁰

The 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment took its objective by 10:30 a.m. and proceeded to dig in. Opposition had been light. The rest of the 112th Infantry Regiment ran into unexpected opposition south of Vossenack and was unable to advance further on that day. Private First Class Raymond Carpenter of Company M, 3rd Battalion spoke for many of his buddies, “I never saw a wood so thick with trees as the Hürtgen. It turned out to be the worst place of any.”²⁴¹ He could only blame himself for being there. In earlier service with the 45th Infantry Division, an Oklahoma Army National Guard outfit, Carpenter received a foot injury. After his recovery he

²⁴⁰ Thomas W. Hickman, *Unpublished Diary*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 40. Note: Hickman was a Battalion Scout with the 1st Battalion of the 109th Infantry.

²⁴¹ Cecil B. Curry, *Follow Me and Die: The Destruction of an American Division in World War II*. (Briarcliff Manor: Stein and Day Publishers, 1984), 97.

received assignment to a quartermaster service battalion, a relatively safe rear-area job. “But I still wanted to fight for our right to be free and be of service to my nation, so in Wales I requested transfer to Company M, 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division – America’s oldest division,”²⁴² recalled Carpenter.

That same day, the action of Technical Sergeant Jacob Welc won him a battlefield commission. The soldiers were taking a beating at Vossenack. The roads had been converted into rivers and mud due to all the rain and snow. German artillery pummeled all routes to the advancing units. The use of vehicles was limited. Hampered by these conditions, the wounded were only brought back as far as the most advanced aid station. Further evacuation to the rear appeared impossible. Without orders, Sergeant Welc drove one of his trucks through the mud-choked roads in the dead of night. In the battered town of Vossenack, German artillery rained in constantly. Despite the incessant shelling, he brought his vehicle into the town, helped load the wounded, and then drove over the treacherous road to the rear medical station.²⁴³

Staff Sergeant Conrad W. Johnson was with Company D, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry. In an interview by the 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section on September 28, 1945, he recalled that after a few days rest from the fighting at the Siegfried Line, he was back in the fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. The fighting was tough for the land was hilly and there were thick woods. It was there that his unit was surrounded. Some of the men were able to escape but he was one of the ones who was taken prisoner by the Germans. He helped carry some of the wounded to a German aid station for treatment. Marching several days, the group came to Bonn, Germany. There they were loaded into boxcars and sent to Stalag XII-A in Limburg, Germany.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 98.

²⁴³ “110th Infantry Regiment Awards and Decorations, Welc.” *28th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 12 July 1945*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Even though he was captured, Johnson later wrote home that he did his best trying to stop the Germans. He knew that his side would eventually win.²⁴⁴

Private First Class Robert J. Esterly, Company I, 112th Infantry carried a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) and was picked to provide the chief means of fire power for a five-man reconnaissance patrol which had the mission of penetrating deep into German territory at night. The patrol had gone well into the Nazi lines when suddenly the stillness was broken by a German guard's order to halt. When the Americans failed to reply to the second challenge, burp gun and rifle slugs began to rip through the darkness. The patrol hastily deployed. Esterly lost contact with the rest of the patrol. All he could see were German gun flashes. Instead of retreating, he chose to stay and fight. Crouching low, he held his fire until he had spotted the muzzle flashes from ten burp guns and rifles. He then fired killing all the Germans. When asked later why he did not retreat, he said "he came here to fight the Germans, not to retreat."²⁴⁵ Esterly was awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day.

The 110th Infantry Regiment attacked against deadly German positions and failed completely to achieve much success. During the attack, the assault battalions received heavy mortar and artillery fire from the Germans and found their advance slowed by heavily booby trapped defensive positions, pillboxes, dug-in wooden bunkers, and other prepared defensive positions. They were only able to advance about two hundred yards. On the morning of November 3, the 2nd Battalion and the 3rd Battalion again launched an attack. The entire front

²⁴⁴ Conrad W. Johnson, Staff Sergeant, Company D, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division. "Personal History Of the Men Who Marched in the Paris Parade." 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section. APO 28, U.S. Army Europe, September 28, 1945. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁴⁵ Robert J. Esterly, Company I, 112th Infantry, *Silver Star Award*. Press release for First Army by 28th Division Public Relations Office, November 20, 1944. 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section. APO 28, U.S. Army Europe, September 28, 1945. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

received heavy American mortar and artillery fire. Even after the area had been saturated with artillery and mortar fire, the assault battalions were unable to breach the fortified positions.²⁴⁶

On November 3, the 112th Regiment resumed their attack. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 112th succeeded in reaching Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. The two battalions set up defensive positions in each town. The 109th Infantry Regiment renewed its attack, bringing into action the previously uncommitted reserve battalion, but was still unable throughout the day to achieve success. In the morning, a sharp counterattack against the left flank of the regiment from the direction of Hürtgen forced a slight withdrawal.

In the November *28th Infantry Division Summary of Activity from Regiments*, the G-2 Section reported "...The 2nd Battalion, 109th Regiment attack didn't get too far but their preliminary attack in the 109th area sucked the Germans in..." Such daily summaries from the 28th Division headquarters might have confused riflemen in the battalions of the 109th Infantry Regiment. They did not feel they had sucked in the German counterattack or foiled their enemies. As they stumbled blindly through the battle area following inadequate maps, they might have marveled to know the divisional headquarters prided itself on letting every man know what he is supposed to do.²⁴⁷ Yet, without good maps or clear guidance, the men did the best they could to fight for freedom. The 110th Infantry Regiment again attacked but suffered heavy casualties and gained no ground.²⁴⁸

On November 4, German artillery fire throughout the entire division area began to increase. A counterattack against the positions in Schmidt drove the 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment out. At first, the counterattack split the battalion in two. One company disappeared

²⁴⁶ "Unit Report 5, 110th Infantry Regiment, 03 December 1944, Consthun, Luxembourg." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 2.

²⁴⁷ Currey, 17.

²⁴⁸ 28th Infantry Division Historical Summary, 157.

into the woods south of the town. The rumble of exploding artillery shells bombarding the town of Kommerscheidt and Schmidt sent the men of Company L into their foxholes. They dug feverishly in an attempt to enlarge their foxholes while there was still time. They were not planning on going anywhere. The artillery fire was especially heavy to their south. Because of a hill and sloping terrain between them, they could not fully defect the problems Company K was facing. In addition to the artillery fire, they were also drawing German tank fire. Company L's 2nd Platoon was dug in on a forward slope facing east with the town of Schmidt directly to their rear. Through the morning haze the men could see about fifty Germans coming over a rise about six hundred yards to their front.

Private First Class Albert E. Drapeau wrote in his journal, "the 2nd platoon was dug in on a forward slope facing east with the town of Schmidt being directly to our rear. Through an early morning haze, I discerned what appeared to be about fifty enemy coming over a rise about six hundred yards to our front."²⁴⁹ "A rising crescendo of yelling and cussing was enveloping our rear," explained Drapeau, "along with increasing enemy fire. Company K was breaking, some units fleeing to our rear through Schmidt and toward Kommerscheidt. Orders to hold were being refused. I personally shouted and cussed some of these men. We came here to fight and defeat the Germans, not to run."²⁵⁰

Most soldiers just wanted the war to end and many looked to God for protection. In his November 5 diary Private Kensler wrote about a letter he sent to his wife, "I wrote to Cindy... We are about two miles from the front and can hear the field artillery. This is it, my darling, this is what we've been trained for and we are here. What is in the future for me God

²⁴⁹ Drapeau.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

only knows...we can hope for the best and pray for the courage to carry on...and a protector when the going gets tough.”²⁵¹

During this action, Captain Linguiti, 112th Infantry Regiment Medical Officer, moved his aid station by pack carry to a small, abandoned house overlooking Kommerscheidt to guarantee immediate medical attention for the wounded. As the fighting grew in ferocity, American infantry and tanks took up positions close to the house occupied by Captain Linguiti’s aid station. On November 5, a resupply convoy for the 1st Battalion arrived in Kommerscheidt at 5:00 a.m. and dumped its load in front of the house used by medical personnel as its battalion aid station. For the next two hours Captain Linguiti, the unit surgeon, fumed as he watched company carrying parties arrive to receive their distribution of ammunition and rations. He was terribly concerned that such activities would compromise his work and that German artillery batteries would fire on the site, unaware that an aid station lay in the midst of all of the activity.

The Germans on the far slope of the surrounding hills, spotting increasing activity around the house, laid down an artillery and mortar barrage on the aid station and surrounding vicinity.²⁵² Captain Linguiti realized the aid station had to be moved if he were to ensure safety for his people and the casualties who crowded their facilities. After dark, he evacuated his staff and patients along the road leading out of Kommerscheidt toward the river.

On three occasions, the Germans scored direct hits on the house, killing medical officers and two medical aidmen, as well as destroying all food and most of the medical supplies. Despite the continuous artillery, Captain Linguiti continued receiving, treating, and evacuating the wounded. When German artillery again hit the already shattered house, rendering it almost

²⁵¹ Kensler.

²⁵² “112th Infantry Regiment Awards and Decorations, Kauffman.” *28th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 12 July 1945*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

completely unusable, he withdrew to combine with the 3rd Battalion aid station in a log dugout bunker. Linguiti left eight litter bearers in Kommerscheidt. These men would collect casualties and carry them to the dugout.²⁵³

As the dugout became untenable and troops were withdrawing, both battalion's chaplains decided to stay with in the dugout, where many of the wounded cried out for religious support. The men had fought for their religious freedom and wanted to exercise their faith even as they lay on the stretchers. Chaplain Alan P. Madden, of the 1st Battalion, and Chaplain Ralph E. Maness, of the 3rd Battalion, remained there until November 9, ministering as best they could to those who were brought to the bunker. They represented both major Christian faiths. Father Madden cared for Roman Catholics, while Reverend Maness cared for Protestants.²⁵⁴ Father Madden was eventually captured by the Germans.

Captain Linguiti's decision to advance his aid station into the village enabled seventy-seven casualties to be given immediate medical treatment, a factor which saved the lives of many of them. Captain Linguiti was listed as missing in subsequent action against the Germans. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day.²⁵⁵

The balance of the battalion drew back to the northern edge of Schmidt, where they were again hit by the Germans. They could not hold their position and withdrew to Kommerscheidt. There is some evidence that the soldiers refused to hold their positions. The 1st Battalion defensive position at Kommerscheidt was reinforced by some of the men from the 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, and held until the morning of November 7.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Henry W. Morrison, *Report of Medical Evacuation, November 11, 1944* sent to 28th Division Surgeon. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Technical Sergeant Emerson W. Buckler was in Company C, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry. In an interview by the 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section on September 28, 1945, he recalled that on November 8 the remainder of his platoon was withdrawing from the Kall River Valley. Besides being wet from dunking in the stream they crossed, he and the rest of his unit was lost. They were on the forward slope of a hill facing the Germans, who tossed mortar and artillery fire on the men all night. Fortunately, no one was hit.²⁵⁶ When dawn broke Buckler gathered the eight remaining men from his platoon and found their way back to the company kitchen set-up. They found several more men from the platoon. From there they went to Harcheidt to a holding position. This is where the German breakthrough occurred. Buckler said, "I never saw so many men in all my life" The enemy used search lights to find the Americans. They held out until the enemy machine gun fire ripped the top off of their dugouts. From then on, they fought a rear guard fight. Company C was split up and half of the men got lost.²⁵⁷

Major Howard L. Topping, Commander of the 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry was assigned the mission of moving his battalion from the vicinity of Germeter to a position about two miles away. His troops were given the task of defending a road and heavily wooded draw from German infiltration which would prevent the remnants of a 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment from an untenable position on high ground. With a small reconnaissance party, Major Topping moved out at the head. The nearest route to his destination led across an open field under German artillery fire. During the trip, the party was twice fired upon by German artillery.

²⁵⁶ Emerson W. Buckler, Tech Sergeant, Company C, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. "Personal History Of the Men Who Marched in the Paris Parade." 28th Infantry Division Public Relations Section. APO 28, U.S. Army Europe, September 28, 1945. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Reaching the woods on the opposite side of the field near his objective, Major Topping observed a five-man German patrol moving toward him. When they were about 100 yards away, he opened fire on the German with his M-1 rifle, mortally wounding two of them.²⁵⁸

Continuing to his objective he observed another German patrol about 200 yards away. Again, opening fire, he killed one of them and forced the others to flee. Despite a German mortar barrage, he remained at his position until he was thoroughly familiar with the ground he was to occupy. When he was about to leave, a German sniper from across the draw shot him through the left wrist. He returned to his battalion but refused to be evacuated until after he had led his men to their new positions. His action permitted the remnants of the 3rd Battalion, 112th to safely withdraw. Major Howard Topping was awarded the Silver Star for his actions.²⁵⁹

The 110th Infantry Regiment again attacked but achieved no material success. As the daily German barrages began, men of the 110th ran for their foxholes. In the distance they could hear mortars firing. Usually, the Germans would fire about eighteen rounds. A moment or two later the shells would land. As debris from explosions settled, someone would lift his head out of his hole and ask if anyone was hit. Soon the Germans found out that the Americans were counting shell rounds, so while the eighteen expected ones were landing, they dropped three more rounds in the mortar tubes. Private Robert C. Wells said, “those last three rounds blew the ass off more than one of our guys because we weren’t expecting them.”²⁶⁰ Wells refused to be intimidated by the German efforts. As the noise faded from the bursting rounds, “I would always look out of my foxhole and call out, in imitation of President Roosevelt: I hate you. Eleanor

²⁵⁸ “109th Infantry Regiment Awards and Decorations, Topping.” *28th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 12 July 1945*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Robert C. Wells, interview by Cecil B. Curry, Washington, Pennsylvania, September 8, 1979. *28th Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

hates you. Even Fala hates you. You sons will never step foot on our soil. And here we were, sitting just inside Germany. It helped to keep up the guy's spirits."²⁶¹ Another favorite comment was to call out to one's buddies, "Alright, I want to take a poll. All you confirmed atheists sound off. I want to see how many of you are left. There were never any responses."²⁶²

Private George Nikola, a scout in the 1st Platoon, Company G, ran along a firebreak toward a shallow dip in the ground he thought might serve as a good field of fire for use against a pillbox. He carried a light machine gun. As he reached the hollow, he dropped to the ground and set the gun down beside him. As it touched the earth it depressed a hidden plunger on a buried mine that then exploded, destroying the barrel of the machine gun and wounding Nickola in the face. Thrashing with pain, his right foot struck a booby trap, setting it off and injuring his foot. Refusing to crawl back to safety, he remained where he was for an hour in order to shout warnings to his buddies not to venture into the area with mines and booby traps. When asked later why he would not withdraw Nickola said, "I came here to fight the Germans in their country and that is what I was going to do."²⁶³ Private George Nikola was awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day.

On November 4, the 1st Battalion, 110th, which had been uncommitted up to that morning, succeeded in a flanking attack seizing its two initial objectives. But it was then faced with the presence of the Germans in dug-in positions cutting them off from the rest of their regiment. Attempts to clear out the area were only partially successful during the following nine days. The regiment was finally pulled off the front line on November 13.²⁶⁴ The men of the

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* Note: Eleanor was President Roosevelt's wife. Fala was his dog.

²⁶² Earl Fuller Jr., interview by Cecil B. Curry, Washington, Pennsylvania, September 8, 1979. *28th Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁶³ George Nikola, Private, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, *Silver Star Award*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁶⁴ Unit Report 5, 15.

division were grateful to be out of combat, if even for only a few hours or days. They talked about their fears to one another. Private Charles Hubner remembered such conversations. “At first we were petrified, really scared. But if we were lucky enough to live through a few skirmishes we weren’t so much scared of a fight as getting maimed. Most of us said we would rather be dead than go home a cripple or, worse, go home to Germans running the country.”²⁶⁵

On November 6, the Germans counterattacked in the town of Vossenack. The 2nd Battalion, 112th had given up its positions, without evidence of strong attacks by infantry, in the face of extremely heavy artillery fire, some of which was direct. At the same time, the Germans captured the main supply route to Kommerscheidt and effectively isolated the 112th Infantry and the newly formed Task Force Ripple that consisted of the 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry, a company of tank destroyers, and two tank companies.

Private Kensler made another entry in his diary on November 8, recording what he wrote to his wife that day, “During the night it snowed. It was damp and cold. I pray God that this may soon end and stop the killing and suffering. To me war is murder. Maybe others would not agree, but that’s one nice thing about being an American, everyone can have his own thoughts and ideas. Thank God for that. This is why we are here. Good night my Darling.”²⁶⁶

While the situation seemed hopeless, the bravery of some continued unabated. During a barrage in which six hundred German artillery rounds fell within a thirty-minute period, Staff Sergeant Paul Kerekes of Company M dashed out from his hiding place to repair breaks in communication wire. As Army Air Forces planes flew in to bomb and strafe German attackers, Staff Sergeant Arthur Johnson of Company K dragged panels marking American position into

²⁶⁵ Charles Hubner, *Unpublished Diary*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁶⁶ Kensler.

view so pilots would be able to differentiate between German and American troops.²⁶⁷ Both men were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for their efforts.

As the German tanks worked their way towards the Americans, they drove them from their foxholes, forcing them to retreat as best they could. Sergeant Tony Kudiak of Headquarters Company was not one to give up easily. He knew the Germans had to be stopped at all costs. When German tanks tried to erase his position, he picked up a Bazooka and blasted the tank. When the Germans crawled from the wreckage, Kudiak and his men picked them off with rifles, then chased away other German tanks which had pinned down the American infantry. As the Germans advanced, Sergeant Kudiak remained in place, climbed into a tank destroyer and repulsed the German grenadiers. When the gun jammed, he abandoned the tank destroyer and climbed into another one. When that gun jammed, he fired at the German tanks with his M-1 rifle, picking off as many German infantry soldiers as he could.²⁶⁸ Sergeant Kudiak was awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day.

The 109th Infantry Regiment was replaced in its sector by the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Division, and the 110th Regiment was then used to reoccupy positions in the Vossenack area. A task force consisting of the 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment was sent to extricate the surrounded and beleaguered 112th Infantry and Task Force Ripple at Kommerscheidt. It did not succeed. Some units became lost in the dense forest, some encountered unexpected resistance, and the entirety of the hurriedly organized task force was thoroughly dissipated. It finally dug in on the southern slope of a hill south of Vossenack and screened the withdrawal of the 112th Infantry during the night of November 8.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ “112th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report, 1-30 November 1944.” *28th Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ 28th Division Historical Summary, 172.

That night, Private Elliott R. Corbett II, Company B, 109th Infantry, penned a letter to his wife Sudie, “I might say with little or no compulsion that I miss you hellishly and I’ve had enough of humping around Europe. I see nothing in Germany to warrant fighting for any of it and being naturally a peaceful character, I look forward to a long life of security and freedom from the elements which are beginning to pall.”²⁷⁰ On November 19, Corbett was captured after being seriously injured. He died of his wounds two days later.

