

Hell in the Huertgen

The Story of American Soldiers Squandered In the Huertgen Forest by Gen. Omar Bradley

The undeservedly forgotten Battle of Huertgen Forest, on the Belgian-German frontier, between the U.S. Army and the German Wehrmacht, raged ferociously from September 19, 1944 to February 10, 1945. The horrors and wholesale bloodshed of this unnecessary engagement rank it among the most scandalous miscarriages of warfare in World War II, and it is marked as the longest battle in the history of the U.S. Army.

BY JOHN NUGENT

PROLOGUE: DEADLY ATTITUDES

It is striking to compare American “non-tactics” in the Huertgen Forest with the tactics General Leon Degrelle, a four-year combatant on the Russian front, describes in his video *Hitler’s Blitzkrieg, Part One*. (See page 74.) He views as criminally negligent the failure by any officer to heed the lessons of the German blitzkriegs of 1939 to 1940.

Inquisitive and forward-thinking members of the military world such as France’s Charles de Gaulle and Britain’s Liddell Hart had known since 1918 one thing at least: masses of loaded-down infantry advancing suicidally on foot into machine guns constituted World War I’s most shameful, disastrous and outdated formula.

The cutting-edge German blitzkriegs that stunned the world meant above all else rapid maneuver and surprise assaults using masses of speeding tanks, dive-bombing Stukas, and elite troops that raced to the front on trucks that unburdened the fast troops by hauling trailers carrying all their heavy gear: heavy coats and jackets, tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear and rations.

The new warfare overwhelmed Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia and Greece in days. Man-

euver in the blitzkrieg method meant enormous “pincer” or enveloping movements that skirted the enemy’s strong points, his center and his heavy divisions while closing a net behind his back and sides.

But the overrated Army generals Omar Bradley and Courtney Hodges, throwbacks to 1918 and disastrous World War I tactics, had learned nothing about speed and maneuver by 1944 when they launched the heart-breaking Battle of Huertgen Forest. They had ignored what most American generals had studied—Hitler’s lightning victories while being outnumbered yet still resulting in very light German casualties.

Bradley, who also despised the blitzkrieging George Patton (denouncing him venomously and personally in the two gossipy autobiographies he wrote), with his subordinate, General Hodges, ordered 120,000 men to slog their way, on foot, directly into a wooded dungeon of machine guns, mines, booby traps and preset artillery. They perished for what historians now call “the strategically insignificant Huertgen Forest.”

Their callous “we got plenty o’ men” attitude, in fairness to Bradley and Hodges, was encouraged by a telegram from Allied Supreme Commander Dwight David Eisenhower. In an amazing telegram, “Ike” removed all incentive for these two generals to maneuver and use tactics to save lives. He offered to immediately replace all killed or wounded with fresh cannon fodder from the rear, asking only for a good estimate of anticipated losses “48 hours in advance.” Ike helpfully agreed not to ask for too many more men “to avoid overstrength.” Eisenhower’s exact words in the telegram to Bradley were:

COMBAT UNITS ARE AUTHORIZED TO BASE DAILY REPLACEMENT REQUISITIONS ON ANTICIPATED LOSSES FORTY-EIGHT HOURS IN ADVANCE TO EXPEDITE DELIVERY OF REPLACEMENTS. TO AVOID BUILDING UP OVERSTRENGTH, ESTIMATES SHOULD BE MADE WITH CARE.

SIGNED EISENHOWER

With unlimited supplies of men thus promised to Bradley and Hodges, and no desire to check out the Huertgen Forest them-



selves, it was time to send their men (to use a sarcastic Marine Corps phrase for blind charges) “hey-diddle-diddle, straight-up-the-middle.”

CRIMINALLY STUPID

How and why so many wonderful young Americans were sacrificed poses an interesting question. It has been said that the battle for the Huertgen Forest was based on a plan that was grossly—even criminally—stupid. There do not appear to be any arguments to the contrary. The statement, “the months-long battle of the Huertgen Forest was a loser that our top brass never seemed to want to talk about,” says it all.

