



# **The Ardennes:: Battle of the Bulge (U.S. Army in World War II)**

*Hugh M. Cole*

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During most of the eleven months between D-day and V-E day in Europe, the U.S. Army was carrying on highly successful offensive operations. As a consequence, the American soldier was buoyed with success, imbued with the idea that his enemy could not strike him a really heavy counterblow, and sustained by the conviction that the war was nearly won. Then, unbelievably, and under the goad of Hitler's fanaticism, the German Army launched its powerful counteroffensive in the Ardennes in December 1944 with the design of knifing through the Allied armies and forcing a negotiated peace. The mettle of the American soldier was tested in the fires of adversity and the quality of his response earned for him the right to stand shoulder to shoulder with his forebears of Valley Forge, Fredericksburg, and the Marne. This is the story of how the Germans planned and executed their offensive. It is the story of how the high command, American and British, reacted to defeat the German plan once the reality of a German offensive was accepted. But most of all it is the story of the American fighting man and the manner in which he fought a myriad of small defensive battles until the torrent of the German attack was slowed and diverted, its force dissipated and finally spent. It is the story of squads, platoons, companies, and even conglomerate scratch groups that fought with courage, with fortitude, with sheer obstinacy, often without information or communications or the knowledge of the whereabouts of friends. In less than a fortnight the enemy was stopped and the Americans were preparing to resume the offensive. While Bastogne has become the symbol of this obstinate, gallant, and successful defense, this work appropriately emphasizes the crucial significance of early American success in containing the attack by holding firmly on its northern and southern shoulders and by upsetting the enemy timetable at St. Vith and a dozen lesser known but important and decisive battlefields. The hard fighting that preceded the Battle of the Bulge has been recounted in two volumes, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, and Dr. Cole's own earlier work, *The Lorraine Campaign*. Events after it will be related in *The Last Offensive*, now in preparation. Two other volumes in this subseries, *The Supreme Command and Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume II*, are useful supplements to the Ardennes volume. This volume deals with the crucial period of the campaign conducted in the Belgian Ardennes and Luxembourg, generally known as the Battle of the Bulge. Although the German planning described herein antedates the opening gun by several weeks, the story of the combat operations begins on 16 December 1944. By 3 January 1945 the German counteroffensive was at an end, and on that date the Allies commenced an attack that would take them across the Rhine and into Germany. The last phase of operations in the Ardennes, therefore, is properly part and parcel of the final Allied offensive in Europe, and so the course of battle beginning on 3 January 1945 is described in another and final volume of this subseries. The problem of the level of treatment is always difficult in the organization and writing of the general staff type of history, which is the design of this volume. In describing a war of movement, the solution usually has been to concentrate on tactical units smaller than those normally treated when the war of position obtains.

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