

CONTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL NCOs TO MISSION
ACCOMPLISHMENTS OR BATTLEFIELD SUCCESSES, IN THE BATTLE
OF THE BULGE

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CLASS #33

BACKGROUND

The time frame was 16 December 1944 – 25 January 1945 in the Ardennes, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany.

The Germans at the start of the battle were equipped with about 200,000 soldiers, 5 Armored Divisions, just over 12 Infantry Divisions, and about 500 medium tanks, and 1900 artillery guns. The allied forces were equipped with about 83,000 soldiers, 242 Sherman tanks, 182 tank destroyers, and 394 pieces of Corps and Divisional artillery pieces.

The main focus/goal in the Germany plan of operation was to split the British and American allied line in half, and the successful capture of Antwerp and Belgium. After the capture of these two towns, the plan was to encircle and destroy four allied armies, forcing the allies to negotiate a peace treaty in the Axis Powers favor.

The attack was planned in total secrecy, in almost total radio silence. Even, ULTRA, the allies reading ability of secret German radio messages, revealed nothing about the upcoming buildup and offensive. The degree of surprise achieved was compounded by the allies' over confidence; they were preoccupied with their own offensive plan. Allied intelligence failed completely to detect the upcoming offensive; almost complete surprise against a weak section of the allies' line was achieved during heavy overcast weather, when the allies' strong air forces would be grounded.

With the allied forces rapid movement toward Germany the supply channels were unable to sustain resupplyment needs. The French railroad was extensively destroyed during the invasion of D-Day. The port of Antwerp, Belgium was captured fully intact by the Allies on the first days after September 1944, but it could not be made operational until 28 November when the Scheldt, which gives access to the port, had been cleared from German control. The extensive destruction of the French railroad system prior to D-Day, intended to deny movement to the Germans, now proved equally damaging to the allies as it took time to repair the system of tracks and bridges. A trucking system known as the "Red Ball Express" was instituted in bringing supplies to front line troops; however, for every gallon of fuel that reached the front line, five gallons of fuel had been expended delivering it.

With the Allied Division needing to be resupplied, this caused them to halt any major allied offensives until they were adequately resupplied. The three Generals: Bradley, Patton, and Montgomery each pressed for priority delivery of supplies. The generals wanted to continue advancing and keeping pressure on the German forces. The short-term goal included opening the urgently needed port of Antwerp, with the long-term goal being to capture the Ruhr area, the industrial heart of Germany. With this pause for supplies, it gave Gerd von Rundstedt, time to reorganize the disrupted German armies. One of the advantages for the German forces in November was that they were no longer defending all of the Western Front. With the front lines in the west, considerably shorter and closer to the German heartland, the German's could use extensive telephone and telegraph network which meant that radios no longer had to be used for communications. This deprived the allies of their most powerful weapon, the ULTRA intercepts.

DRAFTING THE OFFENSIVE AND PLANNING

With the allies forces paused, Hitler felt that his army still might be able to successfully defend Germany long-term. His thoughts in making this happen were, short-term, would be neutralize the Western front. His long-term goal was to split the allies and make the British and Americans sue for separate peace treating, independent to the Soviet Union. Hitler believed that the success in the West would give the German time to design and produce more advanced weapons, and then move the concentration of forces to the East. However, with the allies having air superiority throughout Europe and the ability to intervene significantly in any of German's offensive plans. Hitler pressed forward with his offensive plan, despite concerns from several of his Senior German Advisors.

Several plans for major Western offensives were put forward, but the German High Command choice to concentrate on two. A first plan called for encirclement around Aachen, which the 9th and 3rd Armies were defending. The control of Aachen would give the German's an excellent defensive ground where they had fought the U.S. to a standstill earlier. The second plan for a Blitzkrieg attack through the thinly defending forest called Ardennes. The Ardennes forest if successful would split the Allies forces and enable Hitler to capture Antwerp. This is when the plan was named *Wacht am Rhein* or "Watch on the Rhine", after a popular German patriotic song. Hitler chose the second plan, because it would have more potential to split the Allies forces.

Despite Hitler's decision, the High Command decided, that the offensive plan could be mounted in the Ardennes, as it was done in France in 1940. The plan was for the main forces to advance westward until reaching Meuse River, then turn northeast toward Antwerp and Brussels. The open ground beyond the Meuse offered a successful dash to the coast line.