On November 10, the Germans sent a captured American into the 3rd Battalion, 109th Regiment lines with a demand by the German commander that the unit should surrender. The 3rd Battalion Commander, Major Howard Topping answered with American artillery batteries, in which artillery battalions of the Corps pounded German positions.²⁷¹ 1340th Combat Engineer Battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Truman Setliffe was at the site of the demolished Kall bridge on November 10. When he told his engineers of the German ultimatum to surrender or be slaughtered, they said they would “stick it out and fight. That is what they came for.”²⁷²

This evacuation had been difficult. Casualties had been heavy. Medical evacuation was particularly complicated and dangerous. Vossenack was the hub of three vital roads and key to the Schwammenauel Dam across the Roer River. The area became known as ‘artillery alley.’ German self-propelled, railroad, and field guns poured between 2,000 to 3,000 rounds of artillery shells on units of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment in a 24-hour period. The only road leading into Vossenack was raked with shell fire every hour of the day.

²⁷⁰ Elliott R. Corbett II, Private, Company B, 109th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division. *Letter to his wife, November 8, 1944*. Elliott R. Corbett II commemoration website. The Netherlands. <https://www.elliott-r-corbett-ii.com/publications>. Accessed September 4, 2020.

²⁷¹ “109th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report, 1-30 November 1944.” *28th Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁷² Truman H. Setliffe, Lieutenant Colonel, “1340 Combat Engineer Battalion, After Action Report., November 13, 1944.” *28th Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Despite what seemed to be a hopeless situation, soldiers continued to demonstrate their willingness to fight. For example, during the German counterattack spearheaded by three Tiger tanks, twenty-two-year-old Captain Clifford T. Hackard, Commander of Company C, waited for the tanks to approach. When one came within fifty yards of his observation post, he fired his only rocket, knocking the tank out of action. As the crew attempted to escape, Captain Hackard killed three and wounded two. Later, while checking defensive positions of his men, a German machine gun began firing. Armed with only a rifle, he advanced toward the weapon, leaped into the emplacement, and killed the three crew members. For his actions that day, Captain Hackard was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.²⁷³

With such ferocity of battle, it may be hard to imagine that the two sides actually paused for humanitarian purposes. The fighting was so intense and the casualties so great that not once, but three times over the course of five days fighting was paused to evacuate the wounded. So bloody was the fighting in this area that both sides momentarily tempered their enmity so the wounded could have unencumbered transport to medical support in the rear. The first such respite began on November 7 on the Kall Bridge in the town of Schmidt. The second was arranged by 112th Regimental surgeon Major Albert Berndt on November 9 and the third occurred two days later.²⁷⁴

With the withdrawal of the 112th Infantry Regiment, the attack on Schmidt was temporarily abandoned. On November 10, the 28th Division was instructed by V Corps headquarters to secure a line along the north and west banks of the Kall River. It was in the fighting for this ground that the 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment suffered its heaviest

²⁷³ “112th Infantry Regiment Awards and Decorations, Hackard.” *28th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 12 July 1945*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁷⁴ 28th Division Historical Summary, 200.

casualties. On November 14, all attacks by the 28th Division had ceased. The men were exhausted. Many of the officers stated that they felt no further attacks could have been carried out even had they been ordered.

The men of the 28th Division faced tremendous adversity in several ways during their time in the Hürtgen Forest. During most of the action, rain, fog, and snow in the latter days prevailed. On the days when it did not rain, low-hanging clouds and ground haze prevented effective employment of the considerable air support allocated to the division. The rain turned the narrow firebreak trails inadequate for use as supply routes or armored employment and maneuver. The trails became rutted, slippery quagmires. Even jeeps and M-24 Weasels - a tracked vehicle designed for operation in snow - became stuck and were unable to extricate themselves. The extreme wetness made it impossible for the under-equipped troops to protect themselves against trench foot.²⁷⁵

On an average only ten to fifteen percent of the men per company were equipped with all-weather boots. The overwhelming majority endured the entire action without them. Foxholes turned into veritable artesian wells during the latter part of the action. The ground became so thoroughly soaked that it was impossible for the men to keep dry. The 28th Division Surgeon's Report of Casualties shows 750 cases of trench foot.²⁷⁶ Robert W. Meyer, B Company, 112th Infantry Regiment remembered his first night with B Company, "Light rain had started to fall and I thought, good grief, what a miserable existence. The Hürtgen Forest was a bloody battlefield of survival. It was a kill-or-be-killed situation. Military trash was everywhere; discarded C-rations, bandoliers, empty ammo crates, unexploded shells, mess gear, helmets,

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *28th Division Surgeon's Report of Casualties, 1 November 1944 to 30 April 1945.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1945).

abandoned stretchers, bloody bandages, and corpses were on the ground, stuck to the bushes, and in the trees.”²⁷⁷

The soldiers of the 28th Division faced daunting terrain throughout. The attack was made into and through the dense Hürtgen pine forest. Visibility, at its optimum, was limited to 150-200 yards. In places, it was less than twenty-five feet. As the attack progressed, the constant artillery and mortar pounding of the area, knocked off tops of trees, knocked down others, and in places so choked the ground with debris that visibility and movement were tremendously hampered. Warm food could not be brought up through the quagmire and woods until hours after it had been prepared, and when it finally arrived it was cold and sour. In addition, the attack was made into and through terrain dominated by German-held high ground on the north, east and south. This enabled the Germans to pour observed and, in some cases, direct artillery fire into the heart of the division attack from an arc of 180 degrees. In the opinion of the 28th Division G-3 (Operations Officer), Lieutenant Colonel Thomas E. Colonial Briggs, this was one of the greatest single causes for the failure of the troops to achieve success.²⁷⁸ The road network in the area was limited. It was inadequate for employment of armor. The route from Vossenack through the draw across the Kall River to Kommerscheidt and Schmidt was little more than a trail. As it turned out, this trail caused the breakdown of the movement of supplies and armored support to the Kommerscheidt area.²⁷⁹

Communications, always a problem in battle, was never adequate during the 28th Division operation. The heavy German artillery and mortar fire constantly knocked out wire

²⁷⁷ Phylliss O. Meyer, *The Shadow of Death. The Hürtgen Forest, Luxemburg, Battle of the Bulge, Stalag XIIA, Stalag IIA, Arbeit Kommandos*. As told to her by Robert W. Meyer Jr., Company A, 109th Infantry Regiment. (Self-published, 1999), 59.

²⁷⁸ “28th Division G3 Report to VIII Corps G3, 01 December 1944.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

communications from battalions to companies, and several times for prolonged periods from regiments to battalions. The most exhausting and tireless efforts of the communications personnel to keep communications open, to keep lines repaired, were unable to keep pace with the rate of communications being knocked out. At night, the messengers groped their way through the tangle of shot-down treetops along the frazzled telephone line in order to patch it up again and again. The lack of communications effected the entire situation. Lack of situational awareness hampered quick, effective decisions on the part of commanders, and increased the demoralization of the men. Orders from commanders were slowed or not received at all delaying vital redeployments and other actions.²⁸⁰

Finally, the performance of the 28th's inexperienced personnel significantly hindered the actions of the division. Although the division had received replacements during the month of October, bringing it up to full strength after its attempts to penetrate the Siegfried Defenses in September, many of the men were not trained infantry soldiers. Rifle company officers and non-commissioned officers, in many cases, had been drawn from anti-tank companies, anti-aircraft units, air force ground personnel and other non-infantry organizations. Even during the period of comparative quiet that the division enjoyed for a brief period at Camp Elsenborn, Belgium in October, these deficiencies had not been sufficiently remedied according to Colonel Theodore A. Seely, 110th Infantry Regiment commander.²⁸¹

As a result of the inexperienced personnel, when the attack began, and the casualties mounted, the loss of the few remaining trained men immediately became apparent. Some infantry soldiers broke and ran in Schmidt, in Kommerscheidt, and in Vossenack. Author Ernest

²⁸⁰ "28 Signal Company Unit History, 01 November 1944 to 01 January 1945." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁸¹ "28th Division G1 Documents, 01-30 November 1944." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Hemingway spent eighteen days on the front in the Hürtgen Forest. He wrote later, “It was a place where it was extremely difficult for a man to stay alive even if all he did was be there.”²⁸²

As the operation continued, the rapid rate of attrition of the companies, the loss of the few experienced officers and non-commissioned officers, and the complete lack of trained replacements contributed to the failure of the mission. For the German’s part they conducted a fanatical defense in terrain completely familiar to them. The German troops fought viciously, gave up some ground, but counter-attacked frequently. Their losses were also heavy, yet they succeeded in halting, and cutting to pieces, the attack of the 28th Infantry Division.²⁸³ Many of the American soldiers came to Europe with the idea that the German soldiers were beaten and were therefore complacent. They quickly found the German soldiers to be determined and fearless fighters.

The 28th soldiers were fatigued from exposure to the cold and rain and the heavy artillery fire pounding for hours on end. Self-care had become all but impossible. Often the dead could not be buried because there were not enough men available and because the ground was either too sodden, solidly frozen, or rocky. Constantly suffering casualties, the strength of the teams manning the positions was increasingly sapped. And yet the men held their positions, went out on patrols, attacked, overcame their fears, and faithfully performed their duty. Some exhibited bravery that earned them battlefield promotions and awards for valor. Their shared experience created a spirit of fellowship among them where each man was prepared to do the utmost to defeat the Nazis.

²⁸² “The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest.” *DOCFILM*. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/the-battle-of-hürtgen-forest/av-53307984>. Accessed September 4, 2022.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* 28th Division G3 Report to VIII Corps G3.

The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest was characterized by particular rigor, both with regard to the doggedness and determination of the opponents as well as the terrain and weather conditions. There were many instances of close combat. The soldier was dependent only on himself in this forest with interspersed patches of tangled branches and shrubs. He always had to contend with surprise. Most of the time he could use his weapons only at short distances. He had to be fast and positive with his weapons if he wanted to survive. Many times, success depended decisively on a small number of audacious and bold men. They knew how to enthuse young and inexperienced soldiers and helped them to find their way and hold their own in the uncannily dark forest.²⁸⁴

The second attack on Schmidt had developed into one of the costliest U.S. divisional actions in the whole of World War II. After the action in the Hürtgen Forest, the 28th Infantry Division was destroyed as an effective fighting force. Division combat casualties totaled 6,184. Losses included 614 killed, 2,605 wounded, 855 missing, 245 captured, and 1,865 non-battle casualties. More than 750 of the non-battle casualties were from trench-foot alone.²⁸⁵

Given the difficulties it faced, the 28th Infantry Division fought well against all odds. For fourteen days its men struggled over steep hills and fought off infantry and tanks while enduring endless artillery barrages. They crossed between the ridges of Vossenack and Schmidt using no more than a narrow, twisting trail. They briefly captured the towns of Vossenack, Kommerscheidt, Schmidt, and Simonskall. Private soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and company-grade officers who fought on those ridges were brave, courageous, and resourceful.

²⁸⁴ Paul Bruckner, Lieutenant Colonel. "Tab J to Appendix 1 to Advanced Sheet, Lesson 1." *The Battle of Hürtgenwald*. (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1982), 80.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 28th Division G1 Documents, 01-30 November 1944.

The men knew they were fighting for the American way of life and their chaplains and leaders reminded them.

On November 14, 1944, Ivan (Cy) Peterman of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, who was embedded with the 28th Division, watched survivors emerge from their struggle with German forces in the Hürtgen Forest and wrote:

They crouched in their vehicles, staring straight ahead. If there were heroics to recount, someone else had to talk. The men of this unit (28th Infantry) would not. Too many of their companions remained behind, too many were dead or missing. Too many grievously wounded and shattered in nerves and spirit. If they never saw the Hürtgen Forest again it would suit them. . . . They had enough.²⁸⁶

Many of the 28th Division soldiers, because of glowing wartime propaganda that portrayed them as capable of doing no wrong, believed they could beat a determined foe fighting on his own soil. They learned a hard lesson in the Hürtgen Forest, but never wavered from their motivation to fight for the American way of life.

Plans were drawn up for the relief of the 28th Division by the 8th Infantry Division. From November 16th to the 21st, the changeover occurred. The 28th Division moved south to Luxembourg to rest and refit. But this was not to be, as their resolve would soon be tested again against a determined enemy. Once again, any personal bonds, comradery, or unit cohesion that formed between the soldiers prior to their fighting had dissolved. The veterans were again surrounded by new soldiers with no combat experience who's only motivation was to protect the American way of life.

²⁸⁶ Ivan Peterman, "Great Unsung Battle of the 28th Division: Pennsylvanians on the Western Front," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 1944, Robert H. Henschen Collection, Series #272.99, Manuscript Group 272, (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives).

The soldiers did not have an opportunity to record their thoughts when they were in the middle of German artillery barrages. Once they got to Luxembourg, they found time to record their thoughts. Private Doyle McDaniel, Company A, 1340th Engineer Battalion, wrote that his platoon had advanced to the crossroads by a church and were pinned down by German sniper fire. Private McDaniel climbed onto a shed roof to locate the German positions. As he jumped down, he landed beside a German soldier. Before the man could react, McDaniel shot and killed him. He wrote “I felt bad about killing the German, but knew I had to. I came to Germany to protect my wife and new baby at home.”²⁸⁷

Private Clarence Skains remembered that he and Private Nathaniel Quentin, both of Company M, 112th Infantry were in Kommerscheidt when a general withdrawal was ordered. No one told them of the order so they remained in town while around them other members of their squad lay dead in their foxholes. Quentin noticed a platoon of enemy soldiers crawling toward him, their uniforms blending with the saturated ground now covered by falling snow. He allowed them to advance within twenty-five yards and then opened fire with his BAR, killing twenty and forcing the others to retreat. The Germans attacked again, in one and two man rushes, running through a turnip patch toward Quentin and Skains. The men held their ground and fired steadily and the Germans retreated. Skains wrote that there was no way they were going to withdraw, even if they had received the order to. They came to defeat the Germans, and that is what they were going to do.²⁸⁸

Russell Arford of Company G, 110th Infantry, wrote how concern for a job finally brought him to the Hürtgen Forest. “I signed up in February 1941,” he said, “figuring I would get

²⁸⁷ Doyle McDaniel, Company A, 1340th Engineer Battalion. *Unpublished Journal*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

²⁸⁸ Clarence Skains, Company M, 112th Infantry. *Unpublished journal*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

my year of service over with and get out. By 1942, I thought jobs would be plentiful. They were, but I didn't get any of them. I sure chose the wrong time to go in, for I was immediately federalized and in the army until the end of the war." In the Kall Valley he often wondered if he would ever live long enough to work at any of those jobs. His job now was to fight for the people back home to have jobs.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Russell Arford, Company G, 110th Infantry. *Unpublished Journal*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Chapter Seven

Delaying Actions During the Battle of the Bulge

The Hürtgen Forest was a horrible nightmare, but for the men of the division, it was now over. For some it was over because they were dead. But for the living, the Hürtgen Forest was now just a bitter memory, albeit one that would never really fade. In just two weeks in the Forest, the division had suffered over six thousand casualties. Now platoons were the size of squads. Companies were the size of platoons and battalions were the size of companies. The division had been fighting since July in Normandy and badly needed rest and replacements. Veterans needed time to rebuild their shattered nerves, put the misery of the forest behind them, and maybe enjoy life again. New arrivals needed a chance to ease into their new assignments, make friends, feel a part of something, and learn how to survive in combat. The Ardennes, everyone thought, was the ideal place for this rest. However, Adolf Hitler and the German Army had different plans.

By mid-December 1944, the 28th Infantry Division had been recuperating and replacing their losses in Luxembourg for approximately three weeks. Although it was located in what was believed to be a quiet sector, U.S. VIII Corps had ordered it to hold a defensive line that would have been in more active combat situations untenable. The division was stretched out on a twenty-five mile front facing the German lines across the Our River. Such a deployment, with large gaps between position, was thought acceptable for a quiet sector even though by the time of the Normandy invasion it was generally accepted that a division front should be approximately eight miles.²⁹⁰ The division's regiments were arrayed with the 112th Infantry Regiment in the north, linking with the 106th Infantry Division's southern flank, the 110th Infantry Regiment in

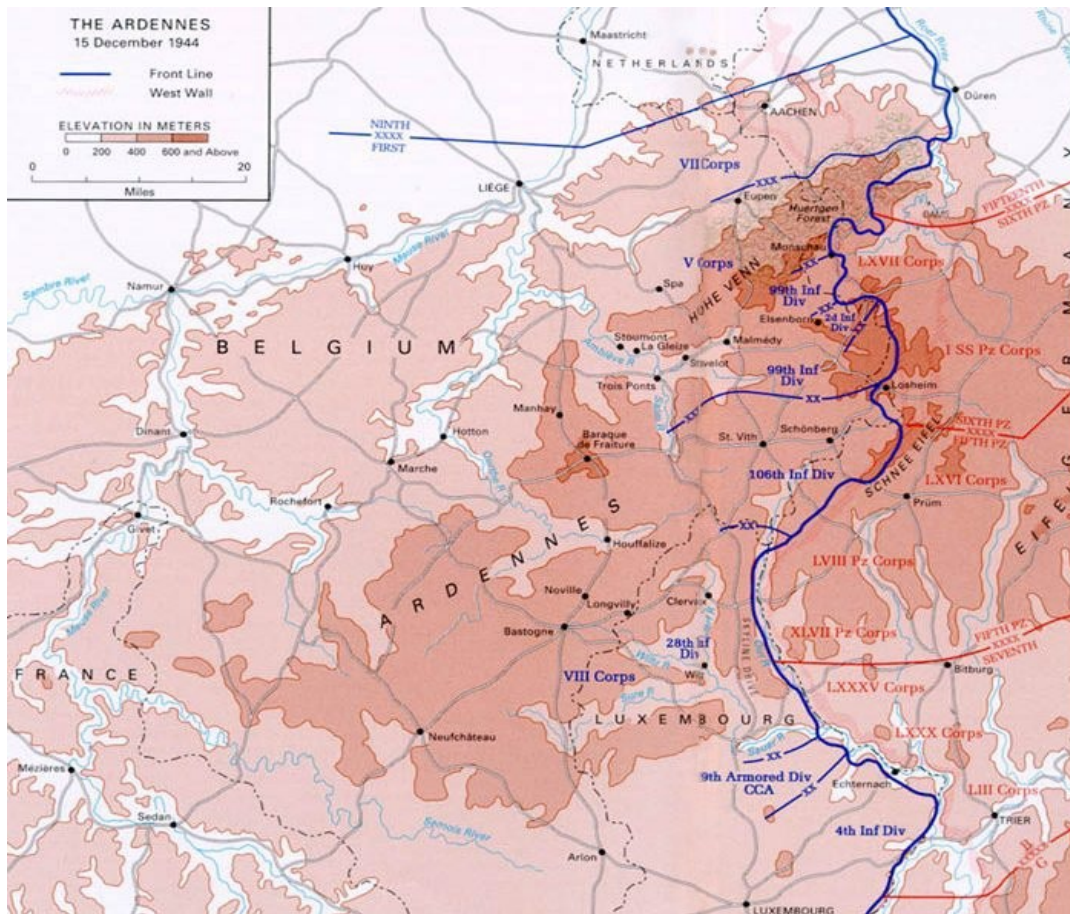
²⁹⁰ George E. Dials. "Send up the Yardstick." *Army* (May 1973), 27. Note: Captain George E. Dials notes that FM 61-100 (Division) does not explicitly specify what a division frontage was to be but he notes that by June 1944 eight miles was the accepted figure.

the center and the 109th Infantry Regiment in the south, tying in with the 9th Armored Division northern flank.

