
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the May meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Harold R. Winton, Professor Emeritus at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies at Air University and the author of *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*. He will be joined with veterans of the ETO to discuss some of the critical decisions and mistakes that lay behind the hard fought victory in Europe.

Military history is usually written one of two ways, from the top down or from the bottom up. At the top are the strategic and political implications of a nation's leaders and general's decision-making process. These names are familiar to the average reader, people such as Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, Bernard Montgomery, and George C. Marshall. History from the bottom up looks more toward the tactical encounters and experiences of the common soldier. Those men going ashore at Normandy or trudging along the snow covered roads in the Ardennes. Their history attempts to give readers a tiny peak into the visceral world of combat. Often left out or part of a broader history are what in modern day parlance would be called the "middle managers" the Corps Commanders.

Corps History is often obscured because they had no "institutional continuity." The common soldier could identify with its platoon, regiment, or division, and the strategic leaders identified with the Army groups. Corps commanders had the difficult job of being the flexible commander of the 'in between', they focused their attention at the operational level of the battle, but had to also bear in mind the strategic and tactical consequences. "The composition of a corps depended on its mission, the terrain, and the situation." (1942 *Field Service Regulations*). At the Battle of the Bulge, the Corps Commanders were: Leonard Gerow, CG, V Corps; Troy Middleton, CG, VIII Corps; Matthew Ridgway, CG, XVIII (Airborne) Corps; John Millikin, CG, III Corps; Manton S. Eddy, CG, XII Corps; and Lawton Collins, CG, VII Corps.

All of these men were products of the much maligned interwar American army. Our World War I experience convinced army leaders that next to command experience, education was the most important thing an officer could do. This was a way for them to master all aspects of the profession. While only three attended West Point (Ridgway, Millikin, Collins), all attended the Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, and five of the six attended the Army War College (Eddy did not).

In order to understand the place of the corps commander in the Ardennes offensive, it is important to have broad overview of what went on. The idea of a German offensive in the West came to Hitler in September of 1944. His goal of seizing Antwerp would deny the Allies a vital logistical link, and might be grounds for a brokered peace. The Germans realized a successful campaign depended upon four things: surprise, poor weather to effectively negate Allied air superiority, rapid progress, and the capture of intact Allied fuel supplies to refuel the *Wehrmacht*.

Since the Normandy landings and breakout in the summer and fall of 1944, the Allies had pushed the *Wehrmacht* out of France and into Belgium. To hinder German operations, allied bombers destroyed the rail links and roads of the German supply network. This destruction also hindered the Allied advance, particularly the movement of gasoline, and the "Red Ball Express" could only move fuel so far before it consumed all it carried. In October 1944, the Allied offensive ground to a halt because of fuel shortages. The densely forested Ardennes area, between Wallonia in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, was thought to be a quiet sector suitable for inexperienced divisions like the US 99th and 106th IDs, and it became a rest area for battle weary troops like the 28th ID and the 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions, who were in reserve.

In early December 1944, Eisenhower met with Bradley and Montgomery to outline plans for an offensive in January 1945. To Montgomery's dismay (and Patton's too), Eisenhower wanted to maintain the broad-front strategy, pushing the Germans back all along the entire front, with some focus in the north. Allied

planning assumed the Germans lacked the ability or capability to launch a major offensive. While the Allies prepared for their offensive, there were indications that the Germans were up to something. *Ultra* intercepts indicated that there was a buildup of ammunition and fuel dumps across the line in the Ardennes. The Germans also had the advantage of closer interior lines, reducing the problems of supply and the effectiveness of *Ultra*, since they could use telephone and telegraph networks. They were defending their homeland not all of Western Europe.

With thick cloud cover and snow, obscuring the area and negating Allied air superiority, the *Wehrmacht* launched a three-pronged offensive on December 16th, along a fifty mile front in the Ardennes between Monschau and Echternach, taking the Allies by surprise. In the north the Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer division attacked and met stiff resistance from the 99th and 2nd Division, who held the critical Monschau and Eisenborn Ridge, which denied the Germans critical roads. In the south, Brandenberger's Seventh Army pushed toward Luxembourg trying to secure the flank from Allied armies. In the center, von Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army attacked toward Bastogne and St. Vith, both critical road junctions.

St. Vith held out for six days before British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery ordered a withdrawal set up more defensive positions. Eleven hard-top roads converged at Bastogne and it was imperative for the advance that it be taken. Defended by the elements of the 10th Armored Division, reinforced by the 101st Airborne, Bastogne refused to surrender, causing serious delays in the German offensive schedule. By December 21st the Germans had Bastogne surrounded; they demand surrender from BG Anthony McAuliffe (101 AB *Artillery* commander) the acting commander of the 101st Airborne. He refused, uttering the memorable and (to the Germans) confusing reply: "NUTS!" The encircled force was finally relieved by Patton's 4th Armored Division on December 26th. By mid-January 1945, the Germans were pushed back to where they had started the offensive, with the loss of 100,000 men, severely crippling their military capabilities. For the Americans, the Battle of the Bulge was the bloodiest battle of World War II, with over 100,000 casualties.

FURTHER READINGS:

Harold R. Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007).
Anthony Beevor, *Ardennes – 1944* (New York: Viking Press, 2015).

Peter Caddick-Adams, *Snow and Steel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
John S. D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).
J. P. Morelock, *Generals of the Ardennes* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1994).
John McManus, *Alamo of the Ardennes* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).
Robert H. Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders - A Composite Biography* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC-CSI, 1989) <http://us-acac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/download/csipubs/berlin2.pdf>

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -
16 May 2017 – "Overrun with Free Negroes" Reconstruction & Resettlement - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 22 May 2017 – *Writer in Residence at Gettysburg* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
Cannon Valley CWRT - 18 May 2017 – TBA – dnl1.pe-terson@gmail.com
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
Airshow - Eden Prairie - 15-16 July 2017 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100
Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Zetter, *Stuxnet and Cyberwar* - 19 Apr. - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafm-n.org 651-455-6942
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
Doug Bekke, WWI Uniforms, noon 15 June 2017, "Annex" New Ulm Historical Museum and again 7 PM Legion Hall, Springfield, MN

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2017-2018

2017

14 Sept. Winning the Pacific War
12 Oct. First Invasion: Operation TORCH
26 Oct. Palawan: PWs of Japan
9 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Origins Grand Alliance
14 Dec. Battle of the Bulge

2018

11 Jan. Eastern Front: Stalingrad
8 Feb. Berlin Airlift
8 Mar. American Airpower in World War II
22 Mar. Nazi Architecture
12 Apr. Lucian Truscott: Greatest Field CO
10 May Marshall Plan: Saving Victory



MGs Gerow, Middleton, Ridgeway, Millikin, Eddy, Collins