

Duel in the mist

***The Leibstandarte during the Ardennes offensive
Volume 1: Kampfgruppe Peiper. Stoumont, December 19th, 1944.***

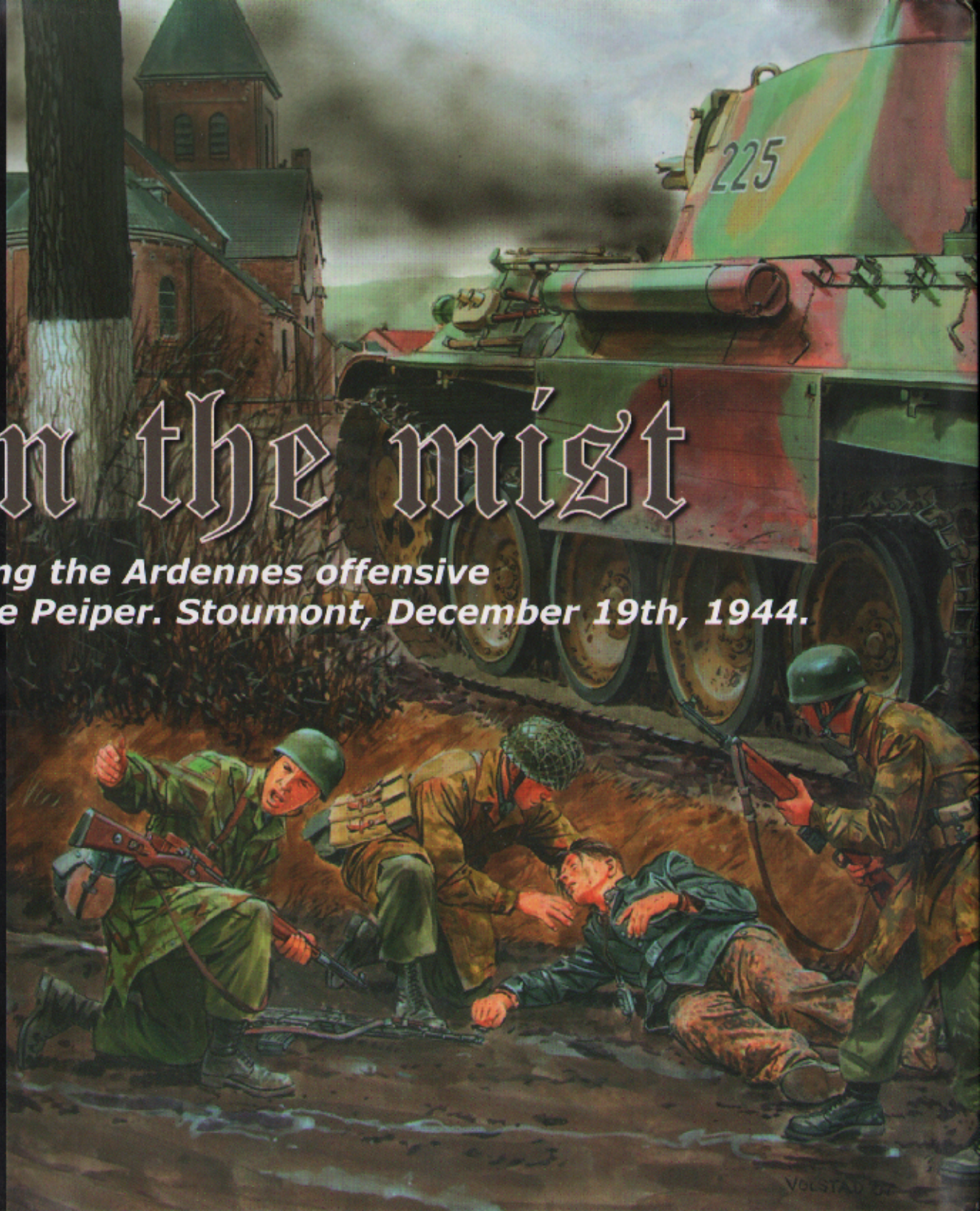
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Foreword

by Major General Michael Reynolds CB

Author of The Devil's Adjutant, Men of Steel and Sons of the Reich

Hitler's last offensive in the West in December 1944 became known as the Battle of the Bulge. It developed into the largest land battle ever fought by the US Army. His plan called for three Armies under Generalfeldmarschall Model, to break through the American front in the Ardennes, cross the MEUSE River and then exploit to the great port of ANTWERP. This, it was hoped, would cut off the British 21st Army Group and the US 9th Army from the rest of the Allied front, causing mass surrenders. Hitler saw it as the basis for another 'Dunkirk'.

SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich's 6th Panzer Army on the right flank of the attack was destined to gain the major honours in the forthcoming campaign. The detailed plan called for SS-Oberführer Wilhelm Mohnke's 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and SS-Standartenführer Hugo Kraas's 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend to take the lead and form an all-powerful wave which would surge to and across the MEUSE river south of LIÈGE. In the 6th Panzer Army order, these divisions were ordered to effect "ruthless and rapid penetration" and to bypass opposition whenever possible. For this task each division formed four Kampfgruppen (KG), but the main strength was concentrated in one armoured Kampfgruppe - KG Peiper in the case of the Leibstandarte and KG Kuhlmann in that of the Hitlerjugend.

Three days after the start of the offensive KG Kuhlmann had been halted after an advance of only some 6 km and although KG Peiper had advanced over 60 km, its supply lines were cut, it was desperately short of fuel and it was at a fraction of its original strength - twenty-four tanks as opposed to the 117 with which it had started. Surprisingly, only a few of those tanks missing when

the KG reached the village of STOUMONT on the fourth day of the offensive had been knocked out. The others had either broken down or were cut off from the vanguard.

This book describes the actions of KG Peiper over a 24 hour period - a period that saw the KG's attempt to push still further to the west through the village of STOUMONT, reach its high water mark only 6 km later and finally be forced to withdraw in the face of overwhelming strength and lack of resources.

This account is written in astounding detail - over 36,000 words, including copious reference notes, and many previously unpublished photographs and movie stills. In order to understand the depth of research this has involved, the reader should compare it with the 5,000 words I wrote in my own book, *The Devil's Adjutant*, in describing the same actions in the same period.

"Duel in the mist" is not only an important reference book, but it is a fine tribute to the soldiers of both sides. Few books have named so many of those who participated in one particular battle. I commend it to all those interested in WWII, the Battle of the Bulge and in particular KG Peiper.

Major General Michael Reynolds CB,
January 2007

The team

The publication of this book has only been made possible by the very close cooperation of a team of enthusiasts. The team members have each made a unique contribution to this project that has allowed it to become a remarkable sum of parts that is a "first" for a serious study of history. It is only fair to each of the individual team members to include a brief summary of their contributions which have allowed this book to be what it is and would have been impossible for one person to achieve on their own. Stefan De Meyer has contributed unique photographs from his extensive photo collection gathered over decades. He has spent many hours ensuring that the finished results within these pages are of the highest quality possible. Timm Haasler and Hans Weber were responsible for the vast majority of the text. They were able to use their extensive connections with veterans from both Germany and the United States to piece together a story that has been told many times before but never before with such attention to detail and accuracy. Simon Vosters was heavily involved in the research of both US and German records for the project. He also did all of the layout and the remarkable artwork for the colour profiles. Roddy MacDougall successfully identified the relationship between assembly plants and camouflage patterns which resulted in appendix 4 and was responsible for the vast majority of the captions. He also played a major role in creating the colour profiles. This book has always been a team project and could never be the work of one person; each of the team members has contributed specialist knowledge or skill without which this book could not be what it is.

We encourage our readers to contact us at bookteam@afvmodeller.com if you have additional information on this subject. We strongly believe that information not shared could be lost forever. Every piece of information has its own value and while appearing to be insignificant, it could be the key to solving some of the unanswered questions in this book. We would urge you to contact us and rest assured that your help and support will be rewarded and acknowledged.

Stefan De Meyer (Belgium), Timm Haasler (Germany)

Roddy MacDougall (Scotland), Simon Vosters (Belgium), Hans Weber (Switzerland)

February 2007

Acknowledgments

December 19th, 1944 was a cold and gloomy winter's day in the Belgian Ardennes. Three days before, on Dec. 16th, 1944 Nazi Germany had launched its last major offensive on the Western Front. The brunt of this attack in the military sense was borne by the Americans, who later referred to it as "The Battle of the Bulge". Belgians in this region prefer the expression "L'Offensive de von Rundstedt" while the Germans simply say "Die Ardennenoffensive". The war wasn't won or lost on this day, nor was the outcome of the whole campaign decided. Its importance in historical and military terms is debatable and the subject matter was chosen more by coincidence than by design.

But people died on this day that would have lived on if Hitler and his Generals hadn't set in motion their war machine in their vain attempt to reproduce the highly successful manoeuvre that had won the West to Germany in 1940. This book is dedicated to those people who lost their lives and to their loved ones, their death in each and every case is a personal tragedy regardless of their nationality.

Today, the Battle of the Bulge has become a popular subject for people interested in historical matters, for various reasons, be it historians, military researchers, writers, modellers and veterans. If you hold this book in your hands now, you may well fall into one of these categories and frankly - these are the people we had in mind writing it in the first place.

After more than 60 years, the men and women who have lived through these dreary days however have become few. But the interest of the general public in subjects of World War II remains unflinching and has not diminished through time, as the countless

publications, documentaries, lectures etc attest. On the other side of the coin, you might also think that yet another book about "Kampfgruppe Peiper" during the Battle of the Bulge is an example of how to beat a subject to certain death. However we think that the authoritative story of the Leibstandarte and its Allied opponents during the Ardennes offensive has not been written so far. We are not so vain as to think that this will be any different when we have told our story, of which this first volume is only a chapter.

We have really tried to make the difference this time by combining many different aspects into one complete story that will please not just the historian but also the hobby researcher, the military modeller as well as those who are simply interested in military history. This was our goal and also the reason five enthusiasts from four different countries set about this project as a team, each of them with specific skills, knowledge and areas of interest. We have to admit that the timely arrival of the world wide web has also helped a lot.

Based on primary sources from various archives in the United States and Germany we added the personal recollections of veterans from both sides involved in the Battle of STOUMONT on December 19th, 1944. We tried to back up the story with numerous original pictures that had been taken during and after the battle.

To our real surprise these pictures and documents have helped to question and disprove many inaccuracies spread by many authors over and over again during the last 60 years. The maps should help to understand how the battle was fought and which forces

were in fact engaged. Accurate colour profiles help to illustrate the difference between the various fighting machines as well as giving the reader a real impression on how tanks and other combat vehicles looked during the Battle of the Bulge.

Publishing a book is rarely a one-person undertaking and during the process, we met many people along the path that deserve to be mentioned for their contribution. We are very indebted for their help and assistance.

First of all we'd like to thank David Thomson who kindly and unselfishly offered his help when needed. Danny S. Parker, a real specialist when it comes to the Leibstandarte and its role in the Battle of the Bulge, needs to be thanked for his outstanding contributions. Danny provided so many unknown files from the Malmedy Trial and helped us to identify the crews of the 2nd Company of the SS-Panzerregiment 1. We also have to thank Wolf Detlef Mauder for providing so much information on the fate of the crews and the tanks of the 2nd Company.

It has been more than 60 years since the Battle of STOU MONT and this book would not have been written without the support of many German and American veterans who were very helpful in providing us with detailed statements on the whereabouts of their respective units during and before the Battle of the Bulge. Their accounts form a unique and incredible amount of information. We would like to thank the following German veterans for their assistance: Dr. Arndt Fischer, Rolf Reiser, Hans Hennecke, Daniel Mayer, Walter Schlünzen, Georg Bunda, Wilfried Holle, Hans-Georg Hübler, Walter Ropeter, Werner Ackermann, Otto Fischer, Heinz Noack, Walter Schüle, Manfred Thorn, Werner Koscielski, Karl Wortmann (all SS-Panzerregiment 1), Herman Staritz (SS-Panzer Grenadierregiment 2), Rudi Jannke (SS-Panzerartillerieregiment 1), Wilhelm Dietrich (SS-Panzernachrichten-abteilung 1), Werner Wendt (schwere SS-Panzerabteilung 501) and Benno Kauffeldt (Panzerregiment 16). On the American side we are very grateful to have received information from: Albert A. Darago, Harry Lane and Leon E. Kent (all 143rd AAA Gun Bn), Curtis A. Martell and John E. Lovell (both 119th Inf Rgt).

For the use of their photos we would like to thank: Freddy Lemaire, Gérard Grégoire, Lee Archer and Bill Auerbach, Bruno Renoult, Rudi Huber, the Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Berlin, Ullstein Bild, MNZS and Danièle Guerlain from Transit Film.

Although not part of the core team we couldn't do without the active hardware and software support of Ron Volstad, Thomas L. Jentz, Hilary L. Doyle, John P. Moore and Woody Vondracek.

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Thank you Missing Lynx and Feldgrau.

Last but not least our heartfelt thanks to our families for their unfailing support and understanding that we "just had to do it".

February 2007

Stefan De Meyer, Timm Haasler, Roddy MacDougall
Simon Vosters, Hans Weber

Introduction

What had happened before?

When the Ardennes offensive finally started at 0530 on Dec. 16th, 1944, Kampfgruppe Peiper was already lined up along the road R51 waiting for the signal to start their engines and to move into the direction of their main objective, the bridges of the MEUSE River in the area of LIÈGE. However frustration was slowly rising because the two Grenadier-Regiments of 12. Volksgrenadier-Division tasked with opening the American lines for the Kampfgruppe had run into massive opposition at BUCHHOLZ STATION and in front of LOSHEIMERGRABEN.

It was only in the afternoon that the Kampfgruppe started to move west and when it had reached LOSHEIM, darkness was already falling. It soon became clear that 12. Volksgrenadier-Division still hadn't cleared LOSHEIMERGRABEN and the railroad-bridge leading north from LOSHEIM was also destroyed preventing the Kampfgruppe from moving along their designated route. At LOSHEIM, Ostubaf. Peiper learned that the 3. Fallschirmjäger-Division, attacking to the left (south) of 12. Volksgrenadier-Division, had taken LANZERATH against heavy resistance at dusk. Using a secondary road via MERLSCHIED, the small hamlet of LANZERATH was reached before midnight. Realizing that the paratroopers had stopped their advance after clearing LANZERATH, frustration again was within Peiper. He intended to continue moving on through the night and therefore requested one battalion of paratroopers from the commander of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 9 in order to protect his tanks in the woods between LANZERATH and HONSFELD, his next goal.

In the very early hours of Dec. 17th, 1944 the Kampfgruppe was moving again after the I. SS-Panzerkorps had authorized the

attachment of the paratrooper battalion. Passing BUCHHOLZ STATION without meeting any resistance to speak of, the first elements of the Kampfgruppe reached HONSFELD before dawn. Here they surprised the still sleeping American garrison. Patrols were sent out along the designated route. They reported that the road to the west was impassable. Therefore the Kampfgruppe moved north towards BÜLLINGEN. At the same time, elements of the Kampfgruppe were attacked by American forces still holding their ground in HONSFELD. Casualties were incurred on both sides.