The men used the time to make sure that everything was ready for battle again. The ranks were filled with new soldiers to fill vacancies. The replacements were green, but the battle-hardened platoon sergeants knew how to manage them. Ammunition was re-stocked, vehicles lost in the Hürtgen Forest were replaced, and the veterans had a chance to rest. Luxembourg resident and fifteen-year-old distillery worker Adolphe Betzen remembered that he spent his days with preparations in the distillery. The copper boilers were scrubbed, barrels cleaned, the water bath of the boiler filled with water, and wood laid. The Americans also did routine work, such as cleaning weapons, writing letters, and standing guard. In the evenings, everyone went to bed comfortable, but facing the German forces across the Our River in Germany.²⁹¹ The men were thinking of Christmas and going home. They were counting their points to see when they could leave.

It was imperative that the Army find a way to send soldiers home in a prompt manner based on objective criteria. Otherwise, it risked provoking widespread protests from restless soldiers who had no enemy to fight. Soldiers more commonly referred to it as the point system. Under this scheme, every U.S. soldier was awarded a number of points based on how long they had been overseas, how many decorations they had received, how many campaigns they had taken part in, and how many children they had. The men of the division soon stopped thinking about how many points they accumulated as the Germans interrupted their rest. They knew that more work had to be done to secure the American way of life. Map 6 shows the disposition of forces in the Ardennes on December 15, 1944.

²⁹¹ Zapotoczny, 82.

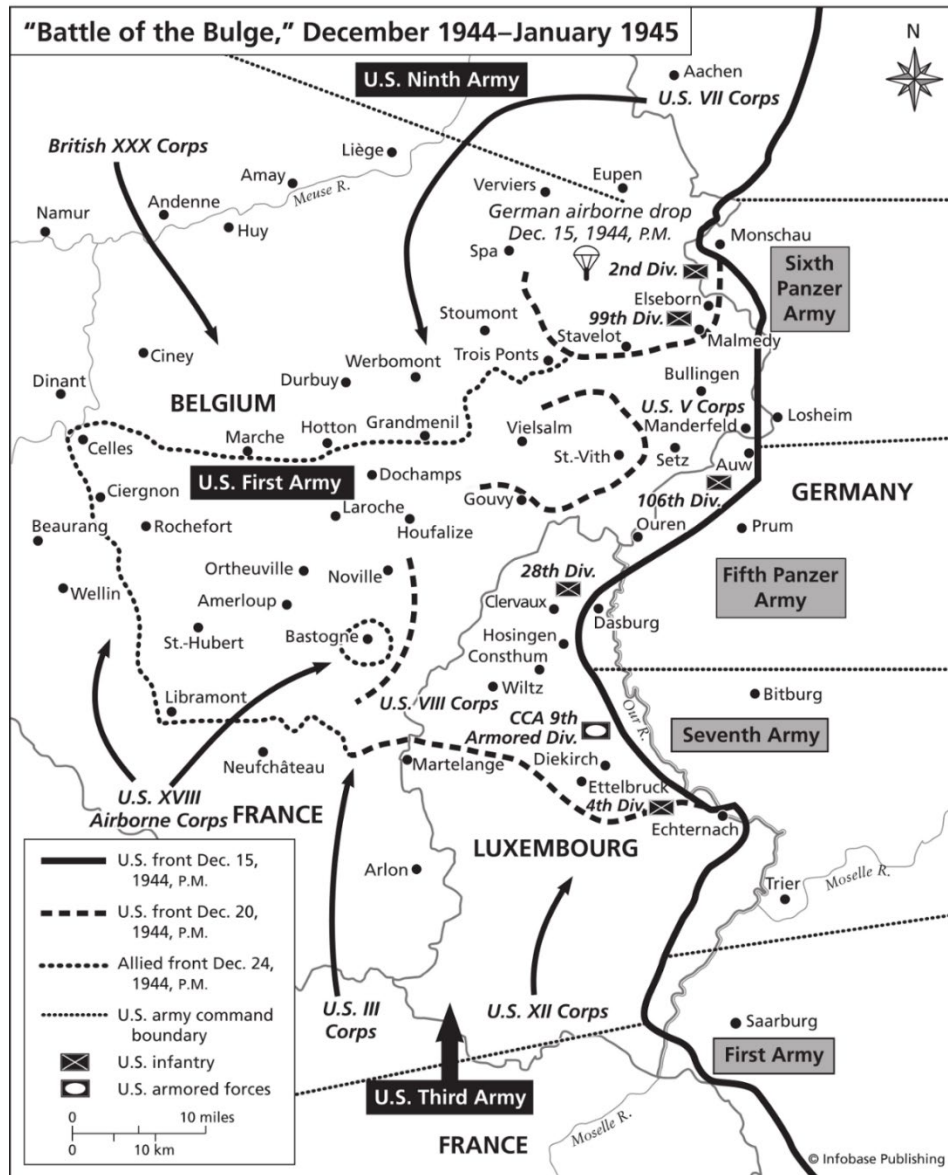


Map 6 - The disposition of forces in the Ardennes, December 15, 1944 (United States Army Center of Military History)

As the men rested, chaplains attended to their spiritual needs. Chaplains conducted services throughout the European Theater attended by many of the men.²⁹² Military chaplains were essential to sustaining morale in the European Theater. Their jobs were a combination of their calling as ministers of faith and keeping up the morale of the soldiers and reminding the soldiers why they were fighting. The original function of a chaplain was clearly to minister to the religious needs of service men, but they were relied on nearly from the start to serve as the conscience of the army, to maintain troop morale, and to constantly remind the soldiers why they

²⁹² Bernard Steis, Captain. Service Company, 112th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by 28th Division History Detachment*, Fort Indiantown Gap, Anville, PA, December 1988. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

were fighting.²⁹³ Map 7 shows the disposition of American and German forces at the start of the German attack and the position of the Allied front as the battle unfolded.



Map 7 - 28th Division and German Units (Defense Mapping Agency)

The positioning of the 28th Infantry Division units allowed for the rotation of soldiers into shelters for rest, minimizing exposure to the tough weather conditions. Soldiers also continued to rotate to divisional and corps rest centers further to the rear. Some lucky men were

²⁹³ Donald F. Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 129.

able to visit Paris for a few days. “Red Cross clubmobiles and doughnut wagons visited and there was a full schedule of USO shows and dances to help raise morale,”²⁹⁴ wrote Geoffrey Perret in *There’s a War to be Won*. Despite previous casualties, most soldiers were confident that the end of the war was near. Their leaders from their Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower on down had told them so. A thorough optimism filtered down through command and staff channels and to the infantry soldiers that the Germans were finished.²⁹⁵

Private Robert W. Meyer Jr., with the 109th, was positioned in Bettendorf. Every three weeks one battalion would rotate to Diekirch where they could buy sandwiches at the Red Cross Club, get a haircut from a local barber, attend services at the local churches, or write letters home. While staying in Diekirch, his company had training exercises. Meyer remembered that on one day, they had made a mock attack up a hill. At the completion of the exercise, they were grouped together in a little clearing within a wooded area. An officer, who was not part of their unit, gave the group a pep talk about why they should not be afraid to die. He said as soldiers it was their duty to die if necessary to accomplish a mission. Meyer said, “the lecture was ended with a gung-ho type of question to us troops: What were we to do when encountering enemy troops and what was the best way to avoid being killed by them. The correct answer shouted back (I suspect from a coached GI) was “Kill the bastards!” Meyer thought this type of thing was needed by some, but not for him. He knew why he was fighting.²⁹⁶

Believing the assurances of their officers that the war would soon end, the soldiers looked forward to a more relaxed Christmas holiday. But even with all the efforts to improve the morale

²⁹⁴ Geoffrey Perret, *There’s a War to be Won*. (New York: Random House, 1991), 404.

²⁹⁵ Harry Kemp, *The Regiment: Let the Citizens Bear Arms! A Narrative of an American Infantry Regiment in World War II*. (San Francisco: Nortex Publishers, 1990), 7.

²⁹⁶ Meyer, 69.

of the soldiers, the weather dampened their spirits. The troops faced freezing rain, thick fog, deep snow drifts and record-breaking low temperatures. Many people in Luxembourg remember the winter of 1944 as one of the coldest and harshest on memory.²⁹⁷ Thanksgiving came on November 23 in 1944. For the survivors and replacements alike, there was much to be thankful for. They were secure, warm and had good food. Some of the men shared their Thanksgiving dinner with the Luxembourgers. The soldiers had established a strong friendship with many of the Luxembourgers. The Americans had liberated Luxembourg, ending four years of German occupation and restoring freedom to a people who yearned for it. The men were proud they had helped free the French people as well. They had not only fought for American freedom, but also for the freedom of the people of Europe.²⁹⁸

The commander of the U.S. Third Army, General George S. Patton, was troubled by the weather. Aircraft was grounded and the conditions on the ground were extremely difficult for the troops. On the morning of December 8, General Patton called the Third Army Chaplain, Father James Hugh O'Neill, "This is General Patton; do you have a good prayer for weather? We must do something about those rains if we are to win the war."²⁹⁹ Chaplain O'Neill looked through the prayer books he had but could not find a prayer for weather, so he wrote one and went to see General Patton with it:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend.

Grant us fair weather for battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call

²⁹⁷ Luxembourg. *Society and Culture - History*. <https://luxembourg.public.lu/en/society-and-culture/history/battle-bulge.html>. (Accessed August 20, 2022).

²⁹⁸ John. C. McManus, *Alamo in the Ardennes: The Untold Story of the American Soldiers Who Made the Defense of Bastogne Possible*. (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 8.

²⁹⁹ Father James H. O'Neill, Reprinted from his 1950 essay. "The True Story of The Patton Prayer." *Review of the News*, October 6, 1971.

upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies and establish Thy justice among men and nations.³⁰⁰

Chaplain O'Neill added a Christmas greeting for the reverse side of the prayer:

To each officer and soldier in the Third United States Army, I Wish a Merry Christmas. I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We march in our might to complete victory. May God's blessings rest upon each of you on this Christmas Day. G.S. Patton, Jr, Lieutenant General, Commanding, Third United States Army.³⁰¹

General Patton approved of the prayer card and instructed Chaplain O'Neill to have it printed and distributed to all soldiers and to put out a training letter on the subject of prayer to all Third Army Chaplains to get all the men of the Third Army to pray for the weather to improve. Chaplain O'Neill typed Training Letter 5 and the training letter with the prayer cards reached all 486 Third Army chaplains, and every organization commander down to and including the regimental level between December 12 and 14.

Training Letter 5 not only encouraged the men to pray for the weather to improve, but it also asked them to pray for victory, to pray for the Army, and to pray for "the defeat of our wicked enemy whose banner is injustice and who's God is oppression."³⁰² Private First Class William Bull, with Company B in Marnach, remembered receiving the prayer card and his company commander's instructions to the men to pray for good weather and to pray they would

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

be successful in beating the Nazis. He said it was a reminder of why they were there, not that he needed any reminder.³⁰³

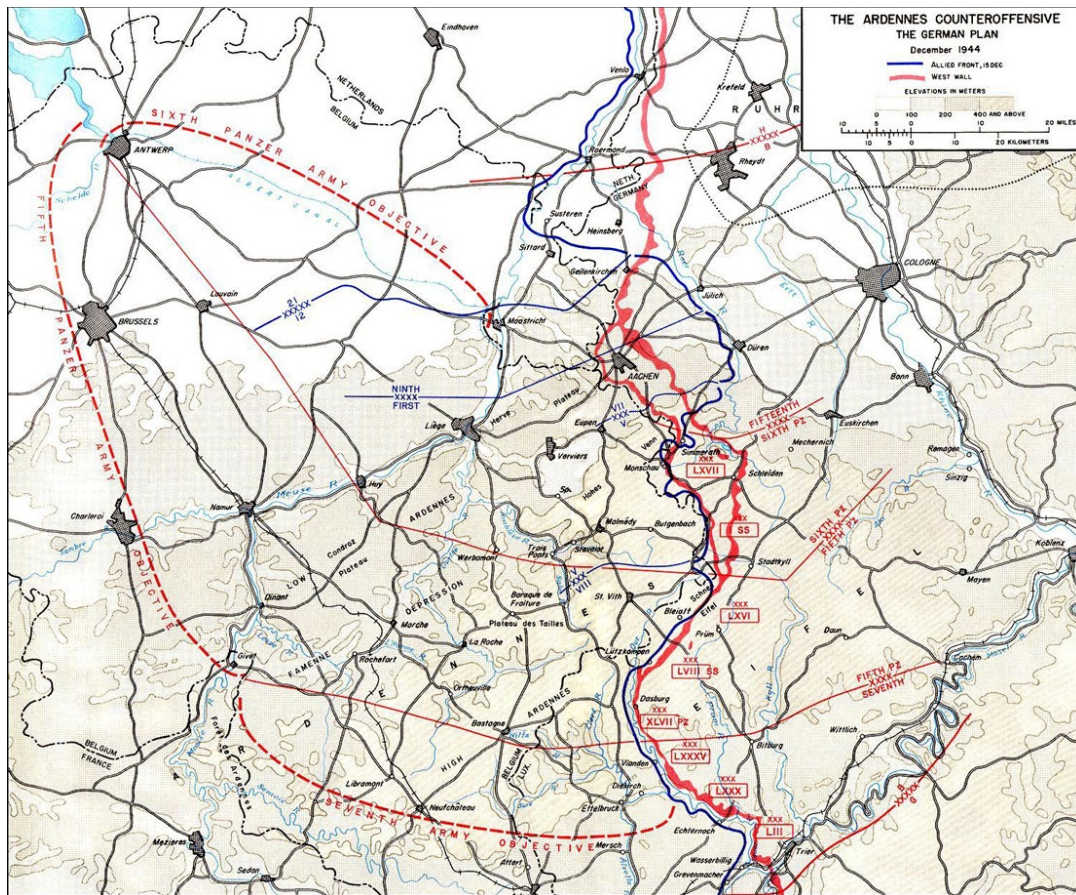
If the German offensive, code named *Wacht am Rhein* (The Watch on the Rhine is a German patriotic anthem), was to be successful it had to accomplish two important objectives. First, German assault companies had to dislodge the American defenders from their positions along the road leading from Ettelbruck/Diekirch in a northern direction towards the Belgian border near Weiswampach. The hard-surface highway (named Skyline Drive by the Americans) gave access to the key towns of Bastogne and St. Vith. The Germans had to reach the far side of the Clerf River before the Americans could react and reinforce the thinly stretched units. Secondly, engineers had to quickly install bridges strong enough to hold armor over the Our River.

According to the German plan, all of this had to be accomplished on the first day of the offensive, December 16, 1944. Once they reached the banks of the Clerf River, the Germans had an open shot at the major hub of the area road network in Bastogne. The successful penetration of the 28th Infantry Division lines would place the German elements in the American rear, where few forces existed to counter a determined German thrust.³⁰⁴

The German plan of attack was well developed and had at least some chance of success. The three German armies, the Fifth Panzer, Sixth Panzer, and Seventh Army of the XLVII Panzer Corps were the maneuver elements for the offensive. Map 8 shows the German plan for their Ardennes Counteroffensive, as they termed it.

³⁰³ William Bull, Company B, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by Walter A. Zapotoczny Jr., Bourscheid, Luxembourg, December 15, 2019.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³⁰⁴ General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger. "Seventh Army, 16 December 1944-16 January 1945." *European Theater Historical Interrogations, Foreign Military Studies, MS#A-934*, Historical Division, U.S. Army Europe, 1945. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 12.



Map 8 - The German Plan (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

The German Seventh Army on the southern flank was composed of infantry divisions with no armored support. Its mission was to protect the southern flank of the motorized and armored formations of the other two armies from an expected Allied counterattack from the south.³⁰⁵ The Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies were designed to be breakthrough and rapid forces which would race west to the Meuse River and then swing north to capture the deep-water port of Antwerp, Belgium.³⁰⁶

On the morning of December 16, 1944, shortly after 5:00 a.m., the so-called quiet sector in Luxembourg suddenly came to life with a heavy German artillery barrage falling all along the

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Christer Bergström, *The Ardennes 1944-1945: Hitler's Winter Offensive*. (Havertown: Casemate Publishers, 2016), 81.

28th Division front. The barrage was particularly intense in the Diekirch - Bastendorf area and in the Marnach - Fischbach area. The men of the 28th Division did not realize it at the time but this was the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. The victorious optimism of late summer, when home by Christmas seemed plausible, had given way to the realization that the Germans were still a tenacious foe – and there was a lot of fighting left to be done.

After the initial artillery barrage, the German assault continued with a massed infantry attack in some sectors and with strong combat patrols probing the line in others. Fighting was particularly heavy in the sectors of the 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 110th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry. The initial German infantry attacks were repulsed with heavy losses inflicted on the Germans. But, during the day the German build-up continued and pressure increased.³⁰⁷

On December 16, the 1st Battalion, 112th was located in the Lutzkampen-Harspelt area, the 2nd Battalion at Leiler, and the 3rd Battalion at Sevenig. At 7:45 a.m. German infantry was observed throughout the regimental sector. The attack came as a surprise. During the period of December 13 to December 15, considerable German truck activity was heard and noticed behind the German lines. This was considered to be the normal traffic necessary for the relief of German troops within the sector. Three weeks previously, the Germans had made such a relief which created the same sounds.³⁰⁸

In the 1st Battalion sector, the Germans attacked with their 1st Battalion, 156th Grenadier Regiment, 116th Panzer Division, and succeeded in penetrating between Company A and Company B. In the 3rd Battalion sector, the attack was launched by the 1st Battalion, 1130th

³⁰⁷ Bergström, 83.

³⁰⁸ “After Action Report for period 13 -20 December 1944, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, 15 January 1945.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Volksgrenadier Regiment and 560th Volksgrenadier Division, which penetrated the lines between Company I and Company K, overrunning the right flank platoon of Company L, and reaching the mortar positions, the 3rd Battalion Command Post, and a stone bridge that enabled a line of communications between the 2nd Battalion and the 3rd Battalion.³⁰⁹

During the day the Germans attacked with tanks and infantry in the 1st Battalion area and penetrated into the support positions, to the kitchens, and command post area. Positions were held and the Germans were repulsed but pockets of Germans existed throughout the battalion area. Frank Olsen, Company A, 1st Battalion, remembered thinking, “Oh no, you don’t, you’re not going through here. We carried out the order they told us - stay to the end - and that is what we did.”³¹⁰

Company C, 103rd Engineers and a composite company from the regimental training area counterattacked to force back the German pockets and the situation was temporarily restored. A counterattack was launched by the 2nd Battalion, less one company, in the 3rd Battalion sector, and their situation was restored. The battalions were again attacked by the German 156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 116th Panzer Division supported by seven tanks in the vicinity of Lutzkampen, and by one battalion of infantry in the vicinity of Sevenig. Both attacks were repulsed with heavy German losses.³¹¹

Late in the afternoon, the Germans employed seven tanks against the 1st Battalion area to overwhelm their defensive positions. The assault was unsuccessful, and one tank was knocked out by a mine. Just before dark, a few German tanks, with flame throwing devices attacked the

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ Platoon Sergeant Frank Olsen, Company A, 1st Battalion. *Interview by 28th Division History Detachment*, Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA, December 1988.