Who can be blamed? Probably no one, or rather everyone who had any connection to its planning. Headquarters personnel from battalion on up to Corps and Army levels found themselves comfortable billets and seldom strayed near the front. Of course there were notable exceptions, but in general the American officers handing down the orders to attack and assigning the objectives had no idea what it was like at the front. Combat veterans said that only on the rarest of occasions was any staff officer above the rank of captain ever seen.

Another of the 24,000 American casualties in Huertgen Forest is carried away on a stretcher. Ernest Hemingway was a war reporter at the Battle of Huertgen Forest and saw the psychological collapse of his friend, Regimental Commander Colonel Charles T. Lahm. In his book *Over the River and Into the Trees*, he wrote: “In Huertgen the dead froze solid, and it was so cold that their faces froze red. We received many reinforcements, but I thought it would be easier to just shoot them when they jumped off the truck rather than have to drag them back in from wherever they were headed to get killed.” General James Gavin, commander of the 82nd Airborne, stated: “It was the most costly, unproductive and poorly led battle that our Army ever fought.”

Certainly the habit of staff (rear echelon) officers shying away from the dangers and gore of the front is not true of most U.S. Army units, and especially not of elite American units or branches such as the Special Forces, Seals or the U.S. Marine Corps.

In the author’s experience in the 1980s with the U.S. Marines, officers had a powerful ethos of sharing everything with the men: combat, dangerous forward reconnaissance, even putting enlist-

ed Marines first in the “chow” line for food.

The honor of the U.S. Army was saved several times by the selfless, hardship-sharing General George S. Patton. Before World War II he had paid with a check from his own pocket \$200,000—in 1930s dollars—to provide critically insufficient spare parts for his tank division. When war came, his men revered him even more. He fearlessly went into harm’s way to reconnoiter up close what his men were facing and to “eyeball” where he was planning next to order them.

After 1945, U.S. generals in the European theater were disappointed to learn from the memoirs of the vanquished but still respected German general staff that they were of one mind about the quality of American generalship. America’s only outstanding general, for the Wehrmacht field generals, had been George S. Patton.

THE HUBRIS BEFORE THE DOOM

General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEP), was almost euphoric after D-Day. General Eisenhower’s intelligence officer predicted that victory in Europe was “within sight, almost within reach.” The First Army chief of intelligence was even more optimistic, declaring that it was unlikely that organized German resistance would continue beyond December 1, 1944.

Others, however, believed that the Germans remained unbeaten. Col. Oscar W. Koch, the Third Army intelligence officer, was convinced that the German army was playing for time and preparing for a “last-ditch struggle in the field at all costs.”

Instead of a quick dash into the heart of Germany, what awaited General Eisenhower’s armies was an exhausting campaign in horrid weather against a foe whose determination was steeled by the knowledge that he was fighting for the very survival of his homeland. As SHAEP plotted its next moves, 200,000 German workers were frantically laboring to strengthen the German West Wall defenses. The Wehrmacht prepared to contest the Allied advance in places like Arnhem in Holland, Aachen and the Huertgen Forest in Germany, and, in France, Metz and the foothills of the Vosges Mountains in Alsace.

The surprising speed and strength of the German counter-attack to British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery’s “Operation Market-Garden” at Arnhem (immortalized in the film *A Bridge Too Far*) should have made crystal-clear to Allied generals that the Germans were giving, as they said belatedly, “no signs of collapse in morale or in the will to defend Germany.”

THE BATTLE OF HUERTGEN FOREST

By late September 1944, the Allies had reached the West Wall defenses of the Fatherland, having taken Aachen on October 21 in house-to-house fighting. That action was highly criticized because American tanks instead could have rapidly encircled the city, starving out its defenders (a method the Germans had perfected in their numerous early victories).