At BÜLLINGEN the weak American defense lines were quickly overwhelmed during the early morning hours and the capture of a small fuel depot allowed the Kampfgruppe to replenish the already dwindling fuel stocks. Kampfgruppe Peiper had finally broken through the first American front lines and it was no wonder it now quickly covered ground to the west reaching THIRIMONT via MORSCHHECK - MÖDERSCHIED - SCHOPPEN - ONDENVAL around noon. While the Spearhead Company tried to use a dirt track directly running from THIRIMONT to LIGNEUVILLE the bulk of the Kampfgruppe with the badly depleted Armored Spearhead Group in the lead used the road leading north in order to reach the N.23, the main highway running from MALMEDY via LIGNEUVILLE to ST. VITH, at the crossroads called BAUGNEZ.

At the same time Battery B, 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion was leaving MALMEDY, driving south along the N.23 in the direction of ST. VITH in order to support the 7th Armd Div. Reaching the crossroads at BAUGNEZ, the column came under fire of the Spitze (armored spearhead) of Kampfgruppe Peiper.

The Americans stood no chance against the German tanks and were quickly overwhelmed. While the German detachment wasted no time with the American PoW's and moved on towards LIGNEUVILLE, the Americans PoW's were gathered in a field next to the crossroads and later killed in cold blood by elements of the Kampfgruppe.

Upon reaching LIGNEUVILLE, the Kampfgruppe had to overcome minor American resistance before it moved in the direction of STAVELOT in the afternoon. The outskirts of STAVELOT were reached at dusk. A small roadblock manned by a group of American combat engineers stopped the Kampfgruppe, which had failed to gauge the true strength of the American defenders in and around STAVELOT. Ostubaf. Peiper intended to proceed his advance early in the next morning by seizing the bridge at STAVELOT with the bulk of his Kampfgruppe while a second group of his Kampfgruppe was ordered to seize the bridges in TROIS-PONTS via WANNE. During the early hours of Dec. 18th, 1944 the Panzergrenadiers of the Kampfgruppe started to infiltrate into the southern part of STAVELOT. Here they experienced strong resistance by the now reinforced American defenders. At the crack of dawn the tanks started to descend along the road from VAU-RICHARD into STAVELOT coming under fire from American anti-tank guns located on the northern bank of the River AMBLÈVE. Still the Kampfgruppe made steady progress. After the bridge over the AMBLÈVE was captured intact, the American defense collapsed and fell back to the north. Instead of mopping up the town and holding it, the Kampfgruppe continued its advance on the northern bank of the AMBLÈVE towards TROIS-PONTS.

TROIS-PONTS was reached before noon, but here the American combat engineers managed to blow the bridge in time. Also the attack of the Kampfgruppe's other group via WANNE ended without success. Whereas Ostubaf. Peiper could continue his advance north along the AMBLÈVE Valley, the second group was forced to return to STAVELOT in order to follow the bulk of the Kampfgruppe by crossing the AMBLÈVE bridge. Running out of gas near WANNE, only a small portion of this group managed to

link up with the Kampfgruppe later, the rest had to stay behind at WANNE after STAVELOT had been recaptured by the Americans during the afternoon of Dec. 19th, 1944.

Reaching LA GLEIZE by noon the Kampfgruppe crossed the AMBLÈVE again near CHENEUX. Now heading into the direction of WERBOMONT, it was suddenly attacked by American fighter-bombers for several hours. Although the losses inflicted were only of minor importance for the Kampfgruppe, the loss in time now played a crucial factor because it gave the American combat engineers the chance to prepare the LIENNE Bridge at NEUFMOULIN for demolition. When the Kampfgruppe finally arrived at the bridge at dusk, the engineers blew up the bridge under the eyes of the weary Germans.

Prelude to the battle 1

Developments in the evening of the 18th

1. The weather

The weather on Tuesday, December 19, 1944 favoured the German attackers. A low cloud ceiling and fog prevented Allied aircraft from intervening. Temperatures remained above zero all day which led to the roads deteriorating rapidly. After the morning fog had cleared, the visibility below cloud cover during the daylight hours was good but with heavy fog creeping in before dusk. The 119th Inf Rgt remarked upon the weather as cloudy and foggy, with visibility being poor.¹

2. The German preparation

Ostuf. Joachim Peiper together with Stuf. Werner Poetschke and Hstuf. Josef Diefenthal prepared the attack on STOUMONT during the night of December 18 -19 while staying in the estate building east of Château FROIDECOUR.² Peiper planned to take STOUMONT first and then continue along the N.33 towards TARGNON and STOUMONT station. A further 1.5 km down the road, at NAZE (called HALTE by the Americans, the French word for the nearby railway stop), a minor road crossed the AMBLÈVE to the west and continued south towards WERBOMONT, Peiper's next goal.

The attack was scheduled to begin at dawn but was delayed due to supply problems; a small convoy reached the division in the early morning. This supply column did not move by way of STAVELOT, but started at KAISERBARACKE, moved east via RECHT - LOGBIERMÉ to WANNE reaching AISSÔMONT.

North of this village, a bridge over the AMBLÈVE was located at PETIT SPAI on the N.23 between STAVELOT and TROIS-PONTS.³

When the divisional liaison officer, Hstuf. Gerhard Nüske, arrived at the estate, he had to inform Peiper about a serious situation: STAVELOT was back in American hands. Thus Peiper had not only lost contact with his division, but his supply lines were also cut. Reopening the route via STAVELOT was therefore an important goal. During the night of December the 18th, elements of Kampfgruppe Knittel reached Kampfgruppe Peiper in LA GLEIZE. In all likelihood, Peiper suggested to the division to use this force to recapture STAVELOT and re-open his supply route. Permission to send Kampfgruppe Knittel back to STAVELOT was finally granted to Peiper just before noon on December 19.⁴

2.1 The German set-up

Although important elements of the Kampfgruppe had been blocked at STAVELOT by the 117th Inf Rgt, 30th Inf Division, it was still able to field one Tiger II, eighteen Panthers, five Panzer IV's and one Flakpanzer IV (Wirbelwind) in the LA GLEIZE sector. To this can be added a substantial number of Schützenpanzerwagen (SPW).

Not included in the aforementioned numbers are:

- Four Tiger II's from 2./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 501 (turret numbers 204, Hstuf. Rudolf Möbius; 213, Oscha. Paul Klose; 221, Ustuf. Georg Hantusch and 223, Ustuf. Franz Hahn disabled near LA GLEIZE);
- One Tiger II from 1./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 501 (most likely turret number 104, Ostuf. Jürgen Wessel/Oscha. Josef Franzel);

- One Flakpanzer Wirbelwind from 10./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (Uscha. Karl Wortmann), which was still on the way back from the LIENNE sector along with the four Tiger II's;
- One Panzer IV (turret number unknown, Hstuf. Oskar Klingelhöfer), which was still on the move from STAVELOT to LA GLEIZE;
- One Panther (turret number 111, Rottf. Bannes), still stranded near PETIT SPAI with engine trouble;
- One Panther at CHENEUX which was already destroyed (turret number 131, Oscha. Adolf Thomas)⁵

Only the following tanks assembled for the attack on STOUMONT:

- Two Befehlspanther (turret numbers 002, former mount of Hstuf. Gruhle, staff SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and 151, Stuf. Poetschke, staff I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1),
- One Flakpanzer Wirbelwind from 10.(Fla.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, eleven Panthers from the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1

Panther 201: Ostuf. Friedrich Christ, CO 2nd company
 Panther 202: Uscha. Hans Friedrich, company troop leader
 Panther 211: Ostuf. Hubert Kaufmann, platoon leader I
 Panther 214: Uscha. Rech
 Panther 215: Uscha. Krüger
 Panther 221: Uscha. Heinz Knappich, platoon leader II
 Panther 222: Oscha. Walter Ropeter
 Panther 225: Rottf. Franz Prahm
 Panther 231: Ostuf. Helmuth Koch, platoon leader III
 Panther 232: Uscha. Herbert Brauschke
 Panther 234: Uscha. Herzog⁶

- Three to five Panzer IV's from the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1

Panzer 601 or 602: Ostuf. Benoni Junker, CO 6th company /
 Uscha. Walter Wrabetz, company troop leader
 Panzer 611: Ostuf. Hans Steiniger, platoon leader I
 Panzer 625: Oscha. Hubert Huber
 Panzer 631: (unknown), former tank of Oscha. August Wien,

platoon leader III, who had been killed at BÜLLINGEN on 17.12.1944

Panzer 634: Rottf. Georg Eberhardt

For the attack on STOUMONT, the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 took over the role as point company from the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 for the first time since the offensive started. The company was commanded by Ostuf. Friedrich Christ, a former member of the 1st Company. He had been wounded during the Normandy Campaign and later that autumn, he had commanded one of the divisional Reserve Tank Companies. He was not familiar with much of his new command because he had spent only four weeks with his men. His outfit was rated second to the 1st Company and this was reflected in the original marching order of the Kampfgruppe, where Christ had to bring up the rear of the Panzer Regiment.⁷

Thus after the first strenuous days and the involvement in the breakthrough at STAVELOT, the 1st Company was finally to have some respite and together with the Tiger II of 3./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 501 it was put into reserve at LA GLEIZE.

The few Panzer IV's from the 6th Company followed in the wake of the Panthers as a second echelon.⁸

For infantry support, Peiper had elements of the III.(gp.)/ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, 9.(Pi.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and a force of paratroopers at his disposal. It is not clear whether elements of the 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 were engaged in active combat, but the company entered STOUMONT with their SPW's during the morning. It appears that although the 2nd Platoon did not push any further, some engineers must have, because the road between the next village, TARGNON and STOUMONT was mined during the following night.⁹

The artillery was composed of elements from the I./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 (less the 3th Battery) with four to eight 105mm Field Howitzers and the 13.(IG)/ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 fielding six Grille (150mm self-propelled Heavy Infantry guns). The discrepancy regarding the number of guns results from PoW's statements, according to

which the 1./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 had one to three Field Howitzers and 2./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 three to five Field Howitzers operating in the LA GLEIZE sector. That the 2./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 was equipped with Wespen (self-propelled Field Howitzers) could not be ascertained, although there are at least two veterans who claim this to be the case. There are however other veterans and PoW's who, together with the lack of photographic evidence suggest there were only towed 105mm Howitzers employed after all.¹⁰

2.2 The German combat plan

The tanks of the 2./ and 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 together with the 1st Assault gun platoon (I. KwK-Zug) of 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (Sd.Kfz. 251/9) were ordered to push along the N.33 into STOUMONT, whereas the 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, mounted on SPW's prepared itself to intervene as a reserve unit behind the tanks. Prior to this, elements of this company had already conducted a reconnaissance mission towards STOUMONT. Heinz Friedrich from the 4th Platoon of 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 recalled a long night:

*"Late that night 18th December 1944 we drove through CHENEUX and LA GLEIZE until we reached the castle near STOUMONT. At 2 o'clock in the morning of 19th December 1944, our company had to dismount again and advance as infantry. About 0830, 19th December we returned to our SPW's and mounted them again and at 0900 hours left in the direction of STOUMONT."*¹¹

In the likely case of enemy resistance, the Panthers of 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had orders to deploy north to the right side of the N.33. On the left flank and south of the N.33, elements of the 9./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, 9.(Pi.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and the paratroopers were given orders to close in on STOUMONT through the wooded slopes of the river valley.¹² A force composed of paratroopers was also ordered to move along the north flank and to head for ROUË, thus trapping the American forces in STOUMONT.¹³

According to a member from 13.(IG)/ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 there were no targets assigned to the s. IG Kompanie and its Grillen

(self-propelled infantry guns) that morning due to poor visibility. However, the batteries of 1./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt 1 are said to have supported the attack with indirect fire.¹⁴

3. The 30th Infantry Division moves to block the German advance

On December 17th, 1944 at 1115, the 30th Inf Div under Maj Gen Leland Hobbs was alerted to immediate movement to the south into the Sector of V Corps, 1st US Army. Meanwhile their former divisional zone between JÜLICH and ALTDORF had been taken over by the 29th Inf Division. The first elements of the division had assembled near HAUSET, north of EUPEN, by midnight of the 17th. These included the 30th Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized), the 119th Regimental Combat Team (119th RCT) near EYNATTEN and the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Further orders received from the 1st US Army were to immediately send one regiment south towards MALMEDY. The 117th RCT of the 30th Inf Div, which was initially following the 119th Inf Rgt, drew this assignment and motored on to this location.

During the night drive, orders for the regiment were again changed while en route to MALMEDY. 1st Bn, 117th Inf Rgt was finally tasked to seize and hold STAVELOT and the 3rd Bn would reinforce the defence of MALMEDY. The 2nd Bn was inserted in between both battalions, protecting their flanks and holding the line along the AMBLÈVE River. The 120th Inf Rgt was last to pull out from the original positions as it had to continue to defend them until relieved by elements of the 17th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. This outfit had been attached to the Regiment for some time and was now taking over responsibility for the defence of the whole sector. Attachment was subsequently changed to the 29th Inf Division. During its march, 30th Inf Div remarked upon an extremely active Luftwaffe with an unknown number of planes bombing and strafing their convoys and dropping a large number of flares. However, the only known loss incurred by this enemy activity was time.¹⁵

3.1 The deployment of the 119th Regimental Combat Team

The Combat Team (CT) formed under Col Edwin M. Sutherland consisted of the following units:

- 119th Infantry Regiment
- 197th Field Artillery Battalion
- Company "A", 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion
- Company "B", 105th Engineer (C) Battalion
- Company "A", 105th Medical Battalion¹⁶

On December 18th, Col Sutherland was ordered first to proceed from the assembly area near EYNATTEN via EUPEN, VERVIERS to THEUX and to wait there for further orders. The Americans left EYNATTEN shortly after 1300. The situation was unclear. The 1st US Army feared the enemy column which had appeared the night before at STAVELOT would move north towards SPA, where the Army HQ was located. By the time CT 119 had reached THEUX, this threat had subsided. Reports of the 117th Inf Rgt indicated that the situation in STAVELOT had stabilized. Indeed, Kampfgruppe Peiper had no intention of moving north to SPA, but continued west along the N.33 (the main route along the AMBLÈVE) towards the MEUSE. This move however now put LIÈGE and its bridges over the MEUSE in danger of being taken by the Germans. CT 119 therefore deployed to cover the southern approaches into the city.

After arriving at REMOUCHAMPS, Col Sutherland split his regiment into two groups. The stronger one, consisting of 1st and 3rd Bns, was sent along the northern bank of the AMBLÈVE River, to follow the N.33 (main road) and to actively search for the enemy as far as TROIS-PONTS, as to block him there on his most direct approach. 2nd Bn was ordered to move further south via AYWAILLE, WERBOMONT to BASSE-BODEUX, 4 km west of TROIS-PONTS, where the route leaving the AMBLÈVE valley and leading west towards WERBOMONT offered the possibility of an approach from the south via AYWAILLE, thereby outflanking the two other battalions. Successful execution of both manoeuvres

stood a good chance of containing the enemy column in the AMBLÈVE River valley.¹⁷

3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt under Lt Col Roy G. Fitzgerald Jr. closed into STOUMONT at 2100. It detrucked and took up defensive positions.¹⁸

Following as regimental reserve was 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt under Lt Col Robert E. Herlong. According to the daily report made by Col Hassenfelt, G-3, 30th Inf Div, the battalion had reached the railway underpass west of TARGNON at 2220, established a road block there and secured a line west of the village of TARGNON that extended some way up the wooded slope into the BOIS DE LA SÛRETÉ.¹⁹

The regimental Command Post (CP) itself was installed on a farm near the small railway station LORCÉ-CHEVRON, next to a bridge crossing the AMBLÈVE. The Americans also called this place "HALTE", the French word for railway stop. The word was certainly painted on the small station building there. Today, the location is called NAZE and consists of just three buildings. There is no longer any railway stop. The place was of tactical importance, because it was here that the bridge Peiper intended to use for his next move crossed the AMBLÈVE. Other than the bridge at Pont de TARGNON near STOUMONT station, this one led behind the LIENNE, the river that had proved such an obstacle to Peiper's forces in the closing hours of the Dec 19th. The regiment closed into the new Command Post (CP) at 2045.