³¹¹ “S-3 Journal, 150001A Dec 1944 to 162400A Dec 1944, 112th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

112th troops in the vicinity of Lutzkampen. It was estimated that during the day more than 400 German troops were killed, and eighty-nine captured.³¹²

Private First Class Charles Haug wrote in 1949 about his experiences that winter. Haug recalled that the evening of December 15 came just as all the other evenings had come. Their usual patrol went out in front of their lines and reported back that they had heard or seen nothing.³¹³ Of the 190 men defending the town of Lutzkampen on December 16, he was one of the twenty-five who survived the Battle of the Bulge without being killed, wounded, or captured.³¹⁴

The next morning, Haug was on guard duty from 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. and remembered wishing that it would soon be 6:00 a.m. so he could go back and sleep a little bit longer. Little did he know that the little sleep he got that night was the last real sleep he would get for the next ten days. At 5:10 a.m. the sky was illuminated by flares attached to white parachutes with an artillery barrage that followed. Haug was a messenger for his platoon. From 7:00 a.m. to about 7:30 a.m. there was complete silence in front of Haug's position. It was still semi-dark, except for the light beams coming from the German lines which were aimed into the sky.³¹⁵

A few minutes after 7:30 a.m., Haug experienced what he called perhaps the biggest hair-raising scare of his Army career. Out of the still darkness, he remembered, came the awfulest screaming and yelling one would ever want to hear. The Germans were advancing and screaming "like a bunch of wild Indians."³¹⁶ They came to within fifty feet of Haug's position when the 112th men started firing. The Germans took cover in the ditch of the road they were advancing

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ Charles Haug, *Courageous Defenders: As I Remember It*. Self-published, 1996. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 17.

³¹⁴ 28th Division Historical Summary, 236.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

on. As dawn started to break, Haug and his fellow soldiers could see where the Germans were located. During the first half hour of the battle the Germans were easy to spot and many were killed. The men of the 112th had beaten back the first wave of the German attack but the Germans continued their pressure and the American lines began to crumble. Haug recalled that they still had some faith in the American Army though, and they prayed that other outfits in the rear would be able to stop the Germans and push them back.³¹⁷

Early on the morning of December 17, after a heavy artillery barrage, the German 60th Panzer Regiment of the 116th Panzer Division attacked with eighteen tanks along the Lutzkampen-Harspelt ridge in the direction of Ouren. Bitter fighting ensued during the day and finally after dark the Germans infiltrated into Ouren. Fifteen German tanks were disabled and 186 prisoners were taken during the fight. The Americans received orders to withdraw west of the Our River, and during the night of December 17, assumed positions in the Beiler-Leiler-Lansdorn area with the Regimental Command Post in Weiswampach. During the day on December 18, a company of German infantry supported by two tanks attacked between Leiler and Lansdorn. The attack was repulsed with fifteen prisoners taken. The next day, the 112th Regiment was pulled back to the vicinity of Huldange where it was attached to the 106th Infantry Division protecting its left flank.³¹⁸

As a result of action during the withdrawal, Lieutenant Colonel William F. Train, Executive Officer of the 112th Infantry was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry. Train was in command of a rear guard task force covering the movement of trucks, jeeps, and tank destroyers. Suddenly, a German tank force churned over the rolling hills. The tank destroyers halted and swung their guns to meet the on-rushing Germans. In the ensuing battle, the American convoy

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 18.

³¹⁸ 112th After Action Report.

was stalled. Vehicles tried desperately to dart out of the line of fire as the tank destroyers and Panzers hurled shells at each other. Dashing past the firing guns and exploding shells, Train gathered up scattered elements of the convoy, reorganized the vehicles, and directed the flow of traffic over another route.³¹⁹

The Germans threw more tanks into the fray. While the tank destroyers were engaging, one attacking tank unit from another Panzer force attempted to outflank Train's convoy from the front. The convoy swung off the road and bounced over plowed fields, but a half-frozen marsh lay ahead. The leading vehicle plunged into the axle-deep mire, helplessly trapped by the soft mud. Realizing that the marshland would be converted into a death trap for the men and vehicles if discovered by the roving Panzers, Train gathered together a few vehicles and led them back over an open road in plain view of the Germans. Train's gamble was to divert the German's attention long enough for the bogged down vehicles to be rescued and permit the main body of the convoy to pick a different route of withdrawal and enable the 112th men and vehicles to reach the safety of Huldange.³²⁰

Train's decoy convoy raced boldly down an open road and were quickly spotted by prowling German tanks. Believing them to be the initial convoy, they closed in for the kill. Train stopped the smaller convoy and the men took cover. The armor-piercing shells of the German tanks disintegrated the decoy vehicles. Train's plan had worked. While the Germans were busy raking the decoy convoy, the main convoy was rapidly withdrawing toward friendly lines. Train

³¹⁹ William F. Train, Lieutenant Colonel. *Silver Star Award*, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. 28th Division Press Release, March 21, 1945. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

led the men from the decoy convoy across the German terrain on foot and reached friendly territory without a casualty.³²¹

Sacrifice came from not only infantry soldiers and leaders, but also from communications personnel. For example, Private First Class Darius E. Berkey, who was acting message chief for the 1st Battalion, operated a SCR 300 backpack-mounted radio from a house under German fire from 10:00 a.m. on December 16 to 10:00 a.m. on December 18. After being shelled out of one house, he entered an adjacent one which subsequently received eighteen hits from a German tank at point blank range.³²² Before they withdrew, the 112th Infantry Regiment inflicted estimated casualties on the Germans of 1,600, including over two hundred prisoners taken and successfully evacuated.³²³

At the beginning of the German attack, the 109th Infantry Regiment headquarters was located at Ettelbruck. Its 2nd Battalion headquarters was located at Bastendorf, with Company E in the vicinity of Fuhren, Company F in the vicinity of Walsdorf and Company G at Brandenburg. The 3rd Battalion headquarters was located at Bettendorf, with Company I in the vicinity of Reisdorf, Company K in the vicinity of Hosdorf and Company L in Bettendorf. The 1st Battalion was in reserve located in Diekirch.³²⁴

Shortly after 5:00 a.m. on December 16, a heavy artillery barrage started, falling on the entire 109th Regimental front, then held by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. At 8:20 a.m. both battalions reported strong German patrols operating on the west bank of the Our River in the

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Warrant Officer Donald H. Wadsworth, Communications Officer, 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment. "After Action Interview, Montfaucon, France, January 15, 1945." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³²³ 112th Infantry. *Presidential Unit Citation*, 17 August 1947 at Fort Indiantown Gap. 28th Infantry Division Archives (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³²⁴ "28th Infantry Division Historical Summary, 109th Infantry Regiment." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

vicinity of Vianden and Bettendorf. Company E, 2nd Battalion, reported strong German infiltrations around their right flank in the vicinity of Longsdorf. Company G was ordered to move from its position in Brandenburg to the right flank of Company F, which held the high ground northeast of Brandenburg. This was accomplished and several strong German attacks were repulsed.³²⁵

During the initial stages of fighting in the 109th sector, Lieutenant Colonel James C. Rosborough, 107th Field Artillery Battalion commander, organized and led a task force to relieve the pressure on one of his surrounded batteries. The artillery commander personally led a platoon of infantry and two tanks, charged the German positions firing his submachine gun and at the same time directed the fire of the two tanks. In the counterattack, the Germans lost one hundred fifty killed and forty captured. Lieutenant Colonel James C. Rosborough was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions.³²⁶

In another action, Captain Paul F. Gaynor was directing his anti-tank company into defensive positions when the Germans struck. In the ensuing battle, 109th units became scattered, surrounded, and disorganized. Holding a house by himself, Captain Gaynor killed eight Germans who were supporting a tank with his carbine rifle. When the tank opened fire blasting the house into rubble in an attempt to trap the lone American officer, Gaynor darted across an open field while German shells tore the ground around him. Reaching the high ground just outside of Diekirch, he discovered only a battered, disorganized force holding the ground. Fearing that the Germans might suspect the strength of his unit, he ran along the hill side firing

³²⁵ “G-3 Journal, 160001A Dec 1944 to 162400A Dec 1944, Headquarters 28th Infantry Division.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³²⁶ “28th Infantry Division Public Relations Press Releases, 1944-45.” *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing Cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

his pistol in the air to convince the Germans that a powerful force opposed them. For his extraordinary gallantry, Captain Gaynor was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.³²⁷

First Lieutenant Moe Katz won the Bronze Star for heroism. Acting as a forward artillery observer for the 108th Field Artillery Battalion, Katz was attached to the 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry in the Ettelbruck sector. Moving forward to the Company L forward positions, Katz spotted a large German column of regimental strength moving along a road. He radioed the information back to his battalion and to the 109th Infantry's regimental commander. A huge trap was formed and sprung on the unsuspecting Germans, who were moving in as if in a parade formation. At a given signal, all American artillery in the sector fired at the same time, killing an estimated 2,000 Germans. Shortly after, Lieutenant Moe Katz had achieved enough points to be sent home but volunteered for Pacific duty. He said, "I'd feel sort of silly going back to civilian life before this thing blows over."³²⁸

At 2:25 p.m. the 1st Battalion lost contact with Company E, which was isolated in Führen and under attack by a battalion of German infantry. Company A from the 1st Battalion and one platoon of medium tanks was sent north to Longsdorf in an attempt to establish contact with Company E. They ran into a strong German position supported by three Tiger tanks south of Longsdorf and were held up. At 7:00 p.m., Company C was moved from Diekirch to positions at Brandenburg. During the day, the 3rd Battalion held firm and repulsed several heavy German attacks in its sector.³²⁹ In conjunction with Company D's 1st and 2nd Platoons of heavy machine

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ Moe Katz, First Lieutenant, 108th Field Artillery Battalion. *Bronze Star Award*. Boston port of debarkation, 1945. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

guns, the 81mm mortar platoon leaders helped to consolidate and reorganize the unit to resist the Germans.³³⁰

The second day of the German counteroffensive, December 17, opened with a terrific barrage of artillery in the 109th Infantry sector that started at 5:30 a.m. and lasted until 6:30 a.m. At that time, the 3rd Battalion reported a German attack of approximately two companies in strength. Stiff fighting ensued and the Germans were repulsed. The 2nd Battalion was attacked at the same time in the area of Vianden - Fuhren by a company of infantry and three Tiger tanks. This attack was repulsed with heavy German casualties and two battalion tanks knocked out. Company A with a platoon of tanks was still unable to contact Company E, meeting strong formations of German tanks and infantry south of Longsdorf. The battalion Anti-Tank Company, which had taken up positions along the road running south from Tandel at the Diekirch - Bettendorf junction, became heavily engaged with approximately two companies of German infantry and three tanks. The attack was repulsed with 150 Germans killed and twenty-five captured.³³¹

A large force of German infantry infiltrated into the gun position area of Battery A, 107th Field Artillery and Battery C, 108th Field Artillery, which brought the attack under direct fire of their howitzers. With the aid of a platoon of infantry and two tanks, the attack was repulsed with heavy German losses. Radio communications was reestablished with Company E, still isolated in Fuhren, between the hours of 1:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Company B with four tanks attempted to link up with Company E, but by 11:00 p.m. they had not accomplished their mission. The

³³⁰ "Battle Record of Company D, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³³¹ "109th Infantry Regiment Historical Record, Period of German Counterattack in Luxembourg, December 16-18, 1944, 28th Infantry Division." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Germans continued heavy interdiction artillery fire on all positions during the night and extensive patrols and infiltration continued. But as the third day dawned, the lines remained unchanged.³³²

On December 18, Company K, 2nd Battalion linked up with Company A, 1st Battalion and organized a defense on the high ground south of Longsdorf. At daylight, the Germans heavily engaged the 3rd Battalion and one platoon of its Company K was overrun. Company C, 1st Battalion, holding positions around Brandenburg, was heavily attacked but repulsed the Germans with no loss of ground. By 12:00 p.m., Company B, 1st Battalion, had not been successful in reaching Company E, 2nd Battalion, meeting heavy resistance south of Fuhren. Some members of Company B's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoons made their way to within 200 yards of Fuhren and reported no friendly troops alive in the town. Company E was presumed lost.³³³

The 9th Armored Division, on the 109th Infantry right flank withdrew to positions in the vicinity of Ermsdorf at 5:00 p.m. This left both of the 109th Infantry Regiment flanks wide open, so a withdrawal to positions on the high ground north and east of Diekirch was executed during the evening of December 18. The withdraw placed the 109th Regiment on commanding terrain in a defensive position. German infantry and armor remained inactive during the withdraw. However, a heavy attack was made in the 3rd Battalion sector during the morning resulting in 300 Germans dead and eighty prisoners captured. As overwhelming German pressure mounted, the 109th Regiment received orders during the afternoon to pull back to new positions in order to

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*

cover the 9th Armored Division left flank. The 109th Infantry was then attached to the 9th Armored Division for future operations.³³⁴

By the aggressive defense of the 109th in successive delaying positions during the beginning of the German attacks, the left flank of the German drive at its base was exposed. The men of the 109th Infantry almost destroyed the entire German 915th and 916th Volks Grenadier Regiments and a major part of the 914th Volks Grenadier Regiment of the 352nd Volks Grenadier Division. Had they not held their ground as long as they did, elements of the 352nd Volks Grenadier Division would have more than likely reached the strategic high ground in the vicinity of Heinerscheid - Grosbous - Merzig - Berg, from which they could have launched an attack into the assembly areas of the 80th and 26th U.S. Divisions. By the 109th securing and holding their positions, the U.S. III Corps was able to launch a successful counterattack against the south flank of the German offensive at its base.³³⁵

Of the front line positions held by the 28th Infantry Division, the 110th Infantry Regiment occupied the longest and therefore the most tenuous line. The size of the assigned defensive sector precluded the establishment of a cohesive defensive line. Forward elements of the 110th Regiment consisted of only two battalions of the three, because the 2nd Battalion was retained by the division as its only reserve. Thus, two battalions were stretched over a ten mile front, a length normally occupied by an entire division, and were placed precisely in the middle of the German Fifth Panzer Army's line of march. In practice, this meant that various companies

³³⁴ "28th Infantry Division Historical Record, Period of German Counterattack in Luxembourg, and Belgium, 109th Infantry Regiment." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

that were located in strong points and patrols that were regularly sent out to provide a screen in the large gaps between the towns held by the 110th units.³³⁶

Despite their small numbers, the 110th Regimental Combat Team was assigned a significant task. Its main defensive line ran along Skyline Drive. The road was only a couple of miles west of the Our River. The defensive positions were designed to cover four main east-west roads which ran from the Our River to Skyline Drive and then proceeded west into the heart of Belgium.³³⁷ The inability of armored units to move cross country due to the Ardennes Forest, necessitated the Fifth Panzer Army to capture and exploit this road network in order to advance.³³⁸

The three divisions of the German XLVII Panzer Corps, two of which were armored, had what seemed to be a fairly easy task to dislodge the two 28th Division battalions stretched over an area too large to hold. The 110th Infantry control of this road network and the German desire to capture it, and to move on to Bastogne, would thrust the men of the 110th Regiment into a major role during the first few days of the Battle of the Bulge. Orders from the Division were in effect that every unit and installation was to hold and fight it out at all costs. With that spirit the first day was one of fanatic resistance.³³⁹

At the beginning of the German attack, the 110th Infantry Regiment headquarters was located at Clervaux. Service Company was located at Weicherdange. Cannon Company was located at Munshausen and the Antitank Company was located at Hoscheid. The 1st Battalion Headquarters was located in Urspelt, with its Company A in Heinerscheid, Company B in

³³⁶ *VIII Corps After Action Report, 6 April 1945.* (Washington DC: National Archives and Record Administration), 3.

³³⁷ Bergström, 81.

³³⁸ John DeVore, "Armor Under Adverse Conditions." *Committee and Officers Advanced Course.* (Fort Knox: The Armored School, 1948-1949), 2.

³³⁹ Zapotoczny, 45.

Marnach, Company C in Munshausen, and Company D in Grindhausen. The 2nd Battalion Headquarters was located in Donnange, with its Company E in Boxhorn, Company F in Eselborn, Company G in Lullange, and Company H in Boevange. The 3rd Battalion Headquarters was located in Consthum, with Company I in Weiler, Companies K and B and 103rd Engineers in Hosingen, and Company L in Holzthum.³⁴⁰

By this time, the 110th Infantry Regiment had been upgraded to a Regimental Combat Team, which meant that it was supplied with additional support troops, including armor. After replacing the losses from the Hürtgen Forest Battle and adding additional personnel, the regiment reached a strength of about five thousand men. The standard for a U.S. Army regiment at the time was slightly more than three thousand.³⁴¹

The mission of dislodging the 28th Division defenders from Skyline Drive was given to the German 26th Volksgrenadier Division and the 2nd Panzer Division. The 26th Volksgrenadier Division was to quickly cross the Our River, and while engineers were bridging the river for the Panzer Divisions to follow, the 26th Volksgrenadier was to overrun the positions held by the 110th and advance to the Cleft River. Once this ground had been secured, the Panzer Division was to race westward and secure Bastogne. According to Generalmajor Heinz Kokott, Commander of the 26th Volksgrenadier Division:

Success or failure of the entire operation depends on an incessant and stubborn drive westward and northwest. The forward waves of the attack must not be delayed or tied down by any force of resistance. Bastogne should fall on the second day of the offensive or at least be encircled by then.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 50.

³⁴¹ Bergström, 81.

³⁴² Generalmajor A.D. Heinz Kokott, "The 26th Volksgrenadier Division in the Ardennes Offensive." *European*

On the morning of December 16 at shortly after 5:00 a.m. the entire 110th Infantry Regiment front was subjected to a heavy artillery barrage for approximately 30 minutes. From 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m., it diminished slightly. From 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. it again increased in intensity. At 7:30 a.m. an attack was made by German infantry along the entire regimental front. German armor and more infantry rapidly followed this. As the day progressed, the German build-up in infantry, armor, and artillery was rapid. Communications gradually diminished between the American units as most wire lines were cut early in the day and radio was depended upon for communications.³⁴³

In the small village of Weiler, Company I, less one platoon in Wahlhausen, was in defensive positions when the German offensive started on December 16 early in the morning. In the early light the patrol sighted a German force of about two hundred men stealthily approaching Weiler through a draw running between the positions of two platoons. Carbine and M-1 rifle fire from the patrol ripped into the German infantry column. The Germans threw themselves behind any cover they could find and laid down such a heavy volume of return fire that the patrol was forced to withdraw to a nearby antitank position and seek cover there. At 7:10 a.m., Company I in Weiler observed another German force of about two hundred men moving West along the draw between Weiler and Company I's 2nd Platoon. The Germans were riddled with small arms and machine gun fire and plastered with 81mm mortar fire. They suffered heavy casualties and hurriedly withdrew. As the day wore on, the attacking Germans exerted continual pressure.³⁴⁴

Theater Historical Interrogations, Foreign Military Studies, MS# B-040, Historical Division, U.S. Army Europe, 1946. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 12.