Building on the successful Aachen offensive, the Allied plan called for a drive to the Roer River, putting tactical bridges over it, then sending the troops across the wide Rhine River plain to reach the mighty Rhine itself at Cologne. Bradley and Hodges decided that going straight through the Huertgen Forest, not around it, to get to the Roer River, was only reasonable. (They felt having any Germans to their rear represented an intolerable danger. Hitler would have encircled any enemy troops he had bypassed while continuing to his goal.)

The four-month shootout in the woods turned into a hellhole into which numerous U.S. infantry divisions, and two U.S. armored divisions were poured. The 1st Infantry Division, the 4th Infantry Division, the 8th Infantry Division, the 47th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division, the 28th Infantry Division (Pennsylvania National Guard), the 2d Ranger Battalion, the 5th Armored Division’s 46th Armored Infantry Battalion with its Combat Command Reserve, plus many smaller supporting units, entered a forest

that GIs quickly called the “green hell of Huertgen” or the “Death Factory.”

Hoping the Americans would fall into their forest trap, the Germans had carefully augmented the natural obstacles of *der Huertgenwald* with extensive minefields and carefully prepared positions. They realized something the Allies had not yet fully grasped—if the Wehrmacht lost the town of Schmidt at the far side of the forest, then the GIs could race to the Roer River dams so the Germans could not “blow them” and flood the valley. The German plan was to keep control of the

dams until the right moment (when the Americans poured into the valley), then flood the area, thereby washing away entire U.S. units plus any Allied tactical bridges thrown over the Roer. German reserves would then mop up any survivors of the “tsunami made in Germany.”

Consequently, the Germans were determined to lure into the forest, if not the far-to-the-rear Bradley and Hodges, then all their men, slowing down for months the American march to the dams. And so it came to pass. The Wehrmacht also knew from experience that the almost impenetrable terrain of the Huertgen Forest would turn their thin lines into a wide and deep defensive trap and simultaneously render nearly unusable the masses of American aircraft, tanks, and artillery.

General Hodges’ First Army was the center of the drive to the Roer dams, advancing in the territory between Aachen on its left and Huertgen Forest on the right flank. To secure that forest flank, Hodges ordered the 28th Division into the Huertgen Forest. It also relieved the 9th Division that had been operating there since September 19, 1944, with little success.

The 9th had already suffered 4,500 wounded and killed—up to 80 percent in some units—trying to secure Lammersdorf and Hill 554 (1,754 feet high) in the forest in an attempt to dominate the Monschau Corridor, one of the few routes through the Huertgen Forest. The 9th Division had intended to cross the Kall River and seize the town of Schmidt past the end of the woods.

The Huertgen Forest battle area was about 50 square miles.

The German plan was to keep control of the dams until the right moment (when the Americans poured into the valley), then flood the area, thereby washing away entire American units.



The forest lies on a plateau adjacent to the Ardennes mountains, divided in the center by the fast running Kall River and the Weisser Weh (in German “White Suffering”) Creek, with the Roer River as its southern and eastern boundary. It begins a few miles southeast of Aachen, Germany. It consists almost exclusively of an endless stand of dark fir trees, 100 feet high, spaced close together. These endless firs created a dark thicket where the enemy could not be seen or attacked until far too late.

Large units could not stay together and maneuver among the deep gorges, high ridges, and narrow trails. And the small unit patrols sent out were routinely cut down by machine guns and mortars firing from well-hidden German bunkers or were maimed and killed by mines, booby traps, and trip wires. The well-built and dug-in defenses included elements of the Siegfried Line (“*der Westwall*”) that ran through the forest. For the Americans, but equally for the Germans who experienced incredible American tenacity in disaster, German General Rolf van Gersdorff’s comment sounded a common chord: “I have engaged in the long campaigns in Russia as well as other fronts and I believe the fighting in the Huertgen was the heaviest I have ever witnessed.”

Those who fought on the American side were mostly from the high school classes of 1942, 1943 and 1944. They were to take up the battle and press through after the classes of 1940 and 1941 had driven this far to the German border but now were too few in number to press on.