For the location of the regimental CP see Unit Journal of 119th Inf Rgt. The Ferriss Report locates the CP at the same spot and also puts Co C, 1st Bn at HALTE (p. 29). However, the CP location according to the overlay prepared for the G-3 Periodical Report for 182400 is near STOUMONT station. The positions of 1st Bn in the G-3 Periodical Report and on the overlay are the same, too. Keeping in mind that the actual unit report from the 119th Inf Rgt for the 18th arrived at the Div HQ only at 0800 the next morning, the G-3 had to rely on the information provided by the liaison

officer, Lt Mc. Donald who had arrived 2055 at the divisional HQ. At 2220, the Executive Officer of 119th Inf Rgt, Col Brown established telephone contact with the division and gave the location of the roadblock manned by 1st Bn as the railway underpass near Pont de TARGNON and STOU-MONT station as the forward CP of the regiment. The regiment stated in its Unit Report that the 1st Bn was putting up road blocks in the vicinity of the regimental CP. The Unit Journal of 1st Bn simply has the information that the battalion set up defence positions to hold R 7 (probably RJ) at "LORCÉ-CHEVRON" but then adds that Company C was put under regimental control for security reasons due to the fluid situation. The road junction which had to be defended for the safety of AYWAILLE was certainly HALTE. It offered the possibility for Peiper to get out of the narrow valley and of approaching AYWAILLE via the relatively open high ground from the south. But also the crossing at Pont de TARGNON was worth securing, thus the strong road block at the railway underpass mentioned above. Co's A and B were in this area and holding the line as described in the G-3 Periodical Report. Co C was detached to protect the main CP in the rear at HALTE. This leads to another interesting insight. When the attack on STOU-MONT started, the regiment did not reinforce 3rd Bn with the two forward companies. Instead, it opted for a more cautious approach and pulled them back to the spot that later became the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) between STOU-MONT station and HALTE, placed there to defend the regimental CP and the vital road junction. This liberated Co C from its security duties at HALTE and explains to some extent why the rescue effort was rather late and executed with only one company.

As stated in the Ferriss Report, Co C seems to have moved out in trucks at around 1000 (p. 29). This version is at odds to the message the regiment sent to the division at 0725 the next morning: "Our 1st Bn is being moved up to reinforce our 3rd". We think the former account is what actually happened.

Elements of the 110th and 143rd AAA Gun Bns that happened to be in the same area acted as an emergency anti-tank screen for the 1st US Army. Armed with the powerful 90mm Anti-Aircraft (AA) gun, they were deployed immediately to support the positions of the 3rd Bn and to cover the roads in the vicinity of the regimental CP.²⁰

4. American Anti-Aircraft Artillery acting as Tank Destroyers

The use of these 90mm AA guns had a great impact on the tactical outcome of the battle. A closer look at their mission is in order.

4.1 The 110th AAA Gun Bn

On the morning of the December 17th, 1944, the 110th AAA Gun Bn received orders from Col C.G. Patterson, AA Officer, 1st US Army to deploy two 90mm AA guns per battery in the ground role to defend the northeastern and the southeastern approaches to SPA. Each 90mm AA gun was accompanied by an M51 Multiple .50-cal MG carriage (a quadruple AA MG turret on a four-wheel trailer) to provide local security. The remainder of the battalion continued in the anti-aircraft role. At approximately 2130 the 639th AAA AW Bn was attached to the battalion. Seven M1 40mm AA guns and five M51's of this unit were tactically deployed along the road N.32 south of SPA.

This anti-tank defence was pulled in at dawn, Dec. 18th, and the eight 90mm AA guns returned to their original anti-aircraft positions. At 1100, the battalion was alerted to prepare for an indirect fire mission with STOU-MONT as probable target. This engagement was subsequently cancelled at 1425, Battery C having fired a single round. This is hardly surprising considering there were no German units in STOU-MONT at this point. However around noon, Battery D was assigned to a new anti-tank mission at the road junction just east of STOU-MONT station, where the road branches off towards Pont de TARGNON.



1 - 2 The 90mm M1 AA gun is mounted on a single bogie mount and was originally designed against high-flying heavy bombardment aviation. Developed to provide longer range, greater muzzle velocity and a larger effective shell burst area than the older 3-inch guns it rapidly became the most successful and widely used heavy AA gun in World War II.

The 90mm M1 AA gun should be made the center of an organized strongpoint supported by infantry and the covering fire of AT or TD guns. Failure to do this leaves the gun position open for reduction by enemy foot troops or armoured scout cars. With the battery broken down to single gun fire units, it does not have sufficient personnel or organic equipment to defend its positions in the face of an infantry attack. Where possible, bulldozers should be supplied to dig in 90mm gun positions to reduce the high silhouette. Depending on the terrain, it would generally take about eight to twelve hours to completely dig the gun into position whenever it moved to a new location.

While ground fire has always been a secondary mission of the AA, never before was it employed on such a large scale as during the Battle of the Bulge. While their armor-piercing ammunition could do an effective job against lightly armoured vehicles at fairly long range, they needed well-placed shots at close

range to knock out tanks. Generally the AA gunners depended on HE ammunition to keep tanks buttoned up all the while, trying to put the tracks out of action or to get shots through the apertures. In fact the AA weapons and AT guns proved to be a good partnership in most of these ground fire missions.

A typical gun crew consisted of thirteen to sixteen men. Some operated dials and levers on the gun, others loaded and fired it, and still others carried the big shells from a storage area established several meters away. Note that the crew was normally armed with the M1 carbine. From his rank and age the unknown staff sergeant on the lower photo was most probably the gun section leader. The presence of a thick layer of snow and the cover over the gun's muzzle put these photos in the latter part of the Ardennes offensive. At the time these pictures were taken in the vicinity of MALMEDY, there was no longer any immediate danger to the town from a ground attack.

(2 x Stefan De Meyer)

3 The 90mm M1 AA Gun was mounted on a steel cruciform with two of the outriggers folding up for travel. The gun was towed on its single axle, dual-wheel carriage with a distinctive perforated firing platform. Once the crew arrived at their destination, the gun would be backed into position and the crew would then pull the outriggers out to the sides

and then lower the gun on to the mounting pads at each end of the cruciform. They would then level the gun with hand operated jacks that were mounted at the ends of the outriggers. This whole operation could be accomplished by the crew in seven minutes.

This particular gun was pictured on the 22nd December 1944 by Lt Daniel in the vicinity of MALMEDY.

(US Official)





The coordinates given in the After Action Report (AAR) are wrong:

K-608039 instead of K-808039.

Battery D sent two 90mm guns, two M51's and fifty men, half of them from 639th AAA AW Bn. These guns were in place and ready to fire by 1700. Gun 2 was commanded by Sgt Joseph Eckenrode and gun 3 commanded by Sgt Lloyd Noteboom. Lt Henry F. Klein was in charge of the whole team.

The AAR gives 1430 as the time here, however, the Unit Journal notes that Battery D did not leave until 1445. As will be shown later, one of these guns played a part in stopping the advance of KG Peiper, albeit not at the position shown in the report. It is very likely that due to the relocations ordered by the 119th Inf Rgt in the night of December 18th, the coordinates of the later positions went unmentioned in the AAR.

For the gun commanders see Lonnie R. Speer, 110th AAA: Driving Hitler's Crawl in' Coffin, p. 193. His account is however mistaken in that he placed the other two guns of Battery D at LA REID /CHEFNÂ instead of AU ROSIER.

At about 1415, two more anti-tank teams were formed from Batteries A and B, each again consisting of two 90mm AA guns, two M51's and approximately fifty men. Battery A also took up position in the AMBLÈVE Valley on the N.33, but further downstream at FOND DE QUAREUX, as did Battery B, another two kilometres downstream at NONCEVEUX. These gun positions were ready to fire at 1730. The three anti-tank teams were now attached to the 11th AAA Group at AYWAILLE and used to cover the N.33 to fend off the approaching enemy column.

Finally, the 110th AAA Gun Bn was attached to the 1st US Army Security Section to deploy the remaining six 90mm AA guns, six M51's and all necessary men to defend SPA. At about 2100 hours these teams were formed following the standard formula of two 90mm guns and two M51's.

Again, the time in the AAR differs substantially from that in the Unit Report and the Daily Raid Report. The time given is the one found in the latter two sources, which places the event roughly 4 hours later.

The batteries left for their anti-tank positions shortly after midnight. The remainder of Battery A (two guns) took up positions near the crossroads at CHEFNÂ. This team will feature prominently in the following account of the combat for STOUMONT. Battery B (two guns) deployed near MALCHAMPS on the highway SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, while Battery D's two guns, reinforced with two additional M51's from Battery D, 639th AAA AW Bn, went into position at AU ROSIER, north of ANDRIMONT, where they arrived at about 0400. They reinforced a road block manned by the Security Section of 1st US Army covering a huge gasoline dump just behind them in the woods south of SPA. On December 18th at 1500, these men under 1st Lt Walter E. Butts watched three P-47 Thunderbolts attacking KG Peiper in the AMBLÈVE Valley. Two aircraft were shot down by German anti-aircraft fire.²¹

About one hour later, at 1600, the battalion CP near SPA was nearly hit by a bomb and Battery B's position was strafed by friendly aircraft, causing damage to a gun and radar. The seven 40mm guns and remaining five M51's of 639th AAA AW Bn were again deployed in a ground role along the N.32 by this time.

Thus, only Battery C remained in an anti-aircraft role. During the night it fired on three German transport aircraft. Also on December 18th, the battalion was assigned to Task Force Hansen as Field Artillery Support. 1st Lt Israel Chanock, the battalion's communication officer, was despatched as liaison officer to STAVELOT. He managed to obtain two-way radio communication with troops there and a liaison plane to assist in the Field Artillery work.²²

Apparently the same liaison plane was put to good use on the December 19th by the Battalion Commander, Lt Col Curren himself.

4.2 The 143rd AAA Gun Bn

The 143rd AAA Gun Bn was stationed at LIÈGE and commanded by Maj Myron T. Flemming. Just prior to the offensive, preparations were made to move the battalion into the HOHES VENN to put up an air-defence screen against the numerous V-1 missiles being launched at LIÈGE. This deployment commenced on December 14th when reconnaissance parties of each battery moved up front to secretly survey the battery and radar positions in the area of MONSCHAU. This mission was cancelled two days later under the duress of the sudden German attack and all advance parties from the batteries returned to their previous anti-aircraft positions around LIÈGE. On December 18th, the commanding officer of the 11th AAA Group having just arrived at AYWAILLE from SPA, briefed the Battalion on an urgent anti-tank mission to the south of LIÈGE.

In the afternoon, Headquarters left for WERBOMONT to establish an advanced CP there. The battalion was supported by 563rd AAA AW Bn. During the night contact was made with the first elements of the 82nd Airborne Division to arrive in the area.

Battery A rolled south along the road N.15 first to MANHAY, then turned to the east and continued a bit further up along the route to TROIS-PONTS. It deployed at SNAMONT near BRA and was ready to fire at 2300.

Battery B, also moving on the N.15, failed to make contact with its reconnaissance party and had to close into an emergency assembly area on the N.23 east of WERBOMONT. The positions they originally intended to occupy east of the River LIENNE were already in enemy hands. The Battery CO, Capt Lemuel Browne and three enlisted men of the reconnaissance party were ambushed beyond the LIENNE when they ran into KG Peiper. Only one enlisted man returned. The guns were placed astride the N.23 and were ready to fire by 2330. This was about one and a half hours after 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, had met with reconnaissance elements of KG Peiper only a few hundred meters down the road.

Battery D was deployed in the vicinity of AYWAILLE, adding to the anti-tank defence set up by the 11th AAA Group together with elements of the 110th AAA Bn.

Battery C under Capt Leon E. Kent was sent to the STOUMONT area. During its move there, it followed a unknown 40mm AA gun battalion and was delayed when its commander refused to move on and later even turned around his unit for fear of enemy contact. The battery later caught up with Lt Mc Guire and his reconnaissance party at the forward Command Post of 119th Inf Rgt at STOUMONT station. There Col Sutherland took the opportunity to integrate the AA guns into his defences. He ordered two guns back to HALTE (the railway stop at NAZE). Both were ready to fire at 2335 and covered the road junction and bridge there. Guns 1 and 4 were sent to STOUMONT to bolster the defence of 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, but only arrived there at 0330. The reason given in the history of the 143rd AAA Bn for the late deployment is "delayed by necessity of borrowing prime mover." Lt Kent remained with the regimental CP.²³

5. The Americans close in on Peiper

5.1 Night Skirmish at the Neufmoulin Bridge, 2nd Bn 119th Inf Rgt

We return now to the 119th Inf Rgt. Its 2nd Bn under Major Hal D. McCown had reached the vicinity of WERBOMONT, where it de-trucked. Attached to it was a platoon of self-propelled tank destroyers (four M10's of A-2, 823rd TD Bn, commanded by Lt Art Cunningham) and - at least on paper - all of Co C, 743rd Tk Bn (all M4 Shermans). Orders were later changed to the effect that only the Shermans of C-3 (i.e. the 3rd Platoon) arrived around 0400, the other two platoons were now on their way to 3rd Bn at STOUMONT. Also in support were the regimental cannon company and a platoon of the regimental anti-tank company.²⁴

The 197th FA Bn, closing into an assembly area at NONCEVEUX at 1800, was ordered to take up positions near WERBOMONT to



4 Pfc P. Snow and Pfc John J. Deckaushar, standing in a Sd.Kfz. 251/9 "Kanonenwagen" they have just "acquired". They have painted a crude star on the machine and are using it against its former owners. The original caption claims, that this gun was picked up with two others miles behind Allied lines as the Germans were trying to take a position on an important road junction.

(US Official via Mirko Bayerl)

support the 2nd Battalion.

The location given is Trou, probably TROU DE BOSSON, north of WERBOMONT. The 197th FA Bn was ordered to return to NONCEVEUX at 1000 the next day to aid the hard-pressed 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, see 197th FA Bn ABR.

