

Battle of the Bulge

Seventy-five years ago, US soldiers were in what Winston Churchill called ‘the greatest American battle of the war.’, the Battle of the Bulge. From Adolf Hitler’s perspective it was the last major German offensive of the war. The German plan was to split the Allies in their drive toward Germany. Also called the Battle of the Ardennes, it took place for six brutal weeks from 16 December 1944 until 25 January 1945. About 30 German divisions attacked the battle-weary American troops across 85 miles of the densely wooded Ardennes Forest. As the German front advanced, the battle took the look of a bulge, hence the name. The US Army lost over 100,000 casualties, the deadliest of the war in Europe. The timing of the attack was also very strategic because of the freezing rain, thick fog, deep snow and record-breaking low temperatures. Warren Spahn, baseball Hall of Famer wrote in his book, *The Love of Baseball* that “I was from Buffalo, I thought I knew cold, but I didn’t really know cold until the Battle of the Bulge.”

The Germans dropped paratroops behind US lines who acted as spies the spread false information. The Germans spoke English extremely well and the US troops started asking trivia questions of suspected spies. General Omar Bradley later told the *Washington Post* that he had been asked to prove his identity by answering three questions; what was the capital of Illinois, what is the position on a football team called that is between the center and tackle and who was the current spouse of Getty Grable.

In the small Belgian town of Bastogne, the 101st Airborne Division was surrounded by German troops and a German officer offered General McAuliffe the opportunity to surrender. General McAuliffe’s response one word – Nuts. Troops of the 101st also had a slogan “They’ve got us surrounded, the poor bastards.” General Patton and the 3rd Army arrived the day after Christmas, broke through German lines and rescued the 101st. The Allies claimed victory on 25 January 1945 and five months later Germany surrendered.

“The Ardennes campaign of 1944-45 was only one in a series of difficult engagements in the battle for Europe,” wrote John S.D. Eisenhower, in his 1969 book, *The Bitter Woods*.

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

Some additional information I found including that the German military advised Hitler not to attempt the offensive. German troops used stolen US Army uniforms to pose as GIs behind US lines. It was also reported that overzealous US soldiers shot out the tires of British General Montgomery’s jeep. A shortage of fuel caused German tanks to run out in battle. Finally, during an interview with former Moorhead Mayor Ray Stordahl, he said that he arrived in Europe in early December, just in time for the Battle of the Bulge.