

Massacre at Malmedy



Tank machine guns mowed down the U. S. prisoners.

Eyewitnesses who escaped from the scene describe the German murder of 100 U. S. soldier-prisoners of war captured in Belgium.

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MALMEDY, BELGIUM—In a snow-covered field three miles from this town lie the bodies of 100 or more American soldier-prisoners of war who were murdered there by the Germans on the first day of Marshal Karl von Rundstedt's counteroffensive along the Western Front. Their frozen corpses may still be where they fell, with "some of the bodies lying across other bodies," as German PWs later described the scene. We do not know whether the Nazis even extended them a decent burial, for the region is still in enemy hands. But we do know the details of the massacre, carried out in open violation of the Geneva Convention.

Early in the afternoon of Dec. 17, a convoy of Battery B of a Field Artillery observation battalion was moving along three miles south of Malmedy on the road leading to St. Vith. About 300 yards beyond the crossroad of the cut-off to St. Vith, the convoy was hit by enemy riflemen, machine gunners and mortarmen hidden in the surrounding woods. All the American vehicles halted immediately.

The men jumped off and took cover in ditches lining both sides of the road. Several minutes later they were flushed out of their hiding places by Tiger tanks from a German armored column which lumbered along the ditches spraying machine-gun fire. Other tanks quickly knocked out some 24 American trucks and other vehicles. Armed only with small weapons, the Americans were taken prisoner.

These Germans had earlier captured some other Americans, among them five MPs, two ambulance drivers, a mess sergeant, several Medical Corps men, engineers, infantrymen and some members of an armored reconnaissance outfit. All the prisoners—there were about 150—were herded up the road where they were searched and stripped of their pocketbooks, watches, gloves, cigarettes and weapons. Their captors ordered them to line up in a snow-covered field south of the crossroads.

While the Americans were lining up, an enemy half-track mounting an 88 gun tried to swing around to cover them but couldn't. Instead the Germans parked tanks at either end of the field, where their machine guns had full sweep over the prisoners. Just then a German command car drew up.

MASSACRE

The German officer in the car stood up, took deliberate aim with a pistol at an American medical officer in the front rank of the prisoners and fired. As the medical officer fell, the German fired again and another American dropped.

Immediately two tanks at the end of the field opened up with their machine guns on the defenseless prisoners, some of them noncombatant Medical Corps men with medic brassards and Red Cross-marked helmets. All of the prisoners in the field were standing with their hands raised over their heads.

When the massacre started, the unwounded dropped to the ground along with those who had been shot. Flat on their stomachs with their faces pushed into snow and mud, the Americans were raked by machine-gun and small-arms fire from a column of tanks which had begun to move along the road 25 yards away. Each of 25 to 50 Tiger tanks and half-tracks took its turn firing on the prostrate group.

One tank and several German soldiers were left behind to finish off those who had not been killed. The Nazi guards walked among the American soldiers shooting at those who lay groaning in agony. They kicked others in the faces to see if they were really dead or just faking. Those who moved were shot in the head.

One American medic got up to bandage the wounds of a seriously injured man from his own company-aid unit. The Nazis permitted him to finish the work, shot both him and the patient.



*Joachim Peiper
(1915 - 1976)*

the colonel in the SS Panzer Division who gave the order to kill 84 American prisoners of war.

During the Summer of 1946 he was tried and sentenced to death. Post-War politics played a roll in re-writing his sentencing; he served only 11 months in jail.

Fortunately the guards were not too thorough in their search for Americans who were pretending to be dead. Several of the prisoners had not been wounded at all and others were only slightly wounded. About an hour after the armored column left, several of the survivors — including some of the wounded—decided to make a break for freedom. Fifteen men made the first attempt. While the guards were some distance away they jumped up and ran north along the road toward Malmedy amid machine-gun fire from their surprised guards. At the crossroads they were

fired on by another machine-gun crew stationed there. This frightened 12 of the fugitives into taking cover in a nearby house while the other three continued to the woods.

The house was a death trap for the 12 Americans. Closing in on their victims, the Germans set up a machine gun in front of the building, which they then set on fire. As the Americans tried to escape through the door and windows of the blazing building, they were mowed down. All died there, buried beneath the falling walls.

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The three who had continued running hid in the woods until dark, then made their escape.

After the first break, several other prisoners made similar attempts. Some succeeded in getting back to the American lines while others were killed. Most of the successful breaks were made after dark. Some of the wounded did not

MASSACRE



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make the attempt until midnight, after lying in snow for 11 hours or longer.

Of the approximately 150 American prisoners rounded up as human targets for the Nazi marksmen, only 43 are definitely known to have escaped the German slaughter, and more than three-quarters of these were wounded. Only 25 men of Battery B's roster of 138 have been reported safe. There may be others but this is improbable, as the area is still in German hands.