Leading the way was Company F under Lt Edward C. Arn. The men marched out in the dark due east towards CHEVRON. Arriving at LA PLATTE, they took a wrong turn and continued on the main road southeast towards HABIÉMONT. The locality was reached at approximately 2200 on December 18th. Co F found the NEUFMOULIN Bridge of the LIENNE River already blown up by the 1st US Army Engineers. The company had just started digging in when a German reconnaissance patrol approached, moving along the west side of the River LIENNE. Reaching NEUFMOULIN, the German column turned to the west, taking the route towards WERBOMONT. During the ensuing short fire fight, the Germans lost five halftracks and approximately fifteen men to an ambush and retreated. The Americans took one prisoner. The soldier was from 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler. The Americans finally realized whom they were up against. During the early morning hours, the first elements of 82nd AB Div closed into the WERBOMONT area, making contact with McCown's battalion.²⁵

5.2 In the Amblève Valley

Being a regular US Infantry battalion, 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt under Lt Col Fitzgerald was composed of three Infantry Rifle Companies (Co's I, K, L) and a Heavy Weapons Company (Co M).

One Rifle Company consisted of a Headquarters (HQ), a Weapons Platoon and three Rifle Platoons, which in turn consisted of three Rifle Squads and a Platoon HQ. The typical US squad at this time consisted of 12 men, armed with at least ten M-1 .30 cal Garand rifles and a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). This array was complemented with a .45 cal Thompson submachine gun, a M1 Carbine (both

were typical squad leader weapons), or a sniper rifle (1903 Springfield). The BAR was too light for a machine gun and too heavy for a rifle, so the squad had to rely on additional support. Unlike their German counterparts, the Americans organized their Light Machine Guns (two LMG's of .30 cal) in a separate LMG squad in the Weapons Platoon. One Heavy Machine Gun (HMG) team with a .50 cal HMG was directly attached to the Platoon HQ. There was a Mortar Section with three M2 60mm mortars. The Weapons Platoon also had three bazooka teams (anti-tank rocket launchers). The Heavy Weapons Company consisted of a HQ, two HMG Platoons (either four water cooled .30 cal machine guns or .50 cal machine guns), a 81mm Mortar Platoon (six M1 81mm mortars) and six additional bazooka teams.

3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt was substantially under strength. Officers and enlisted men present for duty on December 17th were: Co I - 145, Co K - 137, Co L - 165. The established strength of a US Infantry company stood at 193.²⁶

Lt Col Fitzgerald had taken command of the 3rd Bn in the wake of the advance to the ROER River. It was his first combat assignment.²⁷

Supporting the battalion were two platoons of the 823rd TD Bn with a total of eight towed 76mm TD guns, the two 90mm AA guns of 143rd AAA Bn mentioned before, ten Shermans from Co C, 743rd Tk Bn and the 400th FA Bn (armoured) equipped with M7 HMC's (Howitzer Motor Carriage). This self-propelled 105mm Howitzer was also known as "Priest". The battalion was organized into three batteries with six tubes each.

The two platoons of tank destroyers (A-1 and A-3) arrived with the earliest elements at STOUMONT and were in firing positions at 2100. Both platoons were equipped with four towed M5 3-inch TD guns. The battalion HQ had remained in REMOUCHAMPS, which had been reached at 1800. The third platoon (A-2, equipped with four self-propelled M10 tank destroyers) was kept in reserve at REMOUCHAMPS. As mentioned above, it was later

sent to 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt. The company commander Capt Bruce A. Crissinger and Maj Hal McCown, 2nd Bn, met each other at REMOUCHAMPS and decided on the attachment. At STOUMONT, A-1 was led by Lt Thomas Springfield, the commanding officer of A-3 is not known, it might have been under the direct command of Capt Crissinger who was present at STOUMONT.²⁸

The main approach into the town along the N.33 going east to LA GLEIZE was secured by the leading company, Co I, which established a road block reinforced by four 76mm TD guns. Co K was next, covering STOUMONT from the south and southwest. Further to the northeast on a hill flank lies the area of the town called ROUÂ. The remaining company, Co L, took up positions there, facing east. This company was reinforced by the battalion's anti-tank platoon (three M1 57mm AT guns). Battalion HQ was set up in the middle of the town in the boy's school.²⁹ The CO of Company L, Lt David F. Knox wrote into his diary:

*"I went back and moved the company up to our area. It was dark by then and must have been at least 2200. We set up without much trouble. The anti-tank weapons were also set up in our area. I went back to battalion to tell them our situation and to see if they had any more information. Kirby went with me again. Major Rogerson was sitting in the corner. He had the story that the tanks we could hear moving around were stuck down near the river. No one seemed to be concerned about the situation. Capt Del Bene, the S-3, said "If they try to come after us in the morning, we'll sure give them hell!"*³⁰

At 2215, the divisional HQ Chief of Staff, Col Stephens, called Col Johnson, CO 117th Inf Rgt, and informed him on the situation with the 119th RCT and the sighting of 30 enemy tanks. There was some talk about moving CT 117 into the area, but Div HQ reminded Col Johnson that holding STAVELOT still held priority. Ray Haserodt was T/5 in HQ Co., 3rd Bn., 119th Inf. Rgt. He remembers the following:

"We then turned east and by evening had gone up a hill and

*were entering the town of STOUMONT, Belgium. We still had no knowledge of what was going on. We were then billeted in a house in that small town. I pulled my radio jeep and trailer alongside the house. We had maintained radio silence during the move and did not start radio communications that night. We understood that the line companies had been deployed near the crest of a series of hills surrounding STOUMONT to the south and east but no reconnaissance patrols had been sent beyond the company areas. It was quite a sight to see the quartermaster trucks racing from the area and speeding down the long hill out of STOUMONT. The comment was "They knew something we didn't".*³¹

Already at 2130, a security patrol from Co I had established the presence of 30 to 40 armoured vehicles approximately 500 metres to the southeast of STOUMONT. The coordinates given for these elements of Kampfgruppe Peiper "stuck down near the river" point to a location just at the AMBLÈVE River next to a very steep and wooded ridge beneath Château FROIDECOUR.³²

It is likely that this and not the village of LA GLEIZE was the bivouac area for a larger section of the Kampfgruppe. A member of 2nd Platoon, 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, stated that he had spent the night in CHENEUX, later taking the road to LA GLEIZE and continuing further to STOUMONT in the morning.³³

Other elements of the same company however moved on via LA GLEIZE to Château FROIDECOUR where they dismounted and advanced towards STOUMONT as early as 0200 but returned to mount their SPW's at about 0830.³⁴

The battalion staff of 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt was not overly concerned by the presence of enemy armour.³⁵ Neither were the Germans intent on hiding their presence. During the night they could repeatedly be heard shouting at each other and were seen smoking cigarettes.³⁶

With the enemy finally located, the battalion dug in. Co's I and L laid out a hasty minefield and secured all the approaches into the

town. Because it was already dark when the battalion arrived at STOUMONT, there were problems organizing a proper defence perimeter. Fire sectors could not be established and sighting of the heavy guns was impossible. The 81mm mortars of Co M were set up late in the night, but also here problems seem to have occurred, since later they were not able to support the hard-pressed battalion until well into the next morning after the arrival of forward observers within the line companies.³⁷

The defensive positions taken up as noted down in the G-3 Journal of the division are given in Map 1. The location of the observation post north of ROUË is based on the following statement of Bob Hall, HQ Co, 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt:

*"That night I was ordered with two other men to go up to the top of a hill and set up an observation post. At daybreak we observed German tanks and infantry coming towards us. My buddies took off to the rear, but I waited a few minutes longer and ran about 300 yards to a house. Surrounded, I could not go any further and joined about 30 other 30th men in the cellar. Shortly afterwards I looked out of the broken window pane and a German soldier was right outside - he was less than a foot from me without knowing it. I immediately went to another part of the cellar, but was captured."*³⁸

This proved to be a serious setback, given that the other artillery unit tasked for indirect fire support, the 400th FA Bn (armoured) only reached its firing positions in the morning and still had to establish contact with the battalion while the attack was already underway.³⁹

To make matters worse, there was no immediate tank support available. What had happened to the armour?

The tanks of Co C, while still in MALMEDY, were attached to CT 119 and requested to move to the divisional CP at FRANCORCHAMPS. From there, Maj Phillips, acting as liaison officer, led them during the night via FRANCORCHAMPS, SPA and TIEUX to REMOUCHAMPS; the original mission was in support

of the 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt. The convoy incurred delays on the narrow, winding road. Arriving at REMOUCHAMPS, only 3rd Platoon was attached to 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, and this platoon marched on to CHEVRON. In reaction to the German armour presenting itself in front of STOUMONT, the two remaining platoons totalling ten M4 Sherman medium tanks were redirected to this area and arrived at approximately 0500 at STOUMONT station. There they bivouacked and were briefed on the situation by Col Sutherland in person. Due to the German attack commencing, they were sent to STOUMONT at 0615. They reached the town about three quarters of an hour later.⁴⁰

5.3 The armoured artillery: action of the 400th FA Bn

400th FA Bn (armoured) had been attached to 30th Inf Div Artillery at 1100 on December 18th. At 1830, the CO 400th Armd FA Bn reported to Div Arty HQ at FRANCORCHAMPS and was informed of his attachment to CT 119 and of his mission to provide reinforcing fire for the 197th FA Bn.⁴¹

The battalion was in turn tasked with the support of 3rd Bn. It was assigned fire positions south of the AMBLÈVE at CHESSION opposite of TARGNON. The battalion began to close in on this area from 0500 onwards. At 0700 it was alerted by the 119th Inf. Rgt to an imminent tank attack. The men were told to grab their bazookas. The battalion's Battery C was ready to fire first at 0735. Liaison officers were sent to 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, and to the 197th FA Bn. The commanding officer himself set out to the regimental CP, 119th Inf Rgt, at 0830.

There are substantial time differences between the S-2 and S-3 Jnls. 400th Armd FA Bn. Only the time as noted down in the S-2 Jnl will be used in this narrative.

There were however no forward observers with the 3rd Bn at STOUMONT. Because of this, it was only at 0910 that Battery C fired its first volley into STOUMONT - unobserved. Five minutes later, the first elements of Batteries A and B arrived. At 0930, the

battalion CO reached the CP of 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt at STOUMONT. Ten minutes later he announced on air that he would now have to destroy his radio and retire on foot. At 1015, the battalion drew in all its radio posts and sent them to the reserve positions, and at 1040 began to withdraw. At 1100 the order was changed to the effect that eleven M7 HMC's would remain in a tank hunter role atop the hill near CHESSION to support 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt. The remaining seven M7 HMC's took up new positions near NONCEVEUX-REMOUCHAMPS, the same new sector also assigned to the 197th FA Bn. The battalion only reached its positions at 1930 and was on interdiction fire missions during the whole night. Two ad hoc batteries of M7 HMC's were used for this task, the first equipped with eight and the second with ten M7 HMC's.

Fire missions noted down for December 19th were five harassing missions (400 rounds) and one mission of defensive fire expending 168 rounds.⁴²

5.4 Closing down

STOUMONT was not a town that had been deserted by its population. During the night, the inhabitants and refugees from evacuated towns on the frontline took shelter in the available cellars. The Sanatorium ST. EDOUARD is known to have sheltered about 300 civilians, mostly children and young women from the institution itself and refugees from ELSENBORN. There was another group of people in the church community house and the basement in "Maison Robinson" at the entrance to the town sheltered another thirty people.⁴³

It was near 0100 when Gen Hobbs was informed of the presence of 82nd AB Div with 119th RCT and that contact had been established between the paratroopers and 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt. A few minutes later, both Gen Hobbs and Gen Gavin, the famed commander of the 82nd AB Div, spoke to each other on the phone. Gavin mentioned just having talked to Maj Hal McCown, CO 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, specifically about his intention to tie in the artillery of both units. Gen Hobbs asked Gen Gavin to send him an overlay or possibly a liaison officer (LO) in order to get a

better idea about the situation. Gen Gavin promised to send the requested LO as soon as he had consolidated his positions.⁴⁴

Footnotes

1. Danny S. Parker: Battle of the Bulge, p. 192 f; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 101; 400th FA Bn, S-3 Journal; 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Report; 110th AAA Gun Bn (Mbl), S-3 Periodic Report.

2. Hans Hillig, Affidavit 15.03.1946; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.328.

3. Jean Paul Pallud: Battle of the Bulge, p.151 f.

4. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 328. Around 1100, Peiper was seen back in LA GLEIZE talking to Knittel and briefing him on this new assignment, Anton Motzheim, statement dated 28th Feb. 1946.

5. Hstuf Oskar Klingelhöfer's tank, turret number 701, was damaged and later recovered at WANNE. Klingelhöfer took over another Panzer IV of his company with which he followed the Kampfgruppe, Malmedy Trial, Lt Schweitzer, screening results 15th to 24th Nov. 1945.

Undated letter from Rolf Ehrhardt to Gerd Cuppens; various letters from Werner Wendt to Timm Haasler, 1999-2004; Hubert Laby: Ardennes 44 - Stavelot, p.229 f; letter from Karl Wortmann to Timm Haasler, dated 23.11.1999; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.90.

6. The 2./ SS-Pz. Rgt. 1 had already six Panthers less from the total of seventeen it had started with on the Dec. 16th. Four had developed mechanical troubles and two had been knocked out on Dec. 17th near HONSFELD. By coincidence, the losses for each platoon were equally two tanks, so each platoon could field only three tanks for the attack.

7. Undated interrogation report of Friedrich Christ taken prior to the Malmedy Trial.

8. Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 01.05.2005.

9. Various sworn statements of members of 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 during the Malmedy Trial. The paratroopers fighting along with Peiper at STOUMONT are usually considered to be from 3. Fallschirm-Jäger-Division. The story of how Peiper commandeered paratroopers to guide him through the forest from LANZERATH to HONSFELD in the morning of December 17th is well known and gives a plausible explanation for the fact that men in paratroop uniforms and helmets are on pictorial record. It is harder to establish the number of paratrooper that actually accompanied KG Peiper. Sources vary between "almost a Bn", among them 14.(Pz.Jg.)/ FSJ Rgt 9 and that there was a detailed agreement between Oberst H. von Hoffmann and Peiper on which platoon- and company-sized units would mount the tanks (Fritz Roppelt, Der Vergangenheit auf der Spur, p. 434) and "only a company" that had not

received the order by the CO of IL/ FSJ Rgt. 9, Maj. Taubert, to stay behind as Taubert refused to attach his men to the Kampfgruppe (Peiper, testimony during Malmedy trial). Probably this shouldn't concern us too much, because we believe the paratroopers at STOUMONT were not from 3. FSJ Division anyway: A close examination of the G-2 records reveals the rather startling fact that the only soldier from 3. Fallschirm-Jäger-Division processed through the prisoner of war cage of the 30th Inf Div during the relevant period told his captors that he was a straggler from Fs.Jg.Rgt. 8!! The other paratroopers captured at STOUMONT and at LA GLEIZE (amounting to 20 men) gave as denomination Fallschirm-Jäger Rgt. z.b.V. and paybooks to this effect were found on them. One IPW report made by the 119th Inf Rgt mentions that the 12./ FSJ Rgt z.b.V. was attached to the German force in STOUMONT. In the light of this evidence, the paratrooper seen in STOUMONT were almost certainly from Pz. Brigade 150.

10. 82nd US AB, G-2 Report 151 22nd, Dec. 44; 30th US Inf.Div. G-2 Report 186, 20th Dec. 44; 30th US Inf.Div. G-2 Report 188, 22nd Dec. 44; 30th US Inf.Div. G-2 Report 190, 24th Dec.44; Thomas Fischer: Von Berlin nach Caen, p.185 f.

