

Foreword

On 16 December 1944, when the 51st Engineer Combat Battalion faced the Germans' last gasp effort to win the war, it had been operating 30 sawmills in support of the First United States Army. Within days the battalion was spread over the Belgian countryside, defending roads, bridges, and towns from the Nazi attempt to break through to the Meuse River and to split the British and American forces. The men set up roadblocks, using mines and abatis; mined bridges and culverts; and defended river crossings with machine guns, recoilless rifles, and bazookas.

This narrative by Ken Hechler, a combat historian and Infantry captain at the time, was drawn from numerous oral history interviews of participants. Captain Hechler and Technician Fourth Class Harvey R. George did the interviews shortly after the battles.

This volume is another in the Office of History's series of Studies in Military Engineering. It describes the successful defensive operations during a period in the Battle of the Bulge. This unit's story is especially interesting because it identifies the specific locations of all defenses, allowing the reader to follow in detail the tactics of Engineer commanders.



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