³⁴³ "28th Infantry Division Historical Record, Period of German Counterattack in Luxembourg, and Belgium, 110th Infantry Regiment." *World War II Unit Records, Record Group 405, Box 8596.* (College Park: National Archives and Records Administration II).

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Sergeant Thomas Meller's observation post was behind the enemy lines now. He and a companion had captured two Germans who needed medical attention. Meller moved the group to an abandoned farmhouse where a medic bandaged the German's wounds. One of the Germans thanked him for not shooting him and also for dispensing medical care. "I wish to repay your kindness by saving your life and the lives of your men," he said in English. "You have done a commendable job here. There are three hundred companies of three hundred men each, coming down this road. They will take this position. Surrender now and save your life and the lives of your men." Sergeant Meller politely declined, as he thought that the reason he was here was not to surrender, but to defeat the Nazis. Meller and his men were eventually captured by the approaching Germans.³⁴⁵

The ammunition situation of the 1st Platoon at the 3rd Battalion observation post became so critical that a call for resupply and tank support was put through to 3rd Battalion Headquarters at about 3:00 p.m. By nightfall there was still no sign of the tank platoon which was supposed to bring the ammunition. By then the men at the observation post and in the 1st Platoon positions were down to their last few rounds of ammunition. Lieutenant Carl A. Fisher, platoon leader of the 1st Platoon, took the only course left. He called for artillery fire directly on the 1st Platoon and the observation post. Lieutenant Fisher was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions. Despite the requested artillery fire, the 1st Platoon positions and the Battalion observation post were overrun. A few of the men from the 1st Platoon managed to work their way back to other American positions. Only one man from the observation post escaped.³⁴⁶

Second Lieutenant Jacob P. Welc was awarded the Bronze Star for his action in Weiler.

³⁴⁵ "3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry After Action Report." *World War II Unit Records, Record Group 407, Box 8586.* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives).

³⁴⁶ Zapotoczny, 92.

Welc (then an anti-tank squad leader) and his gun squad were attached to Company I, which was located in a forward position along the battalion front. Although superior German forces encircled the town, Welc personally took control of an antitank gun and sent round after round of high explosive ammunition into the midst of the onrushing German infantry. When the supply of high explosive ammunition was exhausted, he started firing armor-piercing shells, and is credited with killing or wounding four Germans. When his position was overrun, he withdrew his men and conducted a house-to-house battle until they reached the rest of Company I, defending the center of town.³⁴⁷

At 8:00 a.m., Company B, 1st Battalion, reported they were being attacked by a German force estimated at seventy men. All of the Company B men were in prepared positions and still holding. At 8:50 a.m. Company B reported seeing 300 German troops northwest and southwest of Marnach. After contact was lost with Company B, Company A was ordered to send a patrol to Fischbach to link up with Company B. At 10:00 a.m. Company C was ordered to attack the Germans in Company B's area, as the patrol from Company A was pinned down by German fire in Fischbach and had to withdraw, reporting that 150 Germans were coming up the road to their position. Company C was not able to attack in the Company B area as they became engaged in a considerable fight short of Marnach.³⁴⁸

At 11:20 a.m., the battalion ordered two platoons of tanks to proceed from Munshausen to Marnach to link up with Company C and clear resistance. One platoon of tanks went to Marnach and contacted Company C at 4:00 p.m. The other tank platoon returned to Munshausen. At 4:30 p.m., Company D was ordered to move from Grindhausen to Reuler, just east of

³⁴⁷ Jacob P. Welc, Second Lieutenant, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. *Bronze Star Award*, April 19, 1945. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³⁴⁸ 28th Infantry Division Historical Record, 110th Infantry.

Clervaux. The last communication with Company B was made at 6:15 p.m. They were presumed lost. At 6:30 p.m. Company A reported Germans to their south and north, proceeding west.³⁴⁹

Private Ralph Obuchowski, 103rd Engineer Battalion, thought going to Hosingen was like going to Heaven. The town had not yet suffered the ravages of war. It was intact, peaceful, and quiet. There were hot baths, warm beds, and indoor plumbing. Except for pulling guard duty occasionally, there was plenty of time to read, relax, and catch up on letter writing in comfort. The war seemed hundreds of kilometers away. But Hosingen was on the front line.

Private Obuchowski recalled, “Out of Heaven it turned into Hell on Saturday morning, December 16.” He and another private were assigned to guard duty. Their station was at a point near the church. Shortly after getting off guard duty, an artillery barrage opened up. Obuchowski and some others decided to take shelter in a cellar. Forty-five minutes later, when the barrage let up, they returned to their quarters to find them completely destroyed. A large piece of shrapnel had penetrated the mattress on Obuchowski’s bed.³⁵⁰ Later in the morning Obuchowski’s squad was assigned to keep the Germans from attacking across an open field. Armed with their M-1 rifles, they took cover in a barn and fired on the advancing Germans. They were able to repel the attack but started receiving fire from German mortars. After dark, they made their way back to the center of the town looking for others from their squad and platoon. By daylight on December 17, it was obvious that things had worsened. They could hear German small arms fire. Still left to their own devices, they decided to stay in the building where they had slept to repel any German attempts to take over the building. Just before dark, the Germans attacked, but Obuchowski’s squad pinned them down. When it got dark, they retreated.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Private Ralph Obuchowski, 103rd Engineer Battalion, 28th Infantry Division. *Unpublished Memoirs*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 2-3.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Early in the next morning, they heard machine gun fire just down the street. They were told that Captain William Jarrett, the company commander, after consulting with other officers, decided to surrender. The water was gone, ammunition was low, and the Germans had taken up positions around the town, with infantry and tanks. The men were ordered to destroy everything that might be of value to the Germans, including their weapons. After being searched and relieved of their watches, money and, in some cases shoes, the men were marched out of Hosingen toward the Our River and Germany. While the defenders of Hosingen did surrender, they held off the Germans for fifty-two hours.³⁵²

Holding at all costs meant that by the end of the day the situation for many units was costly. Some elements experienced heavy losses and could not continue to fight as a combat unit. The order to hold at all cost had a chilling effect on the soldiers but did not dampen their resolve. As darkness approached on December 16, many units were running low on ammunition, all were surrounded. Still, by their staunch defense, they were stalling, creating the time necessary for reinforcements to arrive. Furthermore, they were depriving the German mobile units of the speed they needed and, most important, time they could not afford to lose. General Hasso von Manteuffel, commander of the Fifth Panzer Army described the action of the first day:

The Clerf River was not reached at any point. The enemy was unquestionably surprised by the attack: he offered, however, in many places tenacious and brave resistance in delaying by skillfully fought combat tactics. His counterattacks, which started at once, partly supported by small, armored groups, resulted in many points in critical situations. The tenacious resistance of the enemy together with the roadblocks placed were the most essential reasons for

³⁵² *Ibid*, 6.

the slowing up of the attack whose timing was not going according to plan.³⁵³

The continued presence of the 110th Infantry Regiment strong points on the vital road networks completely upset the German timetable for the first day. General Kokott's division needed to cross the Clerf River by nightfall and its failure to do so was directly attributed to the stand of the men of the 110th Infantry. The 2nd Panzer needed to clear Clervaux and Marnach of American strong points to open the good hard surfaced road westward.³⁵⁴ By the end of the first day, they controlled neither.

In some respects, equally bad for the Germans, was the combative spirit of the men of the 110th. That combative spirit tempted many German units to diverge from the tactics they were ordered to use in the Ardennes. As noted by Charles MacDonald in *Time for Trumpets*, according to instructions from General Manteuffel and General Kokott, the men of the 26th Volksgrenadier were to use the 'Hutier' or infiltration tactics and bypass strong points of resistance, pressing on to their objectives.³⁵⁵ However, the Germans were all too often unable to avoid a fight. MacDonald wrote, "As they moved toward their objectives, they were like a man who tries to sneak past a hornet's nest, only to find the hornets swarming him so furiously that he has to stop and try to destroy them,"³⁵⁶ wrote MacDonald.

Early in the afternoon of December 16, when it became apparent that the Command Post would have to be evacuated, the Regimental Commander, Colonel Hurley T. Fuller, called for volunteers to remain with the wounded as they could not be moved. Major L. S. Frogner,

³⁵³ General Der Panzer A.D. Hasso von Manteuffel, "Fifth Panzer Army (Ardennes Offensive Preparations, 16 Dec 1944-25 Feb 1945." *European Theater Historical Interrogations, Foreign Military Studies, MS# 151A, Historical Division, U.S. Army Europe, 1946.* 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: : Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 29-31.

³⁵⁴ Zapotoczny, 51.

³⁵⁵ Charles MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 144.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 145. Note: Infiltration tactics was an idea developed by German General Oskar von Hutier in 1917. Instead of following preliminary bombardment with a massed infantry attack, small forces of experienced troops were sent forward to slip between enemy strong points on the front-line.

Regimental Surgeon, was the first to volunteer along with other medical personnel, and two Chaplains with their assistant Corporal Carl Montgomery.³⁵⁷

At 2:00 a.m. on December 17, Battery A, 109th Field Artillery, located at Hupperdange, reported German troops overrunning their position. The 1st Battalion lost contact with them at 2:45 a.m. At 8:30 a.m. four light tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion reported to the Battalion Headquarters, having made the run from Heinerscheid to Fischbach to Urspelt. They lost fourteen tanks along the road. At 1:00 p.m. Company A reported being attacked by seven German tanks at Heinerscheid. The battalion lost contact with Company A at 1:30 p.m. Company D reported a German company between their position at Reuler and Clervaux at 1:35 p.m. At 3:30 p.m. they reported they were abandoning Reuler. Contact was lost with Company D at 3:30 p.m. At 4:50 p.m. four German tanks supported by infantry opened fire on the Battalion Headquarters. At 5:30 p.m. all contact was lost with the 1st Battalion and they ceased to operate as a unit.³⁵⁸

Colonel von Lauchert, commander of the 2nd Panzer Division, was concerned about the division's slow rate of advance. Clervaux was a main objective of the tank drive on Bastogne because of its strategic location on the main highway leading to Bastogne. Clervaux should have fallen before noon on the 16th according to the original German timetable. Instead, the Americans continued to hold this key position on the morning of the 17th. A single 57mm antitank gun guarded the bridge near the railroad station where the road coming down from the north entered the town. It was at this antitank gun position that 1st Lieutenant Kenneth G.

³⁵⁷ Ralph Johnson, "A Soldier's Story (1941-1946)." *Unpublished Manuscript*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 11.

³⁵⁸ 28th Infantry Division Historical Record, 110th Infantry.

Maddox of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry, directed the gun crew in a last desperate attempt to keep the Germans out of Clervaux.³⁵⁹

The crew members of the antitank gun were so busy firing at the oncoming tanks that they did not notice an infiltrating German soldier moving up on the flank of the gun position. Lieutenant Maddox saw that the German soldier was about to fire at the gun crew and realized after he shouted a warning to them, that his men could not hear above the noise of the battle. There seemed only one other course of action to him. He leaped in front of his men, firing at the German grenadier. As he did so, Lieutenant Maddox received the full burst from the German's machine pistol in his chest. Maddox's sacrifice was in vain as a tank-infantry team from the 2nd Panzer's 2nd Grenadier Regiment obliterated the antitank gun and breached the defenses of Clervaux.³⁶⁰

Lieutenant Maddox, severely wounded, was evacuated by the Germans to one of their field hospitals, where he died of his wounds on Christmas Day. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day in Clervaux.³⁶¹ Private First Class William Bull remembered watching the tanks coming down the road along the narrow ravine that led into Clervaux. "I was scared. I wanted to get out of there, but I knew we had to stay and fight. We couldn't let the Germans beat us, so we prayed."³⁶²

At 6:00 p.m. German tanks and infantry had penetrated to within fifty yards of the Regimental Command Post and were firing into the Hotel Claravallis which was being used as the command post. At 7:30 p.m., the German infantry moved in and occupied the first floor of

³⁵⁹ Robert E. Phillips, *To Save Bastogne*. (Burke: Borodino Books, 1996), 135.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ Kenneth G. Maddox, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division. *Silver Star Award*. Individual Deceased Personnel File. (Fort Knox: U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Casualty & Memorial Affairs Operations Division, Department 450).

³⁶² William Bull, Company B, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by Walter A. Zapotoczny Jr.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

the hotel. The Regimental Headquarters personnel escaped through a second floor window and re-grouped in Allerborn on the morning of December 18.³⁶³

At 9:00 a.m. the 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry minus Company G was alerted for movement. At 1:00 a.m. on December 17, they were ordered to assemble in an area just south of Donnange. They received orders to secure a road junction a quarter of a mile north of Clervaux and to attack and capture Marnach. At 7:30 a.m. the Battalion crossed its line of departure, the Clervaux-Bastogne Road just north of Clervaux with Company F on the left and Company E on the right. Almost immediately, both companies were heavily engaged by German infantry and tanks. The Battalion plus supporting tanks and tank destroyers inflicted heavy losses on the Germans and advanced, retaking Reuler. At 4:00 p.m. German infantry supported by an estimated twenty tanks attacked, forcing both companies back approximately 500 yards, where they dug in about 200 yards west of Reuler.³⁶⁴

Ralph Johnson of the 110th Infantry recalled how his faith was tested during the Battle of the Bulge. “The peaceful village of Clervaux, Luxembourg took a look of a nightmare. Communications were impossible. The enemy quickly attacked our strongpoints and smashed its way into our center. The men rolled with the punch, fighting, falling back, defending each crossroad and strongpoint with everything they had. I had faith we would prevail though. We were fighting for the right reasons and God was on our side.”³⁶⁵

The German attack of tanks and infantry that destroyed Maddox’s gun position continued its advance capturing the Regimental Command Post. At 11:59 p.m. Colonel Hurley E. Fuller, the Regimental Commander, issued orders for the companies to break up into groups of squad

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Ralph Johnson, *A Soldier’s Story, 1941-1946, unpublished memoir.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 11.

size and withdraw west to Donnage, to assemble and await orders. There were a few men remaining in Clervaux by the evening of the 17th. In the castle across town, which dates back to the 12th century, the officers and men from the Regimental Headquarters Company and a scattering of other units were still holding out. On the morning of December 18, the defending force had run out of ammunition and parts of the castle were set ablaze by German artillery and tank fire. The group decided to surrender at 1:00 p.m.

By 7:00 a.m. on December 18, approximately seven officers and sixty men had arrived at the assembly area, in addition to the whole of Company G. Defensive positions were prepared in the vicinity of Donnage. At 8:00 a.m. the German infantry attacked from the northeast. The defending force was driven from their positions to near Hamiville. At 7:00 p.m. German tanks and infantry attacked through Hamiville southwest on the main highway, isolating the regiment. Another attack followed, overrunning the position. This was the last action of the 2nd Battalion as an organized force.³⁶⁶

In the 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry sector, Company I observed movement in the woods east of their position at 6:15 a.m. on December 16. They observed approximately 200 Germans infantry troops approaching Weiler from the east. The German column was fired on and dispersed. At 7:30 a.m. Company K reported that a few German infantry troops had infiltrated into Hosingen but were killed. At 10:30 a.m. Company L observed a German force south of Holzthum moving west to attack Consthum. Company L alerted Consthum and opened fire on them.³⁶⁷

After five attacks had been repulsed by using direct fire from 105mm howitzers from Battery C, 109th Field Artillery Battalion, and multiple .50-caliber machine guns from an

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

attached anti-aircraft unit, the Germans withdrew at 1:30 p.m. At 6:30 p.m. the Battalion observation post and the 1st Platoon of Company I were overrun by German tanks and infantry at Wahlhausen-strasse. In Weiler Company I had repulsed six attacks on the town, until the Germans completely surrounded the town. Company I split into two groups and attempted to fight their way north to Consthum, to join the 3rd Battalion. At 10:30 p.m. twenty men from Company I made their way into Consthum.

On December 17 at 2:30 a.m. two German tanks accompanied by infantry attacked Company L in Holzthum. Fighting continued in the town throughout the night and the German tanks and infantry were driven out of the town. At 3:30 p.m. Company L was ordered to withdraw from Holzthum and establish defensive positions around Consthum. German tanks clanked into the village. The tanks roared down the village street, methodically blasting gaping holes into houses, while supporting infantry sprayed the area with small arms fire. Company L's radio came on the air, "Town completely surrounded with enemy tanks and infantry. Running low on ammunition. Waiting further orders. Over." Major Harold F. Milton, Third Battalion commander, who had been trying to reach the company ordered the company commander to withdraw his men if possible. A reply came back on the radio, "We can't get out, but the Germans are going to pay if they try to get in." Early in the morning a young lieutenant came on the radio to report that his men were fighting from house-to-house with no ammunition except grenades. He said, "We've blown everything there is to blow except the radio, it goes next." And then over the headset came the sound of a man sobbing. "I don't mind dying. I don't mind taking a beating," said the lieutenant. "But I'll be damned if we'll give up to these bastards." The radio clicked off, and shortly before 12:00 p.m. went dead.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

At 1:00 a.m. Company K in Hosingen reported they were encircled and running low on ammunition. The Battalion Commander ordered Company K to attempt to withdraw to Consthum. Company K replied that it was impossible and that they would hold the position as long as possible. The last contact with Company K was at 10:07 a.m. They were presumed lost.

At 5:00 a.m. on December 18 a heavy artillery barrage fell on Consthum, now defended by the Battalion Headquarters Company, Company M (-), and Company L. Three German infantry attacks were repulsed during the morning. Staff Sergeant Edger E. Ridenour, Company L, volunteered to locate and destroy German tanks menacing his company's position. While repairing a damaged bazooka he had located in a nearby field, Sergeant Ridenour was conspicuously outlined in the bright glow of flares fired by the Germans. During the brightness of the flares, he noticed German tanks maneuvering into position on his right and a long column of German troops advancing toward the town. Lacking protective cover and armed with only a carbine rifle, he crawled back a few yards after the flares burned out and secured a 60mm mortar from an abandoned reconnaissance car.³⁶⁹ Plainly in the view of the Germans, Sergeant Ridenour held the mortar between his legs aiming only by the burst of his own weapons and fired at the advancing German unit until his ammunition supply was exhausted. By his courageous stand Sergeant Ridenour inflicted enormous casualties on the Germans and delayed the capture of Consthum. He was awarded the Silver Star for his actions.³⁷⁰ At 1:00 p.m. German tanks and infantry overran the defenses north and south of Consthum. At 1:30 p.m. the Battalion Commander ordered a withdraw to Kauthenbach. The Battalion then withdrew to Nocher and established a perimeter defense of the town.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Staff Sergeant Edger E. Ridenour, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry, 28th Infantry, *Silver Star Award*. (APO Europe, April 1945). (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ 28th Infantry Division Historical Record, 110th Infantry.