11. Heinz Friedrichs, Affidavit 21st March 1946.

12. Rolf Ritzer, Erwin Szyperski, Arnold Mikolaschek, Heinz Hofmann, Erich Werner, Affidavits from the Malmedy Trial; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 328; Michael Reynolds, The Devil's Adjutant, p.143.

13. Gérard Grégoire, Les Panzers face à l'US Army, p.12.

14. Statement of Hermann Staritz, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 20.10.2001; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.102.

15. 30th Inf Div, G-3 ABR, Dec. 1944.

16. 119th Inf Rgt, AAR, Dec. 1944.

17. 30th Inf Div, G-3 ABR; Dec. 1944; 119th Inf Rgt, AAR, Dec. 1944; Ferriss Report, p.2; Hugh M. Cole, The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge, p.336.

18. 3rd Bn 119th Inf Rgt, Combat Journal.

19. G-3 30th Inf Div, Periodical Report for 18th till 2400 hrs.

20. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Report 18th Dec. 1944; 30th Inf Div, G-3 ABR.

21. The 365th Fighter Group lost one plane shot down, one bellied in at base and seven were severely damaged, Danny S. Parker, To Win the Winter Sky, p. 185.

22. 110th AAA Gun Bn (Mbl), AAR Dec. 1944, Unit Journal and S-3 Periodic Report.

23. History of the 143rd AAA Bn, Dec. 1944; Battery C of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn in the Battle of the Bulge, report by Capt Leon E. Kent.

24. 119th Inf Rgt, AAR, Dec. 1944; 743rd Tk Bn, AAR Dec. 1944.

25. "F" Co, 119th at Neufmoulin's Bridge 18-19 Dec. 1944, by 1st Lt Edward C. Arn; 119th Inf Rgt, AAR, Dec. 1944; 119th Inf Rgt, S-2 Report 19th Dec. 1944; Ferriss Report, p. 24; Testimony of Harold McCown, Malmedy Trial.

26. Ferriss Report, p.27.

27. Ferriss Report, Footnote 12.

28. 823rd TD Bn, ABR Dec. 1944; Ferriss Report. iii.

29. Ferriss Report, p. 26a; Michael Reynolds, The Devil's Adjutant, p.139.

30. Lt David F. Knox, L. Co, 119th Inf Rgt, Diary, p.37.

31. Stoumont then La Gleize and finally some turkey, published in 30th Div News, early winter edition 2003.

32. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Report 18th Dec. 1944.

33. Herbert Stock, Affidavit 15. 03.1946.

34. Strm Heinz Friedrichs, Affidavit 21.03. 1946. Friedrichs was member of the 4th heavy platoon [IV. (schw.) Zug]. 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2.

35. Lt David F. Knox, L. Co, 119th Inf Rgt, op.cit.

36. 119th Inf Rgt, S-2 Report 19th Dec. 1944.

37. Ferriss Report, p. 27.; Lt David F. Knox, L. Co, 119th Inf Rgt, Diary, p.38.

38. Lonnie R. Speer, 110th AAA: Driving Hitler's Crawlin' Coffin, p.194.

39. 400th FA Bn (Armd), S-2 Journal, S-3 Situation Report, Dec. 1944.

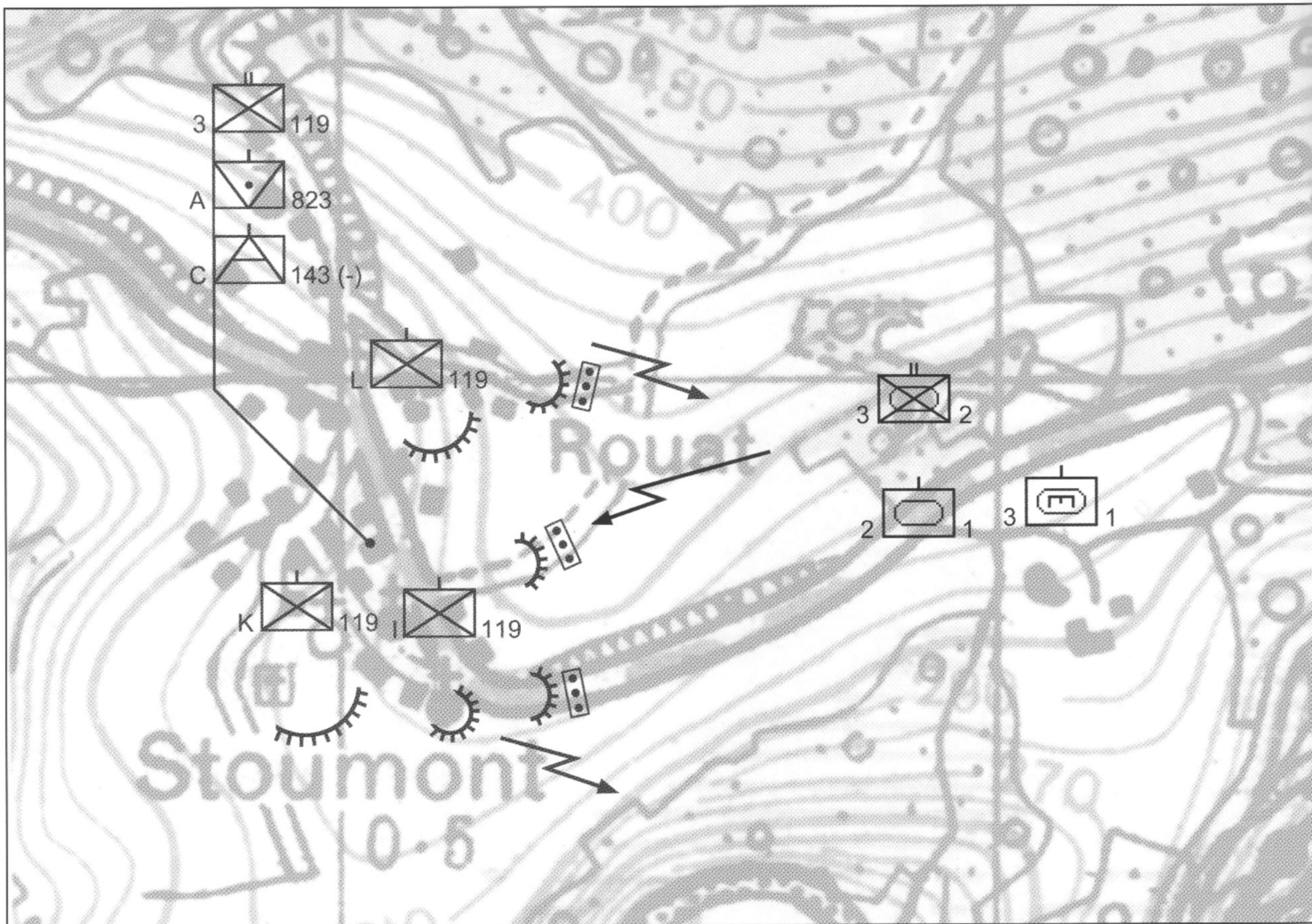
40. 743rd Tk Bn, AAR Dec. 1944.

41. 30th Inf Div Arty, Unit Report No 187 to 189, Unit Jnl.

42. 400th FA Bn (Armd), S-2 Journal, S-3 Situation Report, Dec. 1944.

43. Gérard Grégoire, Les Panzers de Peiper face à l'US Army, p. 29.

44. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl, Summary of TC.



Map 1: First contact in the dark

First contact in the dark 2

The first six hours from midnight till 0600

0145 - 1 enemy tank ran over mine at (633027) - burned.

119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl

0430 - TD Officer from the 823rd TD Bn reported enemy tanks had overrun his gun position and forced one gun crew to withdraw.

0500 - Above officer reported enemy MG fire from tanks, forcing 2nd gun crew to withdraw.

3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl

At 0145 a German tracked reconnaissance vehicle, probably a Schützenpanzerwagen (SPW), ran over one of Co I's mines and exploded into flames.¹

It is noteworthy that this vehicle did not reconnoitre along the N.33 but approximately 200 m north of it along a field track running east to west which joins the N.33 opposite the church (coordinates according to 119th Inf Unit Jnl). This incident must undoubtedly be seen in connection with the reconnaissance mission of the 11./SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, starting around 0200 (see statement of Heinz Friedrich in Chapter I).

The German presence made itself felt well before the main attack began. German armoured vehicles were within the lines of Co I by 0400. At 0415 the crew of the first 76mm TD Gun, Co A, 823rd TD Bn, had to withdraw, since its position had been overrun by the enemy. The hasty mine field laid by Co I had proven useless.

Three quarters of an hour later, at 0500, the withdrawal of the second 76mm TD Gun crew was recorded at the battalion CP. An unnamed officer of the Tank Destroyer Battalion gave enemy machine guns fired from tanks as the reason. None of the TD guns had fired a shot in anger.²

The Ferriss Report, p. 2, describes how in the early morning fog, a tank column crept by the first two TD guns and the crews lost sight of the lead tank. After passing the mines, it was fired on ineffectively by the third TD gun, which was knocked out in return. The fourth TD gun was overrun by infantry. This seems to be the dry summary of an action that lasted more than two hours. The four TD guns with Co I seem to have been operating in pairs, one half-section outside and east of STOUMONT, covering the field track mentioned before (location only confirmed by photographic evidence) and the second half-section at the entrance to the village, next to the "Robinson" house (location confirmed).

Due to heavy fog and darkness, the visibility was so bad that the Germans were able to close on top of the first positions almost unseen. With tanks appearing out of the fog, it is not very likely that the crews managed to hook up their towed pieces and bring them back safely, although according to the log, the battalion

didn't report the loss of the TD guns to the regiment. No major action developed, the TD gun crews and what infantry that had accompanied them simply faded away back to the village, chased by sporadic fire from small arms and machine guns as the German tank column outflanked the first line of defence, probably ignoring the threat they had just bypassed.

It is only at 0715 that entries in the regimental and divisional Jnls mention the loss of a TD gun overrun by enemy infantry, but this is the result of a later action, see below. The 76mm TD gun seen on the German film footage is most probably one of these two early losses, however.

It is likely that the German infantry progressed further to probe the village, with the tanks lying in wait on the N.33, ready to give fire support.

In so doing, the Germans approached the major roadblock of Co I at the entrance to the village on the N.33. It must be noted that the terrain here is such that the N.33 rounds a slight rise to the right and then descends into STOUMONT, the village being built along the road descending gently into the valley of the AMBLÈVE River. Thus, the southern part is situated above most of STOUMONT. The village entrance offers a perfect location for an ambush from a reverse slope position and is the key to the village. Once the entrance is lost, there is not much favourable ground left for the defenders to fight over. The Americans clearly seized on the importance of the spot. The group of houses at the village entrance were turned into strong points, among them the "Robinson House", which with its unique wood and stone structure became a landmark in the German movie filmed by war correspondents during the action, and still looks the same sixty years later. The other two 76mm TD guns in support of Co I were situated here at the crossroads of the N.33 and the "Rue du Village". One gun was positioned alongside the "Robinson House", the other across the intersection in the shadow of the eastern wall of the village church.³

The two 90mm AA guns of the 143rd AAA Bn were first set up in unfavourable positions and efforts were made to improve the situation before dawn. Gun No 4, towed by a M4 high-speed tractor, was moved up to the church, possibly to back up the first pair of 76mm TD guns. At this time, German small arms fire could already be heard and the crew's anxiety added to both the gun and tractor slipping into a ditch next to the road. Lt Leon E. Kent who had gotten word of what actually happened early the next day, remembers the following:

*"They had put a winch on and pulled it out of the mud, which is the standard procedure. Everything went fine. They pulled it out, re-attached and everything. When they started up again they had forgotten, they were all so damned excited, they had forgotten to disengage the winch. The winch was still running when they started the motor of the prime mover, the gun went up and jammed in the thing so hard that no way they could do anything with it. So that is how the gun was lost."*⁴

After coming under fire, the material had to be abandoned. Tracer ammunition ignited gasoline in the M4 tractor, which in turn caused the 90mm ammunition to explode, destroying the gun.⁵ The crew of the abandoned gun joined with the infantry. Gun No 2 managed to set up in a yard behind the "Robinson House", beneath the church and to the west of it, covering the crossroads.⁶

Footnotes

1. Ferriss report, p. 27, gives "about 0300" as time for this action.
2. 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jn, also see above.
3. Maj Martin S. Hayden, AAA units in Ardennes Battle.
4. Leon Kent Collection (AFC/2001/001/7607), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
5. Extract from AA Notes, HQ ETO, 24. January 1945, Nr. 14 regarding Anti-Tank Action by the 143rd AAA Gun Bn.
6. Maj Martin S. Hayden, AAA units in Ardennes Battle.

5 At 0145 a German tracked reconnaissance vehicle, probably a Schützenpanzerwagen (SPW), ran over one of Co I's mines and exploded into flames. This action took place along the field track running approximately 200 m north of the road N.33. The incident must undoubtedly be seen in connection with the reconnaissance mission of the 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, starting around 0200.

This photograph was taken during a fieldtrip in 1994. In the background we can clearly see STOUMONT's church where the field track joins the N.33. This picture is particularly interesting because it reflects the German perspective.