The main forces for the Germans armies were selected for the operations:

- The 6.SS Panzer-Armee, it incorporated the formation of the Waffen-SS, the 1.SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and the 12.SS Panzer Division. 6.SS Panzer was designated as the most northern force.
- The 5.SS Panzer-Armee was assigned to the middle attack route with the objective of capturing Brussels.
- The 7.SS Armee was assigned the southern attack, with the task of protecting the flank. Also, assigned were four infantry divisions, with no large scale armored formation to use in a spearhead unit.
- The 15.Armee was assigned the secondary role. The unit was placed just north of the Ardennes battlefield, with a task to hold the U.S. forces in place.

For the offensive to be successful, the following criteria's have deemed critical:

1. The attack must be a total surprise.
2. The weather conditions had to ground the allied air superiority.
3. The battle had to be rapid, and the Meuse River had to be reached in four days.
4. Allied fuel supplies would have to be captured intact along the way due to Germany's shortage.

The Allies were blind to the German plan of attack, due to poor weather conditions and lack of intelligence. During the German build-up of the forces, a special radio silence order was imposed. The foggy autumn weather also prevented the Allies reconnaissance planes from correctly assessing ground situation. Thus Allied High Command thought the Ardennes was a quiet sector; relying on assessments from their Intelligence services the Germans were unable to launch a major offensive operation. With the Ardennes to be considered a quiet sector, the U.S. deployed a mixture of inexperienced troops of the 99th, 106th divisions, and battle-hardened troops sent to recuperate from the 2nd Infantry Division.

The Americans over confidence and their inability to properly analyze intelligence reports, coupled with Hitler's tight security measures allowed the German army to do what only one man, Adolph Hitler, thought was possible. He succeeded in massing a far superior force in front of the American defenders and was ready to turn certain German defeat into a glorious victory for the Third Reich. The thoughts in every American soldier's minds on 16 December 1944 were all hell has broken loose along the western front.

Now let us take a look at some of the Medal of Honor recipients during the Battle of the Bulge. During this conflict there was a total fourteen recipients and seven NCOs, from the ranks of Sergeant and above that were awarded this distinguished award.

MEDAL OF HONOR (MOH) DESCRIPTION

The Medal



The **Medal of Honor** is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States. Generally presented to its recipient by the President of the United States of America in the name of Congress, it is often called the *Congressional Medal of Honor*.

RANK/NAME	UNIT	DATE OF HEROISM	G. O. No./Date Awarded
SSG PAUL L. BOLDEN	Company 1st, 120th IN, 30th ID	December 23, 1944	73, 30 August 1945
SGT FRANCIS S. CURREY	Company K, 120th IN, 30th ID	December 21, 1944	69, 17 August 1945
1SG LEONARD A. FUNK, JR	Company C, 508th Parachute IN, 82nd ABD	January 29, 1945	75, 5 September 1945
SGT JOSE M. LOPEZ	23d IN, 2d ID	December 17, 1944	47, 18 June 1945
TECH SGT VERNON McGARIT	Company L, 383d IN, 99th ID	December 16, 1944	6, 11 January 1946

BATTLE OF THE BULGE – MOH RECIPIENTS



Congressional Medal of Honor

PAUL L. BOLDEN

Rank and organization: Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company 1, 120th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Petit-Coo, Belgium, 23 December 1944.

Entered service at: Madison, Alabama.

Born: Hobbes Island, Iowa.

G.O. No.: 73, 30 August 1945.

He voluntarily attacked a formidable enemy strong point in Petit-Coo, Belgium, on 23 December, 1944, when his company was pinned down by extremely heavy automatic and small-arms fire coming from a house 200 yards to the front.

Mortar and tank artillery shells pounded the unit, when S/Sgt. Bolden and a comrade, on their own initiative, moved forward into a hail of bullets to eliminate the ever-increasing fire from the German position. Crawling ahead to close with what they knew was a powerfully armed, vastly superior force, the pair reached the house and took up assault positions, S/Sgt. Bolden under a window, his comrade across the street where he could deliver covering fire.

