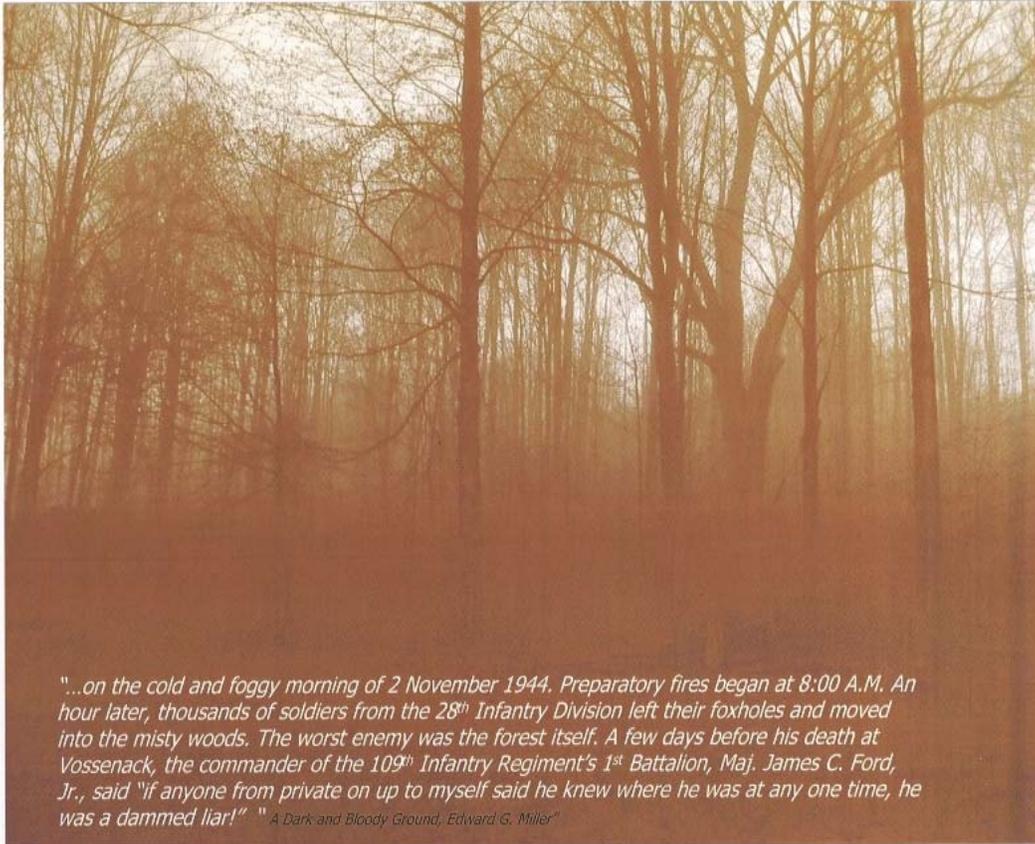


**Major General Cota and the Battle of the Huertgen Forest: A Failure of Battle Command? \***  
Mr. Thomas G. Bradbeer



*"In the final upshot, troops of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division marched into battle in a state of innocence, most terrible to contemplate in the irresponsible attack on Schmidt, which caused the unit to suffer the worst disaster on a divisional level to befall U.S. troops in the campaign in northwest Europe"*  
- R.W. Thompson

In early 1944 he was considered one of the best and brightest brigadier generals in the entire United States Army. Because of his service as the chief of staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division in North Africa and his subsequent work with Combined Operations in Britain, he was considered the Army's expert on amphibious operations. He became a key planner for Operation Overlord (the invasion of Europe), was made the Assistant Division Commander for the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and then earned the US Distinguished Service Cross and the British Distinguished Service Order at Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944 for his actions and his decisive leadership. As a reward for his consistently superior performance, he was given command of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which he then led across France to the German border and the Siegfried Line. He justifiably earned the reputation as a 'fighting general' but when his division was destroyed in November 1944 during the Battle of the Huertgen Forest, so too was the reputation of its division commander, Major General Norman D. Cota. How could one the U.S. Army's best and brightest

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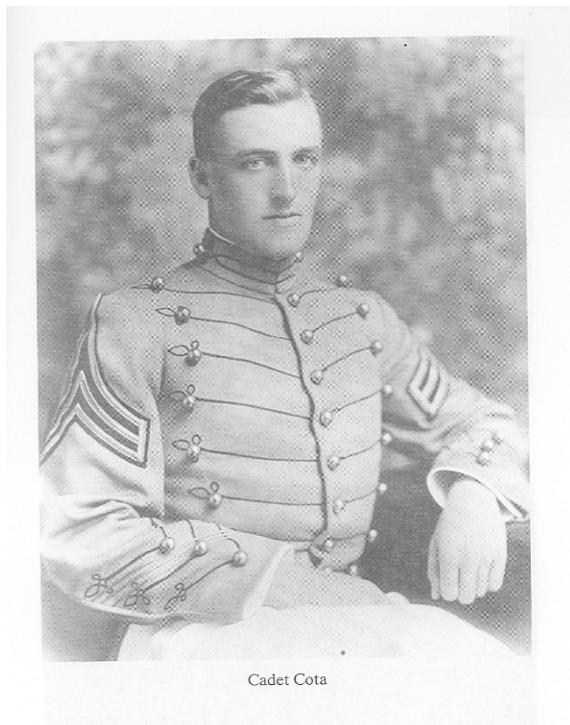
commanders be defeated by enemy forces that had just spent three months retreating across France, Belgium and Holland? What went wrong and how did it happen?

The Battle of the Huertgen Forest began in September 1944 and culminated in mid-February 1945. It lasted nearly five months and it cost the U.S. Army more than 34,000 casualties.<sup>i</sup> It has largely been forgotten for the past sixty years for several reasons. One, it was one of the bloodiest and most disastrous campaigns the U. S. Army conducted in the Second World War. Two, its beginning was eclipsed by both Field Marshal Montgomery's Operation Market-Garden, whose final objective was to capture a bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem, and the German's surprise attack in mid-December through the Ardennes. What followed was the "Battle of the Bulge". This hard fought and well earned allied victory overshadowed the debacle that was occurring less than twenty miles to the north of the Ardennes. Operation Market-Garden and the 'Battle of the Bulge' are two of the most documented and written about battles in history, ensuring that they will never be forgotten by present and future generations.

On the other hand, only a handful of books and articles have been written about the Huertgen Forest battle and most of them in the last decade. There is renewed interest in this battle, partly because of the dedication of the World War II monument in Washington DC in 2004 but also because the US Army has resurrected the battle by including it in its Officer Education System. For the past three years the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas has included a case study on Major General Cota and the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's role in the Huertgen Forest as part of its Leadership curriculum. It is part of a block of instruction that focuses on commanding units in combat. The Army's doctrinal manual on this subject Field Manual 6-0 Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces identifies the three elements of command as authority, decision-making, and leadership. The four elements of decision-making consist of visualizing the battle-space, describing the visualization to subordinates, directing action to achieve results, and leading the unit to mission accomplishment.<sup>ii</sup> A fifth element that is covered in other congruent leadership doctrine is assess. With these five elements forming the foundation of what is now identified as the elements of Battle Command, the officers use it to analyze Cota's leadership skills, his actions, and his decision-making during the planning and execution of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's operation in the Huertgen Forest.

### **Who was Major General Cota?**

Norman Daniel Cota was born on 30 May 1893 in Chelsea, Massachusetts. As a youth he was both industrious and adventurous. He was forced to quit school in the ninth grade to assist his father in running the family grocery store. Working several jobs, he saved his money so he could attend the prestigious Worcester Academy, fifty miles west of Chelsea. While playing football for Worcester Academy (1910-13) he earned the nickname 'Dutch'. It would stay with him for the rest of his life. Upon graduation from Worcester he was accepted into the United States Military Academy at West Point, class of 1917. Several of his classmates included future World War II commanders Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, Mark Clark, Joseph Collins, and Matthew Ridgway.<sup>iii</sup>



Cadet Cota

Because of the country's entrance into the First World War, Cota's class graduated two months early in April 1917. Commissioned in the Infantry, he was assigned to A Company, 22d Infantry Regiment, then stationed at Fort Jay, New York Harbor. A month later he was promoted to first lieutenant and became the commander of A Company. His unit served out the war supervising a Basic Training course and then sending their graduates to France. Three months after graduating from West Point Cota was a captain and a year later he was promoted to major, after only eighteen months on active duty.<sup>iv</sup>

Just before the war ended Cota was assigned back to West Point where he served as a Tactics instructor. In 1919 he was reduced in rank to captain as the army went through a massive downsizing. Married in November 1919 to Connie Alexander of Manhattan, New York and their first child, Ann was born a year later with son Norman Daniel Cota, Junior, born in 1921.

Cota spent the next four years detached from the Infantry and assigned to the Army's Finance Department. While stationed at Langley Field, Virginia in 1922 and serving as the Post Financial Officer, a serious incident occurred which placed a black mark in Cota's file. The post was robbed of more than \$40,000 and Cota was held personally responsible. It would take many years and finally a successful appeal to Congress to clear Cota of having to repay the loss.<sup>v</sup>

Cota returned to the Infantry in 1924 when he received orders to attend the Infantry School's Company Officer Course at Fort Benning. While there he was reunited with Matthew Ridgway and Mark Clark. Upon graduation he was assigned to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii where he became a company commander with the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Later while serving as the Regimental Plans and Training Officer he came in contact with Major George Patton, Jr. who was the Chief Intelligence Officer, Hawaii Division.

After this tour he spent the next four years attending army schools (Infantry Officer Advanced Course, where he was the Honor Graduate, attending the two-year Command and General Staff School) before returning to Fort Benning to teach in the Weapons Department under COL Omar Bradley. It was during this tour that he would earn Bradley's respect and admiration. This tour of duty under Bradley

would later pay major dividends for Cota when Bradley was selecting division commanders to serve in his 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group in the summer of 1944.

Cota, aged 42, was promoted to major in 1935 having spent thirteen years as a captain. He then attended the Army War College, spent two years with the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Plattsburg, New York where he was the Regimental S4 and then Plans and Training Officer. He then was transferred to Fort Leavenworth where he was an instructor at the Command and General Staff School. While there the Second World War began and Cota along with most of the officer corps realized it would only be a matter of time before the United States became involved. In the fall of 1940 Cota became the Executive Officer for the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, the 'Big Red One' at Fort Jay, New York. Four months later he became the division's Assistant G2 (Intelligence) when the unit moved to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. After only four months he became the Assistant G3 (Operations) where his focus was primarily on preparing the division for amphibious operations.

Less than a week after the Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor, Cota was promoted to colonel. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division spent the winter and spring of 1942 preparing and training for combat but it was in June when the new command team was formed that the division found its true war-fighting identity. Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen, was a legend in the army for his fearless courage demonstrated repeatedly during the First World War.<sup>vi</sup> He assumed command with Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., his Assistant Division Commander and then selected Colonel Norman Cota to be the division chief of staff. Whereas Allen was aggressive, impulsive and used a very personal and charismatic leadership style, Cota offset this with a steadfast emphasis on discipline, common sense, and adherence to regulations.<sup>vii</sup> They would prove to be an excellent leader team.

Just days after becoming the division chief of staff, Cota was supervising the division's move from Indiantown Gap, PA to New York City where it would sail for the United Kingdom. The division arrived in Scotland on 8 August and then entrained for England where it spent the rest of the summer and most of the fall training for the invasion of North Africa. On 8 November 1942 the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division landed at Arzeu, Oran and after limited fighting, captured the city of Oran two days later.

In February, 1943 Cota was selected to be the Chief of the American section within the Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ) in London and promoted to brigadier general. Major General Allen was not at all pleased to be losing his chief of staff as he considered Cota to have been instrumental in the success of the 1st Infantry Division but he realized it was for the good of the army and that Cota would be heavily involved in planning future operations that would include the 'Big Red One'.<sup>viii</sup>

Arriving in England, Cota worked directly for Lord Louis Mountbatten, the commander of COHQ, a proven war hero with a forceful personality. Cota was charged with developing doctrine and training for U.S. amphibious operations. He was able to put his experiences from the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division into formal practice. Attending the Assault Training Center Conference in June, Cota was able to present his ideas. He stated that there were three essential phases for amphibious landings: 1) Secure the beachhead, 2) Exploitation of the landing, and 3) Beach maintenance, which included the safe transit of follow-on forces to expand the exploitation.<sup>ix</sup> He also briefed in detail the units required to form the assault divisions, which included the use of well trained regimental combat teams and a Ranger type battalion in each regiment.<sup>x</sup> He also stressed that all beach landings should be made under cover of darkness as he believed daylight assaults would have little chance for success. Although his ideas for the training and organization of assault divisions would be adopted, his tenet for night time assaults fell on deaf ears.

With his wealth of knowledge on amphibious operations, Cota was in high demand by several division commanders whose unit were preparing for the largest amphibious assault in history. In October 1943, Cota was selected by Major General Charles Gerhardt to be the assistant division commander for

the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry 'Blue & Grey' Division. Gerhardt appreciated Cota's no-nonsense approach to training and upon his arrival at division headquarters, the division commander placed Cota in charge of all division training exercises in preparation for their role in the forthcoming assault on Normandy.

In April 1944, as the final plan for the assault on Normandy was formalized, the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 29<sup>th</sup> Division, was identified to be one of the first units to land on Omaha Beach. As the unit rehearsed the assault plan, General Gerhardt realized he had to take measures to minimize the chaos and confusion that was sure to be rampant on the beach. To maintain command and control in the early phases of the assault he decided to form a Provisional Brigade and made Cota the 'brigade' commander. Known as the 'Bastard Brigade', Cota had a staff of about twenty-five officers culled from the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the 29<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions. The last week before embarkation he and his staff war-gamed a variety of contingencies once the units assaulted the beach. At 1400 5 June, Cota briefed his officers closing with:

You must all try to alleviate confusion, but in doing so be careful not to create more. Ours is not the job of actually commanding, but of assisting. If possible always work through the commander of a group.