(Hans Weber)







6 - 7 The crew of gun No 4, C Battery 143rd AAA Gun Bn panicked when they tried to deploy their 90mm M1 AA gun to the east of STOUMONT's church. After coming under fire, the material had to be abandoned. Tracer ammunition set off gasoline in the M4-tractor, which in turn caused the 90mm ammunition to explode, destroying the gun. The M4 high-speed tractor was the most

commonly used vehicle for towing these 90mm AA guns. It was armed with a pulpit mounted .50 cal Browning heavy machine gun on a skate ring mounted towards the rear of the cab's rooftop. The tractor also came equipped with a front-mounted high-powered winch. The cab was divided into two compartments with seating room for the driver and two men in the front compartment and double

seats accommodating eight additional men in the rear compartment. Ammo shell racks for up to 54 rounds were located in a compartment behind the crew, where other equipment belonging to the crew were also stowed

(Collection Freddy Lemaire - AMC)
(Harry Lane via Simon Vosters)



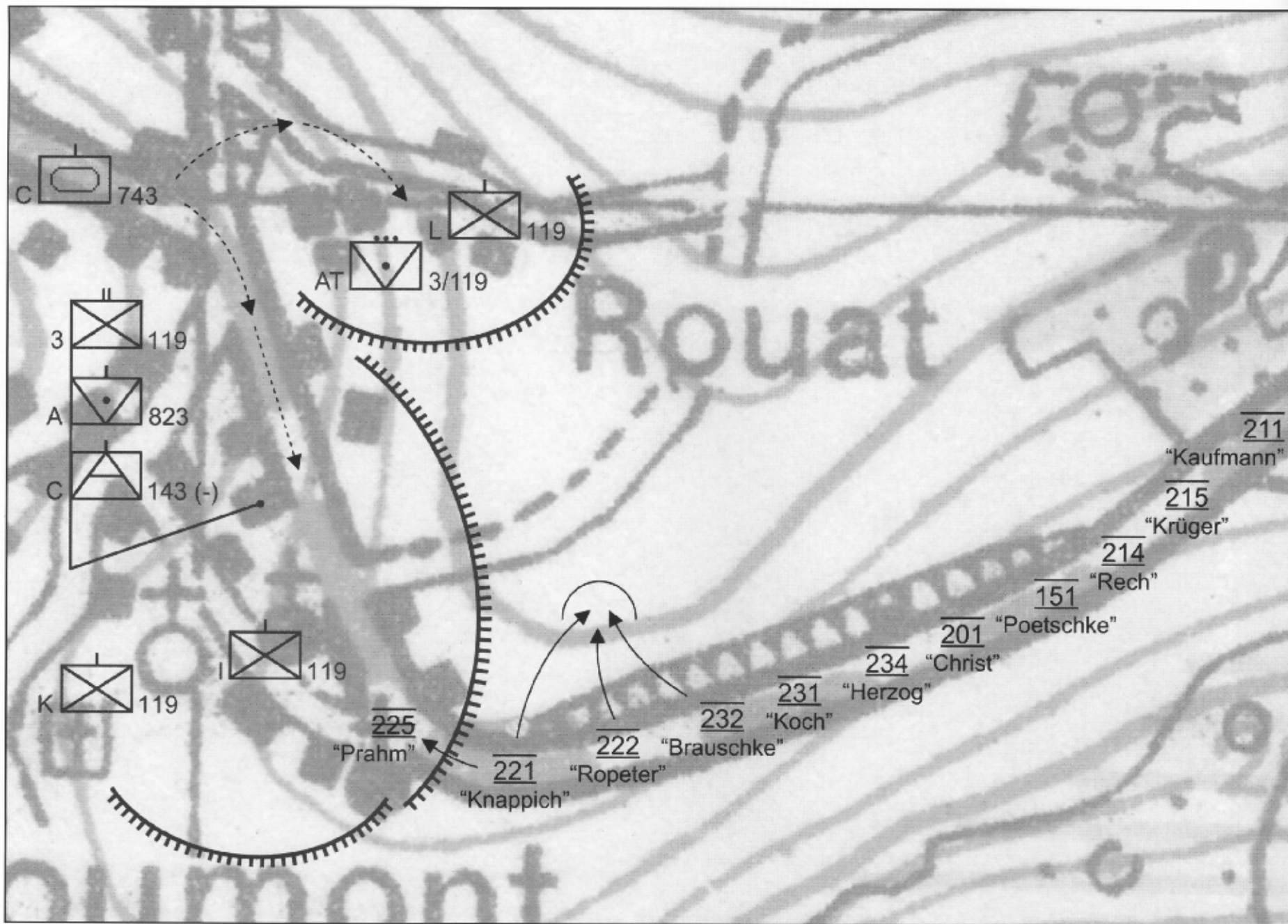
8 Taken shortly after the battle, we can clearly make out the destroyed M4 high-speed tractor with the adjacent 90mm M1 AA gun in the background. This interesting picture also gives us a view of the church's eastern entrance where one of the 76mm TD guns of the 823rd TD Bn was placed.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire - AMC)

9 Another photograph showing part of the destroyed gun No 4, C Battery, 143rd AAA Gun Bn. To the right is the heavily damaged presbytery. The whole village suffered extensive damage from the American shelling.

(Gérard Grégoire)





Map 2: Approach towards Stoumont

Panzer Voran! 3

The time from 0600 until 0800

0600 - Enemy forming on road to front, infantry on the left of road and approximately 15 tanks lined up (message from 3rd Bn).

0715 - One TD gun has been overrun by enemy infantry; sporadic small arms fire; enemy tanks and infantry slowly moving forward (message from 3rd Bn)

119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl

0730 - Battalion received reinforcements of ten medium tanks

0745 - Enemy force estimated at about 30 to 40 tanks and several hundred infantry began concerted attack on our positions. Attack continued, forcing Companies I and K back slowly.

3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl

At 0620 a build up of approximately 15 tanks and a small force of infantry was observed on main road just East of Stoumont. An enemy attack jumped off at about 0700 and by 0715 one friendly TD had been knocked out.

Unit Report, S-2, 119th Inf Rgt

"Do you think they have overrun any part of the 3rd Battalion? - Not yet, they have overrun one TD gun."

Col Brown, HQ 119th Inf Rgt, on a question by Capt Powers, HQ 30th Inf Div, at 0730 on the 19th, G-3 Jnl

It was 0600 when 3rd Bn finally announced a sizeable German force readying itself in front of the positions of Co I. Approximately 15 tanks were seen lined up on the N.33 with infantry to the left (north of the road).¹

It was still dark at this time. The remaining TD guns had failed to obtain permission from the infantry to fire flares.² Whether this would have helped matters with the heavy fog still prevailing is questionable. The regiment now alarmed the 1st Bn and at about 0615, the ten Shermans from 1st and 2nd Platoon, Co C, 743rd Tk Bn, left their bivouac area at STOUMONT station after having spent just over one hour there and moved up front to support 3rd Battalion.³

At 0645 hours, a weak preparatory bombardment by the Germans commenced. The American sources mention only a few mortar rounds. At 0700 hours, when it was just beginning to get light, German infantry attacked the roadblock at the village entrance.⁴

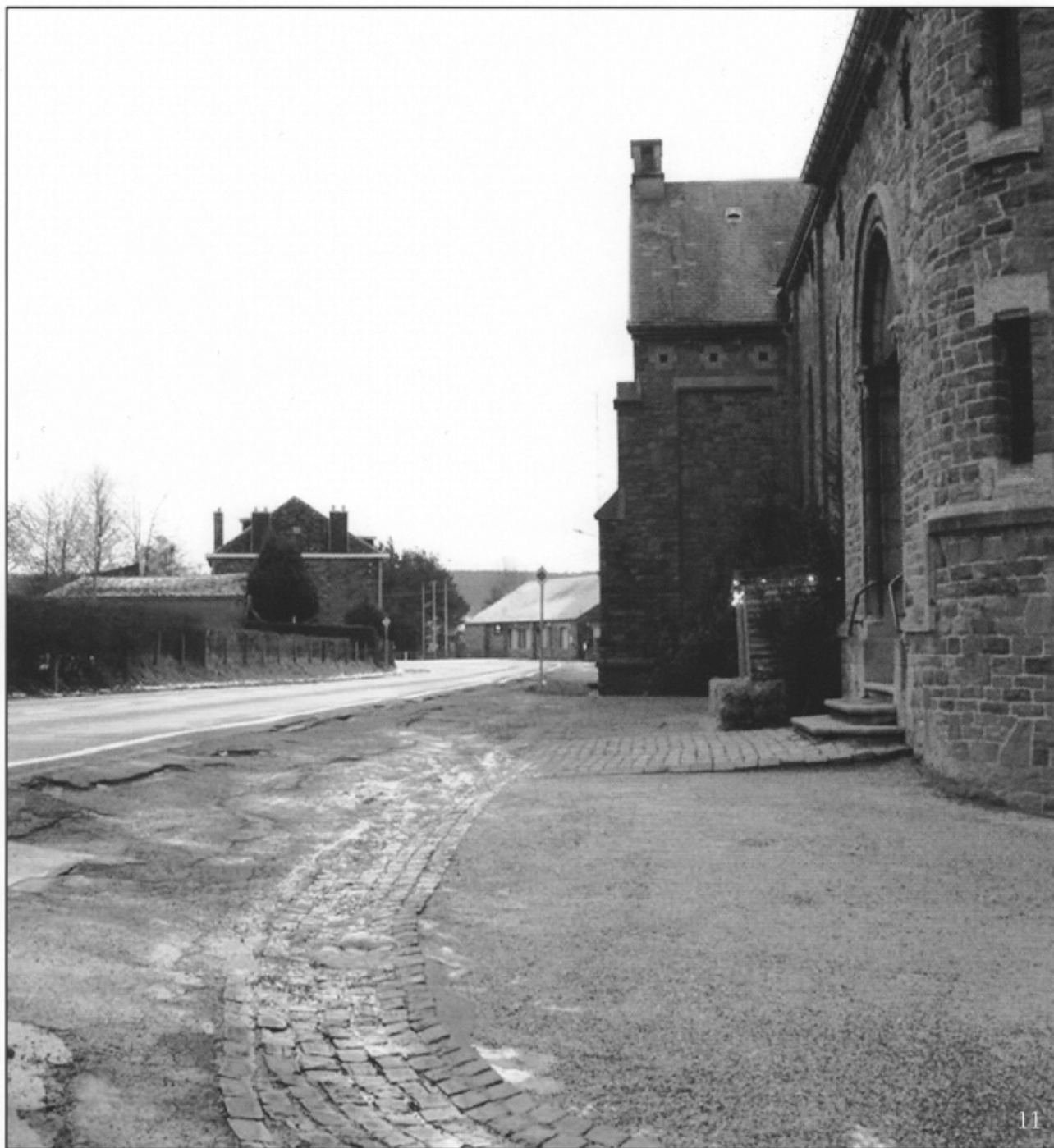


10 C Battery, 143rd AAA Gun Bn managed to set up its gun No 2 in the yard behind the "Robinson House", beneath the church and to the west of it, covering the crossroads of the N.33 with the "Rue du Village". The gun opened fire on the leading Panther (225) of Rottf. Franz Prahm which was only a few meters away. A lucky hit sheared of the gun barrel, other shots forcing Prahm's crew to bail out. Only the final round actually pierced the armour of the Panther.

(Hans Weber)

11 This photograph gives us a glance at the church's eastern entrance where the last TD of A Company, 823rd TD Bn was placed. When Prahm's Panther continued to round the bend into the town it entered the sights of this 76mm TD gun. The reaction of the American crew was quick as the gun registered four hits on the Panther's frontal glacis, all of which ricocheted.

(Stefan De Meyer)





12 Panther 225, commanded by Rottenführer Franz Prahm, was the lead vehicle in the attack on STOUMONT. As it approached the junction in front of the church it was fired on by the American defenders in positions to the left of the road. The first shot jammed the turret preventing the crew from returning fire, with further shots starting a fire that forced them to abandon the vehicle. The gunner Hans-Georg Hübler had started to traverse the turret to the right in anticipation of taking potential enemy positions in this area under fire.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire -
AMC)

13 Over the years only minor changes have been made to the church's infrastructure. While the Wilkins house has been demolished and the trees that marked the N.33 have been removed, the outlook of the village still looks remarkably similar.

(Stefan De Meyer)





14

14 In this photograph we can see the remnants of the "Classic Factory Pattern" on the turret rear with large areas blackened and corroding as a result of the fire. We can also see one of the many differences between the way that the 1st Company and 2nd Company applied tactical markings to their vehicles. In the top left hand side of the turret rear the vehicles tactical number 225 has been repeated using a smaller version of the standard LAH turret numbers.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire - AMC)

The supporting fire was provided by the I./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 which was engaged with its 1st and 2nd Battery between LA GLEIZE and STOUMONT. According to Uscha. Vock, commander of a gun in the 1st Battery, they were deployed in a meadow in the mist. The number of available guns varies considerably between four and nine and there are also two German statements to the effect that the I./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 was equipped with self-propelled Howitzers (Wespe), but until today there is no proof of this. Ammunition was sparse. A PoW from 1st Battery stated that his gun had only been issued 35 rounds of percussion-fused shells, no smoke, gas or other special shells.⁵

Again the tank destroyers were unlucky. Shortly before 0700 the first TD gun near the "Robinson House" is said to have been destroyed by an armoured vehicle, which had moved past the first few houses, knocking out the gun and then retreating.⁶ A TD gun was indeed noted as having been overrun by enemy infantry at 0715.⁷ It is likely that this was the gun in question. German infantry and tanks were now advancing slowly, the tanks firing their guns in support of their infantry. American sources speak of two initial German infantry attacks which were repulsed.⁸

However, it is more likely that the German infantry was bent on taking out sighted anti-tank gun positions and removing mines to prepare for the tank attack. They must have been quite effective, since all but one of the four TD guns were neutralized before the tanks rolled in for the kill and the hastily placed mine fields made no impression at all. Heinz Friedrichs speaks of how his unit returned from a foray against the village to mount their SPW's and to ready themselves for the mechanized push into STOUMONT.⁹ As stated before, around 0730 the first battery of M7 HMC's of the 400th FA Bn was in position and ready to fire. However, there was no artillery observer with the beleaguered 3rd Bn and thus no artillery support available.¹⁰

Impressed by the attack now under way, Col Sutherland suggested to Div HQ to have his 2nd Bn relieved by the 82nd AB Div and moved north to rejoin the regiment. The division was also informed regarding the 1st Bn and the tanks from 743rd Tk

Bn being moved up to reinforce the 3rd Bn. The tanks arrived at STOUMONT at about the same time this information was passed to Div HQ. Not so the 1st Bn.¹¹ In the meantime, the German tanks and infantry had slowly advanced along the N.33 and reached the outskirts of the town.

With the time now approaching 0730 hours, the Panzers geared up to force the issue. At the point of the column, the three remaining tanks of 2nd Platoon rolled with Panther 225 (Rottf. Prahm) taking the lead. Directly behind followed the platoon leader, Hscha. Knappich, in Panther 221 and then Oscha. Ropeter (Panther 222). Ustuf. Koch's 3rd Platoon was next, consisting of Panther 232 (Uscha. Brauschke), Koch himself (Panther 231) and Uscha. Herzog (234). Then came a command echelon consisting of the company commander, Ostuf. Christ in Panther 201 and probably also Stubaf. Poetschke in Panther 151. Following them were the 1st Platoon with Panther 214 (Uscha. Rech), Panther 211 (Ustuf. Kaufmann) and Panther 215 (Uscha. Krüger). The rear was brought up by the leader of the company troop, Uscha. Friedrich, in Panther 202.¹²

Preparations for the attack were minimal, nevertheless a standard operation procedure can be deduced from all the available statements and testimonies of the German participants. It seems that the platoon generally just followed behind its leader, who in turn always had at least one tank ahead of him to act as a battering ram or a target to draw fire as the situation required.

It was surprisingly quiet at this moment. Prahm's gunner, Strm. Hübler, only noticed small arms fire coming from the first house on the left side of the road. Prahm ordered the radio operator to fire the bow MG into the house. Three German infantrymen entered the house and allegedly took out an American squad.

The tank continued to round the bend into the town and thus entered the sights of the last TD gun remaining with Co I. The American reaction was quick and the gun registered four hits on the Panther's frontal glacis, all of which ricocheted.¹³⁻¹⁴



15 This "trophy" snapshot taken by a US serviceman shortly after the recapture of STOUMONT shows two GI's posing at the front of Panther 225. The damage to the gun barrel as well as at least two hits on the glacis plate can clearly be seen. The "tail down, nose up" attitude of the Panther is caused by the weakened rear suspension collapsing and the lack of weight on the front suspension as a result of the missing gun barrel. We can also see the drivers hatch has been jettisoned and is lying on the hull roof. This feature was introduced in August 1944 to allow the crew to escape when the turret was traversed and was overhanging the hatch stopping it from opening in the normal manner.

(Source unknown)

16 This Panther is from the September onwards production run with Lost-Erkennungs-tafeln (poison gas identification panels) becoming standard, one of which can be seen on the upper edge of the turret at the bend in the armour plate towards the rear. Most of its tool stowage is still in place and interestingly it appears to have been issued with the jack support block from a Panther Ausf. A. As was common in Panthers that have suffered an interior fire while still carrying fuel and ammunition, the torsion bar suspension has collapsed leaving the vehicle sitting very low over the road wheels.

