

This Day in History... January 25, 1945

Allies Win the Battle of the Bulge

On January 25, 1945, the Battle of the Bulge came to an end.

On July 25, 1944, Allied troops broke through German lines at Saint-Lô, France, and a month later, Paris was liberated after four long years of Nazi occupation. Driving forward, General George S. Patton pushed eastward toward the Rhine River, while British commander Bernard Montgomery swept into Belgium, capturing Antwerp on September 4th. By the late fall, US and British forces had managed to drive the Germans back to their own borders.



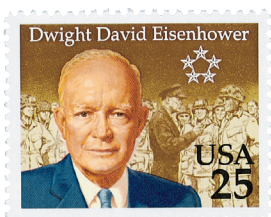
Bradley commanded the US 12th Army during the battle.

Faced with disaster, Hitler made one final attempt to win the war. Pulling together his failing resources, he planned to break through the weakly held 75-mile front of Belgium's dense Ardennes Forest, severing the Allied forces in two. The Germans planned their offensive with strict secrecy. They kept radio communication to a minimum and moved troops and equipment at night. Because the Allies were busy planning their own offensive, they failed to see what the Germans were up to.

On the misty morning of December 16th, more than 200,000 German troops and about 1,000 tanks launched their attack. The four US units they targeted were caught by complete surprise, because their superior air force was grounded by overcast skies. The two forces collided throughout the day, but the

Germans eventually broke through the American front. They captured most of a division, as well as key roads, and then marched toward the Meuse River. This created a large bulge in the Allied lines, which is where the battle got its popular name.

Immediately, supreme Allied commander Dwight D. Eisenhower sent reinforcements to prevent the Germans from pushing in any further. Days later, Patton turned his troops around and launched a counterattack on the German flank. The troops at the front were often isolated in the forest and unaware of the situation in the overall battle, but still did their part to slow the Nazi advance. This included moving or destroying stocks of gasoline, which the German tanks needed to advance, and keeping them away from vital crossroads. At the Bastogne crossroads, a German commander ordered the Americans to surrender, to which General Anthony McAuliffe famously replied, "Nuts!"



Eisenhower said during the battle "The present situation is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us and not of disaster. There will be only cheerful faces at this table."

The Allies also had the terrain in their favor, which set the Germans behind schedule, allowing for more Allied reinforcements to arrive. And as the weather cleared, the Allies were finally able to launch air attacks on the German forces and their supply lines, which proved to be one of the most determining factors in the failed German offensive. By January 16, 1945, the Ardennes front had been re-established to where it had been a month earlier, though fighting continued until the last German troops withdrew on January 25.

The Battle of the Bulge was one of the war's largest and bloodiest battles to involve the United States. Of the 300,000 Germans that fought, up to 125,000 were killed, missing, or wounded. Meanwhile, the Americans, 610,000 strong, suffered 89,000 casualties.

Following the battle, British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill stated, "This is undoubtedly the greatest American battle of the war and will, I believe, be regarded as an ever-famous American victory."



The only stamp in all of the US WWII sheets to picture a winter scene.



Patton led the US 3rd Army during the battle.



Martha Gellhorn stowed away on a boat to Normandy to report on the war, including the Battle of the Bulge.

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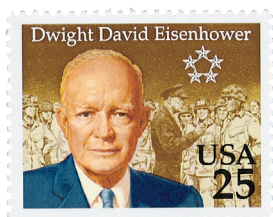
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