



The Hurtgen Forest

The Battle in the Hurtgen Forest took place in Germany, November 1944. It is the story of the destruction of the 28th Infantry Division in WW11.

The area that the fighting took place in was heavily forested for the most part. There were some open expanses which were not used by either the U.S. Army or the Germans. This was because these open areas could easily be observed by either side in daylight and were subject to flares at night. For such forest areas to remain an effective barrier, another factor was essential. The commanding heights had to be retained, and they were held by the Germans. These commanding heights consisted of the German towns of Hurtgen, Vossenack, Kommerscheidt, Schmidt, Brandenburg, and Bergstein. These towns were on a series of ridges in the form of a crescent, with the 28th Division below the ridges and under constant artillery observation. The towns on the ridges ranged from 1300 to 1700 feet high. To get a comparison of height, the area is more rugged and much higher than the gorge and surrounding area of Letchworth State Park, which is called the Grand Canyon of the East. This is the problem which faced the 28th Division from November 2nd to the 9th of November when it suffered its greatest loss of men. The 28th Division was finally relieved on the 16th of November.

In the book, "Battle for the Rhine" by R.W. Thompson, he writes, "It is probable that no single action in the history of war has been subject to an investigation as thorough and meticulous as that which followed the battle for Schmidt. Almost every survivor from generals to GI's was interviewed and carefully questioned.* The war diaries and intelligence summaries of 12th Army Group, 1st Army, 5th Corps, 28th Division, of the regiments and all support arms and services involved have been carefully examined."

In an Infantry Division, 1944, there were 3,240** men classified as assault troops out of 14,000 men in a Division. To get an idea of the losses in this battle, which reached its peak in 7 days, the casualties were 6,184 men in the 28th Division. The assault troops had by far the greatest losses in the Division.***

The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest was also referred to as the Battle for Schmidt.

* I was never interviewed, because I was on my way through 9 hospitals, and they never caught up with me. (A.W.B.)

** "A Soldier's Story" by Omar H. Bradley

*** "Siegfried" by Charles Whiting

The 28th Division entered the Hurtgen Forest (Schmidt) area on Oct. 26th, 1944. The attack started on the 2nd of November, 1944 and reached its peak on November 9th, 1944.

At the reunion in Washington, Pa. in September 1994, there were 12 men attending from K Co., 110th Regiment. Eight of them were from the original complement. The reason for my discussing this is as follows. In discussing my tour with the 28th Division with my wife, I told her that I remember being told that at the aid station the bodies of the GI's were piled up like cord wood, but so much had happened in this battle, that sometimes I wondered if it had been a bad dream. At the reunion I met one of the old members of K Co., and he told the group that I was with, that he had been in the area of the aid station, and the bodies of the GI's were piled 4 high and 50-60 feet long. He said he saw two such rows and there could have been more.