These boys, mostly still teenagers, included championship

Soldiers of Company E, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division move cautiously through the Huertgen Forest near the Raffelsbrand road junction, November 2, 1944. American GIs in Europe had never before fought an extended battle in a forest. They were neither properly trained nor equipped for it. Under 100-foot trees and in gorges, radios were unreliable; planes saw nothing; coordinated troop movements were next to impossible.

high school football players, class presidents, those that had sung in the spring concerts, those that were in the class plays, the wizards of the chemistry classes, rich kids, bright kids. There were sergeants with college degrees along with privates from Yale and Harvard. America was throwing her finest young men at the entrenched Germans, who were at their most dangerous, like any nation, when operating on and protecting its own soil.

The training these young men had gone through at stateside posts such as Fort Benning, Georgia, was physically rigorous but severely short on the tactical and leadership challenges that the junior officers would have to meet. British Lt. General Sir Brian Gwynne Horrocks made a surprise front line visit to the 84th division (one of the few, if not the only general to do so) and described these young men as “an impressive product of American training methods which turned out division after division complete, fully equipped. The divisions were composed of splendid, very brave, tough young men.”

However, when Capt. John O'Grady of the Ninth Army's Historical Section subsequently visited the forest in late November, he sent back a memorandum to Ninth Army: "On November 23 the battalion was attacking a superior German force entrenched in an excellent position. The only thing that higher headquarters contributed to the debacle was pressure, and God only knows where the pressure started, perhaps Corps or perhaps Army. It had the effect of ordering men to die needlessly."

O'Grady was boiling: "Tactics and maneuver on battalion or regiment scale were conspicuous by their absence. It never seemed to occur to anyone that the plan might be wrong; but rather the indictment was placed on the small unit commanders and the men who were doing the fighting. The companies went into battle against the formidable Siegfried Line, using hand grenades and rifle bullets against pillboxes. The 84th Division walked into the most touted defensive line in modern warfare without so much as the benefit of one briefing by combat officers."

To make matters worse, the winter of 1944 was bitter cold and constantly wet, keeping the rugged terrain covered with snow or transformed into mud; sleet, snow and fog obscured the GIs' sight.

The initial objective of the 28th Division was to take the towns of Germeter, Vossenack, and Schmidt. After Schmidt, the roads would be accessible to support the First Army drive over the Roer River to the Rhine.

On November 2, after heavy artillery and air bombardment, the 28th Division moved into the heart of Huertgen Forest. They soon found the bombardment had been ineffective in suppressing the German defenders. The 28th came under intense attack in the dense forest from the Germans' well-prepared positions, where machine guns, mine fields, "preregistered" (already sighted-in) artillery, mortars, and small arms fire combined to make any progress extremely costly.

GIs had to adjust mentally to new realities. A wounded com-

rade might be rigged to a bomb; a sheltering trench or foxhole could be wired to explode; or incoming "airburst" artillery could explode in the treetops and rain down in all directions. To hope to survive, GIs had to unlearn the normal response to incoming artillery: "hit the deck." The shrapnel and huge chunks of treetops and branches would come down full-force on their stretched-out bodies. Instead, soldiers had to stand up absolutely erect while hugging a tree tightly for dear life, trying to make a small target by putting as much of their body as possible under their steel helmet as red-hot metal and flying wood descended.

Although the 28th Division's assault had some initial success, actually capturing Schmidt briefly by the evening of November 3, powerful German counterattacks with tanks pushed back their positions to Kommerscheidt, where they were overrun on November 7.

An operation starting on November 5 along the Kall Trail (running along the Kall River) ran into burned-out tanks, heavy mud, and insurmountable roadblocks. The Germans had felled trees so they perfectly interlocked as they hit the ground, then booby-trapped the ensemble.

The advance naturally stalled, and with heavy losses.