This is necessary to avoid conflicts-duplications of both orders and efforts.<sup>xi</sup>

Cota and his 'Bastard Brigade' landed at Omaha Beach at H+1 (0730) on 6 June, 1944. He was 51 years old, had just completed his twenty-seventh year in the Army, and he was the author of the most current amphibious doctrine in the U.S. Army. For the next twelve hours 'Dutch' Cota would traverse the beach a dozen times, leading, directing, and encouraging the hundreds of American soldiers he found cowering behind beach obstacles, disabled Sherman tanks, and the shingle wall below the German pillboxes. After directing a group of engineers to use Bangalore torpedoes to blow one of the first breaches in the German obstacle belt just southwest of Vierville sur Mer, he then led a platoon of soldiers through the gap and into open country. It was 0830 and American forces began flowing through the breach and off Omaha Beach. He would spend the rest of the daylight hours of June 6 coordinating activities on and around the beach landings. He also found, briefed, and coordinated with both the 29<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division commanders and their staffs. As his biographer Robert Miller wrote, D-Day for Cota "had been the culmination of a lifetime of military training and discipline".<sup>xii</sup>

Major General Norman D. 'Dutch' Cota, commanding general of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.



Cota receives the British Distinguished Order Medal from General Montgomery somewhere in France, July 7, 1944.

Cota would become a legend for his actions on Omaha Beach. He survived the deadly fusillade every time he traversed the beach to get men moving or to direct efforts to breach the enemy barriers. His leadership, his courage, and his actions would earn him both the U.S Distinguished Service Cross and the British Distinguished Service Order. Many eyewitnesses believe his actions warranted the nation's highest medal for valor, the Medal of Honor. Cota would also be remembered for his famous exclamation of "Rangers! Lead the way!" exhorting men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion to leave the cover of the seawall and lead an increasing mass of soldiers through the Vierville breach.<sup>xiii</sup> Today it remains, as it has for decades, the motto of the U.S. Army Ranger Regiment.

Over the course of the next few weeks Cota would be in the thick of the fighting and always forward in the front lines as the men of the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division fought through the hedgerows of Normandy. He would win the Silver Star for his actions at Isigny and the Vire River. On 18 July, after several unsuccessful attacks against the German defenses in and around St. Lo, Task Force Cota attacked and captured its critical road and bridge network. In the process Cota was wounded in the arm and spent the next two weeks in the hospital. For his daring leadership he was awarded an oak leaf to his Silver Star. Six weeks after landing at Omaha Beach he was one of the most decorated army officer's in the entire European theater. He had earned every one of them.

On 13 August Cota was notified that he was to take command of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division after its newly assigned commander, Major General James Wharton, was killed by a sniper while visiting his forward units.

The largest formation Cota had ever commanded prior to his taken division command was an infantry company. Though he had been a division chief of staff and an assistant division commander in combat, he would only have been human had his stomach churned and his nerves been a bit on edge when he arrived at his new command. Arriving at the division command post near Sourdeval, Cota realized a very heavy burden had been placed on him. As the commander of an infantry division he now was responsible for the

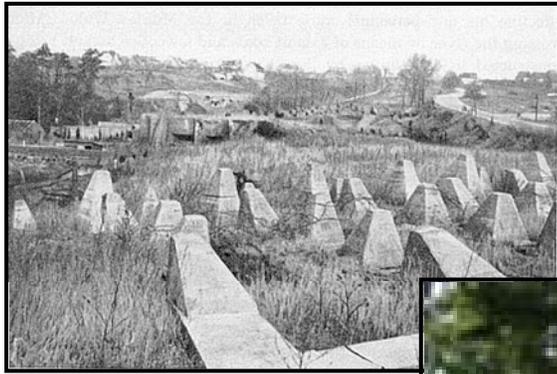
lives of more than 15,000 men. Cota's biographer, Robert Miller wrote "The ultimate accountability for division success or failure was now his and his alone."<sup>xiv</sup>

The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was a Pennsylvania National Guard Division and had been activated in 1940. Known as the Keystone Division, the division had deployed first to Wales, then to England, where its units spent seven months training before landing on Omaha Beach on 22 July. The division had been in combat for three weeks when its commander, Major General Brown, was relieved. The division's performance had been considered unsatisfactory by its parent headquarters, XIX Corps, and Cota, with his reputation of strict discipline and leading from the front, had been brought in to correct the leadership challenges present within the division.

Cota conducted an assessment of his division staff and regimental commanders. He learned that many of them had served with the division in the First World War and had been on active duty since their call-up in 1940. The chief of staff, two of the three regimental commanders, and several of the battalion commanders, had spent their entire careers within the 28th. Though his staff had much time in the unit and their duty positions, it was evident to Cota that both the chief of staff and the division operations officer (G3) were not the competent experts in their areas that they should have been. He also suspected that their performance had probably been partially responsible for the relief of their division commander. To make matters worse the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General George Davis, had joined the division shortly before Cota. He had served on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army staff but in only a few weeks had earned the distrust and dislike of the division staff and the regimental commanders. He would prove to be a problem for the new division commander.

Any thought of making changes to his staff or subordinate commanders was set aside as the division was ordered to move almost ninety miles and attack as part of the corps left flank into Le Neuborg and Elbeuf on the Seine River in an attempt to trap retreating German forces. Upon completion of this mission the 28<sup>th</sup> was transferred to Major General Leonard Gerow's V Corps.

After parading through the recently captured city of Paris on 29 August, the 28<sup>th</sup> spent the next two weeks pursuing the retreating German Army. In ten days the division covered an amazing 270 miles, then unheard of for an infantry division.<sup>xv</sup> Several notable achievements for the division during this period included the capture of the entire Duchy of Luxembourg on 10 September and then becoming the first Allied unit to reach the German border. Waiting for them was the renowned Siegfried Line, a dense obstacle belt that stretched the entire length of the German border opposite France and Belgium. It consisted of minefields, dense barbed wire, concrete pillboxes and mile upon mile of 'dragon's teeth'. Every American soldier who saw the Siegfried Line asked the same question: How many German troops manned the defensive belt and of what quality were they?



Dragon's Teeth along the  
German *Westwall* (Siegfried Line)



It was during the first weeks of September that both the American and British senior commanders began to believe that the German ground forces were exhausted, dispirited and disorganized. It was believed that the war might indeed be over by Christmas. The First Army commander, Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges, went so far as to state that “given ten good days of weather the war might well be over as far as organized resistance was concerned.”<sup>xvi</sup> This overly optimistic view quickly spread down to the small unit level. It would prove to be a major miscalculation of the allied strategic leaders as the Germans would prove.

The 28<sup>th</sup> attacked the Siegfried Line on 13 September, its objective being the town of Uttfeld, a mile inside the German frontier. Cota developed a plan of attack that used only one battalion from each of his two regiments (the 109<sup>th</sup> and 110<sup>th</sup>; the third regiment, the 112<sup>th</sup>, had been attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division). Both attacks failed and Cota relieved the 109<sup>th</sup> regimental commander, Colonel William Blanton, when one of his battalions withdrew without permission.<sup>xvii</sup>



Infantrymen riding on a M4 medium Sherman tank-dozer pass through the Siegfried Line in early October 1944.

The division continued to attack, defeating several German counter-attacks in the process. On 17 September the high ground above Uttfeld was captured. Preparing to envelop the town, Cota was notified by Major General Leonard Gerow, V Corps commander, to call off the attack. V Corps could not expand the flanks of the narrow penetration that the 28<sup>th</sup> had achieved. Cota was disappointed but he also realized that his regiments had suffered nearly 1500 casualties in five days of fighting. It was from this attack that the Germans gave the 28<sup>th</sup> a nickname that would remain with them for the rest of the war. Mistaking the red keystone emblem worn on the left shoulder of each soldier's jacket for a bucket, they became known as the *der blutiger Eimer* or the "Bloody Bucket" division.<sup>xviii</sup>

On 24 September, Cota was promoted to major general and a week later his division was removed from the line and sent into corps reserve thirty miles to the south near Elsenborn, Belgium. The 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment returned from its attachment to the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the 28<sup>th</sup> spent the next four weeks refitting and recuperating from its march across France and Luxembourg. It was Cota's first opportunity to relax since he had landed at Omaha Beach four months earlier.

A major operation for Cota, his staff, and subordinate commanders was the training and incorporation of the thousands of replacements the division received during this period. The replacements arrived as individuals, the vast majority with little or no infantry training. Veterans were leery of the new men, unknown quantities who might put them at risk. Cota knew it would take weeks of hard training and

shared experience to build cohesion and develop the traits and skills they would require to build combat capable small units. Cota had long been on record as being strongly opposed to the Army's replacement system. He had recommended to his senior commanders and the Army G1 (Personnel) that the replacement depots should also serve as training centers rather than just another step of the long processing pipeline that pushed untrained soldiers from the states to France and then to the front until they arrived at their designated units. The burden then fell on the battalions and companies to train the new men, a task they rarely were able to do, especially if they were conducting combat operations. He also recommended that the replacements should be organized and trained as squads where they would develop the skills required to survive in combat prior to arriving at the division replacement center. Neither of his recommendations was adopted.



Major General Norman D. 'Dutch' Cota,  
Commanding General, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

Cota reflected on two critical areas while his unit was in reserve. The first was his performance as division commander. Most troubling to him was the plan he had developed for the attack on the Siegfried Line. He was convinced he had been overly cautious and that had he massed all six of his available battalions, the division may have broken through on the first day when the Germans were less prepared. Instead the division had gained little ground and had suffered nearly 1500 casualties in a five day struggle, almost all of them within the infantry.

He was also concerned about the relationship with both his corps commander, Major General Gerow, and the First Army commander, Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges. Gerow was a leader with little personality and a reputation to be overly controlling of his subordinate commanders, especially when it

came to planning operations.<sup>xix</sup> Hodges, a stoic, inarticulate, and unimpressive figure, delegated much of the command and control of the First Army to his chief of staff, Major General William B. Kean. Kean was a stern and driven leader, and was not well liked by his staff. Some observers believed that this type of relationship between Hodges and Kean caused some confusion as to who in fact was truly commanding the First Army. This division of leadership and command had far reaching effects throughout the First Army. Hodges rarely visited his subordinate corps and division commanders. Instead he had them return to the rear area to his headquarters and brief him there.<sup>xx</sup> He had earned a reputation of being intolerant of any mistake and quick to relieve subordinate commanders when he suspected that they were lacking drive and initiative. With the coming mission to attack into the Huertgen Forest, Cota would have reason to be concerned about his relationships with his superiors.



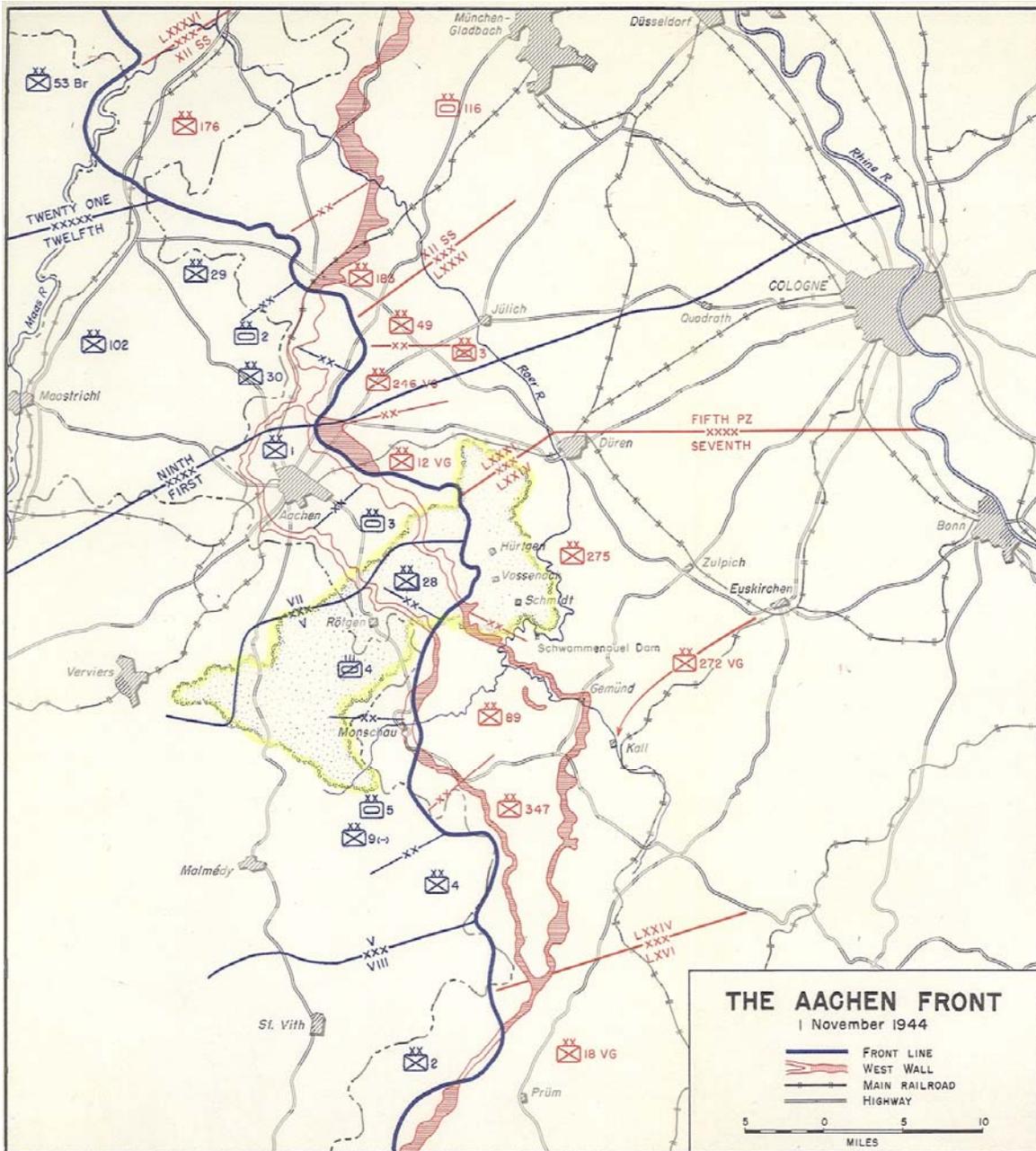
Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, Commanding General, First U.S. Army



Major General (seen here as a Lieutenant General) Leonard T. Gerow, Commanding General, V Corps

### **The Huertgen Forest**

Known as the Huertgenwald to the Germans and the Huertgen Forest to the Americans, the Huertgen Forest was one of the largest wooded tracts in Germany. It is located on the Belgian-German border and was part of the northern portion of the Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg and the Eifel region of Germany. It was twenty miles in length from north to south and ten miles wide from west to east. Its northern limit lay between the cities of Aachen and Duren and then stretched southwards through Monschau until it merges with the Ardennes. The forest encompasses several ridges with steep hills and many valleys and contains some of the most rugged terrain in Europe. Between the two main ridges that bisect the forest was the Kall River, in reality not much more than a stream. A much larger water obstacle was the Roer River on the far eastern boundary of the forest. The Siegfried Line ran right through the middle of the forest whose trees were so dense they impeded both foot and vehicular movement and at the same time blotted out the sun from reaching the forest floor. The Germans had turned the forest into a labyrinth of well camouflaged pillboxes with interlocking fields of fire, dense belts of barbed wire, and dense minefields. The few roads and trails that bisected the forest were covered by artillery in depth.