This is the only known photograph of Panther 225 taken that shows the vehicle's right hand side and considering it was taken under combat conditions it has still revealed a wealth of detail with indications that this Panther received a standardised factory applied camouflage scheme. There is a faint line of light colour starting from just in front of the poison gas identification panel down to the bottom interlock on the turret front. This is commonly seen on Panthers manufactured at both Daimler-Benz and M.A.N.

17 In this picture we can see how different light conditions and exposure to the elements has affected Panther 225; the digits on the turret rear are no longer visible. To the rear of the vehicle the light is just catching the exhaust's armour which has the same contour as the metal shroud above. This leads us to conclude that it is a casting and that Panther 225 was manufactured by Daimler-Benz. The vehicles Kampfraumheizung is also clearly visible in this shot as is the total absence of Zimmerit.

(2 x Stefan De Meyer)







The Panther continued and thus entered the sights of the 90mm AA gun. Commanded by Sgt Sarnowski, the gun opened fire. The first shot hit the vicinity of the left front sprocket. The second shot hit the 7.5cm gun barrel close to the gun mantle, shearing it off. Four more shots fired in quick succession made the crew bail out. One more shot was fired "for good measure" and this proved to be the only round that actually pierced the armour.¹⁵ Hübler had no chance to fire the main gun and so Panther 225 never actually fired a shot in anger during its short career.

Contrary to American sources, not all of the German crew were killed. Gunner Strm. Hans-Georg Hübler survived, as did his loader, Strm. Werner Zander. Hübler's description of the events is as follows:

18 In this dramatic cine still we can see German Fallschirmjäger protecting a wounded soldier from American small arms fire coming from adjacent buildings. The soldier is almost certainly the Panzer crewman mentioned by Hans-Georg Hübler who was wounded while abandoning his damaged Panther which can be seen burning fiercely in the background. Three of the Fallschirmjäger are looking at something off camera to the right, this is probably the rest of Panther 225's crew including Herr Hübler, who were pinned down in a drainage ditch on the other side of the road.

(Transit Film)

*"I tried hard to aim for a corner of a house at the entrance to the village, because I suspected an enemy position there. The tank rolled at slow speed until the driver pushed the pedal down a little bit too much. The Panther's body thus rose up and I lost my aim for a short time. At the same moment the tank was hit and the turret traverse blocked. Again and again I tried to free the turret, but when more rounds hit the tank, the whole crew had to bail out using the rear escape hatch in the turret. At this time the Panther started to smoke, but it wasn't burning yet. We got into a ditch filled with water on the right side of the road and took cover there. The tank was still taking fire, and so were we in the ditch. I remember a wounded crew member lying on the deck behind the turret. I can't tell if it was Rottf. Prabh, who later died of his wounds in LA GLEIZE or the driver, who lost a leg to an AT round while bailing out. When we realized that the Americans were zeroing in on our position, we made a run for it towards the east. Running with our heads down and followed by small arms fire, I reached our lines together with Strm. Zander and reported that there was still a wounded man behind the tank. We were then sent to the rear in the direction of LA GLEIZE. As for the lost barrel, because my gun never fired a shot in combat a round stuck in the barrel can be ruled out. Since we didn't blow the barrel, it can only have been sheered off by a lucky hit or later by the Americans."*¹⁶

At the same time, "Charlie" Company of 743rd Tk Bn had arrived at STOUMONT, led by Lt Macht. Four Shermans from 1st Platoon turned up within the perimeter of the hard-pressed Co I five minutes later.¹⁷ Another four Shermans were ordered to Co L at ROUÂ and the two remaining Shermans remained as a reserve in the middle of the village and later moved up to support Co I. The tanks must have arrived there only minutes before the German tank attack started. They were told by their officers that the enemy push was to be expected at 0730.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

The German tanks progressing along the N.33 came under heavy fire once inside the village limits. At the same time, flanking fire from the woods to the right and from ROUÂ (Co L) was noted. Hscha. Knappich's Panther tried to bypass the wrecked tank, was shot at in turn, and pulled back. Hscha. Knappich immediately

ordered his radio operator to contact his company commander, Ostuf. Christ. The 2nd Platoon continued on the road, but when Uscha. Brauschke saw Prahm's Panther knocked out by anti-tank fire, he stopped the tank at once. When he saw the Panther catch fire, he ordered the driver into reverse and backed off a few yards behind the curve at the village entrance.²⁰

Footnotes

1. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.

2. 823rd TD Bn, ABR No VII, p.5.

3. 743rd Tk Bn, AAR 18 - 19 Dec., p.21.

4. Ferriss Report, p.27.

5. Hans Neugebauer and Hermann Vock, statements given in T. Fischer: Von Berlin nach Caen, p. 186 f; 82nd US Airborne Division, G-2 Report 154, 25.12.44 and 30th US Inf.Div., 22.12.44, G-2 Report 188.

6. Maj Martin S. Hayden, AAA Units in the Ardennes Battle.

7. 119th Inf Rgt. Jnl, 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

8. Ferriss Report, p.27.

9. Heinz Friedrichs, Affidavit 21.03.1946.

10. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.

11. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

12. Arnold Mikolaschek, Erwin Szyperski, Rolf Ritzer, Erich Werner, Heinz Hofmann, Walter Köbler, Georg Bunda, Affidavits for the Malmedy Trial. Horst Vollprecht, sketch to his statement at Schwäbisch Hall.

13. Hans-Georg Hübler, interviewed by Timm Haasler, 05. and 07.06.2004 and Affidavit Hans-Georg Hübler, 06.05.1948.

14. The 823rd TD Bn claimed one Tiger tank destroyed in this engagement, 823rd TD Bn, ABR no VII, p. 6; Unit Report 182200-192200. The report is probably referring to this engagement, as the other four TD guns with Co K were not doing any better. There are no facts to uphold this claim.

15. Maj Martin S. Hayden, AAA Units in Ardennes Battle.
16. Hans-Georg Hübler, interview by Timm Haasler, 05. and 07.06.2004.

17. 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Combat Journal; AAR, 119th Inf Rgt, Jan 45, p.2.

18. 743rd Tk Bn, AAR, p.21.

19. 117th Inf Rgt, S-3 Journal; Ferriss Report, p.27; T/5 Harold Rosenberg, see D-Day Normandy website.

20. Affidavit Heinz Hoffman, gunner tank 221, dated 15.03.1946; Affidavit Erich Werner, driver tank 221, dated 04.04.1946; Affidavit Arnold Mikolaschek, radio operator tank 221, dated 03.04.1946; Affidavit Walter Köbler, loader tank 221, dated 04.10.1946 and 28.08.1953; Affidavit Erwin Szyperski, driver tank 232, dated 08.03.1946, Affidavit Rolf Ritzer, radio operator tank 232, dated 13.03.1946.

Duel in the mist

The time from 0800 until 0900

4

0810 - 1 enemy tank knocked out by our tanks; one of our tanks hit twice but unhurt (message from 743rd Tk Bn).

119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl

0810 - "H - What we would like to do is pull that battalion out and pull it back North to get Sutherland the full force of his team."

Maj Gen Hobbs to Maj Gen Gerow,
telephone conversation,
30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl

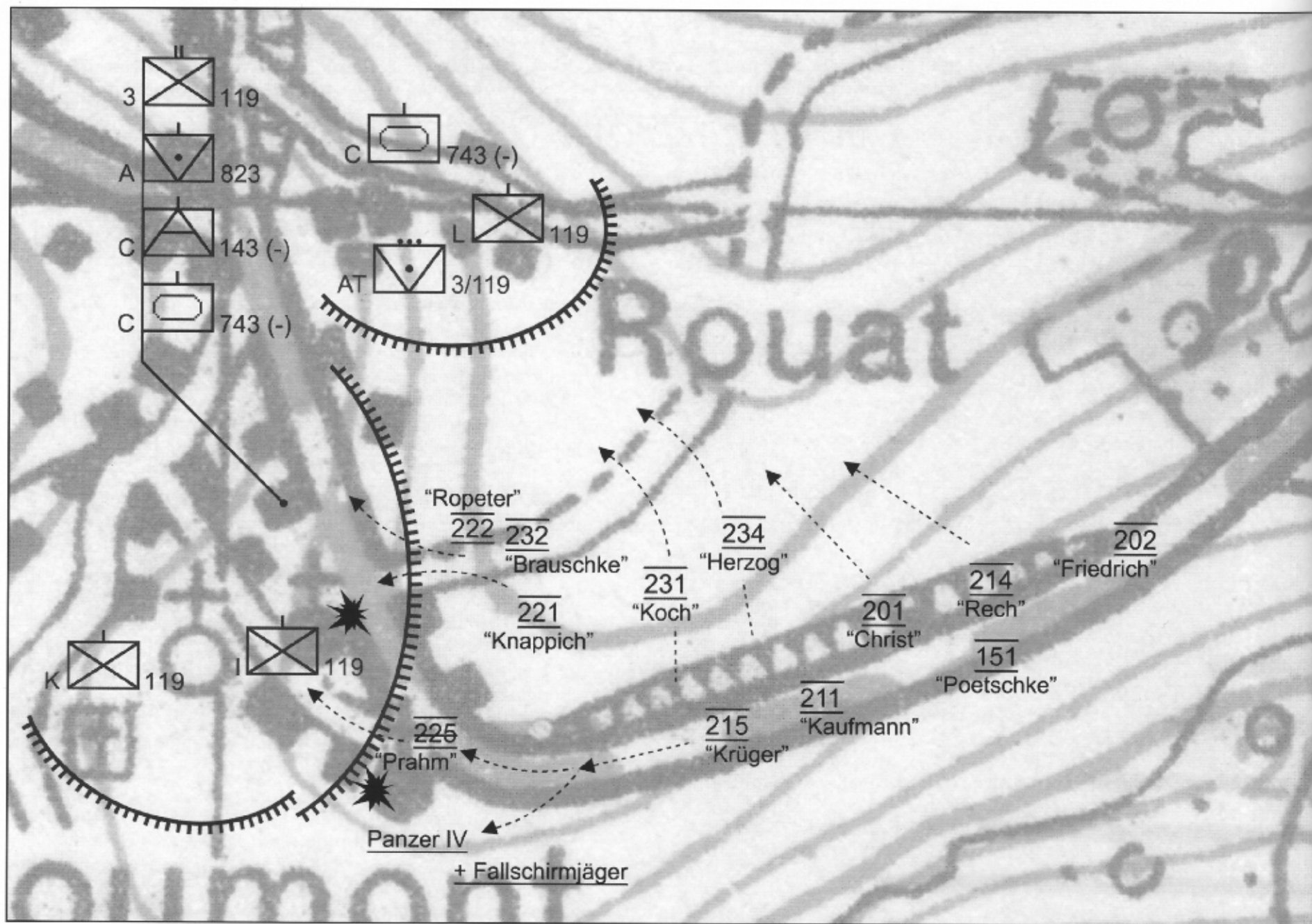
0820 - "H - We have just got another report that there are a lot of tanks rolling his way. G - He has a lot of TD's and AT stuff, and can get set them up and knock hell out of them."

Maj Gen Hobbs to Maj Gen Gerow,
telephone conversation,
30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl

For almost a quarter of an hour, no movement was recorded as the Panthers paused, alerted by the loss of tank 225. Ostuf. Christ ordered the 2nd Platoon to drive forward, but Hscha. Knappich replied on his wireless that he had been hit and that first of all, the anti-tank cannon supposedly somewhere in the field to their right had to be destroyed. The attack stalled. Stubaf. Poetschke had to force the attackers to continue and Peiper himself said that he did so by leaving his tank, taking a Panzerfaust and going over to every tank, threatening every commander that he would shoot him down at once if he retreated even a meter.¹

Ostuf. Christ put pressure on his platoon leaders to get the attack rolling again. The plan was to outflank the troublesome position near the church by going cross country. Hscha. Knappich sent off Oscha. Ropeter with the mission to move towards ROUÂ and then back into the village behind the American positions. He was followed by Uscha. Brauschke. Ustuf. Koch and Uscha. Herzog advanced on their right flank, cresting the small rise and taking up covering fire positions. Hscha. Knappich's tank fired on the church steeple and engaged the nearby 76mm TD Gun and the infantry positions at the eastern outskirts of the town. Finally, the remaining TD Gun next to the church was neutralized. The crew were wounded with one man killed.²

In the meantime, Ropeter and Brauschke had flanked the American road block and progressed north, paralleling the N.33. To their right but staying in the rear, Koch and Herzog provided covering fire. A short distance behind them, Ostuf. Christ took a back-up position to oversee the attack. But these five Panthers were engaged at once by the Shermans of 1st and 2nd Platoon, 743rd Tk Bn with Co I and L respectively. After nearly a hundred



Map 3: Duel in the fog

metres, the route of the two Panthers on the left flank was cut by a field track that turned into a sunken lane before joining the N.33 opposite the church.

The Germans were somewhat unsettled by this feature as they later referred to it as an anti-tank ditch. Ropeter veered to the left and re-entered the town not far from the church. When he did so, he spotted an American tank behind a house and ordered his gunner, Uscha. Schwaten, to fire at it. In the heat of the battle, Uscha. Schwaten got entangled in the cables of the on-board communication system and was unable to aim properly, missing the tank by a hair's breadth. Ropeter then took over the gun but his shell struck the ground short of the tank. The Sherman backed off at once and disappeared.³

Hscha. Knappich, Ustuf. Koch and Ostuf. Christ remained in the field, giving fire support. When the opposition from ROUÂ had ceased, they turned back to the N.33, passing Prahm's burning tank. Hscha. Knappich was first, followed by Ostuf. Christ and then Ustuf. Koch. They pushed along the main road together with some SPW's, moving up to the middle of the town where they caught up with Ropeter and Brauschke.⁴ Prahm's burning Panther was pushed or towed next to the "Wilkins House". The fire spread to the house, igniting it.⁵

From the tanks of 1st Platoon it is known that Uscha. Rech (214) advanced far into the field and beyond the sunken lane, engaging targets in ROUÂ. Later this tank also turned back to the N.33 and moved along the "Rue du Village". Rech must have been preceded by Uscha. Krüger and Ustuf. Kaufmann at some earlier moment.

Captured film footage, taken by an unknown war correspondent on December 19th 1944 shows Panther 214 on the left of a group of at least four Panthers. The tank was later again captured on film. At this moment, the outcome of the battle had already been decided. American prisoners of war were herded through the village and Rech was just passing a Panzer IV in the process of being

refuelled. He must have followed in the wake of Ustuf. Kaufmann (211) who had taken the same route but at an earlier point in time. It was obviously the task of the 1st Platoon to use the "Rue du Village" through STOUMONT as Uscha. Krüger (215) was also pictured using the same route but earlier than Uscha. Rech.

At 0810, the American tankers reported one enemy kill to the 119th Inf Rgt. At the same time they reported how a lucky Sherman had survived two near misses.⁶ Due to the strong opposition experienced, the Panthers stayed in the open fields and contented themselves with firing into ROUÂ. They duelled with the four Shermans of 2nd Platoon, led by Lt Clyde S. Thornell supporting Co L. Lt Thornell was wounded by shrapnel in his back during the morning of December 19th but remained with his tank.