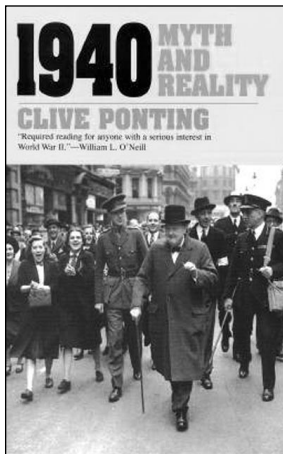
By November 13, virtually every officer in the rifle companies of the 28th had been killed or wounded; there were so many casualties among the enlisted men that the 28th existed only on paper.

The decimated "grunts" were replaced by the 8th Division, and sent for R&R to the rear into the Ardennes. The hapless 28th after a few weeks was surprised to learn that their last weeks of "rest and recreation" there would be enriched by the Battle of the Bulge.

The 4th Infantry Division fared just as badly. From November 7 to December 3, the 4th Infantry Division lost over 7,000 casualties in the Huertgen Forest. In order to recuperate, it followed the 28th into the same "rest & recreation area."

The 8th Infantry Division entered into the Huertgen Forest November 16-20, and with fresh new energies attacked the strong

To make matters worse, the winter of 1944 was bitter cold and constantly wet, keeping the rugged terrain covered with snow or transformed into mud; sleet, snow and fog obscured the GIs' sight.



1940: Myth and Reality By Clive Ponting

BRITISH JOURNALIST CLIVE PONTING squares off against Winston Churchill's version of WWII and gives a unique portrayal. Churchill depicted Britain's WWII survival in terms of sheer heroism, whereas Ponting describes a second-rate power muddling through in the expectation of deliverance from abroad. Ponting's account seems more consistent with human nature and more authentic. The actors in *1940 Myth and Reality* are real people, exhibiting vanity, pettiness and pigheadedness. Those who history has vilified (Chamberlain, Halifax, Joseph P. Kennedy and others) appear in his pages as ordinary public servants serving in extraordinary times under impossible economic and political constraints. Those whose leadership is immortalized by mainstream historians were of no greater character. The most revealing aspect of his book is his description of the pre-Pearl Harbor financial dealings between Washington and London by which the former sought to subjugate the latter. Ponting's 235 pages of lucid reporting ought to be required reading in both countries. Softcover, 235 pages, #228, \$15.95 minus 10% for TBR subscribers. Available from TBR BOOK CLUB, P.O. Box 15877, Washington, D.C. 20003. See page 80 for order coupon and S&H charges. Call 1-877-773-9077 toll free to charge to Visa or MasterCard.

Valor in the Huertgen Forest

Here are just two of the military citations from the many Medals of Honor GIs won in the Huertgen Forest: First Lt. Bernard J. Ray, Company F, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, set out alone to blast a path through German “concertina” (barbed wire studded with virtual razor blades) that was blocking his unit’s advance. Lt. Ray stuffed blasting caps in his pockets, wrapped primer cord around his body, and grabbed several dynamite-filled “bangalore torpedoes.” He ran and crawled up to his barbed-wire target, but was severely wounded while beginning to set his charges.

Apparently realizing he might lose consciousness well before completing his mission and retreating, Lt. Ray connected right on his immobilized body a bangalore to the igniting caps in his pocket and the primer cord around his body. He set off the explosion, blowing apart the concertina as he perished.

Private First Class Francis McGraw, Company H, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, avoided a German artillery barrage, then halted a subsequent German ground assault with fire from his heavy machine gun. Having run out of ammunition, in seconds he successfully reloaded his heavy weapon and continued firing until a second time he exhausted his rounds. Now grabbing a carbine (a short-barreled rifle), McGraw continued firing on the charging Germans until he was finally killed.



