

AMERICANS K.O. TANKS TRYING TO OVERRUN GUNS Foil Nazi Attempt to Break Thru Wedge

By William Strand
(Chicago Tribune Press Service) [Dec. 24, 1944; pg. 2]

With U.S. forces near Bütgenbach, Germany, Dec. 22 (Delayed) - Hurling repeated attacks supported by the cream of their armor, the Germans battled desperately today to burst out of the northern fin of the wedge in our lines and in the directions of our guns with tanks and tank destroyers slugging it out over muddy, misty, snow covered hills.

When the smoke of the afternoon attack cleared away, forward observers reported 19 German tanks lying immobile before their positions. At the same time, they said, a battalion of enemy infantry was trapped on a hillside overlooking Bütgenbach under fire of American 105 mm. howlitzers thundering from the hills behind us.

The Tanks Are Out.

"The tanks aren't moving, aren't shooting, and some are burning," said Capt. Carl Oelze of Cleveland, O. "As far as we're concerned they are knocked out until they start more trouble."

Earlier, a column of 40 German infantry men marching along a road approaching the town were brought under fire from machine guns and tank

destroyers, with only a handful seen to flee afterwards.

Butgenbach is an important town as a road junction giving access to highways north. It has been the hub of fighting in this sector which has been as bloody as any which American troops have seen in the Nazi breakthrough attempt. The enemy's bid to wrest the town from our hands is costing him dearly, according to prisoner of war reports stating that crack Nazi units spearheading the attack have suffered 50 per cent casualties.

Heavy Artillery Barrage.

This morning after pouring 400 rounds of heavy artillery onto the town in 30 minutes-an almost unprecedented amount of ammunition for the Germans to use on one small target-they sent 10 tanks rolling down the road, supporting an attack by a battalion of infantry. Machine guns, mortars and rifles stopped the infantry cold while five tanks managed to penetrate the line. They were destroyed by artillery and tank destroyers.

Less seasoned troops might have broken, seeing tanks apparently overrunning them, but these are among the finest units in the American army and the simply are not running these days. When the full story of this emergency has been told there will be several outfits with bright new chapters in their histories.

30 TOWNS SEIZED IN ADVANCED BY HODGES' MEN

[Jan. 5, 1945; pg. 1]

Lose 500,000 Gallons

SUPREME HDQ., Allied Expeditionary Forces, PARIS, Jan. 4 (AP). - The United States army lost slightly more than 500,000 gallons of gasoline in the German offensive when fuel dumps and tank cars were overrun, it was disclosed to night. This was 1 per cent of the total stocks in the advance area. Communications zone headquarters said the total loss of lubricants in the army advance section and rear area was well under 2 per cent of total stocks and that the benefit to the enemy was negligible.

By John Thompson (Chicago Tribune Press Service)

GRANDMENIL, Belgium, Jan. 4. - Lt. Gen. Hodges' American 1st army by nightfall today had driven two to three miles into the northern flank of the Germans' Belgian bulge. Fighting ahead in a blizzard, more than 30 towns, villages, and hamlets were recaptured. The 1st army's bag of prisoners was increased by 1,500.

In this battle of roadnets, as one staff officer described the action, Hodges' right flank was hammering down toward Lt. Gen. Patton's 3d army which widened its Bastogne corridor. The 1st army's two day old offensive had narrowed the gap between the two armies to 12 miles. It was endangering German panzer SS [armored elite guard] troops and infantry holding positions in the "toe" of Field Marshal Von Rundstedt's salient between Bastogne and Grandmenil, St. Hubert, and Rochefort.

Important to Fighters.

None of the villages the 1st army captured was large, but to the men fighting for them they are important because of their control of roads. Among the more important captured were Malempré, Jevigné, Lansival, Beffe, Freyneux, Fondéejustle, Trois Points, Heirlot, Amcomont, Arbrefontaine, Rehermont, Lafosse, and Cand Floret. The village of Oergebal was taken three times by Yank shock troopers, who had been driven out twice.

One of the most spirited engagements along the front took place with the capture of Malempre, which held out until armored doughboys, flanked by tanks and tank destroyers, smashed the last strong point in a house.

Odeigne, on the center of the front, still was held by the Germans, but the Yanks had flanked it with the capture of Beffe on the west and Freyneux and Fondéejustle on the east. After occupying Beffe the Germans tried to retake it with 100 infantrymen and six tanks, but failed, losing three tanks in the effort.

Germans in Barracks

The capture of Oergebal three times meant that the Yanks had to drive the Germans from their barracks. The town, hidden in a small valley, had been a Belgian military center of some sort at which the Germans holed up in the barracks with self-propelled guns as protection. The last time the Yank infantry took it, they captured 80 prisoners, including one captain and two lieutenants.

With doughboys in Heirlot, Lansival, and La Chapelle, and on high ground overlooking Arbrefontaine and armored columns linked at Jevigne, the assault now is moving into the outskirts of Arbrefontaine.

Moving in on the town the infantry met a local counter-attack as the Germans fought fiercely in a farm house, but the advance was not stopped.