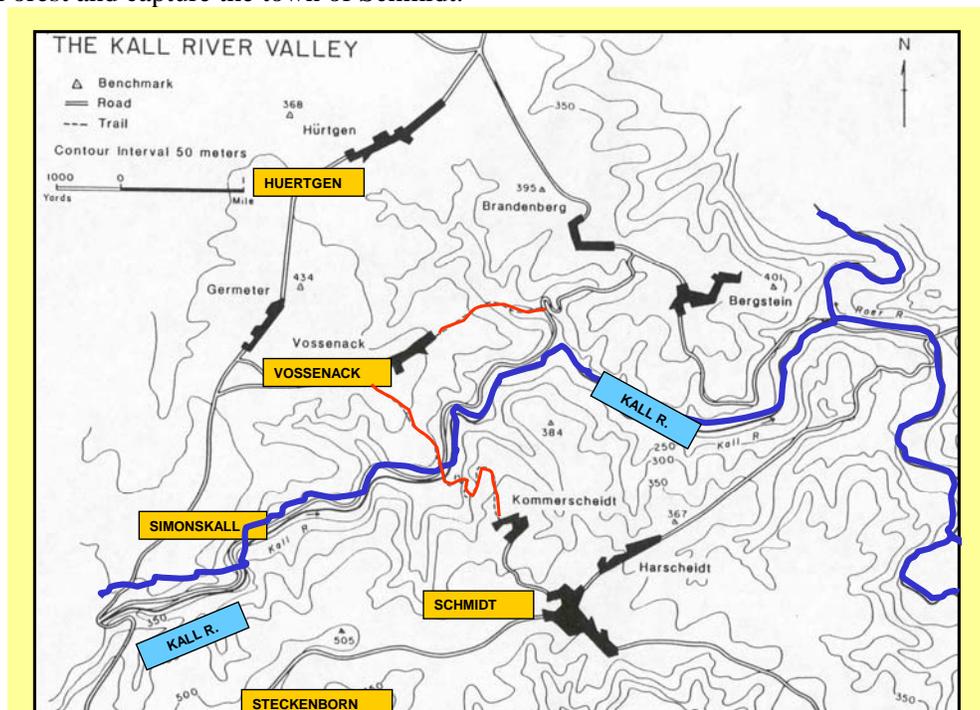
Map of the Aachen Front, November 1944. Area highlighted in yellow encompasses the Huertgen forest

In early September Eisenhower directed his allied forces to continuing attacking on a broad front. His intent was to breach the German frontier and strike deep into Germany. General Hodges First Army would conduct a head-on attack against the Siegfried Line, penetrate and then drive on to the Rhine. Hodges had three corps within First Army totaling more than 256,000 men. Arrayed north to south on the German frontier was XIX Corps under Major General Charles H. Corlett, in the center was VII Corps under the command of Major General J. Lawton Collins. To the south was V Corps led by Major General Leonard Gerow.

Hodges was unwilling to bypass the potential stronghold that the Huertgen Forest posed for the Germans. A veteran of the Muese-Argonne campaign in the First World War this experience may have biased him as he reflected on the bloody battles in and around the Argonne Forest where the Germans had used the Argonne as a staging area and thus threatened the left flank of the American offensive in 1918. That common experience caused them to believe that the Huertgen posed a similar tactical problem. Hodges then gave the orders for VII Corps to eliminate threat.

The Battle of the Huertgen Forest officially began on 12 September 1944 when elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division, VII Corps entered the village of Rott. The advance soon stalled though because of a lack of fuel and ammunition and from a stiffening German defense. The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was then given the mission to attack and seize the crossroads village of Schmidt and thus secure the right flank of VII Corps. From 5-16 October, the 9<sup>th</sup> entered the periphery of the Huertgen, captured 3,000 meters and suffered 4,500 casualties before being relieved.<sup>xxi</sup> By the middle of October, American commanders no longer believed that the war would be over by Christmas.

On 18 October, Hodges was informed that his First Army would be the main effort in an offensive that was to begin in less than ten days. The objective was Cologne and the Rhine River. Hodges assigned VII Corps to be the main effort for First Army but first he had to free them from the Huertgen Forest mission. By redrawing corps boundaries, Hodges assigned V Corps the mission to attack into the Huertgen Forest and capture the town of Schmidt.



The Kall River valley. The villages of Huertgen, Vossenack, Kommerscheidt, and Schmidt were 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division objectives. The Kall trail is the red line from Vossenack to Kommerscheidt.

There were four infantry and one armored division's assigned to V Corps but one of them had just spent the last four weeks in reserve at a rest camp: the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. General Gerow notified Cota on 21 October to move his division north to relieve the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Cota established his division command post in the village of Rott on 25 October and began coordination with the V Corps staff for future operations as his units began to occupy the 9<sup>th</sup>'s positions north of Lammersdorf.<sup>xxii</sup>

When Cota received the operations order for the attack he was perplexed and none too happy. It was far too directive and detailed and left little for him, his staff and his regimental commanders to do except execute it. It was basically the same plan that had been given to the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and that plan had failed. Hodges dictated that the 28<sup>th</sup> was to capture Vossenack and the treeline facing the village of Huertgen. Gerow directed that an entire regiment would assault Huertgen to the north; a second regiment would attack and capture Schmidt in the center and a third regiment attack south towards Rafflesbrand.<sup>xxiii</sup> Cota disagreed with the plan. It allowed no room for initiative.<sup>xxiv</sup> It violated many of the nine principles of war, most especially objective and mass. Furthermore, with the attack scheduled for 31 October and the VII Corps attack not scheduled to begin until 5 November, the 28<sup>th</sup> would be the only unit in the entire 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group on the offensive along the entire 150 mile front.<sup>xxv</sup> The Germans would be able to mass against his separate regiments. He raised his concerns with Gerow and stated that instead of a division attack against a single objective (Schmidt), he was being directed to conduct three separate regimental attacks in diverging directions over some of the worst terrain in Western Europe.

Gerow heard Cota's arguments but they fell on deaf ears.<sup>xxvi</sup> Gerow tried to placate his stubborn division commander by telling him that he was going to reinforce his nine infantry battalions with a tank battalion, a towed tank destroyer battalion, a self-propelled tank destroyer battalion, three combat engineer battalions, and a chemical (mortar) battalion. The 28<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery would also have eight battalions and a separate battery from V Corps Artillery reinforcing the division's assigned artillery. A further six battalions from VII Corps Artillery would also be in a reinforcing role.<sup>xxvii</sup>

When the division order was issued to the subordinate regiments it directed the 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Dan Strickler, to attack north along the western ridge and seize the village of Huertgen. This supporting effort was directed by both the First Army and Corps commanders as they feared the Germans would counter-attack through the village into the left flank of the 28<sup>th</sup> as they had done several weeks before against the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which brought to a halt their forward movement. Strickler had been a machine gun company commander with the 28<sup>th</sup> in the First World War.

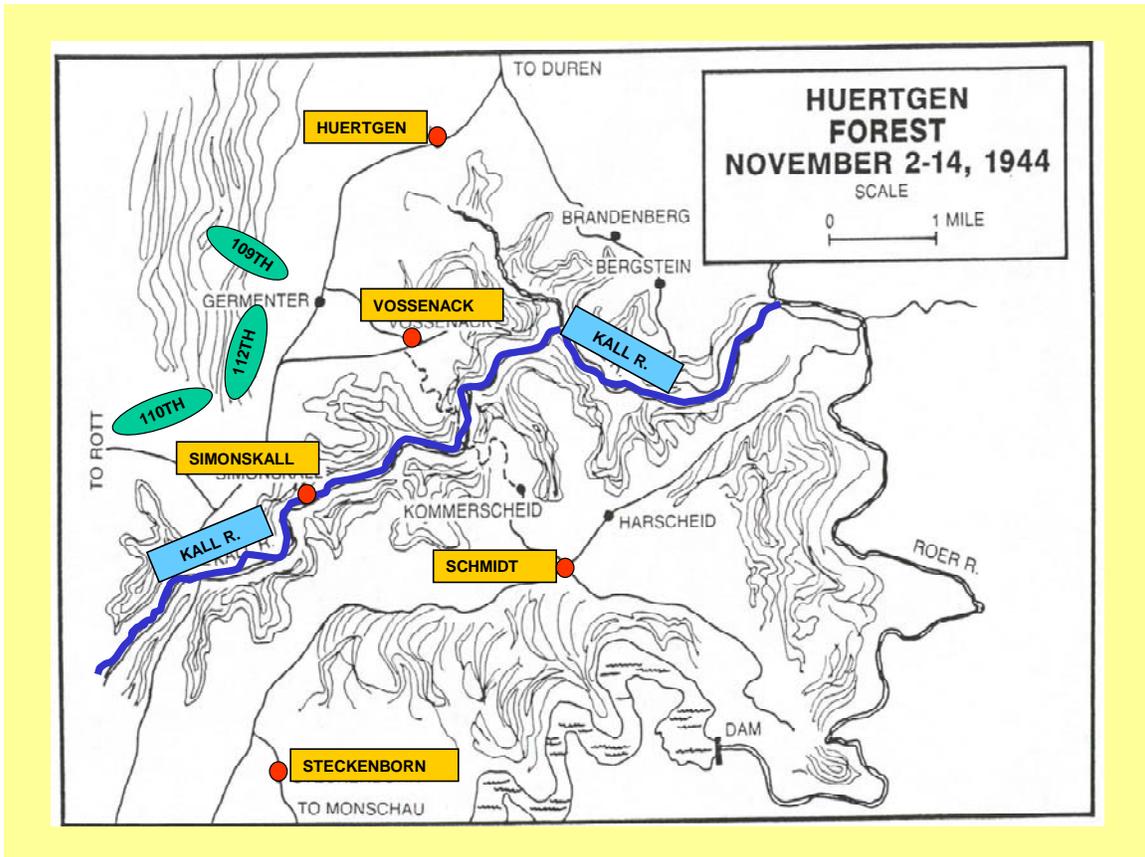
The 110<sup>th</sup> Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Seely, was also to be a supporting attack and was to move south and capture the villages of Simonskall and Steckenborn to prevent any German attacks from that direction. Two battalions would be used; the third battalion was given the mission of being the division reserve.

The 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment was to be the main effort. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Carl Peterson, a veteran of the First World War, he had spent his entire career in the 28<sup>th</sup>.

His regiment was to attack in the center of the division sector, capture the village of Vossenack, cross the Kall River gorge and then capture Schmidt and its road network. The 112<sup>th</sup> would have to traverse more than three miles of extremely difficult and wooded terrain to reach their objective. Cota would have preferred to have had at least two regiments attack Schmidt but he was not given that option.

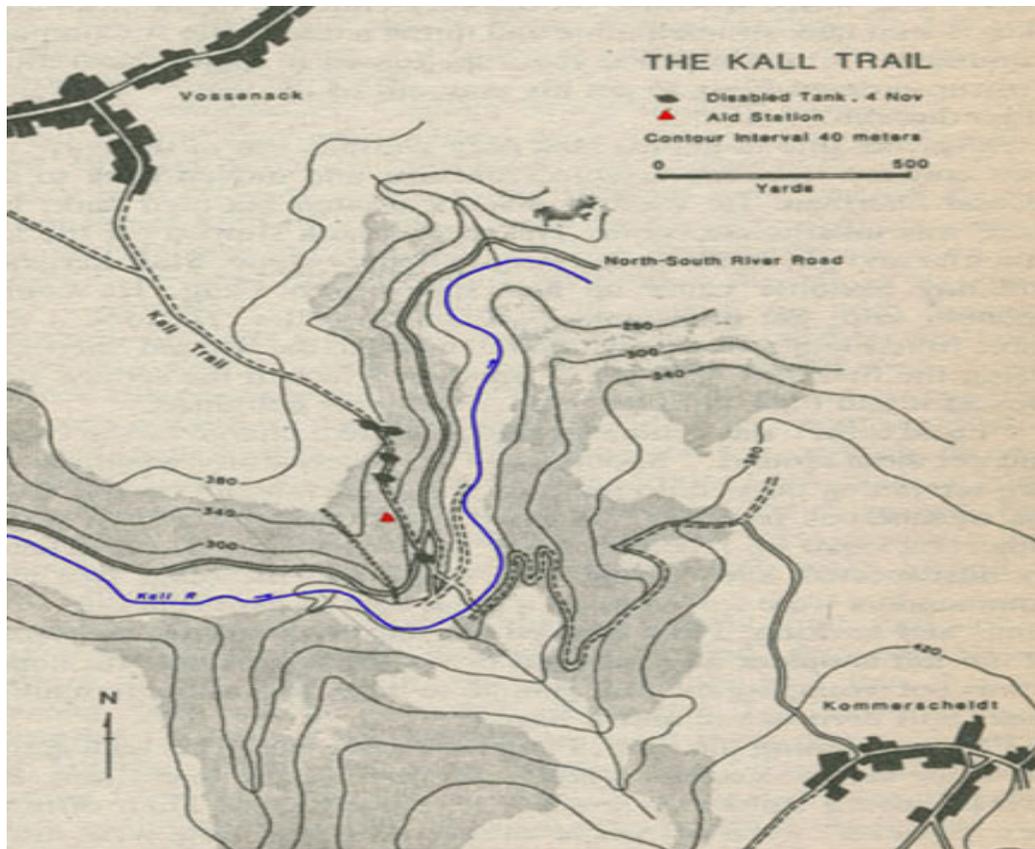
It was during the final days of preparation before the attack that Cota made three crucial mistakes that would have far reaching effects on his division's assault into the Huertgen. The first was that neither he nor his staff directed subordinate units to conduct patrolling into the Huertgen Forest. What were the enemy's dispositions and strengths? Where were the obstacle belts and the reinforced pillboxes? Patrolling, even if not all patrols were successful, would still have filled in many of the gaps that the division commander needed answered about the enemy. Corps intelligence had identified two German divisions defending east of Schmidt, the 275<sup>th</sup> and the 89<sup>th</sup>. What they did not know was that a third division was also in that vicinity, the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division, which was preparing to relieve the 89<sup>th</sup> when Cota's division attacked. All three of these divisions were under-strength and consisted of a mixture of both experienced and newly re-organized units. It was true there were old men and boys in the

three German divisions but there were also some very experienced front line combat units mixed in as well and all of them were now defending their homeland as against the American invaders. Thus the Germans would have three divisions with which to stop the advancing 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.