Top right, U.S. soldiers cautiously enter the Huertgen Forest. Of the 120,000 GIs asked to slog through the muddy forest—directly into heavily fortified German machinegun positions (reminiscent of outdated WWI infantry tactics)—24,000 men perished. The blame for the carnage can be placed squarely on the shoulders of their commanders. **Above left, the grave of Francis McGraw**, one of those killed fighting valiantly in the Huertgen Forest. **Right, an illustration of the entryway to the forest** drawn for a U.S. combat magazine of the period.



points that earlier units had failed to take. On November 21, the 121st Infantry Regiment of the 8th Division was ordered in to gain control of both sides of the Germeter-Huertgen Highway, but bogged down in the familiar pattern of failure. After replacing its commander and adding armored support, the 8th Division finally captured the town of Huertgen on November 28. Kleinau and the Brandenburg Ridge were then overrun—significant progress at last.

As U.S. division after division bogged down or crept forward through mud and blood at a snail’s pace, Army “court historians” and *Stars & Stripes* journalists were writing that the German defense was, quote, “stubborn.” The word choice was typical of a hate-fueled war: what for Americans was “heroic” was for the Germans called “stubborn” or “fanatical.”

In fact, both sides fought with incredible valor and astounding obedience to orders. Ironically, some of the most dogged and vicious hand-to-hand combat took place between young Germans and Americans of German ancestry in the 28th—the Pennsylvania National Guard.

The 28th Division was known as the “Keystone Division” after the red Pennsylvania keystone symbol on their shoulder patches. So many Pennsylvania Guardsmen died in the Huertgen Forest that the Germans, not knowing “keystones” but having perceived a “red bucket” on the patch, agreed the 28th’s nickname should be “Bloody Bucket Division.”

By February 1945, after almost five months as a killing field, the once pristine forest had become a World War I-like “no man’s

land”—blasted by artillery, exploded by booby traps, and cratered by U.S. aerial bombardments. The soil was strewn with uprooted, decapitated and overturned trees, splintered branches, concrete chunks from obliterated pillboxes, and military equipment that had gone airborne and landed everywhere. Worst of all, the many reeking corpses and dreaded objects that turned out to be body parts unnerved the combatants.

Understandably, the emotional toll on the GIs was very high. In forward areas, isolated groups of soldiers spent as much as two weeks under continuous enemy fire, often crammed into rain-soaked, mud-slick foxholes. They existed without hot food or one cup of hot coffee. Frostbite, trench foot and other afflictions spread through the ranks. One officer after another had to be relieved for failure to make progress or for mental collapse. A large percentage of ordinary soldiers also cracked under the stress and were evacuated to the rear with battle fatigue.

The Eye of Vichy: WWII French Newsreels

By Claude Chabrol, famous French film director. This is a composition of footage and newsreels produced by the Germans and their French collaborators during German occupation of France. These movies are astonishing in that they show how well off the French people were during those years. The worst of the destruction came from the British, who continually bombed French towns and villages. #240, VHS, 110 minutes. **WAS \$32.95—NOW JUST \$20.** No further discount. **Call 1-877-773-9077 to charge to Visa or MasterCard.** Add \$3 S&H inside the U.S. Add \$6 S&H outside the U.S.

END OF THE BATTLE

At the far edge of the Huertgen Forest, close to the goal of Huertgen town, the 2nd Ranger Battalion was brought in to seize “Castle Hill” (“Hill 400”). The *Schlosshugel* was a high perch the Germans had occupied from which to rain metal down into the extensive surrounding areas that multiple assaults by First Army had not cleared.

On December 7, battle-hardened Rangers who had clambered up off Omaha Beach on D-Day were sent charging up Castle Hill and, in hand-to-hand combat, overwhelmed a surprised German defense in a vicious, day-long ordeal. Waves of German counterattacks could not dislodge them. The Rangers were reinforced on December 8, finally, after having suffered nearly 100 percent wounded or killed. Nine days later the rebounding Germans took back Hill 400, holding it until February 1945, the last flame of the Battle of Huertgen Forest.

On December 13 the newly committed 83d Infantry and 5th Armored Divisions emerged from Huertgen Forest into the towns of Gey and Strass. Although the eastern section of the forest, including Schmidt, was still held by the Germans, First Army forces went around them (maneuvering at last). They then raced to the west bank of the Roer River.