Three small counter-attacks were more thrown in today in this sector where the Yanks had the use of a squadron of flame throwers mounted on a tank chassis, supporting a 75 mm. gun. The attacks were thrown back, but the advance continued more slowly. Four Mark IV, tanks, four Mark Vs, and two self-propelled guns were destroyed yesterday by this 1st army armored force and today four more.

The difficulties of advance over this type of country hardly can be magnified. Roads are few and narrow, canalizing assaults between densely wooded hills of fir and other trees.

The Germans had felled hundreds of trees forming road blocks defended by anti-tank guns and infantry. In addition they laid large mine fields in the five days their attack was halted. On top of this the Americans have been running into their own mines which the Germans had captured. In some cases doughboys spotted German soldiers trying to blend into the white landscape with their snow caps.

Shell Nazi Supply Line

A network of swollen streams proved a barrier to the advance of the armor. At one point over a stream which had an unfordable soft bottom, engineers built a tank bridge by hand when their hoisting mechanism failed. All the time the Germans shelled furiously, but the engineers toiled on until it was finished.

Our eight inch guns and Long Toms [155 mm. mobile rifles] have been keeping up a continuous 24 hour shelling of the German supply routes in the bulge, particularly on

the road net around St. Vith.

Up to last midnight the 1st army had taken 10,670 prisoners since midnight, Dec. 16, before Gen. Von Rundstedt's drive started. With the toll continuing today the figure probably is approaching the 12,000 mark. The dead and wounded must also be counted in five figures, according to reliable estimates.

Widen Bastogne Flanks

PARIS, Jan. 4 (AP).—United States 3d army armor and infantry today was hammering back and enemy onslaught led by 100 tanks. Lt. Gen. Patton's men stood up under great enemy blows without losing an inch of ground, then lashed out with half mile gains both east and west of Bastogne which cut to three and a half miles the neck of a five mile deep box between Bastogne and Wiltz, 10 miles to the east.

American troops in the area of the Monschau hinge improved their positions slightly in the Lamersdorf area, 13 miles southeast of Aachen, but that sector of the front generally was quiet.

At the northern end of the front, the Canadian 1st army repulsed attacks in company strength by the Germans crossing the Maas [Meuse] river [in Holland].

Penetrate Vosges Line

Diversions enemy assaults spreading from the western Saar 70 miles eastward to the Rhine were blunted after the United States 7th army had given up all footholds in Germany's Palatinate and the enemy had penetrated seven miles into the doughboys' northern Vosges mountain line.

A high army officer said it seemed obvious the German high command was shifting its armor to pre-

pare a new line stretching in an arc about half way back from its deepest present penetration in the Belgian bulge.

This would leave little chance of the Yanks trapping any great number of enemy units even when the 1st and 3d armies make a junction. Nor would anywhere near half of the lost ground be regained, due to the semi-circular form of the German defense.

Patton's Bastogne wedge was a swirling battleground.

Many Counter-Attacks

With two regiments of infantry in support, enemy tanks struck at Longchamps, three miles north of Bastogne, against the heroic 101st air borne division, defenders of Bastogne, and at Michamps, five miles northeast of Bastogne. Both attacks were battered down, but they succeeded in stemming Patton's drive.

Von Rundstedt threw in one counter-blow after another in a futile effort to reduce the Bastogne wedge. One counter-thrust was hammered back near St. Hubert, 15 miles west of Bastogne, and another northwest of Made-St. Etienne, four miles west of Bastogne. The doughboys fought to clear high ground near Foy, three miles northeast of Bastogne.

Hacking away at the rugged defenses, Patton's troops edged forward a half mile on a three mile front near Mande-St. Etienne.

Other forces bucked thru six inch snow and plowed forward a half mile southeast of surrounded Wardin, four miles east of Bastogne, tightening the neck of the Harlange box.

Supreme headquarters confirmed that the United States 7th army had given up its last positions on German soil and had fallen back into France.

The 7th army threw in

counterblows that blunted the tip of a German salient driven seven miles deep into American lines near Bitche in the northern Vosges.

Yanks Regain Highway

The Germans succeeded in cutting the main highways running south from Bitche, but the Americans regained the high late tonight and held Meisenthal, eight miles southwest of Bitche, which changed hands several times.

Americans and Germans fought in Phillipsbourg, eight miles southeast of Bitche.

Fighting broke out in the Vosges mountains north of Reipertswiller, eight miles south of Bitche, where the German push had carried to within two and half miles of the Alsatian plain.

The Americans recaptured Wildenguth, a mile northwest of Reipertswiller.

In the western Saar, the Germans were driven back across the Saar river two and a half miles west of Volklingen, six miles southeast of Saarlautern.

Seven miles southeast of Sarreguemines the Americans recaptured Gros Rederching and drove the Germans from all except the northern fringe of Aachen, two miles to the southeast.

[Swiss dispatches told of violent artillery duels across the Rhine on Wednesday just north of the Swiss border; but said the firing had died down yesterday. These accounts said the Germans tried to cross the Rhine at midnight, but were thrown back by French fire at Huningue, the bridgehead from which the enemy retreated a month ago. German artillery pounded Mulhouse from the Siegfried line forts.]