

Snowy Belgium, Bastogne and Beyond

From a little unknown river called the Our, a mighty concentration of German forces created one of the last desperate largescale tank battles and overall struggles of the war. The minut details have escaped no writer's pen ever since historians have tried to assemble the stories that reflected its repercussion.

It started around 5:30 along a cold stretch noted for its relative quietude. When the battle commenced, at the exact moment that it started, allied commanders thought of it as nothing uncommon. It seemed just another artillery barrage in the destitute of war. Only when hour after hour elapsed, with radio communications to the frontline units going haywire, that it dawned on Army commanders that tremendous forces were involved. (One general thought it was an offensive to capture the capital of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.) The mysterious plan had a meaning. Conceived by Hitler back in August, made into formidable plans by him in mid-September and finally detailed by German High Command in October, the plan in a sense showed the mind of a man who was not quite mad but a genius. A man not quite ready to give in to defeat, and a man who still believed he had as much power as he had in 1932, when out of nothing he became the great dictator. With a card hand of very little he was able to anticipate, and defeat opponents with aces. He believed he could do that again, and it claimed the lives of many Allies, especially Americans to prove he was wrong.

16