Early on the morning of February 5, nearly two months later, other American soldiers charged again into the Huertgen Forest, and for the final time. The smoking ruins of Schmidt and Kommerscheidt fell on February 7, opening the way for another advance that led up along the Roer River to the vital Roer dams, which on February 10 were secured from being blown by the Germans.

The First Army's five months in the “Death Factory” were over.

THE SHOCKING TALLY

By then more than 120,000 Allied troops had fought for Huertgen Forest—the original “cannon fodder” plus their thousands of replacements sent up by Eisenhower. They had vanquished 80,000 Germans, six full divisions, killing 12,000. More than 24,000 American soldiers were wounded or killed, to which must be added 9,000 victims of disease or psychological collapse.

But beyond “killed” (the only number the U.S. media reports from Iraq) what does the word “wounded” imply in modern warfare, and does the public understand it? Enormous numbers of GIs in Huertgen Forest were “wounded.” “Wounded” does not usually mean a Hollywood-style “grazing” on shoulder or thigh, or as Hollywood heroes used to say to the leading lady, “Shucks, it's just a flesh wound.” In many of Tinseltown's “wars” the American soldier shrugs off his little red uniform stain and with zen-like calm continues nailing one enemy for each round.

Since the U.S. Civil War with its first machine guns, accurate rifles and artillery, “wounded” often means that “half-men” are carried back stateside minus legs, feet, intestines, arms, parts of the skull, faces, jawbones, ears, noses, and hands. Thus it was with

many brave Pennsylvanians and other patriotic American fighting men who passed through the “green hell of Huertgen.”

For the unluckiest, “wounded” means “living” ever after in a VA hospital ward. It could mean ending up divorced by a frustrated wife, and being unable to ever find another mate. Victims of booby traps many times do not father offspring.

No doubt this is why the media-savvy Bush administration evacuates the “wounded” from Iraq at night, and lands them in the States also at night when the TV cameras cannot get repulsive pictures to shake up the complacent. Wounds, from *der Hürtgenwald* in 1944 to Falluja in 2004-'05, are sometimes worse to contemplate than death.

The net result of Huertgen for the German defenders was to hold down the Americans for five months before attaining their goal, the Roer River. This meant that the Rhine River that lies behind the Roer was not crossed until even later, March 7, 1945, at Remagen. The Americans, once they hit the German border, advanced thereafter only 50 bloody miles in six months—a World War I-like distance that resulted from World War I-like tactics that brought about the “Death Factory” of Huertgen.

Were this scandalous battle of Huertgen Forest just as widely known to the U.S. public as D-Day in Normandy or Iwo Jima in the Pacific (two victories that were won very rationally) Americans could at least take profound inspiration, not from the generals involved, but from the basic American fighting man and his Spartan courage and endurance. But were the public back in 1944-45 or thereafter to know the immensity of the Huertgen scandal, it would have shaken deeply our confidence in the military establishment and in Omar Bradley, whom the media was building up into a saint, the “anti-Patton” who always followed Eisenhower.

The strategic bottom line is that 120,000 American fighting men were squandered for nearly half a year in the middle of a major war to capture blasted trees. They missed their strategic goal of a quick Rhine crossing.

It is likely the Roer River dams could have been reached faster the Patton way, the blitzkrieg way, by passing by the trap of Huertgen Forest, roaring along the German public roads in their tanks and trucks, leaving behind them on the right those fateful miles of dark, ominous firs.

Had Bradley, Hodges and any rear-echelon officers and volunteers been willing, the Army truckers speeding by that thicket on the right could have slowed down and let all the advocates of “straight up the middle” get off, rifles in hand, to charge personally into the mines, booby traps, pillboxes and preset artillery waiting for them in the gloom of the Huertgen Forest. ♦

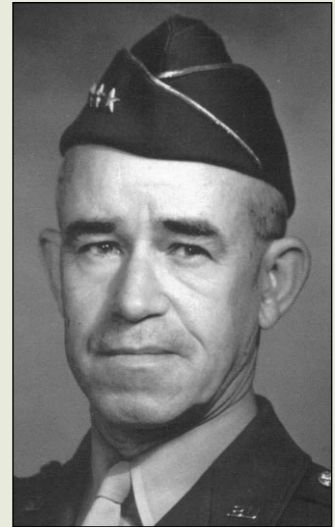
JOHN NUGENT, a Rhode Island native, served both as a machine-gunner and multilingual interrogator in the U.S. Marines. He has been a European-American rights activist for many years. He now lives in Virginia.