Before withdrawing, First Sergeant Sam J. Pizzo, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry earned the Silver Star for his actions. When a strong German force led by Tiger tanks surged toward the town, Sergeant Pizzo, without orders and acting on his own initiative, maneuvered to the forward edge of town with a bazooka in an attempt to delay the Germans armored advance. He was successful in halting the advancing tanks long enough for friendly artillery to demolish one of the tanks and force the others to retreat. Later when the security of the Battalion Headquarters became threatened by the Germans, Sergeant Pizzo bravely remained to destroy all secret documents despite the fact orders were given to evacuate. He escaped to the outer edge of town and while under fire erected a roadblock that delayed German vehicles sufficiently for friendly troops to escape entrapment.³⁷²

Even though the German assault was devastating, the American leaders did what they could to protect their men. For example, on December 18, Captain Anthony J. Nastasi, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, when a concentrated German attack overran his forward positions, he disregarded heavy German artillery fire and advancing German tanks, cleared his men from houses and installations in the area and directed them to the far edge of Consthum.³⁷³

In view of the wide area occupied, the resultant gaps between units, lack of depth to the positions, and absence of reserves, the 110th Regiment was able to mount local independent delaying actions against an overwhelmingly superior German force advancing through them. Small, isolated units and detachments of clerical, communications, and service personnel effected considerable disruption to the German plan of attack. In many instances the men held at all costs, to the point that there were no survivors. In his request for the Presidential Unit Citation

³⁷² Sam J. Pizzo, First Sergeant, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division. *Silver Star Award*, March 30, 1945. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³⁷³ 28th Infantry Division Historical Record, 110th Infantry.

for the 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division Commander Brigadier General Basil H. Perry wrote:

The conspicuous gallantry, heroism, and determination of the 110th Infantry to hold at all costs for nearly 96 hours without sleep, without food, without reinforcements and under the most adverse climatic conditions, upset the timetable of Rundstedt to reach Bastogne on the 16th of December as substantiated by maps and orders captured and forwarded to the VIII U.S. Corps, and contributed materially to the successful defense of Bastogne and to the defeat of the enemy in the Ardennes; and reflect the highest traditions of the Armed Forces.³⁷⁴

Stationed with the 28th Infantry was the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion with 3-inch towed guns. Company A and the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon supported the 109th Infantry Regiment in the area of Ermsdorf, Gilsdorf, Bettendorf, Reisdorf, Beaufort, and Saelborn. Company B and the 2nd Reconnaissance Platoon supported the 110th Infantry Regiment along the Heinerscheid-Marnach-Hosingen line. Company C had guns on both sides of the Our River supporting the 112th Infantry Regiment, its positions extending from Weiswampach to the vicinity of Lutzkampen. As the German offensive began, the men of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion contributed greatly to delay the Germans long enough for reinforcements to be brought up on the shoulders of the bulge. The 1st Reconnaissance Platoon in Marnach was encircled by the Germans but continued to hold a vital road network until the Germans employed tanks and infantry on the night of December 18. The battalion lost twenty-four of thirty-six towed guns, but

³⁷⁴ Basil H. Perry. "Recommendation: Unit Citation, 110th Infantry Regiment." Headquarters, 28th Infantry Division. APO # 26, 1945, 1-3. *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

destroyed twenty-eight German tanks, two 88mm guns, thirteen other vehicles and numerous other equipment, as well as killing several hundred Germans.³⁷⁵

Many of the 28th Infantry Division defenders recognized that they were surrounded and that there was no relief or escape, save as prisoners. Yet despite this sober conclusion, they continued to resist until there was simply no other means to resist. The stand of the men of the 28th Infantry Division had indeed been stubborn. In the first three days of fighting heavy casualties had been inflicted on the German forces. The exact toll they extracted from the Germans is difficult to determine. In 1979 the Army officially recognized that the 28th Infantry Division cost the Germans over 12,000 casualties in the Ardennes campaign.³⁷⁶

In a war, heroes and heroic actions are important and it is important to publicize them as the epitome of American valor and thus strengthen both units and the war effort. Bastogne, is a superb example of the American soldier, standing his ground and holding his position against all odds and winning. Conversely, it is recognized that valorous stands do not always result in holding one's position and emerging intact from the fray. Sometimes valorous actions result in the destruction of a command rather than its survival but the valorous act still produces an advantage for their country. In such a case their valor is no less deserving of recognition and study. Such was the case of the men of the 28th Infantry Division. They came to Europe to fight for freedom and the American way of life and did the best they could.

The historical record clearly shows that for the first three days of the Battle of the Bulge the men stood in their assigned positions denying the German Army clear access to the road

³⁷⁵ *History of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion*. Headquarters, 28th Infantry Division. APO # 408, 1945, 5-6.

³⁷⁶ "Certificate of special recognition of the 28th Infantry Division." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum). Note: A certification given to the division by the Secretary of the Army on May 19, 1979, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 28th Infantry Division.

networks that it so desperately needed. Without the desperate stand by the division, which had been so recently mauled in the Hürtgen Forest, the Germans would have, in all likelihood, been able to follow their schedule and would have achieved far more of their Ardennes offensive objectives. In fact, without the determined resistance of the 28th Infantry Division, there may never have been a defense of Bastogne by the 101st Airborne Division. As the months and years passed many of the veterans reflected on why they fought so heroically against the Nazis.

Chapter Eight

Motivating Factors in the Words of the Veterans

Many Americans viewed the issues at stake during World War II in terms of clearcut right and wrong: democracy against fascism, defense against aggression, good against evil. The country showed remarkable unity in support of a conflict that seemed good and just. Dissenters were few and silent. Stephen Ambrose captured their feelings, “At the core, the American citizen soldiers knew the difference between right and wrong, and they didn’t want to live in a world in which wrong prevailed.”³⁷⁷

The press corps that was stationed in Europe did their best to keep the American population informed of what their boys were doing overseas. Larry Newman, with the International News Service, who covered Patton’s Third Army and was embedded with the American troops in Belgium, wrote the article published in newspapers across America *A Saga of Gallant Men; How Heroic 28th Halted Nazis And Saved Our Armies*, on January 6, 1945. Two Pennsylvania war correspondents, Morley Cassidy with the *Philadelphia Sunday Evening Bulletin* and Ivan H. (Cy) Peterman from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, both who were embedded with the 28th Division told heroic stories of the men of the division.³⁷⁸ One such article written by Morley Cassidy ended up in the *Kansas City Star* newspaper. In his dramatic style he wrote, “They battled all day into the next. Then, late Sunday, encircled, their ammunition gone, they radioed their battalion that the situation was critical. They were ordered to withdraw if possible. Two company commanders radioed back. We can’t get out but will make them pay. They fought to the last man...”³⁷⁹ Cy Peterman wrote an article on November 16, 1944 about the 28th

³⁷⁷ Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day: June 6, 1944. The Climatic Battle of World War II*. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1994), 473.

³⁷⁸ Alice Flynn, *The Heroes of Hosingen: Their Untold Story*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.

³⁷⁹ Morley Cassidy, “The Week of a Thousand Battles, January 28, 1945.” *The Kansas City Star*.

Division in the Hürtgen Forest, titled *Great Unsung Battle of the 28th Division*, “In the Hurtgen Forest, that gloomy expanse below Aachen, where trees, terrain, and weather, even without entrenched Germans, make formidable opposition, and mud-slued roads and clinging snow penetrate like a plague in the bones, American troops fought a great but unsung battle for freedom.”³⁸⁰

Stephen Ambrose hypothesized, “Cause and country were as critical to the GIs as to the Civil War soldiers. The differences between them were not of feeling, but of expression. Civil War soldiers were accustomed to using words like duty, honor, cause, and country. The GIs did not like to talk about country or flag and were embarrassed by patriotic bombast. While they may not have said that they were fighting for the American way of life, they were all proud Americans and believed in their cause. They knew they were fighting for decency and democracy and they were proud of it and motivated by it.”³⁸¹

While few 28th Infantry Division veterans talked or wrote about the ideology of America’s involvement in the war or their specific religious beliefs, some did keep a diary during the war of their experiences. Others, participated in interviews and after action reports shortly after their battle experience. Others reflected on the reasons for fighting in interviews conducted by the U.S. Army European Theater Historical Section in September 1944 and January 1945. Still other veterans participated in interviews conducted by the 28th Division Historical Section in December 1988. Many soldiers commented about their reason for fighting in Wartime Logs, journals, after action reports, and diaries kept during the war.

The men of the 28th Division were reminded of why they were fighting by the actions of the German SS troops. Some German units, in particular the SS units, refused to take prisoners

³⁸⁰ Ivan H. (Cy) Peterman, “Great Unsung Battle of the 28th Division.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 16, 1944.

³⁸¹ Ambrose, 14.

during the Battle of the Bulge.³⁸² The most famous incident occurred near Malmédy, a Belgium village just a few miles above Luxembourg and west of the German border. Early on the afternoon of December 17 the Germans overran Battery B of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, all of whom promptly surrendered. After briefly interrogating the men, including medics wearing red crosses, they were lined up and gunned down with machine guns, rifles and pistols.³⁸³ Word of the massacre spread like wildfire in unit newsletters,³⁸⁴ even to the soldiers in the middle of their own fight, causing Americans to stiffen their defenses, eliminate surrender if possible, and strengthen their determination to destroy Hitler's army.³⁸⁵

American chaplains in Europe after D-Day did more than stay with their units during heavy combat. They worked alongside medics to care for the wounded and became litter bearers. After the massacre at Malmédy many chaplains discovered they could not turn the other cheek. Chaplain Leo Weigel told the men he was with that the SS was "a menace that should be exterminated now because it will not be checked any other way."³⁸⁶ Jesuit historian Donald F. Crosby discovered that the troops no longer viewed SS troops as well-trained elite fighting men. They now saw the storm troopers as evil animals deserving extermination.

Faith was an important and significant factor for the soldiers during World War II. In a 2004 article for *The Spokesman Review, Dallas Morning News*, writer Katharine Goodloe captured some reflections by war veterans on faith in God. These reflections were indicative of most of the men of the 28th Division. "When you're in combat, you pray for safety, you pray for

³⁸² Donald F. Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in WWII*. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 150.

³⁸³ "The Malmédy Massacre," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. (Washington, D.C.: The United States Memorial Holocaust Museum).

³⁸⁴ "Hobo, December 17, 1944, 28th Division G-2 News Flyer." *28th Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

³⁸⁵ Crosby.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

deliverance, you pray to stay alive. It's not always apparent how it's going to happen. It's a leap of faith,"³⁸⁷ commented Norman Ford. Jonnie Henderson said, "When I wasn't actually in combat, I was thanking the Lord for getting me through the day or asking his help to get through the next. When I stepped out of that foxhole and wasn't killed, I knew that the Lord was right there with me."³⁸⁸ Robert Brooks said, "We all had faith and knew that everything would work out. We had faith in our fellow man and in our military. We knew that we would overcome. And we had faith in God. We knew he was on our side." Henry Greenbaum recalled, "I always prayed every day, quietly, to myself, for God to help me make it another day. I never gave up my faith."³⁸⁹

Robert E. Merriam was the chief of the Ardennes section of the U.S. Army Historical Division, and had the opportunity to interview leaders, talk with German officers and to examine battle records on both sides. He recalled that "to the highly disciplined Germans, American normal unmilitary bearing, and apparent lack of discipline seemed completely contrary to their conception of a good soldier. The Germans felt that the American soldier was inexperienced, not completely interested in the war, and somewhat slipshod in his methods."³⁹⁰ These same Germans were unable to comprehend the sudden stiffening of the backbone, the complete change of attitude which occurred when the 28th Division seemed trapped. When the first hours of the Battle of the Bulge seemed like chaos, the German wrung their hands with glee and said, "Did

³⁸⁷ Katharine Goodloe, "War veterans, survivors reflect on faith in God." *The Spokesman Review*, May 29, 2004. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2004/may/29/war-veterans-survivors-reflect-on-faith-in-god/>. Accessed September 10, 2022.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Robert E. Merriam, *Dark December: The Full Account of the Battle of the Bulge*. (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Press, 1947). 75.

we not tell you that the Americans were cowards; did we not say they would wilt if surprised and overwhelmed?”³⁹¹

The Germans failed to understand the psychology of the American soldier. As the initial shock wore off, and terror and dismal uncertainty of those first hours diminished, a perceptible change swept through the 28th Division ranks. The grim truth suddenly dawned on the dazed troops and leaders. The war was far from over. Americans buckled down to the grim business of killing Germans in large numbers. The soldiers forgot for the moment their desire to get home and remembered why they were fighting.³⁹² The following vignettes are examples of how soldiers felt about why they were fighting. In each case, they reflect the concept of fighting for the American way of life. Their comments answer the question of what forces beyond camaraderie and cohesion influenced soldiers to resist the German offensive in the Battle of the Bulge.

Russell Hark was like many young men at the outset of war. Standing on the corner of Delevan and Main Streets in Buffalo, New York, on the afternoon of December 7, 1941. The gas station attendant suddenly came running out shouting, “The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.”³⁹³ The news led Hark to situations that he never thought he would find himself in. After the shock of the news went away, he became aware of the situation that the United States was in. America had to fight to defend the way of life that Hark and others became accustomed to. A few days later, Hark went to the draft board and asked when he would be called for active duty. They told him that his draft number would not be called until the next August. He asked if he could leave sooner, and a week later he received his notice. He was to report to the main post

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ Russell M. Hark, Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion. *Unpublished Memoir*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

office in Buffalo for his physical. He was sworn into the Army after he passed the exam. He left the next morning for basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.³⁹⁴

After eight weeks of training, he was sent to A.P. Hill Military Reservation, Virginia to the 626 Tank Destroyer Battalion. After training, he was assigned to the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion. They set sail for Wales and after five weeks, landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy on July 22, 1944. When the battalion arrived at an assembly area near Colombeires, France, they were attached to the 28th Division. Hark traveled with the 110th Regiment across France, supporting the regiment.³⁹⁵ After the attacks and withdrawal from the Siegfried Line, the 630th was moved to Elsenborn with the rest of the division. Soon he and his unit were in the Hürtgen Forest. After the division was pulled out and sent to the Luxembourg to the tiny hamlet of Enscherange. Hark stayed in a schoolhouse and did not bother to set up the guns since they were told they were in a quiet sector. On December 16, they were awakened by artillery and the start of the German onslaught.³⁹⁶

After firing at the Germans, they were eventually overcome and pulled back to Morhet, about eight kilometers from Bastogne. They had five of their thirty-six guns left and were attached to the 17th Airborne Division. It was very cold and all Hark had to wear was his leather combat boots. One day he received rubber shoes with leather tops. When he removed his combat boots, his feet were blue. The medics took him to an aid station. After his frozen feet healed, he went to a replacement center and then returned to his unit and found out that he had enough points to go home. In the replacement center General George Patton visited and gave the men a

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

speech about the necessity of winning the war. Here is an excerpt from his speech as Hark remembered it:

Men, all this stuff you hear about America not wanting to fight, wanting to stay out of the war, is a lot of bullshit. Americans love to fight. All real Americans love the sting and clash of battle. When you were kids, you all admired the champion marble shooter, the fastest runner, the big-league ball players and the toughest boxers. Americans love a winner and will not tolerate a loser. Americans play to win all the time. That's why Americans have never lost and will never lose a war. The very thought of losing is hateful to Americans.³⁹⁷

It appears that Patton repeated some of his 'Blood and Guts' speech that he delivered to his troops in England. Hark said that the men who listened to it loved every word of it. Russell Hark returned home, having done his duty and became a supervisor of heavy equipment for Niagara Mohawk Power Company in Buffalo, New York.³⁹⁸

Private First Class Louis Jurosek, Company A, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, kept a diary during the war. He wrote about being at an outpost just east of Heinerscheid, about a mile from the German border. Having no real rank, he was an old timer looking after the new replacements. At 5:30 a.m. the Germans opened up with a heavy artillery barrage from Echternach in the south to Monschau in the north. Jurosek and his new replacements responded as best as they could against the overwhelming German attack. Jurosek said he would constantly have to remind his scared replacements of why they were fighting. When it became obvious that

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

their position was going to be overwhelmed, Jurosek gathered his group of replacements around him and started a fighting retreat toward St. Vith.³⁹⁹

They were constantly engaged in skirmishes with the Germans as they made their way through the woods. During one of the skirmishes outside of St. Vith, Jurosek was wounded by some shrapnel from a German 88mm round. The shrapnel penetrated his upper right leg. He would not leave his replacements until they were safely in the hands of a sergeant at the mess facility.⁴⁰⁰ After medical attention he returned to service and continued on with the 110th Regiment. Except for recuperating for fourteen days from his leg wound, Louis Jurosek was in action with the 110th Regiment from July 22, 1944 to May 9, 1945. He wrote in his diary that he was determined to beat the Nazis; they could not win. He made it back home to Detroit, Michigan on August 2, 1945.⁴⁰¹

Richard F. Leech was the company commander of Company D, 109th Infantry. He started keeping a journal of sorts up until the end of the war. After many battles across France and in the Siegfried Line, his unit became stymied for approximately two weeks. They were pulled out of the line and after a brief rest they were sent northward to the Hürtgen Forest to relieve the 9th Division who had been held up in the vicinity of Vossenack, Germeter, and Schmidt. After several days of fighting and crawling in and out of the basements of houses in Vossenack and Germeter, the 109th Regiment was ordered to launch an attack to the northeast to the town of Hürtgen.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Louis Jurosek, Company A, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Unpublished Diary*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² Richard F. Leech, Captain, Company D, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. *Unpublished Journal*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum.)

The attack was through heavy forest. Leech went along with Lieutenant Colonel Dan Strickler, regiment commander and his headquarters group, which was following Company C, commanded by Captain John Ritter, so that Leech could call a mortar fire ahead of the battalions as it advanced. Leech had a radio operator and several runners with him. About a mile after they left to go into the forest, they came across Captain Ritter who had just been shot through the mouth. He was on his feet and gargling with Cognac and spitting blood and broken teeth, but still leading his men and directing the company. Lieutenant Colonel Strickler ordered him to immediately turn over his command of the company to someone else and go to the rear. Leech found out later that Ritter did not go and kept on fighting.⁴⁰³ Leech and the others knew why they were there.

Leech's group advanced another mile within sight of the town of Hürtgen. The remaining Germans that they had not killed were flushed out of the forest and across the fields. Leech's group held up at the edge of the forest to regroup and reorganize. Many of the men were completely lost and separated from their units and they flushed the Germans out through the fallen trees. They were then hit with a heavy German artillery barrage. Leech hit the ground as did everyone else until the barrage was over.⁴⁰⁴

When the barrage lifted, Leech started to get up and found that his left elbow would not work. He looked down and saw a hole in his jacket where a piece of shrapnel had pierced through. Leech made his way back to the company command post and found his bed roll had been riddled with a mortar burst right where he had slept the night before. He turned over command of Company D and his driver drove him to the aid station. Richard Leech made in

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

home to Colorado Springs, Colorado and became the president of the Colorado Association of Real Estate Brokers.⁴⁰⁵

The fighting men of the 28th Division were not the only ones there to defeat the Germans. Ruth Puryear was a nurse with the 107th Evacuation Hospital that supported the 28th Division. She kept a journal during the war and wrote about her experiences. In September 1944 they had a long drive through France, Belgium and Luxembourg. In October they opened their hospital in Clervaux. Their staff consisted of forty doctors, forty nurses and 205 soldiers with tents for four hundred beds. In October and November, they had terrible rain and mud and in December there was snow.⁴⁰⁶ On the night of December 15, Ruth and another nurse went to the latrine tent in the forest. They thought they heard German voices. Her friend was so upset that she let her flashlight fall into the latrine hole. A few weeks later a military policeman came into the hospital and said he had passed through an area that must have been used by a special unit because they had an illuminated latrine.⁴⁰⁷

On December 16, the hospital staff were woken in the middle of the night and were ordered to put warm clothes on as the Germans were attacking. They heard German tanks in the distance. No one wanted to leave as they were there to support the troops. Finally, they decided to leave, abandoning everything but their patients. It was very cold that night as they traveled to an old castle in Libramont, Belgium. Other units helped them with supplies until they were able to get re-supplied. The ballroom of the castle was used as a surgery room. In one room there were all kinds of animal heads on the wall. It was in this room that the nurses attached the

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ Ruth Puryear, 107th Evacuation Hospital. *Unpublished Journal*. (Munshausen, Luxembourg: Cercle D'Etudes Sur La Bataille Des Ardennes).