Initial Positions of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the Huertgen Forest

The second mistake was tied to the first. Cota had approved the extremely narrow Kall trail to serve as the division's main supply route (MSR). The trail started near the village of Vossenack, down a steep gorge across the Kall River then uphill to the village of Kommerseid, ending only a mile from Schmidt. Aerial reconnaissance could not confirm the trail's condition due to the dense forest covering it but ground patrols would have provided much valuable information, both about the enemy and the trail. Cota did assign three battalions of engineers to work on the Kall trail and improve the track across the gorge but this lack of real intelligence would prove costly, especially to the main effort, the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, almost as soon as the battle began.



The Kall Trail (dotted line). The trail goes from Vossenack in the north-west then south east across the Kall River and then up the high ground towards Kommerscheidt.

The third mistake was his decision not to use armor to support his infantry. Believing that the forest would not allow access and the required road network to support tanks, he kept all but two of his tank companies and all of his tank destroyer units in the rear to augment his division artillery. Had he discussed this with the commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, he would have learned that tanks could operate in many areas of the forest and with some training and prior coordination they could provide valuable support to the infantry. The 9<sup>th</sup> had assigned a tank company to each infantry regiment with a platoon supporting each battalion. Communications problems between the two arms in the dense woods were solved by having the infantry platoon leader ride on the back of the lead tank while controlling his unit by radio. They also learned that by using small infantry-tank teams the infantry could provide security to the tanks while the tanks provided the firepower and mobility to keep the attack moving. The 9<sup>th</sup> also learned that when minefields and barbed wire obstacles held up the infantry, the soldiers would normally go to ground and dig-in. If tanks were supporting them, the soldiers would press the attack.<sup>xxviii</sup> Had Cota known all of this he might have followed the 9<sup>th</sup>'s hard-learned example. Instead he attached A and C Company, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, to his main effort, the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He would rely on his artillery and five fighter-bomber groups from the IX Tactical Air Command to be his major combat multipliers.

### The 28<sup>th</sup> attacks into the Huertgen

The 28<sup>th</sup>'s attack was delayed forty-eight hours because of heavy rain and fog blanketed the area. It was an ominous sign foreboding that the worsening weather conditions would have a major impact on the

upcoming battle. In a rare visit to one of his front line units, General Hodges met with Cota and his staff on 1 November. Cota may have been confident of success when talking to his superior<sup>xxxix</sup> but just days later when interviewed he stated that he believed that the attack had “a gambler’s chance” for success.<sup>xxx</sup> After directing Cota to begin the attack the next day, regardless of the weather, Hodges returned to his headquarters where he told his aide that the 28<sup>th</sup>’s plan was excellent. “They are feinting to the north in hopes of fooling the Boche into the belief that this is the main effort, and then whacking him with everything in the direction of the town of Schmidt”<sup>xxxxi</sup>

At 0800 Thursday, 2 November, V and VII Corps Artillery’s, in support of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery, initiated a sixty minute preparation into the Huertgen Forest. They fired more than 4,000 rounds while the 28<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery fired 7,313 onto known and suspected enemy positions.<sup>xxxii</sup>

As the last rounds impacted, the three regiments of the 28<sup>th</sup> climbed out of their foxholes and advanced north, east, and south towards their objectives. The 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry attacking northwards got as far as the Germeter-Huertgen road before they encountered a large minefield south of Wittscheidt. The three infantry battalions became intermixed as German artillery located north of the village of Huertgen and on the Brandenburg and Bergstein Ridge, pounded the advancing American infantry. German tanks then advanced south through the village pushing the Americans back. The German defenses dug in along the Weisser Weh valley were impassable and within twenty-four hours the 109<sup>th</sup> would dig-in after suffering heavy casualties. Unable to advance without sustaining even more casualties, the 109<sup>th</sup> would spend the next five days occupying positions to the south and west of Huertgen before being relieved by the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. What had the 109<sup>th</sup> achieved? The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had captured part of its objective but had failed to seize the crossroads which allowed the Germans to maintain a critical link of their supply route in the area. The 2d Battalion had occupied the bend in the Germeter-Huertgen road but could never secure the high ground south of the village. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion never got near its objective, having impaled itself in a minefield that no one in the regiment even knew existed until they stumbled into it.<sup>xxxiii</sup> With 1,275 killed, wounded, and missing in five days of combat, the regiment had suffered more than 50% casualties.

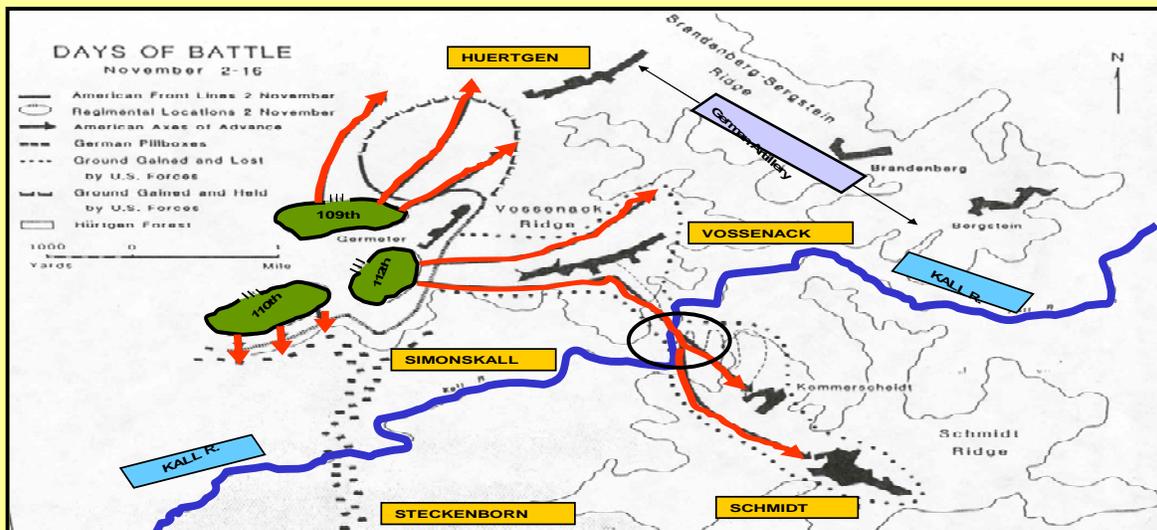
To the south, the 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry was even less successful. The 2d and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion’s met strong opposition from well-entrenched German units and were forced back to their original start positions. Thick minefields, a lack of viable roads, thick mud and dense woods made forward movement almost impossible. The 110<sup>th</sup> would attack several more times over the course of the next ten days but each attack in turn failed. When the unit was finally relieved on 13 November, every officer in the regiment’s rifle companies was either dead or wounded and one battalion had only fifty-seven men left from an original strength of more than 160.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In the center, 2d Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment with an attached tank company from the 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, attacked east through Germeter and quickly captured the lightly defended village of Vossenack. The village was about one city block wide and 2,000 yards in length. Once secured the tank-infantry team occupied the ridge beyond the town by early afternoon. The 1st and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions attacked from Richelskaul into the woods but could not cross the Kall River gorge due to intense German small arms and artillery fire. There was also some confusion in the routes of attack due to the fact that the two battalion commanders had made some changes within coordinating with their regimental commander which then added to the frustration of the two units.



Soldiers of Company E, 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, move through the Huertgen Forest south of Germeter during the initial attack towards Vossenack on the morning of 2 November 1944. Several moments after this photograph was taken, the patrol came under fire from a German machine gun. Every member, to include the cameraman, were killed or wounded.

Receiving reports from his regimental commanders at his command post, Cota believed it was too early to be overly concerned with the lack of success achieved on the first day. The weather had negated the use of air support for most of the day and the dense minefields near Huertgen and Simonskall had



The initial attacks conducted by the three regiments of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on 2-3 November 1944.

proved troubling but he hoped the next day's attacks would prove to be more successful.

The next day indeed proved to be much better for the 28<sup>th</sup>. Lieutenant Colonel Peterson, the 112<sup>th</sup> commander, made the decision to bypass Richelskaul and sent his battalions, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in the lead, through Vossenack and then onto the Kall Trail. Climbing the muddy and narrow trail upwards they then entered the village of Kommerscheidt meeting only light resistance and by 1300 had captured the village. Leaving the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion to hold Kommerscheidt, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion pushed on and after overcoming a very surprised and negligible German force, Schmidt was also captured. Cota ordered the regimental commander to send the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion forward, link up with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and establish a much stronger defense as he expected the usual German response to losing key terrain- a counterattack. Lieutenant Colonel Peterson however recommended that a defense in depth vice placing two thirds of the regiment forward the Kall Trail was more practicable. Cota agreed to this recommendation and when the day ended the 112<sup>th</sup> had a battalion each in Vossenack, Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. Had Cota visited Schmidt, he would have realized the predicament that Peterson had placed his units in. Schmidt was too large an area for one battalion to defend properly. The perimeter formed a rough square with each side almost 900 yards long. Had Cota seen the positions he would not have reversed his original decision. Tired, and wet from crossing the Kall River, with little sleep in the last seventy-two hours, the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion failed to dig proper fighting positions. When sixty antitank mines arrived at midnight they were emplaced on top of the three hard surfaced roads leading into Schmidt instead of being dug-in. Even worse, no patrols were sent out to locate where the enemy had pulled back too. No attempt was made to determine what the enemy might be planning to do. Had they done any patrolling they would have found enemy units less than a mile east of Schmidt preparing to counterattack them at first light.

Back at Cota's command post "the atmosphere at division headquarters in Rott was jubilant, Success had come far more easily than Cota or any of his staff had expected".<sup>xxxv</sup> Notes of congratulations poured in from the other corps and divisions along the 12<sup>th</sup> Army front. If Cota had reservations about the attack before the operation, they faded away when he received word that Schmidt had been captured. In his own words he felt like "a little Napoleon."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Had he known how precarious the situation was in Schmidt and more so along the Kall Trail, neither Cota nor his staff would have gotten any sleep that night.

There was no way Cota could have known that when his regiments began their attack's on 2 November, that the commanders and staffs of the German Army Group B, the Seventh Army and its subordinate corps and divisions, including the 74<sup>th</sup> Corps facing the 28<sup>th</sup>, were located in a castle in Cologne conducting a wargame which included a theoretical American attack into the Huertgen. When Army Group B's commander, Field Marshal Model, received word that several American regiments had attacked into the forest and were moving toward Schmidt, he directed the commander of the 74<sup>th</sup> Corps to return to his headquarters. The wargame continued, but Model now used actual reports from the front vice a fictional script. When word was received that Vossenack had been captured, Model directed an infantry unit from the 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division to move into the sector. It was this force that blunted the 109<sup>th</sup> attack south of Huertgen on 3 November.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

To make matters more difficult for Cota and his division, the weather was worsening and would play a major factor in preventing the continuous air cover the 28<sup>th</sup> expected for its operations. German artillery, dug-in along the Brandenburg-Bergstein Ridge, had been extremely effective and caused many casualties, especially to the 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment. It was also having a major impact on the 28<sup>th</sup> communications by repeatedly cutting the phone lines between battalion, regiment and division headquarters. At the same time the American artillery had failed to destroy the German artillery batteries and observation posts on the ridge.

Cota's staff had received a report that the bridge crossing the Kall Trail had been destroyed but it was almost eight hours before engineers were directed to confirm the status of the bridge and the condition of the trail itself. Two officers from the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion conducted a reconnaissance on 3 November and reported that the bridge was in fact intact, in good condition and that the trail could be used by tanks. A Company, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, commanded by Captain Bruce Hostrup, left Vossenack late in the evening to lead his tank company across the Kall. Less than a quarter of the way from his start line to the bottom of the gorge, the left shoulder of the trail consisted of large rock outcroppings. To the left there was a sharp drop-off into the gorge. At the narrowest part of the trail Hostrup's tank began to slide in the thick mud and nearly went over the edge to certain death below. The company commander slowly reversed his course, convinced that the trail would not support tanks in its present condition.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Directed to work through the night, the engineers made little headway and by next morning there were still no American tanks across the Kall Trail.

With Schmidt captured and believing the 112<sup>th</sup> was in a viable and supportable defense in depth, Cota focused on his flanks. Believing the road network in and around Steckenborn was vital to the success of reinforcing Schmidt he made the decision to commit his division reserve (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 110<sup>th</sup> Regiment) to the south. The battalion set off after dawn on November 4 and within an hour became bogged down by a line of pill boxes near Raffelsbrand. Not only had Cota committed his reserve early in the battle to a supporting effort, he made a bigger mistake by failing to identify another reserve force, though he had several tank destroyer and combat engineer battalions available that could have served in that role. Cota did receive some good news just after daybreak on November 4 when he was informed that a tank platoon under the command of First Lieutenant Raymond Fleig had crossed the Kall Trail and were enroute to Kommerscheidt. Much later he was given the bad news: The Kall Trail was blocked by five disabled Sherman tanks, one had struck a mine, one had plunged off the trail and three had thrown track. The trail was closed to all vehicular traffic until engineers could improve the trail and clear up the damaged tanks. It would remain blocked until the early morning hours of 5 November. There would be even worse news for the division commander at the end of the day.

At 0700, as Fleig led his three tanks to Kommerscheidt, the sounds of German artillery began pounding the village of Schmidt. For thirty minutes German shells pounded the 112<sup>th</sup>'s 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. Minutes later, the Americans observed a large formation of dismounted German infantry, supported by at least fifteen Mk III, IV and V (Panther) tanks, advancing on Schmidt from the northeast from Harscheidt. To the south, another German force, supported by eight Panther tanks and four Sturmgeschütz assault guns advanced from Strauch.

The German tanks drove around the easily identified antitank mines lying on top of the roads and fired their main guns into the few fighting positions dug by the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. American soldiers, with nothing to stop the German tanks, and witnessing their comrades being killed all around them, having suffered through an intense artillery barrage for most of the morning, began to flee their positions. Many retreated back to Kommerscheidt where their battalion commander was located and was in no position to stop the rout. At least one company retreated into the woods southwest of the village, most of them being captured several days later.