Bradley Trashes Patton

What one not-so-great general
had to say about one of the
great generals of U.S. history



GEORGE PATTON



OMAR BRADLEY

When Gen. George S. Patton went operational after D-Day (on Aug. 1, 1944), he advanced his tanks 400 miles in 30 days. Dwight D. Eisenhower and Omar N. Bradley complained that he was bypassing resistance, violating pre-Normandy planning, and disdaining the effort to hit the huge German cities in the industrial Ruhr valley. Patton shot back that his success was having a psychological effect on both Americans and foes; it was causing the psychological and physical collapse of entire armies; and it offered brief but precious moments to seize what might vault the Allies quickly over the Rhine. Otherwise the shortened fall days, wet weather, stiffening German resistance on the soil of the Reich and over-extended Allied supply lines could stifle the American advance. Patton's motto came from French statesman Georges Danton, "*De l'audace, de l'audace, toujours de l'audace*" ("be audacious, be audacious and more audacious").

General Bradley lived to write his first book in 1951: *A Soldier's Story*. In it he attacked British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery and all his plans, always defending his superior, Eisenhower. This was also true when Ike ordered support for Montgomery.

Bradley did not keep a wartime diary of his spite and wisdom. Patton, however, did keep a secret, very personal record of his frank opinions. With Patton's dated diary, we have clear and undoctored proof of his incredible advance sense about the enemy's intentions before the battle.

In 1951's *A Soldier's Story*, Bradley praises Patton faintly. But in 1983 Gen. Bradley wrote a general retelling that fiercely attacks Patton, *A General's Life*. Talking about Patton's breakout from Normandy after D-Day, Bradley drops his earlier book's positive version of an incident with Patton and inserts the following:

"I had a sharp telephone exchange with Patton that morning. He further infuriated me with his boastful, super-

cilious attitude. 'Let me go [from his part of Normandy] on to Falaise and [humorously] we'll drive the British back into the sea for another Dunkirk.' I replied coldly and firmly, 'Nothing doing. You're not to go beyond [nearby] Argentan!'

"[Patton] wrote obsessively candid self-congratulatory or self-abnegating letters and diaries. . . . Reading these volumes was one of the most astonishing literary experiences of my life. It would seem that no thought George ever had went unrecorded. . . ."

Having read the Virginian writing to himself, Bradley would have been pleased to read this from "gentle George": "[Bradley's] success is due to his lack of backbone and subservience to those above him. I will manage without him. In fact, I always have. Even in Sicily he had to be carried."

Bradley: "It may be a harsh thing to say, but I believe it was better for George Patton and his professional reputation that he died when he did. The war was won; there were no more wars left for him to fight. He was not a good peacetime soldier. He would not have found a happy place in the postwar Army. He would have . . . indiscreetly sound[ed] off on any subject any time, any place. In time he would have become a boring parody of himself—a decrepit, bitter, pitiful figure, unwittingly debasing the legend." (*A General's Life*, 64)

Bradley was made the military adviser for the 1970 movie *Patton*. In *Patton* (the film) Omar tries to steer Patton out of trouble: "Those out-spoken comments will eventually catch up with you, George!" and "You're going to get yourself relieved if you don't shut up!"

One news flash to the world: Bradley decided Patton's voice was too high for commanding troops. "I sometimes wondered if his macho profanity was unconscious overcompensation for his most serious personal flaw: a voice that was almost comically squeaky and high-pitched, altogether lacking in command authority." (*A General's Life*, 98) ❖