In rapid succession, S/Sgt. Bolden hurled a fragmentation grenade and a white phosphorous grenade into the building; and then, fully realizing that he faced tremendous odds, rushed to the door, threw it open and fired into 35 SS troopers who were trying to reorganize themselves after the havoc wrought by the grenades. Twenty Germans died under fire of his submachinegun before he was struck in the shoulder, chest, and stomach by part of a burst which killed his comrade across the street. He withdrew from the house, waiting for the surviving Germans to come out and surrender.

When none appeared in the doorway, he summoned his ebbing strength, overcame the extreme pain he suffered and boldly walked back into the house, firing as he went. He had killed the remaining 15 enemy soldiers when his ammunition ran out.

S/Sgt. Bolden's heroic advance against great odds, his fearless assault, and his magnificent display of courage in reentering the building where he had been severely wounded cleared the path for his company and insured the success of its mission.



Congressional Medal of Honor

FRANCIS S. CURREY

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company K, 120th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Malmedy, Belgium, 21 December 1944.

Entered service at: Hurleyville, New York.

Born: Loch Sheldrake, New York.

G.O. No.: 69, 17 August 1945.

He was an automatic rifleman with the 3d Platoon defending a strong point near Malmedy, Belgium, on 21 December 1944, when the enemy launched a powerful attack. Overrunning tank destroyers and antitank guns located near the strong point, German tanks advanced to the 3d Platoon's position, and, after prolonged fighting, forced the withdrawal of this group to a nearby factory. Sgt. Currey found a bazooka in the building and crossed the street to secure rockets meanwhile enduring intense fire from enemy tanks and hostile infantrymen who had taken up a position at a house a short distance away. In the face of small-arms, machinegun, and artillery fire, he, with a companion, knocked out a tank with one shot. Moving to another position, he observed three Germans in the doorway of an enemy-held house. He killed or wounded all three with his automatic rifle. He emerged from cover and advanced alone to within 50 yards of the house, intent on wrecking it with rockets. Covered by friendly fire, he stood erect, and fired a shot which knocked down half of one wall. While in this forward position, he observed 5 Americans who had been pinned down for hours by fire from the house and three tanks. Realizing that they could not escape until the enemy tank and infantry guns had been silenced, Sgt. Currey crossed the street to a vehicle, where he procured an armful of antitank grenades. These he launched while under heavy enemy fire, driving the tankmen from the vehicles into the house. He then climbed onto a half-track in full view of the Germans and fired a machinegun at the house. Once again changing his position, he manned another machinegun whose crew had been killed; under his covering fire the 5 soldiers were able to retire to safety. Deprived of tanks and with heavy infantry casualties, the enemy was forced to withdraw. Through his extensive knowledge of weapons and by his heroic and repeated braving of murderous enemy fire, Sgt. Currey was greatly responsible for inflicting heavy losses in men and material on the enemy, for rescuing 5 comrades, two of whom were wounded, and for stemming an attack which threatened to flank his battalion's position.



Congressional Medal of Honor

LEONARD A. FUNK, JR.

Rank and organization: First Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company C, 508th Parachute Infantry, 82d Airborne Division.

Place and date: Holzheim, Belgium, 29 January 1945.

Entered service at: Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania.

Born: Braddock Township, Pennsylvania

G.O. No.: 75, 5 September 1945.

After advancing 15 miles in a driving snowstorm, the American force prepared to attack through waist-deep drifts. The company executive officer became a casualty, and 1st Sgt. Funk immediately assumed his duties, forming headquarters soldiers into a combat unit for an assault in the face of direct artillery shelling and harassing fire from the right flank.

Under his skillful and courageous leadership, this miscellaneous group and the 3d Platoon attacked 15 houses, cleared them, and took 30 prisoners without suffering a casualty. The fierce drive of Company C quickly overran Holzheim, netting some 80 prisoners, who were placed under a 4-man guard, all that could be spared, while the rest of the understrength unit went about mopping up isolated points of resistance. An enemy patrol, by means of a ruse, succeeded in capturing the guards and freeing the prisoners, and had begun preparations to attack Company C from the rear when 1st Sgt. Funk walked around the building and into their midst.

He was ordered to surrender by a German officer who pushed a machine pistol into his stomach. Although overwhelmingly outnumbered and facing almost certain death, 1st Sgt. Funk, pretending to comply with the order, began slowly to unsling his submachine gun from his shoulder and then, with lightning motion, brought the muzzle into line and riddled the German officer.