Ninety minutes after the German counterattack began, the American artillery finally struck back but it was already too late. By 1130 the Germans had recaptured Schmidt and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry no longer existed as a cohesive unit. The staffs of both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions had been captured along with more than 130 other men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.<sup>xxxix</sup> The regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peterson, located in his command post at Vossenack, was not aware that Schmidt was even under attack from two directions until an hour and a half after the attack had begun. It was sometime between 0900 and 1000 that Cota received word that Schmidt was under attack but he was unaware of its magnitude. He directed his Assistant G3, Lieutenant Colonel Trapani, to go to Schmidt and let him know what was

happening. Trapani was never able to get through the Kall Trail and reported back to receive the full wrath of his division commander. By mid-morning he was given reports that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was holding its own. Based on this information he ordered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion to continue their attack eastwards as soon as they had defeated the enemy foray into the village.<sup>x1</sup>



Tank Destroyers on the Kall Trail, Hüertgen Forest  
803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion Southwest of Düren

At 1200 Cota received updated information that led him to believe that the Germans had recaptured the village. He then directed his Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General George Davis, to take the Assistant G3 and get to the front, regardless of obstacles. He needed information to make informed decisions and they would serve as his eyes and ears. Cota then turned his attention to his Main Supply Route (MSR) and directed the 1171<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Group commander, Colonel Daley, to find out what was happening on the Kall Trail. Two hours later Daley notified Cota that five disabled tanks had blocked the trail. Cota then directed Daley and his engineers that they had till first light the next day to clear the trail, and if necessary to push the damaged tanks off the trail and into the gorge. The trail must be opened if the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment was to be resupplied and reinforced. Cota knew that future success for his division depended on the viability of the MSR.

Nine miles east of Cota's command post, the Germans were not satisfied with just recapturing Schmidt. At 1400 they continued their attack by sending eight Panther tanks from the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Regiment and 200 German infantry from the 1056<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment towards Kommerscheidt in the early afternoon. The German tanks engaged in a close-in tank battle with the recently arrived Sherman tanks led by Lt Fleig. Fleig's crew destroyed three Panthers, a fourth was destroyed by one of his other crews and with improving weather, American fighter-bombers arrived and destroyed a fifth tank. The Germans then withdrew.



German reinforcements ride on the hull of a Sturmgeschütze Stug III self propelled gun during a counterattack into the Huertgen Forest, early November, 1944.

It was after dark when General Davis contacted Cota via radio. He had plenty of bad news to report. Schmidt had been re-captured by a combination of German armor and infantry units. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had suffered massive casualties and was no longer combat effective. Its commander was a non-battle casualty and his staff captured. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Kommerscheidt, with the assistance from three tanks, had repulsed a combined tank-infantry assault but expected another attack in the morning. He also confirmed that the Kall Trail was blocked by disabled tanks.<sup>xli</sup>

With this information Cota conducted an assessment of his division. In the north the 109<sup>th</sup> had failed to capture the village of Huertgen but was holding its own. To the south the 110<sup>th</sup>, having received its third battalion, the division reserve, had captured the small hamlet of Simonskall but was still nearly two miles from its objective of Steckenborn. In the center, the 112<sup>th</sup>'s 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had been virtually destroyed and had lost Schmidt. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was holding Kommerscheidt while the 2d Battalion held Vossenack. He also knew he had been out of touch with his regimental commanders for most of the day and yet his staff was still sending reports to corps headquarters that troop morale was high, losses were low, and battalion's were still attacking towards their objectives. Cota did not know it at the time but after seventy-two hours into the attack, he had lost control of his division and the battle. Charles MacDonald, in his classic work on the Huertgen Forest, stated it was in the hours after the Germans recaptured Schmidt that Cota lost control of his division and the battle.<sup>xlii</sup> He would never regain it. On Sunday morning 5 November, shortly after first light, nine self-propelled tank destroyers and Captain Hostrup's six remaining tanks, crossed the now open Kall Trail gorge and made their way into Kommerscheidt. The engineers cleared the trail just before dawn. What should have taken only a few hours under normal conditions had taken almost twenty-four hours of backbreaking work by both the engineers and tank crews.

At 0730 Major General Gerow visited Cota in his command post at Rott to assess the situation. He was perplexed about some of the reports his headquarters received. The reports from Cota's staff led him to believe the situation was much better than it actually was. He had been told that two battalions from the 112<sup>th</sup> were attacking Schmidt only to find out later that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had been destroyed and the 1<sup>st</sup>

Battalion was barely hanging on to Kommerscheidt against strong enemy pressure. He was unhappy with Cota and his G3 for forwarding incorrect and inaccurate data. One example is that the previous night the 28<sup>th</sup> G3, Lieutenant Thomas Briggs, sent a report through V Corps to First Army, stating elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's were conducting a counterattack against Schmidt and had gained more than 300 yards by late afternoon. The truth was no American units were counterattacking, and no ground had been gained.<sup>xliii</sup>

When Gerow departed Rott, Cota contacted Lieutenant Colonel Peterson, who was now located with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Kommerscheidt. He directed him to take the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and recapture Schmidt. About the time Peterson received this order over the radio the Germans began their third attack on the village in two days. The attack failed due to the stubborn defense put up by the infantrymen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, combined with effective artillery support, Captain Hostrup's and Lieutenant Fleig's nine tanks and nine self-propelled tank destroyers, and the timely arrival of P-47 fighter-bombers from the IX Tactical Air Command.

Any thoughts of retaking Schmidt by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were unrealistic. As it was, the 112<sup>th</sup> was barely managing to hold onto Kommerscheidt. This is where one must question the division commander's location on the battlefield. The 28<sup>th</sup>'s attack into the Huertgen Forest was now entering its fourth day and Cota had spent almost all of his time within the confines of his command post. This was very unlike the "Dutch" Cota who was the hero of Omaha Beach and St. Lo; the general had earned the reputation of being a fighting general; who led from the front and had earned five medals for bravery in less than six weeks. The same hard-charging officer, who consistently led from the front and was wounded in combat during the capture of St. Lo.

Cota usually made his decisions after he had visualized the tactical problem, made his assessment and then directed his subordinate commanders to act. To do this he was up front with his lead elements, at the point of contact or close to it, but so far in his division's fight in the Huertgen Forest, he remained at his division command post, nine miles from where his battalions were fighting and dying.

Around 1030 5 November, General Gerow returned to Cota's command post. With him were the First Army commander, Lieutenant General Hodges, his chief of staff Major General Kean, and the VII Corps commander Major General Collins. Cota must have been perplexed to see Collins present. His corps was to have begun their attack that morning. Hodges informed Cota that he postponed the VII Corps attack and then wanted Cota to explain how his division allowed the Germans to recapture Schmidt. When Hodges and his retinue left, he had been assured by the 28<sup>th</sup>'s commander that a plan was being drafted to retake Schmidt the following day. More disturbing to Cota though was the fact that for the past four days his division had been the only allied division attacking into Germany along the 150 mile front. Worse still was the fact the VII Corps attack was postponed indefinitely until the weather improved. Cota realized the Germans would now be able to concentrate their forces on the lone enemy division trying to take Schmidt.

When Cota realized the 112<sup>th</sup> would need assistance if it was to recapture Schmidt, he formed Task Force Ripple (under the command of the 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion commander) and issued the order on the night of 5 November. Lieutenant Colonel Ripple was assigned the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Tait, a company of tank destroyers, and two tank companies (one medium, one light) from his own battalion. In actuality the infantry battalion was at 40% strength after taking heavy casualties in four days of fighting, south of Richelskaul. The medium tank company was Captain Hostrup's, with only nine tanks operational (instead of 14) and the anti-tank company, like Hostrup's was already in Kommerscheidt and had only seven of 14 tanks still combat ready. It begs the question how Cota thought an ad hoc formation, with each sub-unit at no more than half strength, could

recapture a division objective a full strength infantry regiment supported by several tank and tank destroyer companies could not hold?

At 1200 that day Cota relieved Lieutenant Colonel Albert Flood whose 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had been for the most part destroyed in Schmidt the day before. One wonders if Hodges, who was renowned for relieving subordinates, had any influence on Cota's decision. Major Robert Hazlett, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion commander, took command of what was left of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and incorporate the survivors into his own unit. Along the Kall Trail the situation went from good to bad to worse in just a few hours. German units began to interdict and then sever the trail and thus cut off the division's supply route to Kommerscheidt. Prior to the initial attack on 2 November, Cota assigned the mission to Colonel Daly for the 20<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion to provide security along the trail. A back-brief would have confirmed this but through a misunderstanding, only one squad guarded the stone bridge crossing the river and a company was positioned around the trail where it entered the woods southeast of Vossenack. This did very little to prevent the enemy from gaining control of most of the trail at their leisure. It was only after darkness on November 6 that the engineer group commander learned the Germans had gained control of the trail in several places and were preventing supplies from reaching the units in Kommerscheidt.

Lieutenant Colonel Ripple linked up with his infantry support just before daylight on 6 November. As they moved along through Vossenack towards the Kall Trail they learned from the engineers that the Germans had gained control of the trail. Ripple ordered his men to make their way along a firebreak that paralleled the trail. Minutes later after much exertion, Ripple and his 300 infantryman entered the woods and a meeting engagement occurred with the reconnaissance battalion of the 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Regiment. Leading his men in the attack, Ripple and his men fought through the enemy formation, moved downwards through the forest, and crossed the trail and gorge to the far side where they made their way to Kommerscheidt. Twelve hours later the engineers would report Ripple's attack cleared the trail of Germans and it was now open again.

When Ripple's force arrived in the village they were exhausted. As Ripple, Tait and his subordinate commanders were conducting a leader's reconnaissance before the start of the attack, German snipers wounded Tait and three other officers from his battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Peterson met with Ripple and both agreed there was no chance of success given the condition of the men. Peterson canceled the attack and ordered the infantry battalion to dig in along the treeline behind Kommerscheidt.<sup>xliv</sup> While the Germans were focusing their attention on the Americans in Kommerscheidt, they had not forgotten about those who had occupied Vossenack. The 2d Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> occupied open and exposed positions along the Vossenack ridge, less than a mile from a heavy concentration of German artillery batteries located on the Brandenburg and Bergstein ridge. Artillery had pounded Lieutenant Colonel Hatzfeld's battalion steadily for three days and in the process inflicted many casualties. While Task Force Ripple was encountering the enemy reconnaissance battalion along the Kall Trail, a furious barrage struck Hatzfeld's battalion. Intense small arms fire was then intermixed with the barrage, coming from the opposite tree-line. Word spread through the American positions that German infantry were attacking through a gap between two companies of 2d Battalion. The cumulative effect of the artillery and small arms fire shattered the nerves of a group of soldiers and as one soldier left his position he was followed by several more, then a squad left its positions, and more and more men began to flee.

Within minutes a mass of soldiers abandoned their fighting positions and were streaming for the rear. Officers and non-commissioned officers tried to stop the rout but were unable too. Chaos ensued. Several company commanders and platoon leaders, seeing men on their flanks withdrawing, gave the order for their formations to withdraw. The tanks and tank destroyers supporting the 2d Battalion, seeing the infantry withdrew, started their engines and withdrew as well. German artillery pounded the 2d Battalion's positions, causing even more casualties with men in the open.

Captain John Pruden assumed command of the 2d Battalion the day previous when Hatzfeld broke down. He and his small command group attempted to halt the fleeing men. They stopped nearly 70 men and formed a new defensive line at the battalion command post, just west of the village church. American artillery began to shell the German positions but several rounds fell short, landing near the command post and killing and wounded several of Pruden's group.<sup>xiv</sup> When the 28<sup>th</sup> G3 reported this incident to V Corps on 6 November the report read "2d Battalion received very heavy and concentrated artillery fire, withdrew to reorganize and then regained their original positions"<sup>xlvi</sup> The reality was the 2d Battalion had been routed and was no longer a cohesive combat unit. Now, two of the three infantry battalions within the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Cota's main effort, were combat ineffective.

While Pruden tried to reorganize his defense at around 1200 hours he observed German infantry moving into the outskirts of Vossenack from the northeast. They began to occupy several of the houses under cover of the artillery barrage now falling on the village. Things were going from bad to worse but help was on the way for the distraught young captain.

General Davis, who had been in Germeter when the 2d Battalion broke under the intense artillery barrage, met Captain Pruden near the village church. Finding out that 2d Battalion had no more than 60-70 combat effective infantrymen, he called Colonel Daly, the engineer group commander, and directed he send the 146<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion into Vossenack to bolster Pruden's defense and push the enemy out of the village. He also directed that two companies from the 1340<sup>th</sup> Engineers and an additional two companies from the 20th Engineers move to the Kall Trail and continue improving its trafficability. The 146<sup>th</sup> Engineers arrived around in Kommerscheidt at 1500 and an hour later a company from the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineers arrived to reinforce them.

Early in the afternoon of Monday, 6 November, General Cota left his division command post in his jeep and made his only recorded visit to the forward positions of his divisional units during the Vossenack-Kommerscheidt-Schmidt battle.<sup>xlvii</sup> He must have been appalled by the conditions his men were operating under. The trail was so narrow it only allowed a single Sherman tank to drive down it in single file. The rain and snow had turned it into a muddy lane where the mud was six to ten inches deep in some places. The steepness of both the trail and the gorge would have shocked him. Far below in the gorge lay the wreckage of several tanks, pushed there on his orders because they could not be repaired or removed from the trail in a timely manner. He would have witnessed at first hand the difficulties the engineers, the tank and tank destroyer crews had to contend with, trying to keep the trail open so that supplies, men and tanks could move forward to Vossenack and Kommerscheidt. His thoughts were never recorded but it is not hard to imagine that once he saw the trail that he did begin to second guess himself about the decision he had made to use the narrow and extremely hazardous Kall Trail as the division's main supply route without a proper reconnaissance of it first.



KALL TRAIL SUPPLY ROUTE between Vossenack and Kommerscheidt on Vossenack side of gorge. Note thrown tank tracks on the right.

Cota reached Vossenack shortly after 1400 and met with Captain Pruden and Lieutenant Colonel Isley, commander of the 146<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. He briefed them that he was working to get reinforcements into Vossenack to relieve Pruden's infantry that night. The engineers would remain. The division commander spent thirty minutes at the Vossenack command post. Soldiers observed the division commander and felt better knowing he was with them. He was well liked within the division and had earned the trust of his men.<sup>xlviii</sup> Observers were amazed the entire time that Cota was in the village not one artillery shell landed in Vossenack. It was the first lull in four days. Five minutes after Cota departed for his command post the German artillery fire began once more and a shell landed in the exact spot Cota's jeep had occupied only minutes before.

