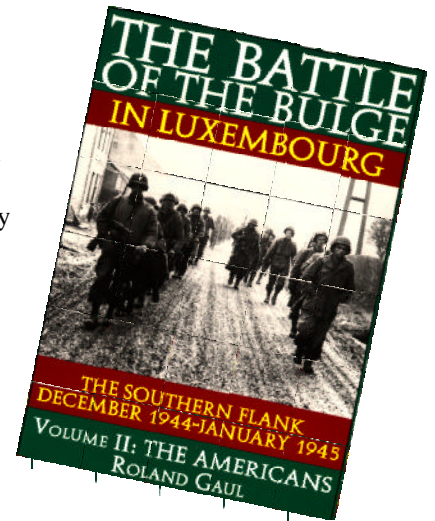
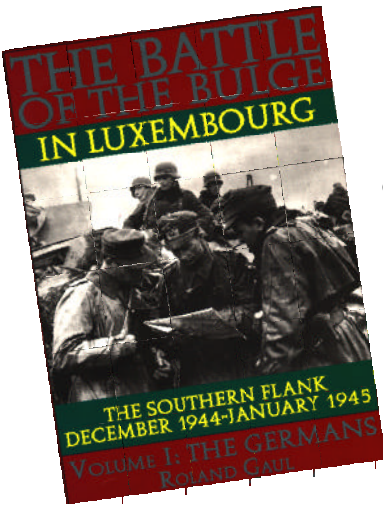


The Battle Of The Bulge In Luxembourg

By the end of September 1944, the Germans had been driven back across Luxembourg’s natural border along the Our and Sauer rivers. Just across the border in Germany lay the bunkers and fortification of the Siegfried line or Western Wall. For the civilians in Luxembourg, life was almost beginning to return back to normal. No one thought the Germans were capable of the offensive we now call The Battle Of The Bulge.

In these two volumes, Roland Gaul records the events from the stories and experiences of the soldiers and civilians who lived through those perilous days.



The Germans

The break through in Luxembourg started early in the morning of December 16, 1944 with shelling along the Luxembourg front from the Belgium border in the north to the town of Echternach in the south. For the Germans, it was a desperate drive to cut off the Allied forces fighting in the low countries to the north and west. To muster enough men for the assault, personnel from the German navy and air force were retrained as infantrymen in the Wehrmacht (army). Boys as young as 17 years from “Hitler Youth” and older men of the Volkssturm were also pressed into

Continued on next page



The Americans

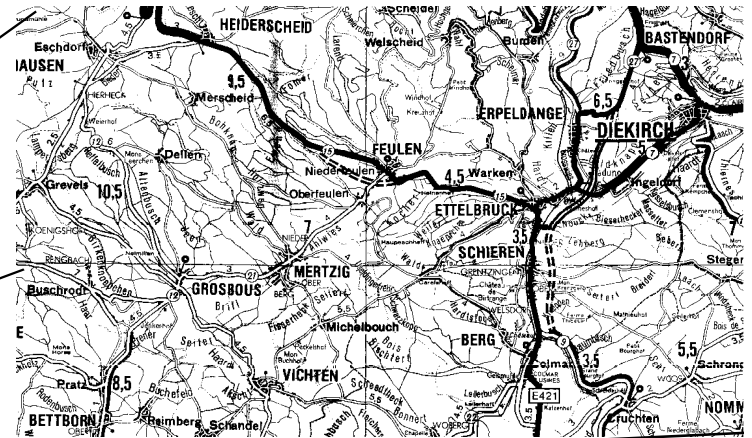
The dress parade, at which several American soldiers were to be decorated for bravery, scheduled for mid-morning of December 16, 1944 in Diekirch was quickly cancelled. Diekirch and towns all along the border, a few kilometers away, were under heavy German artillery fire. The American were not prepared for the German onslaught. Although there had been numerous reports of a German buildup, no one really believed they were

The Civilians

On May 10, 1940, the Nazi German armies poured through Luxembourg. The Grand Duchy was integrated into the Third Reich and the name Luxembourg ceased to exist; from then on the country was called “Gau Moselland.” German law was imposed, the use of the native language forbidden, French-sounding names were converted, and a vast campaign was undertaken to indoctrinate and to make the population believe that they

