

BATTLEBOOK

Hürtgenwald and the Kall Trail



**Command Sergeant Major, United States Army Europe
Senior NCO Staff Ride**

Table of Contents

Welcome

Foreword

Concept and Objectives

Tab A: Opening Essay: Operations in the Hürtgenwald- Battles in the Dark Forest,
Oct-Nov 1944

Tab B: Orders of Battle

Tab C: 28th Infantry Division Select AARs

Tab D: German Reports on the Battle

Tab E: Supplemental Materials

Tab F: Maps

Ride Maps in separate zip file

Foreword

Welcome to the USAREUR Command Sergeant Major's Hürtgenwald and Kall Trail Staff Ride. This ride primarily follows the operations and tactical engagements of the 28th Infantry Division during its attempts to capture the town of Schmidt on the east side of the Kall Gorge.

The battles in the Hürtgenwald (Hurtgen Forest) are considered by both the United States and German armies to be one of the toughest and most difficult actions of the Western Front during World War II. One German commander later noted that even though he had served several years on the Eastern Front, he had never seen such intense fighting for such a sustained period as what he witnessed in the Hürtgenwald.

Even today, the fighting in the dark forest between Belgium and Germany has sparked contention and controversy, and a number of American commanders after the war wrote post-war justifications or condemnations of the decisions to fight there. Ultimately, the fight in the forest led to the burnout of four U.S. Army infantry divisions. Each was, in turn, sent to a very quiet sector of the front to receive replacements and retrain in preparation for the coming drive into Germany. That quiet sector was called the Ardennes Forest.

As we study the tactical and operational decisions of the battle, let us remember that most Soldiers on both sides at this late date in the war no longer fought for political motivations or lofty ideals. Instead, they fought for and with each other, as a brotherhood of uniformed personnel that few truly understand. This in large measure can explain why Soldiers from both sides attempted to help the other's wounded, even at the risk of their own lives.

The battles in the Hürtgenwald are largely forgotten by many, with the German attack in the Ardennes Forest only a few weeks later overshadowing it. However, tremendous lessons can be learned from this action, both tactically and operationally, as well as lessons about leadership, moral, unit cohesion, and the necessary qualities of today's Soldiers who move beyond the mere fighting to a higher calling.

Concept and Objectives

Staff Rides in USAREUR are leader training events that use the setting of a historical campaign or battle as the basis for FSO professional development. Staff rides address both the Operational and Self-development Domains of FM 7.0, in that they require each participant to establish what happened, and then, while standing on the ground where the action occurred, to critically analyze plans, orders, events, decisions, and the actions of leaders performing under severe stress. Only through active participation by each staff rider as a part of a group, grounded in preliminary study and looking for personal lessons applicable to today's or tomorrow's mission, is the enormous training value of a staff ride realized. The ultimate outcome for this staff ride is to build cohesion, leader development, readiness, and empowering our alliance.

Organization of the Material

This Battlebook is fully digital and comes in seven parts. The first is this portion, with the table on contents and foreword. The next six are each a tab for the ride. The additional zip file are the detail ride maps. While participants will get a map during the ride, each may wish to look at the maps in more detail on a computer prior to the ride.

Some of the primary source documentation may be difficult to read due to damage of the original items. However, the information that can be gleaned from these is invaluable, both in understanding the mind of those Soldiers who participated in the action, and also to understand what items need to be reported in such after action reports. When printed front and back the total page count is under 150, including maps and charts. When looking at AARs, both American and German, it is not necessary to read everything, but to instead focus on items that may be important for a given stand.