General Cota notified the V Corps commander about the events taking place in Vossenack. He had no reserve but two engineer battalions were now reinforcing the infantry in the village. If the Germans captured Vossenack and then moved towards Germeter they could effectively cut the 28<sup>th</sup> in half. General Gerow contacted the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division commander and directed him to send a regiment to Huertgen and relieve the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry that night. When notified he would be receiving the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Cota planned to keep the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 109<sup>th</sup> in Germeter, move the 2d Battalion into Vossenack to relieve the remnants of the 112<sup>th</sup> and then push the German forces out of the village and move on and capture the ridge. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion would take up positions on the southern slope of Vossenack ridge where they could protect the main supply route along the Kall Trail.

General Davis returned to Kommerscheidt after dark and met with Lieutenant Colonel Isley. He told Isley his battalion's mission was to remain in Vossenack and defend the MSR to Kommerscheidt. The combined force of infantry, engineers and tank destroyers held most of the village but the Germans held the eastern portion and it was only a matter of hours before they renewed their efforts to capture the entire village. During the night of 6 November there was continuous fighting in and around the church in Vossenack. German infantry occupied the tower and basement of the church while American engineers held the main floor.<sup>xlix</sup>



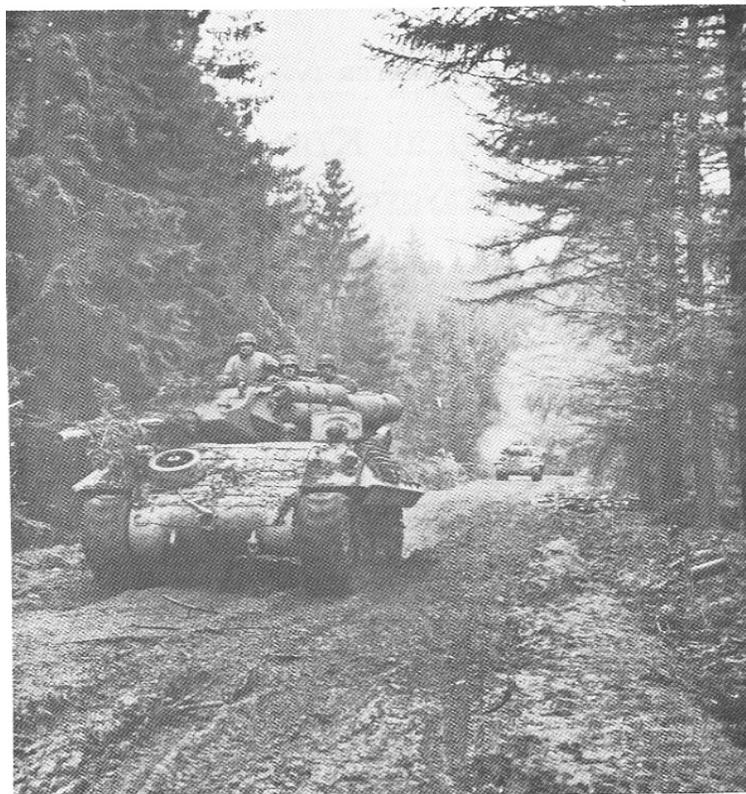
German infantry reinforcements were directed towards Schmidt in the Huertgen Forest, once it was identified that the Americans were attempting to penetrate in that sector.

The next morning, 7 November, would prove to be the decisive day for the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in its battle in the Huertgen Forest. Realizing Task Force Ripple would not be able to recapture Schmidt, Cota met with his Assistant Division Commander, General Davis and directed the formation of Task Force Davis. It would consist of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry which had been replaced by elements of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry the night before, given a hot meal, issued with gloves and new overcoats and was then inundated with 200 new replacements and told they would be the primary combat element of the task force whose mission it was to attack and recapture Schmidt. The other elements of Task Force Davis were to include the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions' 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Companies A and C, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion; Companies B and C, and the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Most of these units were assigned to Task Force Ripple.

Once again the formation looked good on paper but every unit in Task Force Davis suffered heavy losses over the last five days of fighting. Only one battalion had received a large number of replacements and most of these replacements, if not all of them, added little to the effectiveness of their units except in numbers only.

What Cota nor Davis didn't know, but should have, was that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry was in total disarray. The battalion staff did not exist; all were casualties, except for one officer. All four line companies were at less than 50% strength. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry were in no condition to launch a counterattack on Schmidt on 4 November and their condition had only worsened in the last forty-eight hours. This was the main reason Lieutenant Colonel Peterson canceled the proposed attack by Task Force Ripple on 6 November.<sup>1</sup> The armored units were in just as bad shape. Only two M-10 tank destroyers were still operational in Kommerscheidt and the Sherman's assigned to the task force would be

pulled off the Vossenack ridge. With the condition of the Kall Trail, there was no guarantee they would be able to maneuver down it to link up with the forces in Vossenack and Kommerscheidt. General Davis pushed, prodded and yelled but too little avail. There was no way his task force would be able to traverse the Kall valley, maneuver and fight through Vossenack and Kommerscheidt and then recapture Schmidt. As Cecil Currey wrote, in his book *Follow Me and Die: The Destruction of an American Division in World War II* “the concept was unrealistic from the beginning, refusing to take existing conditions into account—a desperate effort by two divisional generals under pressure from Corps and Army superiors to accomplish an impossible task.”<sup>li</sup> The attack planned for Task Force Davis was canceled when the infantry battalion became lost in the forest and could not link up with the other elements in a timely manner.



*TANK DESTROYERS M-10 of 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, moving up over a narrow, muddy forest road west of Germeter.*

While Cota and Davis were planning Task Force Davis, the 146<sup>th</sup> Engineers supported by tanks from the 70<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion advanced behind an intense artillery barrage, fighting house to house to clear the 156<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division out of Vossenack. After nearly eight hours of intense street fighting, the Germans were forced to retreat, leaving behind more than 150 killed and wounded.<sup>lii</sup>

In Kommerscheidt, the Americans huddled in their foxholes while a cold rain fell on them. A fierce artillery barrage began to sweep through the village for more than an hour setting many of the houses on fire and stunning many of the American defenders with its intensity. Then through the mist a battalion of German infantry, supported by fifteen tanks, appeared moving down the road from Schmidt. An intense tank battle ensued in which the Germans had five tanks destroyed and the Americans lost two Sherman's and three tank destroyers. Lieutenant Colonel Peterson commanding the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry units in Kommerscheidt radioed Cota at 1125 and informed him the situation was desperate. Cota directed him to

hold the village and his positions “at all costs.”<sup>liii</sup> German infantry supported by ten tanks stormed into the village and began to overrun the American fighting positions, inflicting many casualties. Individually and then as groups, the Americans began to pull back. Unlike the panic stricken routs at Schmidt and Vossenack, it was an organized withdrawal back to their reserve positions in the tree-line behind the village.

Believing he received an order to report to the division command post, Peterson turned his command over to Lieutenant Colonel Ripple and made his way back down the Kall Trail. In doing so he was wounded twice and had to cross the bitterly cold river. Several engineers found the wounded Peterson and took him to the aid station near the division command post on a stretcher. When Cota saw the wounded Peterson lying on the floor, he believed the regimental commander had abandoned his men in the field. Cota, probably because of a lack of sleep, food, and most especially the enormous stress he was under from the misfortunes of the last few days events, collapsed to the floor.<sup>liv</sup>

Moments later Cota was revived and asked why Peterson was not in Kommerscheidt with his men. Peterson explained he received a radio message instructing him to return and brief the division commander on the situation. Cota knew of no such message. Peterson reiterated the situation was desperate and that he did not believe his men could hold the village.

Lieutenant Colonel Ripple, now in command of the American forces in Kommerscheidt, had only two tank destroyers and three tanks operational (commanding one of them was the indefatigable Lieutenant Fleig). The five armored vehicles provided support while the infantry pulled back and then they too withdrew into the trees. Cota was then notified the 112<sup>th</sup> had lost Kommerscheidt and had occupied a defensive line west of the village.

Cota and Davis met late in the day of 7 November and discussed the situation. Kommerscheidt was in German hands and the enemy was still attempting to push the Engineers out of Vossenack. Major James Ford, Jr., commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry had been killed that afternoon in Vossenack. They were both informed that German units had again interdicted the Kall Trail and inflicted heavy casualties on the engineer units attempting to secure and maintain it. Davis agreed with his division commander when Cota recommended he pull all units forward of the Kall Trail back to the west side of the river. Cota realized any hopes of re-capturing Schmidt were gone. Now he needed to save his division, or what was left of it. He contacted the corps commander and requested he be allowed to pull his units forward of the Kall Trail back to a defensive line west of the Kall River. Gerow stated he would contact First Army and discuss the situation with General Hodges. At 2310 Gerow contacted Cota to tell him Hodges “was very dissatisfied with the situation. It seemed that over the last three days the only thing the 28<sup>th</sup> was doing was losing ground.”<sup>lv</sup> In a very strange and unorthodox move, General Hodges contacted Brigadier General Davis, Cota’s ADC, to get his assessment of the situation. Davis had served on Hodge’s staff and earned his respect. This says much about what Hodges thought about Gerow and Cota. Only after Hodges talked to Davis did he authorize Cota to pull his forward elements back beyond the Kall. Of course, this was based on several conditions; the 28<sup>th</sup> must hold their positions on the southern slope of the Vossenack ridge and Hodges also demanded that Cota provided a unit to reinforce the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Division as it prepared to attack around the town of Huertgen. He gave the mission to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry since they had suffered the fewest casualties in the division to that point. The battalion was able to provide three companies whose combined strength was only 190 men. For them the battle would churn on for almost another week before they too were relieved.

Shortly after first light on Wednesday, 8 November, General Eisenhower and General Bradley arrived at Cota’s command post. They had come to the front to inspect the conditions and since the 28<sup>th</sup> was the only division along the entire 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group front engaged with the enemy, it only made sense that they would first stop and see Cota. When Eisenhower greeted Cota with “Well Dutch, it looks like

you've got a bloody nose"<sup>lvi</sup>Cota flinched. His division was in the process of fighting a vicious battle on the most restrictive terrain he had ever faced and in the worst weather conditions he and his unit had ever experienced. One can imagine the look on the division commander's face when he glowered back at the Supreme Allied Commander.

Both General's Hodges and Gerow arrived at Cota's command post shortly after Eisenhower's arrival. The Supreme Allied commander and Bradley did not stay long, probably sensing that the First Army commander wanted to talk to Cota alone. They would have been right. Hodges gave Cota a severe verbal reprimand in front of the corps commander. For the second time in less than twenty four hours, he told Cota he was extremely disappointed in his performance. Even worse, he had lost control of his division and he had done little to rectify the situation. Gerow stood by and did not intervene. As Hodges left he took the corps commander aside and suggested to him that he should consider relieving Cota. Hodges had already made his decision as to who he would hold accountable for the failed attack into the Huertgen Forest. Credit must be given to Gerow because he did not act on his army commander's advice. That night, Cota called all of his regimental and battalion commanders to a briefing at the division command post. He directed a minefield be established east of Vossenack to separate the American and German forces. General Davis spoke up and stated the engineers who were serving as infantry could emplace the minefield during daylight. The next day they did just that, laying 5,000 mines while they were covered by infantrymen from the 2d Battalion, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry. While Cota and his commanders were conducting their meeting at Rott, German infantry and engineers blew up the stone bridge over the Kall River, cutting the now no longer needed main supply route for the 28<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>lvii</sup>

For all intent and purposes, the 28<sup>th</sup>'s battle in the Huertgen Forest ended that day. Offensive operations were over, but for the next week the division would attempt to consolidate its positions west of the Kall Trail and gain accountability of the hundreds of missing soldiers who were scattered throughout the division sector. That night the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry pulled back across the Kall River under their new commander, Colonel Gustin Nelson, an experienced officer from the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. More than 2,200 soldiers from the regiment had attacked across the river on 2 November. Five days later only 300 men returned. The fighting may have been over for the men of the 28<sup>th</sup> but the pain and suffering would continue. As Robert Miller wrote in his biography of Cota:

"The weather conditions got even worse as the temperature dropped, and heavy snow began to cover the forest floor. A combination of cold and wet weather brought on an epidemic of trench foot. . . the fighting may have lessened, but for the soldiers in the Forest, there was only increasing wretchedness, misery, and despair."<sup>lviii</sup>

The 28<sup>th</sup> was relieved five days later on 14 November and replaced by the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The relief was completed on 18 November and the division was sent forty miles to the south to occupy a quiet sector in the Ardennes where it would begin the process of refitting and retraining. On the same day the 28<sup>th</sup> was pulled out the Huertgen it was also transferred from V Corps to VIII Corps under Lieutenant General Middleton. The division was now a shell of its former self. All total the division, with its attachments, had suffered 6,184 casualties. The 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the division's main effort in the attack to capture Schmidt, had 2,316 casualties out of a total strength of 3,100 men. 167 were killed, 431 were listed as missing (almost all of whom were later confirmed killed in action), 719 were wounded, 232 were captured and another 544 had become non-battle casualties. There were also heavy casualties amongst the two armored units that supported the infantry. The 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion lost 31 of 50 M4 Sherman tanks and the 893<sup>rd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion lost 16 of 24 M10 tank destroyers. Within the 28<sup>th</sup> Division, two of the three regimental commanders had been wounded, two battalion commanders suffered from combat fatigue and had to be replaced during the battle, a third commander was badly wounded by a sniper with Task Force Ripple and a fourth was killed in action. By the time the 28<sup>th</sup> was relieved in the Huertgen, four majors and a captain were commanding infantry battalions, a position normally held by a

lieutenant colonel. A 40% casualty rate across the division was staggering, even worse was the fact that it was much higher amongst the infantry regiments, exceeding the worst nightmare of General Cota and his commanders.

Why did General Cota and the 28<sup>th</sup> fail in the Huertgen Forest?

After the 28<sup>th</sup> was pulled out of the Huertgen Forest, the V Corps commander directed his staff to conduct a study to analyze why the division had failed. They concluded that there had been no problems with the overall plan itself. Since the corps commander and his staff were the ones who wrote the majority of the operations order, it was not surprising that they stated this. The purpose of the V Corps operation was threefold: 1) protect the southern flank of VII Corps; 2) provide additional maneuver space and supply routes to VII Corps for its planned November 5 attack; and 3) draw enemy reserves away from VII Corps prior to its attack. By accomplishing the third purpose the 28<sup>th</sup> suffered enormous casualties and was virtually destroyed.