Continued on next page

Continued on next page



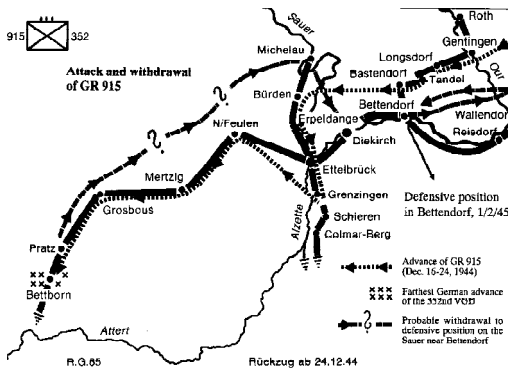
The Grand Duché De Luxembourg

The map on the left shows the small country of Luxembourg. With an area of 998 sq. miles, it is slightly less than twice the size of Shelby County, Iowa. In the area enlargement above, Pratz-Bettborn is shown at the bottom left with Diekirch near the top right. Pratz is the small village where Nicholas Gaul was born and lived until he emigrated to the United States in 1871. Some of his sister Roselie’s ancestors (the Jean Claude, Jean Pierre, and Nico Steichen families) still live there. Roland Gaul, the author and historian of *The Battle of the Bulge in Luxembourg* lives in Diekirch.

The Germans, continued

service for the final assault. However, equipped with the most modern infantry weapons, the MP 44 Sturmgewehr (assault rifle) sub-machine gun as well as the self-loading G-43 carbine, and lead by battle tested cadre of officers and noncommissioned officers, the Volksgenadierdivisions (VGD) was a formidable force.

Of particular interest is Unteroffizier (Sergeant) Wilhelm Stetter's account. His company's objective was Pratz-Bettborn.



The map above shows his group's, GR 915, route from their crossing point near Tandel on December 16, 1944 to their objective Pratz-Bettborn. By the 23rd, they were near their objective, about 200 meters or so to the first houses. In his account, he remembered his company, "There were only a few of them left. To the right and left of us, the place was dominated by Americans. . . . We were to hang on until reinforcements, we had been promised, arrived. Before us, in the village of Pratz, which we were supposed to have captured yesterday, we heard the rumbling of tank engines." It appears the Americans managed to successfully defend the village. Of the retreat from the area he says, "In the villages the dogs began to bark as if they too wanted to drive us to our death." When they finally took of defensive positions in the Bettendorf area, of his company of 70 men, only 12 remained. He was later captured by the Americans.

His account of the action and his suffering is just one man's experiences. In the book others also tell their own stories. Although he survived many of his comrades did not. There were approximately 83,000 German casualties during the Battle of the Bulge (killed, missing in action and wounded).

The Americans, continued

capable of a major offensive. Luxembourg, after all, had, since the end of September, become a "Paradise" for the battle weary troops to rest and regroup. On December 10th, Marlena Dietirch had even entertained the troops in Diekirch. Now that city was suddenly under siege.

The fighting was fierce along the front as the Americans tried to stem the German onslaught. As their stories unfold in the book they often collaborate the same battles or incidents experienced by their German counterparts. Those involved in the early fighting often end their narrative describing their capture by the Germans. By Christmas the German advance was finally halted. By then, almost half of Luxembourg, the southern flank of the "Bulge," was occupied by the German Army.



By February 7, 1945 the Germans were once again driven back to the western wall. However, the Americans had paid a steep price. U.S. casualties during the "Battle of the Bulge" was 75,000 killed, wounded and missing in action. Many of the dead are enshrined (pictured here) at the American Military Cemetery at Hamm, Luxembourg. It is also the final resting place (below) of another hero of the battle, General George Patton Jr.

*The Civilians, continued*

were ethnic Germans. In late 1942 they started conscripting young men into the German Labor Service and the Wehrmacht. Any wonder then, that when the Americans came in early September of 1945, the entire population gave them and their returning Crown Prince Jean a warm welcome. However, for many living the northern part of the country the war was not through with them.

When the shelling started the civilians along the border could do little else but take refuge in their cellars. As an example, in Diekirch the Americans delayed in evacuating the civilians, reassuring them that they would hold back the Germans. When the order to evacuate was finally given many did not get the word and those that did were not allowed along the main roads used by the retreating American army. Others stayed to take care of the sick and elderly and or the farm animals. Those that stayed suffered huddled in their cold damp cellars for over a month in one of the coldest winters in memory.

They could do little but pray as their houses and farms were looted for food by the half starved Germans. Their chickens and pigs quickly disappeared. They could only watch as their horses were taken to be used to pull the German guns and supply wagons. Their cattle were driven off to supply the Wehrmacht field kitchens. Many times their household furnishings were thrown out into the weather to make room for military command posts and communication centers. They were under almost constant shelling, first by the advancing Germans then by the counterattacking Americans. It was not until March and April 1945 that the U.S. authorities allowed the Luxembourg refugees to return to their villages. The villages and farms had suffered severe damage, and it took months and sometimes years of reconstruction.

Of the some 11,200 young Luxembourgers (out of a total population of 293,000 in 1945) drafted by force into the German army, some 2,900 were killed in action or missing. The total toll of lives of the Luxembourg population amounted to 5,259 deaths.