Battle of the Huertgen Forest - Timeline

- 11-16 September 44 Elements of VII Corps, to include 1st Infantry Div and 3rd Armored Division, penetrate the Siegfried Line in a "Recon in Force" movement.
- 14-18 September 44 39th and 60th Inf Regiments of 9th Infantry Division attack astride Monschau Corridor.
- 16 September 44 *German 12th Infantry Div arrives in sector*
- 19 September 44 "True" Battle of Huertgen Forest begins. 9th ID continues to attack with mounting casualties and little gain. 39th and 60th Inf, renew attacks, now towards Germeter, Vossenock, and Schmidt axis. 47th Inf Regiment defends penetration on northern edge of forest at Schevenhuete. When attacks end about one week later, both regiments still in the woods. Road to Lammersdorf-Germeter cut vic Jaegerhaus. *Germans continue to assemble reinforcing units in the sector.*
- 6-16 October 44 9th ID renews attack west. Objective – Schmidt. First Battle of Schmidt. Crosses Weisser Weh, takes Germeter. Road north and south of Germeter. German counterattack against 39th Inf on northern flank, west of Huertgen, later influences orders given to 28th ID. Regiments suffer heavy casualties
- 21 October 44 Aachen falls to the 1st Infantry Division. 28th Infantry Division given mission to attack and secure Schmidt. Attack to begin NLT 2 November to coincide with VII Corps attack
- 1 November 44 VII Corps attack postponed until 16 November. 28th ID directed to attack as scheduled.
- 2 November 44 28th ID attacks from line vicinity Germeter to seize Vossenack, Kommerscheidt, and Schmidt. Vossenack falls this day to 2/112th Infantry, but attacks by 109th and 110th Regiments not very successful.
- 2 November 44 *German Army Group B Commanders Map Exercise at Cologne to study problem of attacks on Huertgen. Allows Germans to analyze new U.S. attacks, adjust defenses, commit forces. Moedel commits part of 116th Pz Div. 89th ID directed to stop movement from Monschau area, counteratk at Schmidt if required.*
- 3 November 44 28th ID attacks on right (110th Regt) and left (109th) run into stiff resistance. Two battalions of 112th Regt take Kommerscheidt (1/112) and Schmidt (3/112). Kall River trail becomes the MSR for 28th ID units on eastern side of the Kall River gorge. BG Cota releases division reserve, bn of 110th Inf, to attack Simonskall in stalled 110th sector.
- 4 November 44 28th ID has difficulties moving tanks and supplies across the Kall River on the trail. 3 tanks arrive in Schmidt about 0700. *About the same time, German 116th Panzer attacks U.S. positions in Schmidt with Inf, Armor, and Artillery.*

Battles in the Huertgen Forest, September 1944-February 1945

3/112 defenses collapses, units withdraw, many in panic, with some survivors collecting in the defensive position in Kommerscheidt w/ 1/112 Inf. Late afternoon, BG Davis, ADC, 28th, arrives in Kommerscheidt. Cota orders 112th Cdr to retake Schmidt.

5 November 44 Germans continue to shell American positions in Vosseneck and Kommerscheidt. Evening, Cota directs attack by LTC Ripple with composite force to retake Schmidt (TF Ripple).

6 November 44 In Vossenack, *Germans continue intense shelling of 2nd Bn, 112th Inf.* G Company, 2/112, on eastern edge and forward of town panic (even though no ground attack) and abandon positions. Elements of U.S. 146th Engineers, working nearby, ordered to move into Vossenack and hold defensive line with remnants of 2/112 Inf. V Corps CG diverts a regiment from 4th Infantry Division, 12th Infantry, to support 28th ID (relieves 109th Inf next day). In Kommerscheidt, 1/112 (-) and remnants of 3/112 occupy Kommerscheidt. TF Ripple attacks from Vossenack to Kommerscheidt. Infantry arrives mid/late day.

7 November 44 146th Engineer Battalion attacks and regains lost ground in Vossenack. Relief of 109th Inf by 12th Inf completed. *German shelling continues.* Cota recommends that 28th ID forces east of the Kall R. be withdrawn. Late on 7th, early 8th, U.S. elements begin w/drawal from Kommerscheidt.

8 November 44 *Germans attacks against U.S. elements s. of Kommerscheidt, but still east of Kall River continue.* Ike, LTG Bradley, LTG Hodges, and MG Gerow, Cota's chain of command, visit 28th ID CP. 12th Inf attacks to remove German salient astride Weisser Weh.