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

plasma bottles for the wounded to the antlers and heads of animals. They worked around the clock conducting surgical operations. Ruth remembered that it was hard, but they had to do it.

Chief Warrant Officer Ralph Johnson, a staff officer with the 110th Infantry Regiment, kept a diary of his experiences during the war. In 1976 he wrote his memoirs from the notes in his diary. He was in the Pennsylvania National Guard 28th Infantry Division training in North Carolina on December 7, 1941. He was asleep in a corn field near Halifax, Virginia, his blanket covered with snow, when a loud, noisy radio was blasting in the early dawn. He remembered cursing the radio operator as he tried to go back to sleep, but the blast persisted, so he uncovered his head and tried to listen. He could hear that Pearl Harbor on Hawaii had been bombed. It was a matter of hours before the shock took effect. All he had on his mind was visiting his family at Christmas. “The true meaning of Pearl Harbor did not sink in for days afterwards. I don’t think anyone ate breakfast that morning. Periods of hushed silence mingled with harsh accusing oaths accompanied the remaining one hundred miles to our base at Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania,”⁴⁰⁸ wrote Johnson.

The 28th Division was originally scheduled to land at Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, but instead landed on July 22, 1944. Johnson recalled seeing a sign on the beach placed by the U.S. Army 1st Division that read ‘Welcome to Normandy-Courtesy of the First Division.’ Johnson and his fellow soldiers hung their heads as they safely walked ashore and bivouacked in a Normandy apple orchard. Johnson read from the pocket Bible he had received before he left the United States.⁴⁰⁹ The men were disappointed that they had not come ashore on June 6. It was the topic of conversation for everyone as they awaited orders. They wanted to get a crack at the

⁴⁰⁸ Ralph Johnson, *A Soldier’s Story, 1941-1946, Unpublished Memoir, 1976*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum), 1. Note: Written from the notes of a diary kept by Johnson during his service during the war.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Nazis. They came to Europe to fight for freedom and they wanted to get at it. Soon Johnson and his regiment would get their chance. After chasing the Germans across France and into Germany, the 110th Infantry Regiment was in Luxembourg on December 16, 1944.⁴¹⁰

Johnson wrote in his diary, “I had faith we would prevail though. We were fighting for the right reasons and God was on our side.”⁴¹¹ Ralph Johnson thought, “the men who fought in the Battle of the Bulge were like the Minutemen who stood at Concord Bridge in 1776. We were in the business of destroying the enemy and returning home to a full and productive life.” Ralph Johnson returned home on October 1, 1945 and stayed in the Army for another six months to help with paperwork.⁴¹²

Charlie Waldrup, Company K, 110th Infantry Regiment, had his first combat experience of the war in Percy, France. In his 1989 memoir, he recalled, “We were all green. It was something different from what we’d ever experienced. Of course, we’d seen a lot of beat-up troops back on the beach, Omaha Beach, and into St. Lo, but this was altogether different because they were shooting at us.”⁴¹³ They had taken Percy after a pretty fierce fight, lost some troops but they were going out of Percy and one of his buddies said, “Look at that. There is a dead German.” Waldrup replied, “Yes, and if you don’t mind, these Germans will kill you too.”⁴¹⁴ About the same time, a German burp gun opened fire on them. After a few minutes, the Germans left. Waldrup remembers thinking that the Germans had to be defeated or they would kill everyone. They would come to America and kill everyone. After the Siegfried Line they went into the Hürtgen Forest. To him, it was one of the roughest battles. The Germans were

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ Charlie Waldrup, Company K, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Unpublished Memoir, 1989.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

killing Americans by the numbers. They had to dig a hole, put brush on it, and put dirt on top. That was the only way they could survive the shrapnel from the artillery barrages.⁴¹⁵

The 3rd Platoon of Company K were captured east of Hosingen during the Battle of the Bulge. Waldrup escaped capture. He commented, “People say the Bulge was the worst in Europe. It was bad, all of it was bad. The ones who talk about the Bulge didn’t serve in the holes in the Hürtgen Forest. There the weather was against us, the trees were against us, and the Germans were against us. When you get three against you, I’ll tell you, you can’t win. But we knew that we had to win. I prayed every night.”⁴¹⁶ Charlie Waldrup was thankful that God showed him a way to get through it and he believed that God saved him for a purpose.

Harold M. Snedden, Service Company, 110th Infantry Regiment, was captured by the Germans at Clervaux on December 18, 1944. In 1989 he wrote, “After interrogation, we were marched back behind the lines. The question they asked was where was Patton’s tanks? We were not about to tell the Germans anything. Patton’s tanks were going to beat them. They had to beat them. Patton knew why we were fighting.”⁴¹⁷ After marching for several days and sleeping on the hard frozen ground, they came to a railhead and about one hundred prisoners were herded into boxcars that horses for their artillery had been moved in. No sanitary facilities were available and water was scarce. Snedden and his fellow prisoners were taken to the Stalag 9B prison camp at Bad Orb, Germany.⁴¹⁸

Their menu consisted of a cup of colored water, which was supposed to be coffee, for breakfast. They might get some beans or bread or a piece of horse meat soup for lunch or dinner.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ Harold M. Snedden, Service Company, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Unpublished Memoir, 1989.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

There were no sanitary facilities. Their toilet was an open trench. They were housed in an old dirty, wooden barracks. There were no blankets unless they had one when they were captured. The men were soon infected with body lice. Snedden had a copy of the New Testament which the Germans let him keep, along with pictures of his wife. He read the Bible often and prayed for the Germans to be defeated. He remembered the prayer from Patton that he received before he was captured. He remembered the Germans coming through the camp rounding up American Jews. They were marched away from camp and never returned.⁴¹⁹ On April 2, 1945, Easter Monday, a tank column from Patton's Third Army knocked down the main gate and they were liberated. The lieutenant in the head tank was from Snedden's hometown, Ogleby, Illinois. Snedden said, I never gave up hope the entire time I was a prisoner. I knew that someday General Patton would beat the Germans. He had to."⁴²⁰

Private Eddie Pfannenstiel kept 'A Wartime Log,' which was provided to many prisoners of war by the Y.M.C.A., of his experiences during war. Eddie's experience as a driver and cook took a back seat to the need for combat infantry riflemen. He was transferred to a replacement battalion while still in the United States. As part of the 112th Infantry Regiment, he was among replacements for the casualties they were suffering. With the 112th in the Hürtgen Forest, he wrote about the tree bursts, shells that exploded above the trees to illuminate their positions. "We felt like sitting ducks. When not fighting, we fought the cold and rain in our foxholes, and prayed to God that he would save us."⁴²¹ Eddie felt that the replacements during the battle were poorly trained but enthusiastic about fighting the Germans. After some rest, Eddie found himself facing

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

the German attack on December 16. He was part of the rear guard assigned to cover the withdrawal of his unit.⁴²²

On December 18, he was taken prisoner after spending eighteen hours with four other men in the second story of a house in Ouren, Belgium, hoping their forces could return to rescue them. They had taken refuge in the house because they had used up all their ammunition and grenades fighting towards the rear. The Germans first searched the house and did not discover them. Thinking they were in the clear they continued to hide while the Germans occupied the main floor. Finally, a German came upstairs, lit a cigarette and found them. They had no choice but to surrender. Their captors were German SS troops and guarded them on the way to their prison camp. A German lieutenant learned that Eddie could speak German so he put him in charge of the first small group of prisoners. They were taken to Stalag IXB in Bad Orb, Germany.

Each nationality was kept in separate compounds. The Geneva Convention rules provided that prisoners be allowed to select a representative among them. Since Eddie spoke German, he was selected as 'Chief Man of Confidence.' In that position, he was responsible for keeping detailed records of what was happening in the camp. He entered details of his stay in his Wartime Log and hid many of the documents from the German guards. Regular Catholic and Protestant services were held in the camp. Eddie recalled that everyone believed God would save them from the ordeal. Church services were attended by most of the men. Eddie tried to attend services no matter what was happening.

⁴²² Eddie Pfannenstiel, *A Wartime Log, Unpublished Memoir*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum). Note: Eddie was eventually assigned to the 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division.

The Germans segregated the known American Jews and transferred them from the camp. Eddie never saw them again. In his position, he was able to write to the Red Cross and request supplies for the prisoners. He was keenly aware that the religious needs of the prisoners included supplies. He was successful in obtaining supplies for the Protestant Chaplains that included Bibles, Testaments, Communion wine, and wafers and religious music. For the Catholic Chaplains he obtained one thousand Sunday Missals, five hundred Rosaries, and twelve Kyrials (a collection of Gregorian chant settings for the Mass).⁴²³

Eddie was attending church on Easter Sunday when he was called out. A man had come up from Bad Orb to report that shells had hit the town. Eddie was sent into Bad Ord to accompany unarmed German officers to surrender the town. After liberation, Eddie received a letter that he was to be flown to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. to turn over his records from the prison camp. After five days in Washington, Eddie was given six days leave and scheduled to report for officer training in Texas. He turned down the officer training and returned home to Kansas. Schools and organizations asked him to give talks. He said that he hated to do it and did not like talking about his time in the Europe. He just wanted to be left alone. He believed that in his own way, he contributed to the war effort.⁴²⁴

Private First Class Robert W. Pocklington, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry, recalled the week before December 16, 1944 during an interview in December 1988. Pocklington had kept a journal during the war and referred to it during his interview. He remembered the flood lights and music from the German side, not only in German but in English. It was kind of a morale booster for the men on the front lines. The weather was cold, overcast, foggy, and very damp. They had plenty to eat and were well-equipped with

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

ammunition and hand grenades. It felt like the war would be over soon. They had beat the Nazis and would soon go back to normal living at home. Originally in the 106th Infantry Division, he was transferred to the 28th Division four days before leaving the harbor in Boston.⁴²⁵

Pocklington said that when they came into the area in Luxembourg, they knew it was a rest area. But their main objective was to protect the main roads that came from Germany. He commented, "If they [the Germans] got by this point, and they got by that point, we were surrounded and we would have had it. Bastogne would have been next. We couldn't let that happen. We could not let the Germans win and screw-up our way of life. No, we won't let that happen."⁴²⁶

Pocklington's job was in the Pioneer Platoon, specializing in demolition with the use of TNT, explosives, booby traps, and land mines. He was set-up in one of the foxholes overlooking Skyline Drive. It was cold, dark and he heard the sound of a tank coming down through a gully. He did not know if it was an American or German tank. He thought it might be an American tank from the 707th Tank Battalion or from the 9th Armored Division needing repairs. He was just lying in his foxhole, having his last cigarette and loosening his boots when he heard the clanking sound of tank treads coming close to his foxhole. The next thing Robert heard was the sound of a .50 caliber machine gun firing at the tank. He got up from his foxhole and saw two Germans getting off the tank and running down the hill. German infantry soon showed up and the fighting started.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Robert Pocklington, "Interview by 28th Division Historical Section, Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, Pennsylvania, December 1988." *28th Infantry Division Archives*, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

Pocklington and the others who were in foxholes made their way up a stream and found an American convoy. There were a lot of men in Pocklington's unit that were not killed or captured but gave their best in the fight. He commented, "Well you know in the military we are always to fight and to hold. You are taught to shoot first and ask questions later, because that son of a bitch ain't going to testify against you. So, in war time that was the first thing I thought of. We came here to fight for freedom and to keep these bastards from winning. That is why there were so many heroes there."⁴²⁸

First Lieutenant Morris Katz was in the 108th Field Artillery Battalion as a forward observer at an observation post in Hoesdorf. Katz kept a journal and wrote that on December 15 there had been some activity reported in the area around Vianden. He was ordered to go to the Vianden Castle, observe what he could and fire some registration checkpoints, and get some corrections so that they could bring fire on any portions of the terrain across the Our River. He had no reason to believe that there was anything going on, anything other than a routine registration mission. In fact, Lieutenant Katz had a date to go to a party that night in Ettelbruck.⁴²⁹

He finished his job around 3:00 p.m. and started back in his jeep with his radio operator and driver, hoping to drop them off in Diekirch and to continue on to attend the party. Before they got to Fohren the party drew some machine gun fire and drove off the road. Another jeep was behind them. The firing ceased and Katz told the driver of the other jeep to get back and report what happened and give a note to Marion Conny, who was with the Red Cross in Ettelbruck, his date for the party. With no more machine gun fire, Katz proceeded to the party.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Morris Katz, 108th Field Artillery Battalion. *Unpublished Journal*. 28th Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Little did he know that that would be the last party he would attend for a while. The 108th Field Artillery fired in support of the 109th Infantry until they could no longer continue. When asked if he thought his unit made a difference in the war, Katz responded, “I think they made a tremendous difference. The preservation of peace and freedom was on the line. I keep thinking that we did the best we could do. We delayed the Germans and they didn’t win.”⁴³⁰

Captain Robert H. Henschen, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment kept a journal during the war. A few years after the war, he started to write his experiences from his journal notes. He recalled that his driver and he were feeling the freedom of the day as the slow tail end of the divisional movement was on the road to the long promised rest period in Luxembourg. Henschen had finished with his part of clearing the last 28th Division troops from the Hürtgen Forest.⁴³¹ It was a typical early December day, gray overcast sky and patches of snow here and there on the rolling hills. As open trucks filled with men moved along the chilling wind caused the soldiers to huddle together under blankets for warmth. In spite of their discomfort the men were beginning to relax from the tenseness of the previous week.⁴³²

There were jokes passed around and a little horseplay was going on. Everyone had the sense that the war was about over. They were still wearing the same uniforms, wearing the same beards, and had most of the same dirt on them that went with them into the Hürtgen Forest many weeks before. “The real grit, stamina, fearlessness, and dogged courage of the American boys were still to be more severely tested and proven in a way they least expected. The men proved

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ Robert H. Henschen, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Unpublished Journal*. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴³² *Ibid.*

themselves once again. They knew in order to make it home that had to keep the Nazis from winning, and they did,”⁴³³ recalled Henschen.

Staff Sergeant Frank Kusnir joined Company B, 110th Infantry Regiment in 1936 and was with the same regiment across France, into Germany and to Luxembourg after the Hürtgen Forest battle. On the night of December 15, Frank and another soldier were sent out to reconnoiter the downtown of Clervaux. He was with the intelligence reconnaissance section and suspected that there were some German sympathizers in town. He thought that by having a conversation with some of the villagers, they might be able to find out if anything was going to develop in the area. They no sooner got into the town when three German artillery shells dropped in. Frank thought, “hey, our artillery goofed up again. They are shelling us again.” There was a period of ten minutes or so with no shelling. The next thing he knew, two more shells dropped in and he thought, “the damn fools made another mistake.”⁴³⁴ There was no more shelling that night. Years later, Frank thought, “the Germans must have been registering their artillery and we did not realize it.”⁴³⁵

Early the next morning, there was an artillery barrage landing on the hill above town. When the artillery firing stopped, he looked up at the hill and a whole line of German tanks were parked on the hillside facing the Americans. The tanks were firing at the medieval castle that Frank was stationed in. The walls were very thick so they were well protected.⁴³⁶ They could not answer the fire from the German tanks as the men were only armed with carbines and rifles. The German tanks and artillery kept firing at the castle for three days, but Frank and the men held

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ Frank Kusnir, Staff Sergeant, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by 28th Division Historical Section, Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, Pennsylvania, December 1988.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

their ground. They would occasionally shoot at any careless tank crewmen who ventured out of their tanks. The Americans who occupied the castle had one order. They were to hold the castle at all costs.⁴³⁷

On the third day, the Germans sent infantry to capture the castle. Frank recalled, “They came right up to the castle courtyard. They were foolhardy because they had no chance. We killed quite a few of them. Then they would withdraw. Then they wanted to know if we would surrender.”⁴³⁸ The company commander said no. We would fight to the last man. The Germans assaulted again and the Americans would kill more of their enemy and the Germans would withdraw again. Finally on the afternoon of December 18, Frank’s group was out of ammunition and the castle was on fire, so they made the decision to surrender.⁴³⁹

The Americans had captured three Germans earlier and walked out of the castle with them in tow. A German Colonel told the Americans to stand against a wall. “He said line them up and we’ll shoot them over there.”⁴⁴⁰ The Colonel asked one of the Germans who had been captured how they had been treated. He told the Colonel they had been treated well, fed well and their wounded taken care of. Frank recalled the Colonel stated in perfect English, “You men are lucky. My intention was to shoot all of you for my dead comrades laying strewn through the courtyard. You are now prisoners of the German Army.” Frank and the other 110th Infantry men were sent to the prison camp at Bottorf, Germany.⁴⁴¹

During his interview, Frank was asked if he thought it was important that people remember what happened during the Battle of the Bulge. Frank replied, “They should. There

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

were a lot of people who did a lot of things. I believe every man who was there was a hero. Sometimes when you felt like a guy was a laggard, you pepped him up a little, but there were no cowards. I was scared, we were all scared, but it didn't keep us from fighting for freedom. That is why we were there."⁴⁴²

Sergeant John R. Chernitsky was with the 110th Regiment Anti-tank Company.