He turned upon the other Germans, firing and shouting to the other Americans to seize the enemy's weapons. In the ensuing fight, 21 Germans were killed, many wounded, and the remainder captured.

1st Sgt. Funk's bold action and heroic disregard for his own safety were directly responsible for the recapture of a vastly superior enemy force, which, if allowed to remain free, could have taken the widespread units of Company C by surprise and endangered the entire attack plan.



Congressional Medal of Honor

JOSE M. LOPEZ

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, 23d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division.

Place and date: Near Krinkelt, Belgium, 17 December 1944.

Entered service at: Brownsville, Texas.

Born: Mission, Texas.

G.O. No.: 47, 18 June 1945.

On his own initiative, he carried his heavy machinegun from Company K's right flank to its left, in order to protect that flank which was in danger of being overrun by advancing enemy infantry supported by tanks. Occupying a shallow hole offering no protection above his waist, he cut down a group of 10 Germans. Ignoring enemy fire from an advancing tank, he held his position and cut down 25 more enemy infantry attempting to turn his flank. Glancing to his right, he saw a large number of infantry swarming in from the front. Although dazed and shaken from enemy artillery fire which had crashed into the ground only a few yards away, he realized that his position soon would be outflanked. Again, alone, he carried his machinegun to a position to the right rear of the sector; enemy tanks and infantry were forcing a withdrawal. Blown over backward by the concussion of enemy fire, he immediately reset his gun and continued his fire. Single-handed he held off the German horde until he was satisfied his company had effected its retirement. Again he loaded his gun on his back and in a hail of small arms fire he ran to a point where a few of his comrades were attempting to set up another defense against the onrushing enemy. He fired from this position until his ammunition was exhausted. Still carrying his gun, he fell back with his small group to Krinkelt. Sgt. Lopez's gallantry and intrepidity, on seemingly suicidal missions in which he killed at least 100 of the enemy, were almost solely responsible for allowing Company K to avoid being enveloped, to withdraw successfully and to give other forces coming up in support time to build a line which repelled the enemy drive.



Congressional Medal of Honor

VERNON McGARITY

Rank and organization: Technical Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company L, 393d Infantry, 99th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Near Krinkelt, Belgium, 16 December 1944.

Entered service at: Model, Tennessee.

Born: 1 December 1921, Right, Tennessee.

G.O. No.: 6, 11 January 1946.

T/Sgt. McGarity was painfully wounded in an artillery barrage that preceded the powerful counteroffensive launched by the Germans near Krinkelt, Belgium, on the morning of 16 December 1944. He made his way to an aid station, received treatment, and then refused to be evacuated, choosing to return to his hard-pressed men instead. The fury of the enemy's great Western Front offensive swirled about the position held by T/Sgt. McGarity's small force, but so tenaciously did these men fight on orders to stand firm at all costs that they could not be dislodged despite murderous enemy fire and the breakdown of their communications. During the day the heroic squad leader rescued one of his friends who had been wounded in a forward position, and throughout the night he exhorted his comrades to repulse the enemy's attempts at infiltration. When morning came and the Germans attacked with tanks and infantry, he braved heavy fire to run to an advantageous position where he immobilized the enemy's lead tank with a round from a rocket launcher. Fire from his squad drove the attacking infantrymen back, and three supporting tanks withdrew. He rescued, under heavy fire, another wounded American, and then directed devastating fire on a light cannon which had been brought up by the hostile troops to clear resistance from the area. When ammunition began to run low, T/Sgt. McGarity, remembering an old ammunition hole about 100 yards distant in the general direction of the enemy, braved a concentration of hostile fire to replenish his unit's supply. By circuitous route the enemy managed to emplace a machinegun to the rear and flank of the squad's position, cutting off the only escape route. Unhesitatingly, the gallant soldier took it upon himself to destroy this menace single-handedly. He left cover, and while under steady fire from the enemy, killed or wounded all the hostile gunners with deadly accurate rifle fire and prevented all attempts to reman the gun. Only when the squad's last round had been fired was the enemy able to advance and capture the intrepid leader and his men. The extraordinary bravery and extreme devotion to duty of T/Sgt. McGarity supported a remarkable delaying action which provided the

time necessary for assembling reserves and forming a line against which the German striking power was shattered.

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