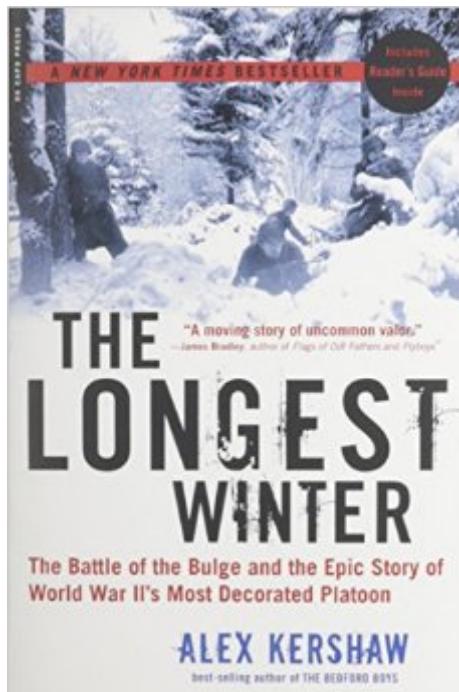


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The Longest Winter: The Battle Of The Bulge And The Epic Story Of WWII's Most Decorated Platoon



Synopsis

On the morning of December 16, 1944, eighteen men of the Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon attached to the 99th Infantry Division found themselves directly in the path of the main thrust of Hitler's massive Ardennes offensive. Despite being vastly outnumbered, they were told to hold their position "at all costs." Throughout the day, the platoon repulsed three large German assaults in a fierce day-long battle, killing hundreds of German soldiers. Only when they had run out of ammunition did they surrender to the enemy. But their long winter was just beginning. As POWs, the platoon experienced an ordeal far worse than combat-surviving in wretched German POW camps. Yet miraculously the men of the platoon survived-all of them-and returned home after the war. More than thirty years later, when President Carter recognized the platoon's "extraordinary heroism" and the U.S. Army approved combat medals for all eighteen men, they became America's most decorated platoon of World War II. With the same vivid and dramatic prose that made *The Bedford Boys* a national bestseller, Alex Kershaw brings to life the story of these little-known heroes-an epic tale of courage, duty, and survival in World War II and one of the most inspiring episodes in American history. *The Longest Winter* is an intensely human story about young men who find themselves in frightening wartime situations, who fight back instinctively, survive stoically, and live heroically.

Book Information

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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. "WÃrzburg 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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