They found there were six major reasons that the 28<sup>th</sup> was unsuccessful in the Huertgen: 1) extremely poor weather conditions, which effected every facet of the operation, but most especially it negated the air support that was to isolate the battlefield; 2) the Kall Trail was totally inadequate as the division's single main supply route; 3) enemy resistance was much stronger than expected; 4) lack of a division reserve after the second day of the battle; 5) German artillery on the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge line dominated the battlefield. Though not stated in the report was the glaring fact that seventeen U.S. artillery battalions from V Corps and the 28<sup>th</sup> Division, had failed to suppress or destroy their German counterparts. The VII Corps commander, Major General Lawton Collins believed that this was the major reason for the 28<sup>th</sup>'s failure in the Huertgen: "My personal judgment was that the reason for not taking Schmidt was they didn't use their artillery fire as well as it could have been used."<sup>lix</sup>

The U.S. artillery supporting Cota's division did in fact fire an enormous quantity of shells (to start the initial attack on 2 November, nearly 12,000 rounds were fired by the seventeen battalions in less than sixty minutes) but there were also several critical periods where they fired very little. During the German counterattack that recaptured Schmidt on 4 November, U.S. artillery did not fire until ninety minutes after the fight began. Poor radio or wire communication between the infantry, their forward observers and the artillery headquarters coordinating the fire support was found to have broken down at several critical periods of the battle. The German artillery along the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge proved to be the major combat multiplier for the German defenders and many interviews conducted with the men of the "Bloody Bucket" division after the battle stated the intensity of the enemy artillery was the reason for the loss of Schmidt and Vossenack.<sup>lx</sup> General Gerow believed the division artillery commander failed to coordinate and synchronize his artillery support properly with the maneuver commander (Cota) and like Cota, he lost control of his assets early in the battle.<sup>lxi</sup>

General Cota may have believed he had been given a nearly impossible mission to accomplish by attacking in three different directions into the Huertgen, but he also knew his division's performance during the battle had been poor. The routs that took place at Schmidt on 4 November and then again at Vossenack on 6 November were two of the more glaring events that bothered him. Prior to the initial attacks, he had thought the regimental and battalion leadership was good, especially the commanders and their field grade officers. Inexperienced junior officers and several thousand replacement troops within the infantry units might explain part of the problem but those two factors couldn't account for why the division had not accomplished its mission.

In the weeks after the battle, Cota analyzed what he could have done better to have shaped his division for success. His efforts to command and control the division had not been anywhere near what he would have liked it to have been. With his three regiments attacking in three different directions,

communication had been poor at best. The terrain, both the numerous valleys and thick fir trees, especially in and around the Kall Trail, had severely impacted radio transmissions which then in turn interrupted the forward units efforts from keeping their higher headquarters informed of what they were encountering at Schmidt and Kommerscheidt.



U.S. M7 105mm howitzer (above). The M7 howitzer motor carriage mounted the reliable M2A1 105 mm howitzer. A .50 caliber heavy machine gun was provided for crew protection. This artillery piece was nick-named 'the Priest' because of the pulpit like open mount to the right of the howitzer. Its maximum range was 12,200 yards and its rate of fire was four rounds a minute.



U.S. 155mm self-propelled gun providing support to the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division near Budesheim shortly after the end of the Battle of the Huertgen Forest. This self-propelled gun was created by pairing up the 155mm GPF gun with the M3 medium tank chassis. It was the first American SP gun to use the large rear coil spade in its design. Its maximum range was 18,700 yards and had a rate of fire of four rounds a minute.

Throughout the first week of the battle Cota had spent the majority of his time in the division command post. From there he was able to supervise a staff he inherited from a division commander who had been relieved. But even by being in the command post and providing guidance to his staff officers, he now realized this had not done much to improve their performance. Much of the confusion at headquarters was caused by the chaos of battle had consumed his three regiments but that did not excuse the numerous inaccurate reports sent to V Corps and First Army. Cota must have also questioned himself as to his location during the battle. By spending most of the battle at his command post he was unable to visualize, direct, or assess what was taking place along the Kall Trail, at Schmidt, Kommerscheidt, or Vossenack. Thus was unable to influence the events taking place there.

Where should the division commander locate himself during a battle? Army doctrine, then and now, states the commander should place himself where he can best influence the operation's progress. At division level that is normally the division's command post, where the focus is on information flow to assist the commander in making decisions and planning operations. That said the commander cannot isolate himself from events. To visualize, direct, lead and assess the commander must go forward where he can meet with subordinate commanders and soldiers face to face. The commander must build his command and control systems so he can position himself wherever he can best command without losing the situational understanding that enables him to respond to opportunities and changing circumstances.<sup>lxii</sup> Why did Cota only visit the front lines once in the first five days of the battle? There is some evidence to suggest that the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group commander, General Bradley, had suggested his corps and division commanders should spend more time in their command posts and less time up in the front line where they too often put themselves in harm's way. Cota may have been adhering to his higher commander's guidance but this was very unlike his leadership style. By commanding his division from his command post and only visiting his forward units once in the first five days, he lost control of his division and in turn lost control of the battle. Whether or not his presence forward with the main effort would have changed the outcome of the battle for Schmidt is questionable, but had he gone forward to Schmidt after its capture on the second day of fighting it is safe to say he would not have tolerated the soldier's failure to dig in or the failure to bury the mines as opposed to placing them in the open and on top of the roads leading into the village. There would have been more emphasis of coordinating artillery support to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry had Cota been in Schmidt and received a back-brief from its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Flood, about how he was going to use artillery and air support to assist him when the Germans inevitably counterattacked after losing the village with its key road network.

The failure to conduct reconnaissance into the forest, and especially of the Kall Trail, prior to the 28<sup>th</sup>'s attack must also be placed on Cota's shoulders. The selection of the Kall Trail as the division's main supply route from aerial photographs was a major mistake, which had catastrophic second and third order effects for the division. If the division engineer inspected the trail prior to the battle or if an armor officer had personally seen the trail to verify that armored vehicles could traverse it, then armed with this information, Cota may have made the recommendation to the corps commander that his division should have attacked from the south through Lammersdorf to Strauch and then onto Schmidt on the paved two lane road instead of the muddy, narrow and very steep Kall Trail. This would have required a shift of boundaries between the 28<sup>th</sup> Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Group but hadn't the First Army commander done just that when he shifted corps boundaries so that the V Corps could take the Huertgen Forest mission from VII Corps? In February, 1945 Major General Gavin requested that the Lammersdorf-Strauch-Schmidt road be his division main supply route to the V Corps staff before his 82d Airborne Division moved into the Huertgen Forest. The V Corps Chief of Staff laughed at Gavin's suggestion and told him to use the Kall Trail as ordered.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Cota's failure or inability to use his tanks and tank destroyers as a combined arms team with the infantry, except in very small elements, was also instrumental in the lack of success achieved by the 28<sup>th</sup>.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had proven in October that tanks and tank destroyers could be used to good effect with infantry in the forest. By assuming tanks could not operate in the forest was a fallacy that cost soldier's lives and may have been the difference between success and failure.

Cota realized he must make some changes with his staff. The fighting in the Huertgen had identified "certain weak links in the training of the Division, both tactical and command and staff."<sup>lxiv</sup> He started by replacing the chief of staff, Colonel Charles Valentine. He and Valentine had not bonded into the team he thought they needed to be. Nothing like the relationship he and Terry Allen had built in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. This had proven to be a major disappointment.<sup>lxv</sup> He knew some of General Hodges and Gerow's displeasure with him had been over the confused state of affairs within his command post and especially his operations section. When the Germans had counterattacked and recaptured Schmidt, it took nearly half a day before the division staff realized what had happened and Cota himself was in the dark for most of that time. Thus he replaced his G3, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Briggs. Surprisingly, the division artillery commander, Brigadier General Basel Perry, remained in command, even though both the V and VII Corps commanders believed it was Perry's lack of coordinating and synchronizing the fire support for the division played a major factor in the division's failure. The staff built over the next four weeks would develop into a very effective team and would serve under Cota until the end of the war. Cota also recruited or received several excellent regimental commanders; one was Lieutenant Colonel James Rudder, who had led the 2d Ranger Battalion ashore on D-Day against Pointe du Hoc. He would train and build the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment into one of the best regiments in the European theater. In February, his Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General George Davis, was transferred to Seventh Army headquarters. Davis was neither respected nor liked by the officers of the division and many suspected he never earned Cota's trust. No one shed a tear when he departed.

Both Generals' Hodges and Gerow must bear much of the responsibility for the plan that had the 28<sup>th</sup> attacking in three different directions into the Huertgen. Gerow dictated three objectives to Cota; one, a regiment must secure a line of departure north of Germeter to enable a future attack to the northeast; two, a regiment attack south to capture Strauch and Steckenborn and the roads in that area that would provide a better logistics network, and three: a regiment must capture Schmidt. The first two were supporting efforts and yet two thirds of Cota's infantry had to secure them, leaving only one regiment to attack and capture the main objective assigned to the division. It would have made more tactical sense had Gerow assigned another unit from the corps (12<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Division) to attack and capture the village of Huertgen, while the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Group captured the Rollsbroich-Strauch-Steckenborn road network in the south. With the northern and southern flanks secure, Cota could then have attacked Schmidt with three regiments instead of three battalions. One regiment could have attacked Vossenack while the other two regiments crossed the Kall Trail, captured Kommerscheidt and then Schmidt. Even more importantly they would have been able to hold the three villages from counterattack and protect the Kall Trail from interdiction. Had V Corps shaped the battle like it could have and then given Cota the mission to capture Schmidt and allowed him and his staff to write the order the outcome may have been vastly different than it actually became.

Instead by attacking in three directions simultaneously, Cota's regiments were isolated and thus could neither communicate with nor support one another. Once Schmidt was captured Cota did not have the strength to hold it. By directing that Cota split his forces he was robbed of unity of command and thanks to the corps commanders plan, at least five of the nine principles of war were violated (objective, mass, maneuver, unity of command, and simplicity).<sup>lxvi</sup> Most of this was pointed out by Cota to Gerow before the attack was launched but his arguments were ignored.

Had Hodges committed the VII Corps to the attack, even a week after the postponed date, it would have taken some pressure off the 28<sup>th</sup>, as the Germans would have been forced to disperse their forces in response to the VII Corps attack. Hodges was also very well aware the German artillery was dominating

the 28<sup>th</sup> but he failed to appreciate the casualties the division was suffering and the impact on the division's ability to continue fighting. On 8 November, Major William Sylvan, General Hodges' aide de camp, wrote reports from the 28<sup>th</sup> indicate that never has enemy artillery along our front been so heavy. The General insists the battalions cannot be properly deployed or dug in. He said that no matter how heavy enemy artillery was, casualties would not be high nor ground be lost. He is rather worried tonight about the general situation since full employment of his other divisions in the drive toward the Rhine rest to a certain extent upon the success of the 28<sup>th</sup>. A possibility some personnel changes may be made.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Hodges was looking to cast blame away from him and he focused on his two subordinate commanders, Gerow and Cota.

Cota would remain in command of the 28<sup>th</sup> until the war ended. His division would suffer heavy casualties for a third time when it received the brunt of the German attack through the Ardennes on 16-17 December. In a chaotic but well fought defensive withdrawal, the 28<sup>th</sup> was largely responsible for providing the required time needed for the American forces to establish their defense. In January-February 1945, the division assisted in the elimination of the 'Colmar pocket' in the Vosges Mountain region. The last three months of the war found the 28<sup>th</sup> pursuing retreating German forces east of the Rhine. When the war in Europe ended, Cota and the 28<sup>th</sup> were assigned occupation duties in the Cologne area. Three months later the division redeployed by ship and landed at Boston Harbor four days before the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. A week later the war in the Pacific was over. The 28<sup>th</sup> assembled at Camp Shelby, Mississippi where the unit was inactivated on 13 December 1945.

Cota hoped to remain on active duty and perhaps be promoted to Lieutenant General. He had sent several letters to the Army G1 requesting a variety of duty assignments but none of the letters were answered. With the war over and the army about to go through an enormous draw-down he was ordered to take a physical. The writing was on the wall. Aged fifty-two and found to have a mild form of diabetes, he was directed to retire. With some regret, Cota became a civilian after twenty-eight years military service. Postwar, he would become heavily involved in civil-defense work for the city of Philadelphia and was very active in a variety of veteran's activities. He died on 4 October 1971, age seventy-eight. He was buried alongside his wife Connie, at West Point.

Today the hero of Omaha Beach and St. Lo is largely forgotten. The 'Fighting General', whose division fought for eleven vicious months from Normandy to the Rhine and beyond, can teach us much about organizational leadership and leadership in combat. Though his division was destroyed in two weeks of the most difficult combat conditions imaginable, it was rebuilt, only to continue fighting until final victory was achieved. Major General Norman 'Dutch' Cota should be remembered for his heroic leadership, the example he set for others to emulate, and the lessons that can be learned when things don't go right in combat. There are many lessons to be learned from this case study about Major General Cota and the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's experiences during the battle of the Huertgen Forest which encompass the art and science of battle command, its elements and components for future leaders and commanders to analyze and consider.