Chernitsky also kept a diary while he was with the division. He came from a small mining town in Pennsylvania. In 1939, the Pennsylvania National Guard was recruiting by telling young men that they could get a year in service before being called up for the draft. John joined the National Guard shortly after graduating from high school. He attended weekend drills with his unit until they were called up to federal service on February 17, 1941. His unit had just pulled into a bivouac area at A.P. Hill Military Reservation, Virginia on the night of December 7, 1941. Someone had a portable radio and heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. John recalled, "While making our trip through the south, we Yankees were treated not too politely. The Southerners didn't appreciate Yankee soldiers floating around the south, but on December 8, all that changed."⁴⁴³

In the morning they got up early and all of the Catholics went to Mass. John's faith was important to him and he always tried to attend services even throughout Europe. If there was not a Catholic Chaplain, then many of the Catholics would attend Protestant services. After Mass on December 8 the men returned to the company area and prepared to convoy to Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. One of the first things that John and the men noticed was that the attitude of the Southerners had changed overnight. Men were dropped off at road junctions with signs to direct

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ John R. Chernitsky, Anti-tank Company, 110th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by 28th Division Historical Section, Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, Pennsylvania, December 1988.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

the convoy. The local people would come out and talk with them, wishing them the best. At every stop, local people would bring them hot coffee, cakes, and doughnuts. John figured, “the Southerners treated them better because they knew we soldiers would be protecting them from the Nazis and the Japs.”⁴⁴⁴

After being sent to Luxembourg, John was with the 3rd Platoon in Hosingen. The division headquarters in Wiltz started a non-commissioned officer refresher school. There had been so many casualties and so many men were promoted to ranks of corporal and sergeants in the field without having any understanding of what the duties of leadership were. Sergeant Chernitsky was one of the sergeants picked as an instructor in the school. He got to Wiltz on December 15 and was shown to his quarters in a portion of a leather warehouse and told he and the other instructors could go to the theater where movies were being shown that night. They got out of the movies, went back to the warehouse and were greeted by an officer who told them to get their barracks bags together and they would be taken back to their units. On the way out of Wiltz early the next morning they ran into German troops and came back to Wiltz and assigned to a rifle platoon to defend Wiltz. Sergeant Chernitsky was with band members, clerical staff, cooks, bakers and anyone who was caught between Wiltz and Clervaux trying to get back to their units.⁴⁴⁵

The men defended Wiltz as long as they could and eventually broke up into small groups to make their way west toward Bastogne. While trying to go to Bastogne, Chernitsky was captured and became a prisoner of war and sent to Stalag 2B at Hammerstein, Germany, and moved to various prison camps. He eventually made it back to the United States on May 11, 1945 and back home to Uniontown, Pennsylvania. In his interview John said, “Although my wife

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

had asked me repeatedly to write my army and war remembrances, I wouldn't do it. Even though I can't remember what happened at each prison camp, there are some things I'll never forget, like how degrading it was being a prisoner of war. They stripped me of my freedom. I kept thinking that they [the Germans] had to lose. They can't be allowed to strip anyone else of their freedom."⁴⁴⁶

Lieutenant Colonel James E. Rudder, Commander of the 109th Infantry Regiment, was interviewed by the 3rd Information and Historical Services, Headquarters III U.S. Corps on January 6, 1945 at Buzancy, France. Discussing the events of December 16 and after, he commented that when the first reports started to come in on December 16, all the 109th Infantry Regiment units were alerted and the division headquarters was notified. All of the battalions reported that the company-strength attacks by German infantry did not include tanks. Rudder said, "Everyone was holding and I saw no cause for alarm. We were in a good position and had a distinct advantage of terrain. As the attack progressed, it became apparent that it was in great strength. Still, we did not even consider giving up any ground and the division order was to hold as long as the positions were tenable. After all, we were there to beat the Nazis. We were not going to let them win."⁴⁴⁷

During the night of December 17, the German attack continued in force, but the American artillery was breaking up much of the German infantry and the attack was being stopped in many places. The situation began to deteriorate on all fronts and the 109th Infantry reserve battalion from Diekirch was committed. On December 18, the decision was made to withdraw the regiment in the direction of Bastogne. That night the battalions were pulled back to

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ James E. Rudder, Lieutenant Colonel, 109th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by the 3rd Information and Historical Services, Headquarters III U.S. Corps on January 6, 1945 at Buzancy, France.* Section 3.3, 735017. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives).

the northwest of Ettelbruck to cover the 9th Armored Division. Lieutenant Colonel James E. Rudder believed they did the best they could under the circumstances and commended his men for their sacrifices.⁴⁴⁸

John F. Marshall was with Company B, 707th Tank Battalion. His battalion had landed with the 28th Division and supported the division across France, the Siegfried Line, the Hürtgen Forest and to Luxembourg. John would write to his wife Daisy and tell her what he could about his experiences. In a January 5, 1945 letter he wrote, “Daisy, you asked me several times who stands out as a good soldier. They were all good. We were cooperative and fought with any unit we were attached to and there were many. It probably sounds like an old cliché, but I am proud of my conduct and performance in combat, nothing heroic, just did what had to be done to stop the Germans and was blessed to live through it. For this guidance and intelligence, I thank Almighty God.”⁴⁴⁹

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. Macsalka, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment was interviewed by the 3rd Information and Historical Services, Headquarters III U.S. Corps on January 22, 1945 in the mountains south of Kaysersberg, France. Lieutenant Colonel Macsalka explained that on the morning of December 16, Companies E and F were online with Company G at Weiswampach where it had been sent two days previously for training. At 6:00 a.m. the battalion S-2 was informed by the regimental S-2 that strong German patrol groups of fifty to sixty infantrymen were putting pressure on the 1st and 3rd Battalions. At 8:30 a.m. the Regimental S-2 informed the Battalion S-2 that the Germans were launching a full

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ John F. Marshall, *Letter, January 5, 1945*. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

scale attack. Macsalka said that he was not worried at that point since five different plans had been set up to engage the Germans.⁴⁵⁰

At 11:30 a.m. the regiment called for Plan B to be put into effect. All of the plans involved an attack against any enemy penetration into the 2nd Battalion main assembly area. From this assembly area, Plan A called for the battalion to move through the right flank of the 3rd Battalion area, Plan B through the center of the 3rd Battalion and Plan C between the 1st Battalion and 3rd Battalions, Plan D through the center of the 1st Battalion, and Plan E through the left flank of the 1st Battalion. Plan B was called for because the Germans were known to be near a footbridge that the Americans had built.⁴⁵¹

As the regiment was overrun, they fell back to Burtonsville and mined the road behind them and eventually were re-assigned. Macsalka was confident that one of the plans that had been formulated would have stopped the German advance. He commented, “We knew that we had to beat these Germans. They were bringing no good to the people of Europe. If left unchecked, they would bring no good to us too.”⁴⁵²

Lieutenant Colonel William H. Allen, commander of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment was interviewed by the 3rd Information and Historical Services, Headquarters III U.S. Corps on January 16, 1945 at Montfaucon, France. In the interview, he stated, “The principal reason for the success of the enemy penetration of December 16-17, 1944 was that there just wasn’t enough troops available at the time to offset the German attack in force.” Early in the morning on December 16, Allen received a report from the regiment S-2 that approximately fifty

⁴⁵⁰ Joseph L. Macsalka, Lieutenant Colonel, 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment. *Interview by the 3rd Information and Historical Services, Headquarters III U.S. Corps on January 22, 1945 at Kaisersberg, France.* Section 3.3. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives).

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

German infantry soldiers were attacking the Company H mortar position which was set up within the 3rd Battalion. A kitchen truck returning to the rear from Company A was ambushed by an unknown number of Germans. Late in the afternoon, seven tanks approached Allen's position. Lieutenant Colonel Allen manned a .50 caliber machine gun and fired 150 rounds at the advancing Germans. After the last burst, forty Germans surrendered.⁴⁵³ "After enormous pressure from the Germans we had to withdraw to fight another day," commented Allen. "We were not going to give up on beating the Nazis. That is what we traveled across Europe to do. To beat them back and end their reign of terror."⁴⁵⁴

First Lieutenant, Jack Colbaugh, 108th Field Artillery Battalion, was the forward observer who directed the first artillery shell fired into Germany during the Siegfried Line Campaign. During a 1985 interview with Gus Hickock, 28th Division Association Historian, Colbaugh recalled a story about the British Royal West Kent Regiment fighting in Burma who were surrounded by a Japanese division. The regiment had killed over 4,000 Japanese before they were finally relieved. Someone from the British regiment left behind an inscription from World War I. It read, "When you go home, tell them of us and say, for their tomorrow we gave ours today."⁴⁵⁵ Colbaugh went on to say, "Well, that's what our buddies did. We were men at that moment and we held at all cost in the Bulge. The Luxembourgers will never forget. They were in love with the men of the 28th Division."⁴⁵⁶

When asked why he thought the 28th Division was there, Colbaugh replied, "We went to war to defeat a monstrous animal, a Nazi Dictator, enslaving the people of Europe, who had his

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ Jack Colbaugh, First Lieutenant, 108th Field Artillery Battalion. *Interview by Gus Hickock, 28th Division Association Historian, September 21, 1985.* (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

eyes on enslaving us. Roosevelt sent us with a message for him. It was victory at all cost, those were our orders.”⁴⁵⁷ In Colbaugh’s judgement, the action of the 28th had become known as the greatest single achievement in the history of the United States Army. The German attack failed to crash through to the Meuse and Antwerp. “It may have been the crucial moment of the war.”⁴⁵⁸

The men of the 28th Division were proud of what they accomplished. They felt that they were strong in the face of over-whelming odds and honored their dead. Perhaps a poem written by Private First Class Russell G. Ogborn, Company E, 112th Infantry Regiment in August 1945 epitomizes the attitude of the soldiers of the division. They knew what they came to Europe to do and were proud of what they had done. It was published in the division newsletter, distributed to the troops, and reads:

They were formed in Pennsylvania,
Joined by men from every state,
With the keystone for their emblem
They were called the twenty-eight!
They hit the beach at Omaha,
Crossed the hedges row by row,
Where the Jerry learned to hate and fear
The keystone’s ruddy glow.
Fire and movement were their watchwords
As they climbed up Hill 210,
Wrote a bloody page for history

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

In the woods of Compiègne.
A victory march in Paris,
Ever forward with the dawn,
Through Belgium, France and Luxembourg
The twenty-eighth “rolled on.”
The Siegfried line has seen them
All along its mighty wall,
From Aachen, south to Alsace,
Where they fought at Colmar’s fall.
There are towns they’ll long remember –
Vossenack, Schmidt and Kommerscheidt,
And the break-through in December
When they slowed the German tide.
With blood and sweat they carved a niche,
In history’s hall of fame.
With deeds of valor shining bright
And victory was their aim.
In Valhalla’s halls their heroes live,
Who fell along the way,
They’re resting now, awaiting call
To march on judgement day.
When my last recall is sounded
May I go there to dwell,

And march again with the legions
Of the Gentlemen from Hell!⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁹ Russell G. Ogborn, *Gentlemen From Hell*. Poem. 28th Infantry Division Archives, filing cabinet 2. (Fort Indiantown Gap: Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum).

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

This chapter will conclude this dissertation study by summarizing the key research findings in relation to the research aims and questions and discuss the value and contribution thereof. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

The purpose of this study was to determine what motivated the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division, in the face of overwhelming odds, to fight so stubbornly during the first few days of the Battle of the Bulge to delay the German plan of attack. This study aimed to answer three research questions:

1. What forces beyond camaraderie and cohesion influenced soldiers to resist the German offensive in the Battle of the Bulge?
2. How did faith factor into the nexus of ideas that inspired the perseverance of the soldiers?
3. How significant was the delaying action of the 28th Division to the Allied success in the Battle of the Bulge?

As the last major German offensive of the war, and the United States largest land battle of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge is frequently examined in literature. Despite this, historians continue to focus primarily on physical aspects, unit cohesion and camaraderie and suggesting that physical forces were the single influence on the final result. This research employed primary and secondary sources to conduct the historical analysis and provide an interpretation of the motivating factors that caused the soldiers of the U.S. Army 28th Infantry Division to delay the Germans. By analyzing the various interpretations presented in the literature and personal

accounts, this research produced a re-interpretation of the first days of the Battle of the Bulge through the perspective of combat motivating factors.

The specific actions that were taken by the division soldiers to slow the German advance was examined. This study has shown that the actions of the soldiers of the 28th Division delayed the German plan to capture Antwerp, Belgium long enough for the Allies to re-enforce the Bastogne, Belgium area and halt the German advance. While organized in strongpoints along the Luxembourg-German border, the 28th Division troops were able to establish fields of fire at key road intersections, avenues of approach to towns, and hilltops to interdict the German attacks. In some cases, the men fought to the last man and in a few cases surrendered only when all ammunition was expended and they no longer had the means to resist.

Despite intense German artillery, mortar, small arms, and tank fire and a scarcity of ammunition the men continued to fight. Taking the brunt of the German assault were the three regiments of the 28th Infantry Division – the 109th, 110th and 112th. Facing overwhelming German forces, without any sleep, often without food, the soldiers of the division fought nonstop, often until the last bullet and last man, to stop the German drive. Overall, the 28th Division would identify elements of nine German divisions in its sector before the battle was over.

How faith factored into the nexus of ideas that inspired the perseverance of the soldiers was examined. The study found that the soldiers brought with them to Europe their religious beliefs and continued to practice their faith even in adverse circumstances. Religion and faith were tremendously important to American soldiers in World War II. Religious beliefs and practices and ideas of freedom of religion are basic elements in American culture and this ethos naturally extended to the U.S. military. Many soldiers attended religious services when they were

available. Soldiers read from the Pocket Bibles chaplains handed out. Some men felt that God protected them as they faced their enemy. The freedom to practice their religion was an integral part of why they fought so bravely.

American soldiers found comfort and motivation through prayer on the front lines of World War II. Despite witnessing horrific acts, most soldiers remained steadfast in their religious beliefs. Some even performed heroic acts believing that God would not permit them to be killed. General Patton's prayer was distributed to every man prior to the German attack on December 16, as a reminder that prayer was not only important, but encouraged by their leadership. The soldiers were constantly reminded that freedom of religion was part of the American way of life.

This study followed the Division from their training in the United States and England, their landing on the beach in Normandy and their fight and pursuit of the Germans through the hedgerow country at Percy, Hill 210, Gathemo and Hill 288, across France, as it faced the pillboxes in the Siegfried Line in Germany and the nightmare of the Hürtgen Forest. All the way the personal commitment of the soldiers of the need to fight for the American way of life never wavered. The 28th Infantry Division went to rest in Luxembourg, thinking that the war would soon be over. They had sustained some 6,184 casualties in 18 days of fighting in some of the worst conditions imaginable in the Hürtgen Forest. They relaxed and thought about Christmas and going home. When the Germans attacked on December 16, the thoughts of going home soon evaporated and the men realized their fight for the American way of life was not over. They summoned the strength and confronted the overwhelming German onslaught. Many asked God to protect them as they frustrated the Germans by whatever means they had.

In the Ardennes positions the division was in the process of absorbing replacements for their casualties and re-building the three infantry regiments which had been decimated. Tribute is

due to the men who were together for only a couple of weeks, who had not trained together, almost total strangers, and yet were soldiers all and fought for the American way of life until killed, wounded or overrun.

Research identified stories about the men who had taken the brunt of the German offensive in Luxembourg. They fought gallantly and desperately in hundreds of scattered battles. There were days and nights of incredible heroism. Stories of some who were awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Distinguished Service Cross for their actions serve as a testament to the commitment of the Americans. Some of them received the awards posthumously. These stories offers us insight into sacrifice on the battlefield and demonstrates the honor and courage with which they and so many other soldiers fought.

The principal reason the soldiers fought to delay the Germans advance was identified. A review of the literature about the Battle of the Bulge yielded significant gaps in the understanding of what motivated the 28th Infantry Division soldiers during the first few days of the Battle of the Bulge. Some literature argues that soldiers fight because of unit cohesion or fighting for one's buddy while others suggest that ideology plays a role, albeit a secondary one.

The soldiers had read and seen films about life in Nazi Germany in theaters before going to war and posters appeared that emphasized the need to defeat the Nazis. They had heard speeches by political leaders and were constantly reminded of the reason they were fighting the Germans. The government had a concerted effort to gain support for the war. Citizens were encouraged to support the war effort and were encouraged enter the military to fight for the American way of life. Along with instilling teamwork, and learning the basics of survival, drill sergeants stressed the importance of winning to preserve the American way of life. The *Why We Fight* films along with other orientation films and materials were shown to American soldiers

during basic training, and chaplains not only tended to the soldiers religious needs, but they also continued to underscore why it was necessary to defeat the Germans.

William Henderson argues that cohesion is the primary motivational factor that must be considered in any study of combat motivation. He equates cohesion with terms such as spirit de corps, group morale, and elan. While Henderson's conclusions are plausible when groups of soldiers train together and fight together over time, due to the losses the division encountered during its fighting across Europe, the division units were filled with replacement soldiers. Many companies experienced dips in effective strength of fifty percent or greater even as they attempted to assimilate new replacements. For example, the men of the 28th Division were only in Luxembourg after their Hürtgen Forest experience for three weeks before the Germans attacked, it is unlikely that the men could have developed a sense of unit cohesion. As a result of the significant turn-over of personnel, the bonds that had been developed between the veterans who had been with the division since its initial training did not exist. In many cases leaders did not know the names of their replacements and the veterans found it difficult to bond with the new replacements.

Unit cohesion and camaraderie undoubtedly were strong motivators when soldiers are together and have a chance to get to know each other and how they can count on each other. As the 28th Division confronted the Germans from one battle to the next, the number of casualties grew. The men who left the training in Wales were not the ones who fought the next major battle. The attrition of war since the division landed in Normandy steadily thinned out the ranks. Lone replacements found themselves among groups of strangers with little chance to get acquainted before being flung into battle, so there had to be other factors that motivated the men to fight as they did. Challenging the conventional ideas about why soldiers fight and the

contribution of the 28th Infantry Division during the Battle of the Bulge, this study concluded overwhelmingly that the soldiers of the 28th Division believed they were fighting to preserve the American way of life, which included freedom to worship, freedom from oppression, and freedom of movement.

Despite the near destruction of its infantry regiments, the Division retained significant resilient structure with an experienced headquarters that continued to function proficiently, supporting elements survived generally intact, and most companies retained small veteran cores. The core of veterans continued to support the idea of fighting for the American way of life with the new replacements. It is clear from interviews and personal accounts that the overriding reason why the men of the 28th Infantry Division fought so fiercely to delay the Germans during the first days of the Battle of the Bulge was to insure the American way of life. Personal narratives, interviews, unit historical summaries, journals, and after action reports constituted a substantial portion of this study. The comments made by veterans were substantiated by comparing their statements with after action reports, unit reports and interviews conducted shortly after the battles.

Throughout the soldiers' personal interviews, and writings, we see the soldiers return to the idea that the Nazis had to be defeated so that freedoms in America would not be affected. This sense of duty and willingness to fight is reflected in letters the soldiers wrote home and in diaries and journals they kept during the war.

This study adds to the historiography of the Battle of the Bulge by discovering previously unpublished details about the specific actions taken by the three regiments of the 28th Infantry Division and placing them in the larger context of the Battle. Historians and writers have virtually skipped over the heroic efforts of the 28th Division units who had been badly battered

by their engagements attempting to breach the German Siegfried Line and in the fierce battles in the Hürtgen Forest. Future researchers can now have a more thorough understanding of why the Germans were not able to execute their plans, and what caused the soldiers on the front line to fight so determinedly.

Many veterans of World War II were reluctant to talk about their experiences, their religious beliefs, and what motivated them to fight. Most say, they did their duty and came home. Interviews of veterans many years after the war may be skewed with sentimental memories and jaded with time. In future studies the circumstances described by veterans in these interviews should be corroborated with reports and interviews conducted as close to the events as possible. The availability of interviews and reports shortly after the Battle of the Bulge was a limitation during research for this study, however, there was overwhelming evidence corroborated with after action reports, chaplain reports, and unit summaries to support the conclusions.

While this study only examined the motivations of the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division, it lays the groundwork for future research on the role that such motivations have on the soldiers willingness to fight and the role leaders and government efforts play in motivating soldiers. Future researches must weigh the validity of the statements of veterans years after their experiences with primary source evidence from documents produced during or shortly after the events.

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