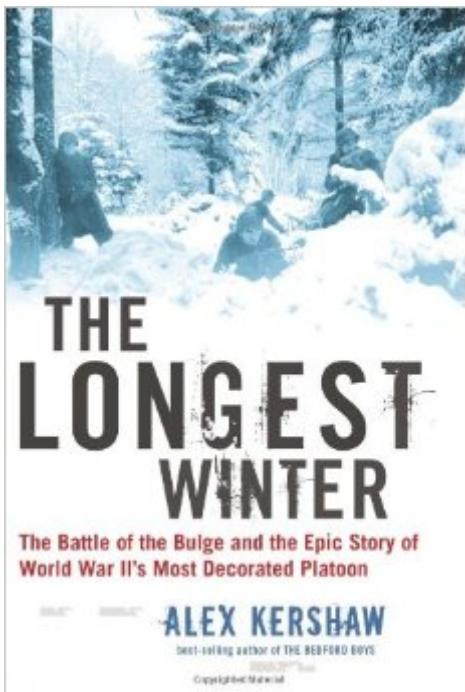


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The Longest Winter: The Battle Of The Bulge And The Epic Story Of World War II's Most Decorated Platoon



Synopsis

From the author of the best-selling *The Bedford Boys* comes this epic story of courage and survival in World War II. On a cold morning in December, 1944, deep in the Ardennes forest, a platoon of eighteen men under the command of twenty-year-old lieutenant Lyle Bouck were huddled in their foxholes trying desperately to keep warm. Suddenly, the early morning silence was broken by the roar of a huge artillery bombardment and the dreadful sound of approaching tanks. Hitler had launched his bold and risky offensive against the Allies - his "last gamble" - and the small American platoon was facing the main thrust of the entire German assault. Vastly outnumbered, they repulsed three German assaults in a fierce day-long battle, killing over five hundred German soldiers and defending a strategically vital hill. Only when Bouck's men had run out of ammunition did they surrender to the enemy. As POWs, Bouck's platoon began an ordeal far worse than combat - survival in captivity under trigger-happy German guards, Allied bombing raids, and a daily ration of only thin soup. In German POW camps, hundreds of captured Americans were either killed or died of disease, and most lost all hope. But the men of Bouck's platoon survived - miraculously, all of them. In vivid, dramatic prose, Alex Kershaw brings to life the story of America's most decorated small unit, and some of little-known heroes who played parts in this inspiring story.

Book Information

Hardcover: 326 pages

Publisher: Da Capo Press; export ed edition (November 23, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0306813041

ISBN-13: 978-0306813047

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 6.2 x 1.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (184 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #376,525 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #25 inÂ Books > History > Military > Prisoners of War #83 inÂ Books > History > Military > Regiments #890 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Romance

Customer Reviews

The Longest Winter: The Battle of the Bulge and the Epic Story of World War II's Most Decorated Platoon, Alex Kershaw's latest foray into the WWII genre, is a quick, straight-forward read that tells the inspiring story of the Intelligence and Reconnaissance (I&R) Platoon, 394th Infantry Regiment,

99th Infantry Division. This small unit of US GI's can fairly be credited with one of the most significant defensive actions associated with the Battle of the Bulge - Hitler's last gamble to turn the tide of war in the West. Kershaw spins a riveting yarn of the eighteen young men who battled until killed (2 members) or captured (the remainder) at the small Belgian town of Lanzerath on 16 December 1944 against an overwhelming force (1st Battalion, Fallschirmjager Regiment 9 - temporarily assigned to 1st SS-Panzer Division). The Longest Winter is separated into three major parts: 1) training and pre-battle actions; 2) The Battle of Lanzerath itself; and 3) captivity, liberation and post-war accolades. While the second section is the main theme of the book and is written with flair, it is not particularly original. It was John S. D. Eisenhower who first detailed the Battle of Lanzerath in his 1969 *The Bitter Woods*. More recently the actions of the I&R/394th have been competently put to page by Stephen Ambrose (*Citizen Soldiers*, 1997) and Ronald Drez (*25 Yards of War*, 2001). In contrast, the first and third sections of The Longest Winter represent narratives of new information. Almost all of the actions associated with the I&R/394th are crafted entirely from interviews Kershaw conducted with surviving members of the platoon. While this provides an engaging narrative with a human feel, it lacks the historical clarity of thoroughly researched material.

To base a book mainly on interviews with 10 surviving members of the I & R platoon provides Keshaw with a very small data base to work with. Consequently he pads his book with accounts of Hitler, Eisenhower, J. Peiper, and others, none of which is particularly relevant to his story. Even brief retelling of Robert Kriz's crossing of the Rhine or the surrender at Iserlohn is in no way connected to the platoon. Remarkably he is able to extract from these 10 men not only accounts of their experiences, but actual conversations they had 60 years earlier. Because Kershaw writes in the present tense, the reader is led to believe he is receiving a stenographic reproduction. It would be acceptable to use memories, but the author needs to alert the reader to the fact that these comments or verbal exchanges are recalled and therefore subject to all sorts of distortions. Kershaw, who is given to fictionalizing, also conflates the comments of non-99ers with the platoon members, so the reader is led to believe these were the attitudes and experiences of the I & R guys. Finally the number of errors in this book are legion. The ASTP stood for the Army's Special Training Program, not the "Advanced STP." Aubel is not "just across the French border" but rather is in eastern Belgium, close to the German border. GI's did not wear "beanie caps" but wool caps. Lyle Bouck and the others were not "the first batch of prisoners at Hammelburg," rather 100s of non coms and privates from the 99th arrived there on Dec. 26 and 27th, whereas his group arrived on January 18th and there were no searchlights, as he claims. "Würzburg was not "famous for its

ball-bearing factories"; that was Scheinfurt. The Danube was not "blue" but brown and its waters were not "swollen by the spring melt from the Alps.

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