"It was, without any doubt, the greatest American battle of the Second World War and it will, I believe, always be considered a great American victory."
– Sir Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, 1945

What can we see of the violent past today in the Ardennes of Belgium and Luxembourg? Sixty years ago in December 1944, this hilly region in Europe along the German border witnessed some of the most bitter fighting of the Second World War— an epic campaign that would forever be known as The Battle of the Bulge.

Today, tell-tale signs of the great battle, are still imprinted on the quaint villages and farms of this lovely region of Europe— albeit faint marks of a past that fades with each passing year.

Yet, if we look closely— and carefully— the past is alive again....

1) Hosingen: In front of a shell-pocked house in the village of Hosingen, my wife Lisa asks a local about the distance to Kautenbach, Luxembourg. Hosingen, just east of the Our River, on the top of the 'Skyline Drive' was the scene of intense fighting on 16-18 December, 1944 between the 110th Infantry Regiment and the 26th Volksgrenadier Division. Today, most of the destruction has been repaired.
2) Krinkelt:

Then:

Before dawn on December, 18, Panthers of the 12.SS Panzer Division's 3.Kompanie were plunged into the small Belgian village of Krinkelt to wrest it from the Americans of the 2nd Infantry Division who defending there. Fighting eddied from house to house for hours in the light of burning buildings. In the fog and mist the Mk V Panthers were able to motor down its narrow streets only to fall prey to hidden bazookas and anti-tank guns of the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion. A Panther commander of the 2nd Platoon, Willi Fischer wrote of the fighting in Krinkelt that Monday:

"The fatal attack on Rocherath-Krinkelt got underway on 18.12.44. It was a perfect 'Panzer Grave.' The Panzers of 1. Kompanie drove at the point, then followed our Kompanie, with Brödel as Kompanie chief. Myself, I was slotted in behind Beutelhauser, my Platoon leader. When I reached the vicinity of the church, a gruesome sight was waiting for me. Beutelhauser was knocked out in front of me. We had both already crossed the second intersection. When Beutelhauser was hit, I was able to spot the approximate location of the enemy anti-tank gun. Beutelhauser was able to bail out and reach safety. His loader was killed by rifle bullets as he attempted to escape. I moved my panzer into position behind a house, which provided visual and fire cover. I didn't know what to do next. Brödel's vehicle stood next to me, burning lightly. Brödel sat lifeless in the turret; he had been killed. Along the course of the street ahead of me, all of the Panzers had been knocked out, some were still on fire..."
Then:
In the photo, the gun of the first Panther has been blasted front its mount and the two tanks smoulder with the burned lifeless body of an SS tank crewmen behind the turret of the first. (Signal Corps Photo: 198204).

And Now...
Sixty years later, the author found the scene of terrible loss just another quiet side street in the little Belgian village of Krinkelt. Other than a repair to its roof, the restored house does nothing to suggest the macabre 'Panzer graveyard' of 18 December 1944.
3) Harlange:

Then:
On January 12th the 35th Infantry Division of made their way through the little hamlet of Harlange as the Germans scrambled to escape the developing pocket Southeast of Bastogne between Harlange and Tarchamps. The big trouble for the American advance in this area was local traffic management-- uncooperative cows! (Signal Corps Photo: 198942)

And Now...
Southeast of Bastogne, today the modest agricultural region of Harlange, Luxembourg is little changed and although behind a fence, the bêtes are still king!
4) Forzée

Then:

The day after Christmas, men of the U.S. 75th Infantry Division advanced through the little hamlet of Forzée, nine miles east of Celles to consolidate the gains made by the 2nd Armored Division against the Germans at the tip of the Bulge close by the Meuse River. (Signal Corps Photo: 198286)

And Now...

Where once an M-36 of the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion once stood guard, the locals today spruce their flower garden. Forzée goes on.
5) Altrier:

Then:
Ten miles southwest of Echternach is the village of Altrier. On January 14, 1945, the threat to the region of a German advance was over. Here Corporals Robert Garrison and James Loeschly and Pvt. Franklin Seidling of the 4th Infantry division use an unconventional but festive means to transport gifts to the local children. (Signal Corps Photo: 198706-S)

And Now...
The tree in front of the house has grown, but the place in Altrier is nearly the same. [photo courtesy Roland Gaul]
6) Bastogne:

Then:
On 17 May 1940 Adolf Hitler drove off from his command bunker at Felsennest, near Bad Münstereifel, to see Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt at his headquarters in Bastogne at No. 3 Avenue de la Gare. The triumphant reception that Hitler received may have further convinced him that the German panzer of von Kleist were moving too far into the heart of France; he had just ordered their lightning advance halted the previous day-- one of the pivotal decisions of WWII that allowed the British army to escape at Dunkirk. In the stormy meeting that followed, von Rundstedt convinced him to allow the panzers to advance one more. But if full of anxiety, he did not show it upon leaving. Here a smiling Führer looks on approvingly at an adoring crowd of soldiers while a stony von Rundstedt sits beside him in the Mercedes Benz convertible. Little did both suspect that four and a half years later they both would be in a great struggle to capture the Belgian market town.
And Now...

Where vanquished conquerors once rode, two locals make their way down the street from the Bastogne train station. The triumphant German army of 1940 is gone, but the *Avenue de la Gare* remains unchanged. Time marches on...