As is customary in all atrocity cases, the Inspector General's Department of the Army made an immediate investigation to determine the authenticity of stories told by survivors. Five wounded soldiers were interviewed less than 12 hours after their ordeal when the details were still fresh in their minds. Thirty-two men were questioned thoroughly and their stories were found to coincide in all except minor details. The Inspector General's Department has released some of the survivors' statements with the guarantee that they are an essentially correct account of what happened on Dec. 17 in the snow-covered field 13 miles south of Malmedy. Questioning of German prisoners later verified most of the story told by the Americans.

HERE is the testimony of Theodore Jay Paluch, as recorded and certified by the Inspector General's Department:

"Battery B of a Field Artillery observation battalion was in a convoy going south from Malmedy. They stopped the convoy at 1330 when mortar fire was heard. We got out of the trucks and jumped in a ditch beside the vehicles. Then some men took off when they saw they were being captured. They [the Germans] took watches, gloves and cigarettes from prisoners, then put us inside a fence. Tanks passed for 15 minutes.

"Everything was all right until a command car turned the corner. At that time an officer in the command car fired a shot with his pistol at a medical officer who was one yard to my left. Then he fired another shot to my right. At that time a tank following the command car opened fire on approximately 175 men inside the fence. We all fell and lay as still as we could. Every tank that passed from then on would fire into the group laying there. At one time they came around with pistols and fired at every officer that had bars showing. An officer put mud on his helmet to cover his bars.

"The tanks stopped passing about 1445. At 1500 someone said: 'Let's go.' At that time 15 men got up and started to run north from where we were laying on the other side of the road. Twelve of the men ran into a house (at the north-western part of the crossroads) and three of us kept going.

"There was a machine gun at the crossroads plus four Germans. When we got in back of the house, they couldn't fire the machine gun at us. They burned the house down into which the 12 men ran.

"When the three of us were in back of the house, we played dead again because a German in a black uniform came around with a pistol,

MASSACRE



They shot both the medic and his wounded patient.

looking us over. We lay there until dark when we rolled to a hedgerow where we weren't under observation. Laying there was a staff sergeant from — Division, shot in the arm. We started to walk but stayed 200 to 300 yards from the main road. In about a quarter of a mile we met a medic who was shot in the foot and also a fellow from my outfit. Four of us came into Malmedy."

A first lieutenant who was wounded and therefore must remain unidentified was the only Battery B officer available for questioning by the IG Department. Here is his summary:

"We made a turn to the right of the crossroad to head toward St. Vith. We got about 300 yards down the road and at that time artillery, mortar and small-arms fire opened up on our echelon. The fire seemed to come from the east and south-east. Some of the men got out on the road with their hands up. They told me a [German] tank was coming down the road. Naturally, small arms was all we had. We put our hands up and they approached.

"One of the officers in the tank stuck his head out and was going to shoot me, but I changed my position and he started to shoot at the captain instead. He missed both times. I jumped into a ditch which was nearby.

"At this time about three or four tanks came down the road. They told us to take off to the rear of the column and questioned some of the men about watches, jewelry and such things. My medical corporal requested permission to give first aid to the wounded but was refused.

"While we were in the field, an officer shot into those of us who were not wounded. We fell to the ground and lay there motionless while they continued to shoot into the crowd. It was withering fire. I was wounded twice in the foot while lying on the field. Apparently satisfied, that group left. Then after a while more German soldiers came up the road. As they passed the field they took pot shots at us.

"We were lying in the field about an hour or hour and a half. Then we made a break for it. I found shelter in a barn.

"No man in our group tried to make a break before we were first fired upon. We had our arms over our heads. None of us had any weapons while in the field."

One member of a Field Artillery unit, T-5 Warren R. Schmidt, escaped this massacre by crawling into a small stream and covering himself with grass and mud. After his convoy was stopped, Schmidt jumped into a ditch along with his battery mates. But as mortar and machine-gun fire increased, he sought shelter in a stream only one foot deep. He reached this stream, 40 feet from the road, by crawling on his stomach.



The burning building was covered by German guns

Estimating that the Germans had 40 Tiger tanks, Schmitt said in his sworn statement:

"They stopped our convoy, and men in black uniforms dismounted and began rounding up prisoners. I submerged myself in the stream and covered myself with grass and mud so that I wasn't captured. All during this time I was laying in the stream and playing dead. I don't know whether they saw me or not. For about an hour after they first started firing into the group of prisoners, all of the tanks that passed fired into them. Forty half-tracks that passed fired also.

"I lay in the stream for approximately two hours and after that time was so numb that I couldn't move the lower half of my body, but by crawling and dragging myself I made my way to some woods. I rubbed my legs to get back circulation and then by means of my compass found my way back to the road. I went down the road until I was halted by a friendly guard and was taken to an aid station."