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<sup>i</sup> Astor, Gerald *The Bloody Forest: Battle of the Huertgen September 1944-January 1945* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, Inc, 2000), 356

<sup>ii</sup> Field Manual 6-0 Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces, August 2003

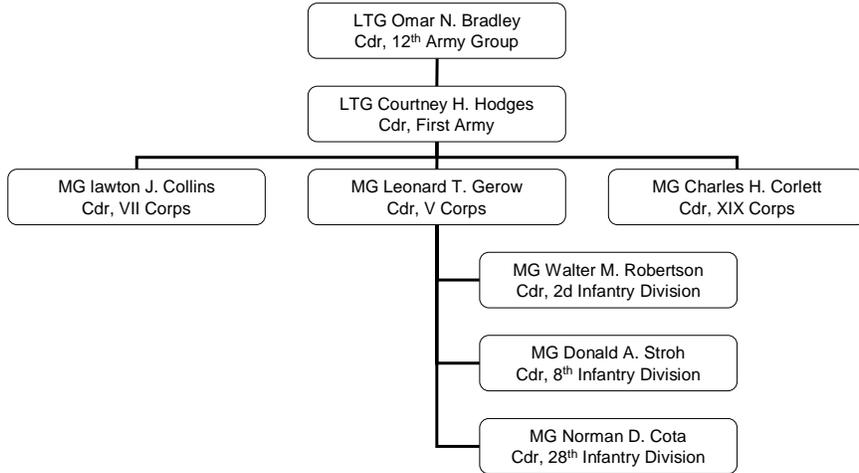
<sup>iii</sup> Miller, Robert A *Division Commander: A Biography of Major General Norman D Cota* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, 1989), 12-19

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21

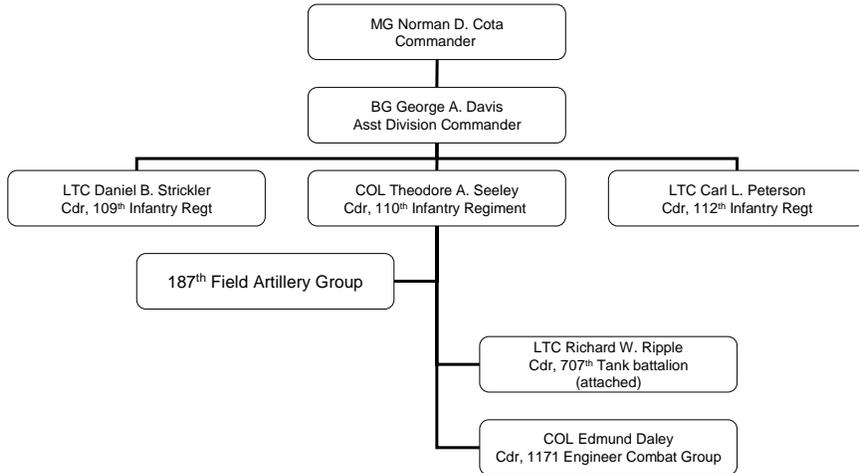
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- <sup>v</sup> Ibid, 25
- <sup>vi</sup> Denno, Bruce F Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command (Association of the United States Army: *Army Magazine*, June 1984), 62-70
- <sup>vii</sup> Miller, 72-73
- <sup>viii</sup> Allen and Cota would maintain a close friendship for the rest of the war Allen even sent Cota a very personal letter explaining why he (Allen) had been relieved of division command in August, 1943
- <sup>ix</sup> Miller, 63
- <sup>x</sup> McGeorge, Stephen C “Seeing the Battlefield: Brigadier General Norman D Cota’s “Bastard Brigade” at Omaha Beach”, *Studies in Battle Command* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1990), 105-111
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid, 78
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid, 11
- <sup>xiii</sup> Balkoski, Joseph *Omaha Beach* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004), 197
- <sup>xiv</sup> Miller, 93
- <sup>xv</sup> Ibid, 100
- <sup>xvi</sup> Astor, 3
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid, 104
- <sup>xviii</sup> Miller, Edward G & David T Zabecki Tank Battle in Komerscheidt (Primedia Enthusiast Group: *World War II*, November 2000), 43
- <sup>xix</sup> Currey, Cecil B *Follow Me and Die* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1984), 51 When the war began in 1941, Gerow was the Chief of the War Plans Division in Washington DC His deputy was Dwight Eisenhower
- <sup>xx</sup> Bolger, Daniel P Zero Defects: Command Climate in First Army, 1944-45 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: *Military Review*, May 1991) 61-73
- <sup>xxi</sup> Weighley, Russell F *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 366
- <sup>xxii</sup> Miller Robert A, 113
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Doubler, Michael D *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 180
- <sup>xxiv</sup> MacDonald, Charles B *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest* (New York: JB Lippincott Company, 1963), 90
- <sup>xxv</sup> Miller, Robert, 114
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid, 117
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Weighley, 366
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Doubler, 178 On October 31, the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division published a five page paper titled “Notes on Woods Fighting” Lessons learned included the following: It is strongly recommended that units... be given previous training in this type of fighting... Woods fighting is radically different from ordinary operations, and a knowledge of its basic requirements will save lives and insure success Night Operations were...physically impossible Never send replacements to a company in the heat of battle... Replacements should not be sent forward during hours when enemy barrages are likely (9<sup>th</sup> Inf Div RO, Oct 44, Annex 3, Lessons Learned)
- <sup>xxix</sup> Cecil Currey wrote that “Cota believed he could accomplish his mission” That said there was ample evidence provided by the interviews of Cota, his division staff officers and his regimental commanders before, during, and immediately after the battle, conducted by four members of the 2d Information and Historical Section attached to the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, that the division commander and his subordinate commanders had grave misgivings about attacking into the Huertgen Forest The three separate regimental attacks, by regiments that were filled with untrained replacements, over severely restricting terrain that was dominated by enemy artillery did not bode well for the 28th
- <sup>xxx</sup> Astor, 106
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Miller, Robert, 118
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Astor, 106
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Currey, 41
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Doubler, 182
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Miller, Robert 119
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> MacDonald, 102
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Ibid, 101
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Miller, Edward, *A Dark and Bloody Ground* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 70
- <sup>xl</sup> Ibid

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- <sup>xli</sup> Cota Interview; HQ, V Corps , “Summary of the Operations of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for the period 2-15 November 1944” (18 Nov 44)
- <sup>xlii</sup> MacDonald, 107
- <sup>xliii</sup> Currey, 262 I have attached three of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division’s G-3 Periodic Reports from the battle at the end of this article that demonstrate why Gerow and Hodges believed the 28<sup>th</sup> was doing much better than in fact it actually was Several authors have tried to present the idea that Cota and his staff were deliberately lying to their higher headquarters I don’t agree with this viewpoint I believe that they presented what they believed was actually taking place and in lieu of hard facts from the forward commanders, they filled in the gaps with what they assumed was taking place By allowing this to take place (inaccurate reporting), Cota unintentionally caused much further suffering for the soldiers under his command than warranted,
- <sup>xliv</sup> Miller, Edward, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 74
- <sup>xlv</sup> *Ibid* 80
- <sup>xlvi</sup> MacDonald, Charles B & Sidney T Mathews *Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1952, reprinted 1999), 363
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Currey, 198-199
- <sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>xlix</sup> Miller, Edward, 82
- <sup>l</sup> *Ibid*, 211
- <sup>li</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>lii</sup> MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 116
- <sup>liii</sup> Currey, 215
- <sup>liv</sup> *Ibid*, 216 In his book *On To Berlin*, General James Gavin described Cota’s collapse as a “fainting spell” but no author or historian has ever addressed it General Gavin, as commander of the 82d Airborne Division, led his division into the Huertgen during the last two weeks of the battle in February 1945 He was extremely critical of the plan to attack into the Huertgen and had recommended that the forest be bypassed He also had stated that fighting in forests took “a special kind of warfare for which our troops were not well trained or equipped” His famous quote “The Huertgen Forest was our Passchendaele” which referred to the needless slaughter of British troops amidst the mud and swamps of Flanders, at the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917, would be a testament to the ferocity of the battle and the intolerable weather and terrain conditions that the American troops of eight US divisions and three separate combat groups faced during the battle of the Huertgen Forest
- <sup>lv</sup> *Ibid*, 221
- <sup>lvi</sup> Miller, Robert, 129
- <sup>lvii</sup> Currey, 237
- <sup>lviii</sup> Miller, Robert, 130
- <sup>lix</sup> Astor, 147
- <sup>lx</sup> HQ, V Corps , “Summary of the Operations of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for the period 2-15 November 1944” (18 Nov 44)
- <sup>lxi</sup> Miller, Edward, 91
- <sup>lxii</sup> FM 6-0, 4-26-27
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Gavin,
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Miller, Edward, 91
- <sup>lxv</sup> Miller, Robert, 131
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Currey, 263
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Astor 143-144

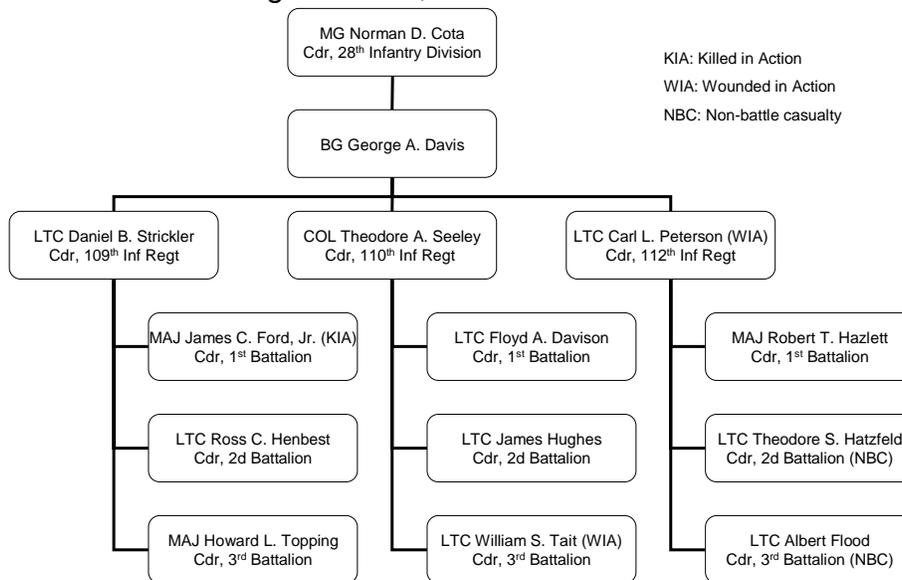
12<sup>th</sup> Army Group  
Chain of Command  
The Battle of the Huertgen Forest  
12 Sept 1944-10 Feb 1945



28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Chain of Command  
Huertgen Forest, 2-16 November 1944



## 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Chain of Command Huertgen Forest, 2-16 November 1944



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Mission as assigned from V Corps to 28th Infantry Division for operations in the Huertgen Forest.

Field Order Number 30, Headquarters V Corps,  
21 October 1944

Relieve 9th Infantry Division on 26/27 October in sector and prepare to attack on Cows order to secure objective shown (Accompanying overlay showed objective as area including Kommerscheidt, and Schmidt).

Letter of Instructions, Headquarters V Corps,  
23 October 1944

Attack on Corps order (target date 1 November 1944), secure high ground in the vicinity of Schmiidt, maintain contact with units of VII Cows on the north and south. When the Vossenack-Schmidt line is secured the division will attack southwest to secure the general line: Lammersdorf-Rollesbroich-Strauch-Steckenborn.

Letter of Instructions, Headquarters V Corps  
30 October 1944

When the initial operations of the 28th Division have been completed, namely securing the general line Vossenack-Schmidt, the operation outlined below will be taken. Division: Hold the Vossenack-Schmidt line. Advance to the west and south and capture Steckenborn. Concurrently with this advance, attack to the south astride the Hurgten-Rollesbroich road and clean up enemy resistance north of Rollesbroich. Prepare to take over the defense of the Kesternich-Simmerath line after capture by elements of the 5th Armored Division, while maintaining the security of the Schmidt-Vossenack-Steckenborn position.

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**SECRET**

Headquarters  
28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division  
5 November 1944  
In the Field

**Message to Commanding Officer, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment**

1. It is imperative that the town of Schmidt be secured at once. Task Force 'R', under the command of Lt. Col. Ripple, is attached to your command effective upon arrival at KOMMERSCHEIDT.
2. You will use this Task Force as the spearhead of your attack to capture SCHMIDT. The remaining elements of your command now at KOMMERSCHEIDT will follow close behind this Task Force and occupy and defend the route of approach to Schmidt from all directions with special attention to the high ground SW of the town. Schmidt, when captured, will be held at all costs.
3. Details will be arranged between yourself and Lt. Col. Ripple.
4. It is imperative that no time be wasted in getting this attack under way and it will be launched prior to 061200 November 1944.
5. Reports will be made to DHQ every half hour.
6. I again caution you that men defending road blocks or a terrain feature must dig in and must be able to fight from the foxhole they dig. Great care will be exercised to prevent any recurrence of the episode of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.
7. All previous instructions relative to Task Force 'R' in conflict with this message are rescinded.
8. "Roll On."

COTA  
Comdg

**OFFICIAL**

Briggs  
G3

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**Several examples of reports sent from the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division G3 to V Corps G3 during the first week of November, 1944.**

**28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division G-3 Periodic Report  
020001 November to 022400 November 1944**

Weather: Cool and clear; visibility fair.

109<sup>th</sup> attacked at 0900; 1 BN advanced about 2300 meters meeting light enemy resistance. 3 BN advanced about 1300 meters, meeting heavy resistance.

Result of operation: 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry advanced to its objective on the left, encountering light enemy resistance. Progress on the right was slow due to heavy artillery, mortar, machine gun and small arms fire...Division operation was successful and placed units in position for future action.

Combat efficiency: Excellent.

Thomas E. Briggs  
Assistant Chief of Staff  
G-3

**28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division G-3 Periodic Report  
060001 November to 062400 November 1944**

Weather: Cool and clear.

Result of Operations: 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment continued pressure against the enemy, improved with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions.

Combat efficiency: Excellent.

Thomas E. Briggs  
Assistant Chief of Staff  
G-3

From Unit Report Number 5, HQ, 28 Infantry Division, 6 December 1944.

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**28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Casualties: Huerten Forest-1944**

**2-14 November 1944: 6,184 Battle and Non-battle casualties**

**112th Infantry Regiment: (Original strength: 3,100)**

167 Killed in Action  
719 Wounded in Action  
232 Prisoners of War  
431 Missing in Action (later confirmed killed in action)  
544 non-battle related (sickness, combat fatigue, etc.)

**Total casualties: 2,093**

**110<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment: (Original strength: 3,202)**

65 Killed in Action  
1,624 Wounded in Action  
253 Prisoners of War  
288 Missing in Action  
86 non-battle related casualties

**Total casualties: 2,316**

**109th Infantry Regiment**

**Total casualties: 1,275**

707th Tank Battalion  
893d Tank Destroyer Battalion  
146th Engineer Combat Battalion  
340 Engineer Combat Battalion  
1340<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion

**Total casualties for these units: 500**

**Main combat vehicle losses:**

16 of 24 M10 tank destroyers (893d Tank Destroyer Battalion)

31 of 50 M4 Sherman tanks (707th Tank Battalion)

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**Lieutenant Colonel (ret) Thomas G. Bradbeer**

LTC (ret) Thomas Bradbeer is an Assistant Professor, Command & Leadership Department, at the United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He recently retired after 24 years on active duty as a Field Artillery officer. He has studied all aspects of the Huertgen Forest campaign and has conducted several battle staff rides to the area.

He has been published in *Military Heritage*, *Aviation History*, *Relevance*, *the Journal of the Great War Society*, *the Field Artillery Journal*, and *Air Power History*.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Akron, and a Master of Arts in Education from the University of St. Mary. He also earned a Masters in Military Art and Science (MMAS) in Military History from the US Army Command and General Staff College. He is a graduate of both the US Army Command and General Staff Officers Course and the USAF Command and Staff Course. He is currently working on a PhD in Military History from the University of Kansas.