9 November 44 28th ID now withdrawn to west side of Kall River.

11 November 44 PVT Eddie Slovik, 109th Infantry, for desertion, convicted of desertion and sentenced to be "shot to death with musketry." Trial held in Roetgen, Germany. Slovik had deserted in early October, when the division was not in contact. He had never been in direct combat.

16 November 44 First U.S. Army launches its attack, Operation QUEEN, after largest air-ground attack of the war. Julich, other towns destroyed. VII Corps launches ground attack to break out from Stolberg Corridor to the Roer R.

16-18 November 44 1st ID attacks north from a line Schevenhuetten-Gressenich. S Hill 232 and Hamich. 4th ID attacks from Schevenhuetten to support main effort by 1st ID.

19 November 44 Hope for a U.S. breakthrough fades as VII Corps gains less than two miles.

Battles in the Huertgen Forest, September 1944-February 1945

19 November 44 8th Infantry Division relieves 28th ID. Elements of 2d Ranger Bn attached to 8th ID. Occupy positions, conduct patrols. 4th ID misses an opportunity to penetrate the Huertgen Forest vicinity Grosshau. Attack on 20 November is too late as German 344th ID occupies positions in front of 4th ID on 19 November.

21-24 November 44 8th ID begins its attacks in the Huertgen-Kleinhaus-Brandenburg axis with one regiment to take woods south of Huertgen, cut road, and let LD for attack of CCR, 5th Armored Division.

24 November 44 4th ID bypasses the MLR using feints and reaches a point one mile from the edge of the forest.

25 November 44 CCR, 5th Armored Division, attacks to seize Huertgen astride the Germeter-Heurtgen Highway in the 8th ID sector. Attack fails, CCR withdraws.

26 November 44 Elements of the 121st Infantry, 8th ID, secure woods SW of Huertgen. *German 275th Division withdraws after being flanked by elements of the 4th ID. German 47th Division, decimated by heavy fighting, reinforced by German 3d Parachute Division.* Reinforcement occurs at a critical time, as V Corps is preparing to attack to break out into the Roer River plain.

27 November 44 One company of U.S. infantry establishes foothold in Huertgen and is cut off by German forces during the night.

27 November 44 MG Cota approves guilty verdict of PVT Eddie Slovik, 109th Infantry, for desertion. Sentence: Shot to death by Musketry.

28 November 44 Elements of 121st Inf, supported by tanks, attack and sieze Huertgen, which falls after two months of fighting in the Huertgen Forest.

29 November 44 1st ID loses two companies of 26th Infantry in Merode.

29 November 44 4th ID attacks and seizes Grosshau.

30 November 44 Decimated 4th ID stops German counterattack vicinity Grosshau using last bit of reserve force.

1 December 44 4th ID ceases attacks. Relieved by 83rd ID. 4th ID suffered 4000+ casualties and gained 3 miles.

1 December 44 8th ID attacks to seize Brandenburg and Bergstein

5 December Bergstein taken (but not Hill 400)

Battles in the Huertgen Forest, September 1944-February 1945

- 7 December 44 2d Ranger Battalion attacks and seizes Hill 400. Defends hill against numerous German counterattacks. Relieved on 8 December by 13th Inf Regt, 8th ID. Germans retake the hill 9 days later.
- 10-13 December 44 83rd ID committed to the fight. Attacks from line west of Guy to take Guy, Strass, and Schafberg. 5th AD attacks behind 83d ID starting on 13 December and clears NE edge of Huertgen, reaching the Roer River
- 13 December 44 2d ID and 78th ID attack to capture Roer Dams via Monschau Corridor, but....
- 16 December 44 Germans launch counteroffensive in the Ardennes
– **The Battle of the Bulge**
- 30 January 45 78th ID, supported by elements of 5th AD, attack to seize Schmidt. Later augmented with elements of 7th AD.
- 31 January 45 PVT Eddie Slovik executed for desertion.
- 4 February 45 9th ID elements reach the intact Urft Dam
- 7 February 45 Kommerscheidt and Schmidt taken by elements of 78th ID and 82d Airborne Division.
- Early February 45 Germans destroy the valves on Roer Dams, resulting in extensive flooding along Roer River, delaying First and Ninth Army attacks across the Roer.