William Reem is another of the few Battery B men who escaped uninjured. The Germans took his watch and ring after routing him out of a ditch where he had taken cover. Reem said that some of the Americans who didn't have their hands up when the Germans approached were summarily shot. Reem said under oath:

"Some of the boys were moaning, and they [the Germans] came around and shot them again. I couldn't understand what the Germans were saying, but they laughed and talked and then they shot. They shot one fellow twice in the leg while he was laying there. They took something off of him; he is a T-5. He was laying about 15 feet away from me and I talked with him while I was laying there. I heard them shoot him. The Germans were standing right at his head. I think they took his wristwatch or something; he was hollering 'No, No' and then they shot him. I asked him if he was hit and he said 'Yes.' But he came in with me. . . . There were two others [who escaped] who were medics; I didn't know them as they weren't from my outfit. They [the Germans] shot three of our medics; some other medics were also shot. There were three or four lieutenants from my battery; I think one got away. When I looked around, I saw one with a green raincoat and a white stripe on his helmet, running. I don't know whether he got away or not. I couldn't tell how many men got away. Men were running in all directions. Quite a few ran -- 10 in a bunch that I was in."

Pvt. Roy B. Anderson, an ambulance driver from Austin, Ind., was driving his ambulance south of Malmedy on his way to Waimes when he had to stop behind a convoy. It was Battery B's anti-aircraft guns, trucks and jeeps. Pvt. Anderson, who wore his Medical Corps brassard on his arm,

MASSACRE

was rounded up in the fenced field with the artillerymen. He said under oath that there were several other medical soldiers in the group who were also wearing armbands. He told how an American medical officer, wearing a Red Cross brassard, lay next to him in the field, shot in the stomach. Anderson also testified that before the first shots were fired into the group, he saw no one trying to make a break and saw no Americans with weapons.

When machine guns first opened up on the convoy, T-5 Charles Fappman, who was driving one of B Battery's $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton trucks, thought they were friendly gunners firing at buzz bombs, which were then coming over very low. But when the bullets got closer, the men in his truck yelled for him to stop. He did. This is his sworn account of what happened after that:

"We all dove into a ditch on the right-hand side of the road, where we continued to receive machine-gun fire and a few mortar shells. One or two tanks then came along the road and strafed the ditch with machine-gun fire. Another man and I got up and raised our hands. We were motioned to get out on the street. We were then formed in a circle, and as the tanks went by they would stop and call us over individually and relieve us of our wristwatches and gloves.

"They penned up the whole of B Battery in a circle and then told us to go over a fence into a field southwest of the house. They had us there in a circle for about 10 or 15 minutes. One German pulled out his pistol and fired point-blank into the crowd, and a fellow to the left of me dropped. He fired again and someone at my back dropped. Then almost immediately they opened up with their machine-gun fire."

The account of how two Medical Corps men were shot in cold blood after one had treated the other's wounds was given by Sgt. Kenneth Ahrens of Erie, Pa., a member of B Battery. Ahrens knew both men and their names are listed in his official statement.

One American soldier was held prisoner in a German half-track for three hours before being herded into the slaughter field. A mess sergeant from an Infantry outfit, he was captured by a German tank while driving his jeep along the road near Waimes. The mess sergeant was put on the Nazi half-track, and he rode around with his captors for three hours. Finally when the Germans had rounded up their victims, he was forced into the field with the other Americans. He was wounded in the arm by machine-gun bullets, but eventually he managed to escape.

THE testimony of the German PWs captured after the massacre has substantiated the account of the atrocities given by the Americans who escaped. Here is an extract of the testimony given by one German prisoner, a member of the 1st SS Panzer Division:

"On Dec. 17, 1944, at about 3:30 P.M., I saw approximately 50 dead American soldiers lying in a field near an intersection where paved roads radiated in three directions. This point was near Malmedy and between two and three kilometres from Stavelot. The bodies were between 30 and 40 meters from the road and were lying indiscriminately on the ground. In some instances the bodies were lying across each other. There was a burning house at the intersection and a barn and a shed. I also saw a line of disabled jeeps and trucks on the road near this house. I did not stop at the scene, but continued on with my organization."

Questioning of the German PWs, together with

MASSACRE

the description of SS uniforms and insignia supplied by the Americans, has convinced First Army officials that members of the SS Panzer Division are responsible for the atrocity at Malmédy. Most of the Germans in the particular company involved are believed to have been killed in the recent battle against American forces in eastern Belgium.

One German prisoner, a member of the 1st SS Panzer Division but not of the particular outfit that carried out the massacre, when asked if the appearance of the bodies had made any impression on him, replied: "It was such an unusual sight, I thought it was murder." Another German, told of the killing by fellow prisoners, said: "I have no idea why it was done. There are people among us who find joy in such atrocities."



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