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Title: The Battle of the Bulge

 The Battle of the Bulge is an event that vividly demonstrated that if one spreads their forces too thin along a ‘front’ they are vulnerable to a concentrated, focused thrust by a well-armed enemy. It also demonstrated that if you create a bulge or salient in your enemy's front, then you are exposing your flanks and are susceptible especially to a ‘pinscher’ type counterattack. Also, the deeper your penetration, the more difficult it will be to supply the vanguard and flank defenders. The vanguard will not only need ammo and rations but also fuel to continue to penetrate further. All of those drawbacks to a deep penetration worked together to bring the Germans to a halt and an extremely expensive withdrawal. As it turned out, when the skies finally cleared, Allie's air supremacy guaranteed a German defeat. This paper seeks to highlight the events of the Battle of Bulge following my take on this significant event of history.

The Battle of the Bulge was the last major German offensive on the western front during World War 2. Germany launched a coordinated armoured attack against allied forces in the Ardennes region of Belgium in December 1944. The German goal was to push to and hold the port city of Antwerp in order to cut off allied supplies and split allied forces. It was called the Battle of the Bulge because the German attack created a bulge in the allied line pushing the allies back across a massive front. The Battle of the Bulge is also considered the largest battle the US participated in, in the war and was Germany's last major offensive of the war. As the weather improved in late December 1944, allied air power was able to play a role in attacking advancing German units and destroying their much-needed supplies which essentially sealed the fate of the German forces and forced them to retreat.

Any summary of the Battle of the Bulge is incomplete without at least a mention of the 101st airborne division's bravery in holding the town of Bastogne against the German onslaught. Furthermore, General Patton's speedy relief of the encircled allied forces in Bastogne is one of the preeminent achievements of the Second World War. Hitler losing on the Easter Front sought to replicate his victory over France in the west by launching a surprise offensive against the Allied armies in France and Belgium. He thought that if he could attack where the British and American Armies joined in Belgium, he could split the two forces much as he did in France in 1940, driving the Brits to the North, and seize the port of Antwerp one of the primary supply ports for the Allies. This would split the Allied armies and cause them to surrender or at least seek terms for an armistice, allowing him to turn his remaining force against the Russians keeping them from entering Germany.

Hitler’s army groups made up in large part of newly raised troops and new armored formations, were secreted into the Ardennes Mountains of Belgium. It was an area fraught with difficulties which aided in the element of surprise; as no Allied general except Patton thought that the Germans would be crazy enough to attack there during the coldest winter on record. Hitler gambled that the bad weather would keep allied airpower from hindering his attack, and his anticoation was right. However, his timetable, necessary for success, was far too optimistic and was never achieved (“What You Need To Know About The Battle Of The Bulge”). The attack was successful where the surprise was achieved but failed to breakthrough in other areas. It inflicted large casualties on some American formations, especially the Green units that were in the "quiet zone" that the attack was launched against. Marshaling all available forces Eisenhower ordered certain transportation centers, small-town critical road junctions, be held at all costs slowing the Germans and upsetting their finely balanced time table. The offensive really never had a chance. It was called Wacht am Rhine, or Watch on the Rhine.

The Battle of the Bulge got its name because of the huge bulge it made in the allied lines, line a big elongated wedge the point toward the west, the base was the initial breakthrough (*The Battle of the Bulge*). It took a month of heavy fighting to push the Germans back to where they started along with major Allied casualties.Instead of attacking and pinching off the base of the bulge and pocketing all the German forces, Eisenhower insisted on pushing the whole of the bulge backward, which went against most mobile warfare doctrine at the time. Patton and Montgomery both wanted to attack the base and cut off all the German forces in the bulge, but it did not happen. Instead, there were weeks of ground combat in winter conditions. This led to manpower shortages and Eisenhower had to disband army formations that were not critical at this point in the war and turn them into the infantry. Anti Aircraft and even some armored formations were cannibalized in his way, which lowered the survival chances of the transferred soldiers since they had not received advanced infantry training. They were essentially cannon fodder.

In my opinion, even if there was no "Battle of the Bulge", Germany would have still been defeated, there was no way the depleted Wehrmacht was holding back the Allies on the Western Front into a stalemate. The "Battle of the Bulge" was a waste of resources and Hitler's Generals fiercely opposed it. The men, vehicles and aircraft would be irreplaceable and were better off defending Germany instead of being used for a last-ditch offensive, they argued. The German forces that were squandered in “The Bulge” represented the last mobile strike force on the Western Front. Had it been used in a purely defensive role that mass of armour and seasoned troops would have held up the Allies drive to the East, thus allowing Russia to advance well past Berlin into western Europe (Passmore and Harrison). For that reason, both Westerns and the Germans should be happy that Hitler kicked the west door open with this ill-fated attack.

It was a failure for Germany because Germany was done long before they launched Operation Nordwind. It was just the last frantic thrashings of a dying regime. By that stage, they simply didn’t have enough tanks, troops, artillery, and most importantly, fuel, to sustain that sort of attack (Cole). They only reason they got as far as they did is that they caught the Allies by surprise (they thought the Germans were done and couldn't believe they would attack) and because the weather was bad, which prevented the Allies from using their air supremacy to pound the advancing columns to dust. It was rolling the dice and expecting them to come up 13.

As with most things at that time, with the remaining resources tied down at the Eastern front and the Western Allied forces quantitively far superior in men and material, it was “too little, too late”.Even if the offensive would have succeeded in its primary goal with the help of the weather (a rather unreliable ally as the German soldiers learned),the Allies had many other venues to move against the Wehrmacht. With clear air superiority, which allowed them to bomb at will, there was virtually no place for the Germans to take a stand. It was simply a question of time when the resources of men and material would be exhausted. In this case, it was for the best. As the German proverb goes "Better an end with horror than a horror without end".

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