According to Lt David E. Knox, CO of Co L, the situation was initially stabilized with the help of the Shermans:

*"About 0830 tanks or halftracks began to come over the rise in our front. The tankers with us wasted no time with them. Two were knocked out and no more tried to come over. We realized, however, that there were probably plenty behind. We knew this because they kept throwing direct fire rounds into our buildings. At the same time we could hear a hell of a fight going on to our right, in the area defended by Companies "I" and "K". About this time Lt Parramore called me on the sound-powered phone and told me that these two companies were getting pushed back. That wasn't good because our flank would soon be very vulnerable. I immediately checked with the battalion. They told me that there had been some trouble, but that everything would be O.K. I could hear the other company commanders on the radio occasionally. Discussion was held on the use of Powell's stuff, which meant artillery. The answer seemed to be that it would be available if we could hold out an hour. The 81 mm Mortars were set up and could fire. Lt Conway, the mortar observer, arrived at our CP about that time. It was now about 0900."*⁷







19 - 20 An unknown "Kriegsberichterstat-ter", who found cover behind one of the abandoned 76mm TD guns of the 823rd TD Bn, immortalized this Panther during the attack towards ROUÂ. We have not been able to identify this Panther yet or who or what is on the engine deck. In the background we can make out two other Panthers providing covering fire.

21 One of the Panthers involved in the attack on ROUÂ was the mount of Uscha. Rech (214). His Panther can be seen to the left of the photograph, with part of the unidentified Panther still visible on the right. When the American resistance in ROUÂ collapsed, Rech's Panther returned to the entrance of STOU MONT and continued to advance west using the "Rue du Village". Some of the key features in identifying this Panther were the dangling Schürze on the left hull side as well as the jerry can stowed on the turrets port side. These features will be clearly seen in the cine stills taken of Panther 214 in the centre of STOU MONT (see Chapter 5).

22 The unknown Kriegsberichterstat-ter continued to film the German attack on ROUÂ. In the background we can make out Uscha. Rech's Panther 214 advancing towards ROUÂ, which is now largely hidden by a smoke screen.

(3 x Transit Film)

Other than the kill recorded by the 119th Inf Rgt and described above, no further German tank losses had been registered by the American side up to 0900. The loss of another two Panthers during this engagement can be ruled out as there is no hard evidence for such a claim. On the German side, a couple of halftracks were knocked out, which will be described later. The impression is that the Shermans struck the well-armoured Panthers and possibly knocked out at least two SPW's, but other than stopping the German push on ROUÂ, they did not inflict much more damage.

After the remainder of 2nd and 3rd Platoon had moved off the N.33 to the right and into the fields, the remaining tanks, possibly the 1st Platoon with Uscha Krüger (215) and Ustuf. Kaufmann (211) but without Uscha. Rech (214) and reinforced by a couple of Panzer IV's drew up on the N.33 and prepared for a direct push into the village centre. They were preceded by Paratroopers and Panzergrenadiers who exerted heavy pressure on the American road block at the "Maison Robinson". When a mortar shell hit the halftrack carrying the ammunition only 5 meters from to the 90mm gun position and the ammunition began to explode, Sgt Sarnowski destroyed the gun with a rifle grenade and ordered his men to continue as infantry.⁸

It was probably during this phase that Pfc Albert A. Darago and Pvt Roland E. Seaman distinguished themselves with a daringly close combat action against the Panzers. Both were crewmembers of one of the 90mm AA guns of 143rd AAA Bn, most likely gun No 4, which had previously been mired in the road ditch. When an infantry Lieutenant asked for men to take on two German tanks stationed near the road junction at the "Maison Robinson", they volunteered. They had not been trained in the use of the bazooka before, but received short instructions from the Lieutenant on the spot. They were credited with the destruction of two Panzer IV's and received the Distinguished Service Cross.

These are the words of Albert A. Darago:

"On the morning of December the 19th an infantry Lt came up and asked for two volunteers to stop two tanks. Seaman and I



volunteered. We didn't know how to use a bazooka but the Lt told us what to do and where to hit the tanks. He also said to turn our heads away from the flash of the shell as it was fired as to not hurt our eyes. I can only tell you what I did to the best of my memory. The Lt loaded the bazooka. I crawled up to the hedge and rested the bazooka on the hedge. I kneeled on one knee to balance myself. To my surprise there were four tanks, two Tigers and two Panthers. There were two soldiers standing behind one of the tanks. It looked like the Germans were getting ready for a big push. I fired and heard a loud explosion. Then all hell broke loose. Crawling back to the Lt I was under heavy cross machine gun fire. The Lt asked me how I made out and I told him I got a direct hit. He loaded the bazooka and said to go back and finish it off.

I crawled back and found that two of the tanks had taken off. I fired and hit the tank again. Then I crawled back I reported to my 90mm position. My gun had been put out of action, so I ran down to the other gun that was firing at two tanks; I believe that those tanks were the two that had left. The gun crew said they didn't need me so I ran to the Lt who asked about the second shot and I told him I got a second hit. At that moment a shell hit the building we were behind and the Lt fell to the ground with a strange look on his face. He lifted his hand and his stomach was coming out. I pushed it back in and turned to call a medic and before I could say anything the medic was there. He put a rag around the Lt's stomach and asked me to give him a hand putting the Lt on the back of a halftrack. We put him across the back and the medic asked me to stay on the back and hold him.

We drove down the road about half a mile and on the right side of the road were two houses with the doors off and were being used for the wounded men. I was about to take the Lt off the halftrack but the medic said









23 Pfc Albert A. Darago of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn received the Distinguished Service Cross for his role in the battle for STOUMONT.

(Albert A. Darago via Simon Vosters)

24 - 25 This marvellous landscape played a key role in the battle for STOUMONT. In order to outflank the troublesome position near the church, Ostuf. Christ commanded his Panthers cross country. After nearly a hundred metres, the route of the vehicles on the left flank was cut by a field track that turned into a sunken lane before joining the N.33 opposite the church. The Germans were somewhat unsettled by this feature as they later referred to it as an anti-tank ditch. To the left we can see a group of houses that formed the part of town called ROUÂ. Also note the presence of the described field track running through the terrain.

26 The American resistance was strong and forced the Panthers to stay in the open fields. Lt David Knox's Co L who was responsible for the defense of ROUÂ got the welcome support of four Shermans of C-2 743rd Tk Bn. This particular photograph was taken at edge of ROUÂ and makes it possible to identify us with the American defenders.

(2 x Hans Weber, 1 x Rudi Huber)

he would take over and there were men there to take of that and I should go back to my unit. I turned around and saw my outfit coming down the hill. At that point there was gunfire coming from the trees on the left. We all began to run. Seaman said the Lt was in a wheelchair at the DSC ceremony. Also, you asked me how I felt I was scared but I did what needed to be done.”⁹

The first authentic documentation of these kills is an entry in the Combat Journal of the 119th Inf Rgt and was noted down at 1050. Given that besides two light tanks (sic), three Panthers were claimed at the same time by the 143rd AAA Bn, this is clearly from an announcement summing up the combat action at that moment. It was about this time that last elements of the AAA Bn under Lt Kent had taken off from their position at STOUMONT station and retreated further down the valley and it is likely that the message was transmitted orally by a liaison officer reporting to the regimental HQ at HALTE. The Unit Report of 119th Inf Rgt already further identifies the light tanks as Mark IV's. To this day, there is no photographic evidence confirming the loss of two Panzer IV's at STOUMONT. The count taken by the S-2, 119th Inf Rgt on December 24th on lost German equipment mentions one Mark IV near STOUMONT and six at LA GLEIZE. All six tanks at LA GLEIZE are confirmed and identified. The Mark IV at STOUMONT is most probably the Wirbelwind Flakpanzer at the Sanatorium ST. EDOUARD, mounted on the Mark IV chassis. An article from "Stars and Stripes" published on February 26th, 1945 contains a sketch locating the two destroyed tanks next to the "Robinson" house on the N.33. If this were accurate, these two tanks should have shown up in the original footage the Germans made during the attack.

The film footage however does show a Panzer IV reversing from the road and turning around in the field. Finally, there are no such tank losses mentioned in the affidavits by the members of LSSAH obtained during the Malmedy trial. These affidavits do contain valuable sketches and both in the written text as well as on these sketches, only

Prahm's Panther is mentioned. We do not question the boldness of the two men and that they scored hits, but it is almost beyond doubt that the claims of destroying the tanks are not valid. It is also worth mentioning in this context that Hans-Georg Hübler (a crew member of Panther 225) claimed in his later statement from 1948 that the knocked-out Panther only caught fire after being hit in the motor compartment from the left. From the position of the tank and the AA Gun, it seems unlikely that this hit came from the AA gun, but it could have come from the two bazookas.

It is not clear from the American sources when the action happened. We put it after the destruction of Prahm's Panther and the loss of the second gun in accordance with the official records of 143rd AAA Bn and the sources AA Notes, HQ ETO, regarding anti-tank action by the 143rd AAA Gun Bn and Leon E. Kent, Battery C of 143rd AAA Gun Bn in the Battle of the Bulge. This is at odds with the report by Maj Martin S. Hayden, AAA Units in Ardennes Battle, and probably also with Darago's account, placing it before the destruction of the second 90mm AA gun. Thus, we believe that Darago and Seaman ran from gun No 4 to gun No 2 and while there, volunteered for the tank hunt. The description of the two tanks destroyed range from everything from light tanks to Tigers, so not much faith can be put in the identification. A possible explanation for the difference in tanks is that the group fired upon contained both Panthers and Panzer IV's and might thus have been the remaining two Panthers of 1st Platoon and two Panzer IV's. The tanks engaged were indeed most likely Mark IV's, as the first report makes mention of light tanks.

Lt McGuire together with Cpls Davis and Guigar and Pfc Fidram then tried to bring an abandoned German AT gun to bear on the next German Panzer entering the village but were dispersed by enemy infantry fire and had to abandon the plan.

There were indeed a couple of captured German 7,5cms used by 823rd TD Bn and in due course, one such AT was

reported as being lost in STOUMONT on this day (823rd TD Bn, ABR No.VII, p. 5). The Pak 7,5cm was, according to the relevant TO&E not organic to the German Panzergrenadier and Fallschirmjäger companies engaged at STOUMONT. The Pak 7,5cm photographed later next to Panther 234 further down the N.33 was probably also from this captured stock.

Shortly after 0800, Maj Gen Hobbs was seeking permission from V Corps to get the 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt relieved by the 82nd AB Div as Col Sutherland had proposed. The reports from the 119th Inf Rgt made it clear that the main enemy effort was now along the AMBLÈVE towards LIÈGE. He reasoned that a push further south would actually mean a detour for the Germans. Maj Gen Gerow assured Hobbs that he would contact Maj Gen James M. Gavin, Commanding General (CG) of the 82nd AB Div, on his behalf. Barely 10 minutes later, Gerow called Hobbs and told him that everything with the 82nd AB Div was arranged as they had previously discussed and requested the 119th Inf Rgt to get hold of all its men and wipe out the German threat.¹⁰

At 0825 the division informed the 119th Inf Rgt about the release of the 2nd Bn. However, there was no immediate result from this on the battlefield. It was 1300 when the 505th Prcht Inf Rgt finally relieved the 2nd Bn from its positions overlooking the LIENNE River. All the attached artillery, tank destroyers and tanks had by this time already moved to their new positions.¹¹

The artillery was also attempting to get things going now. At 0830, Capt Race was sent as liaison officer to 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, and the CO himself went out to contact regimental HQ.¹²

Footnotes

1. Trial testimony by Jochen Peiper. Interestingly enough, each tank in the Panzer Regiment was issued a Panzerfaust, see order "Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung Nr. 29, Ib/Tgb.Nr.1048/44 v. 5.12.44 geh." Whether or not this story is true, a former member of the company claimed that he saw his battalion commander the first time during the battle in

STOUMONT when he was bawling out his company commander, Ostuf. Christ, for slowing down the advance of the entire company. Screening of Oskar Maurer, 10.-19.12.1945.

2. Erich Werner, Affidavit 04.04.1946, Erwin Szyperski, Affidavit 07.03.1946; Georg Bunda. Loader tank 231, Statement 22.12.1947; Terrain analysis June 1991; Walter Köbler, Affidavit 04.10.1946 and 28.08.1953; Horst Vollprecht, driver tank 231, sketch, Ferris Report, p.28.

3. Walter Ropeter, interviewed by Timm Haasler on the 11.07.2003.

4. Georg Bunda, Sworn Statement 22.12.1947, Otto Lessau, Sworn Statement 08.04.1946.

5. Grégoire, Les Panzers de Peiper face à l'US Army, p.12.

6. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.

7. David F. Knox, 1st Lt, Co. L, 119th Inf Rgt; Journal, courtesy of Warren Watson.

8. Maj Martin S. Hayden, AAA Units in Ardennes Battle. According to German sources, Peiper later inspected the AA gun and noted that since only the optics were missing, the gun would still be functional.

9. Albert A. Darago, E-mail to Simon Vosters, 18.01.2005.

10. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Journal, TC 0810 and 0820.

11. 82nd AB Div, G-3 Periodic, 182400-192400

12. 400th FA Bn, S-2 Jnl.

Breakthrough 5

The time from 0900 until 1000

0900 - T: What is the situation down there this morning? H: This morning first thing our Blue Battalion of Crisis (3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt) was hit hard and some elements were overrun. Our Red Bn (1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt) was used in there to assist it.

Telephone Conversation between
Gen Thorsten, G-3, 1st US Army
and Col Hassenfelt, HQ 30th Div.

- 0905 - 1 enemy half track knocked out by tanks.
- 0910 - Co at church in Stoumont; enemy firing smoke on the 3rd Bn's right flank - might indicate a possible encirclement from that side.
- 0915 - (tanks) knocked out another halftrack.
- 0920 - (tanks) knocked out two more tanks

119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl

0952 - "Over in Stoumont we are working them over, too. The last report we got was they were beating the piss out of them. We have enough soldiers over there so they had better run out another division if they want to get through."

Col Stephens, 30th Inf Div HQ, to
Col Hill, V Corps HQ, telephone
conversation, 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl

0940 - CO radio abandoning his position, destroying radio, withdrawing on foot.

400th FA Bn, S-2 Jnl

0955 - Send TD's + 4 tanks to Regiment at once

119th Inf Rgt Jnl,
message to 2nd Bn

At 0900, 1st US Army contacted the 30th Inf Div. The division reported on the 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, being hit hard with elements overrun. Probably due to the earlier report by CT 119, it also explained on the use of 1st Bn to assist 3rd Bn. Here, the division was unaware of the real situation. There were no elements of the 1st Bn fighting in STOUMONT.¹

For the defenders of STOUMONT, all the support that the regiment and the division tried to administer came too late. Peiper himself organized the infantry lying in the ditch, including 9.(Pi.) /SS Pz. Rgt. 1 for the decisive push into STOUMONT.² The Panzergrenadiere and Panzerpioniere of the Kampfgruppe took out the remaining positions of Co I along the N.33 and thus flanked the Co K in the western part of the village. The four 76mm TD guns located there were not able to make their presence felt. Capt Bruce A. Crissinger, CO of Co A, 823rd TD Bn, later attributed the failure of his guns to the fact that they were all towed guns, which exposed their crews to small arms fire and prevented them from manoeuvring so as to avoid being outflanked.³

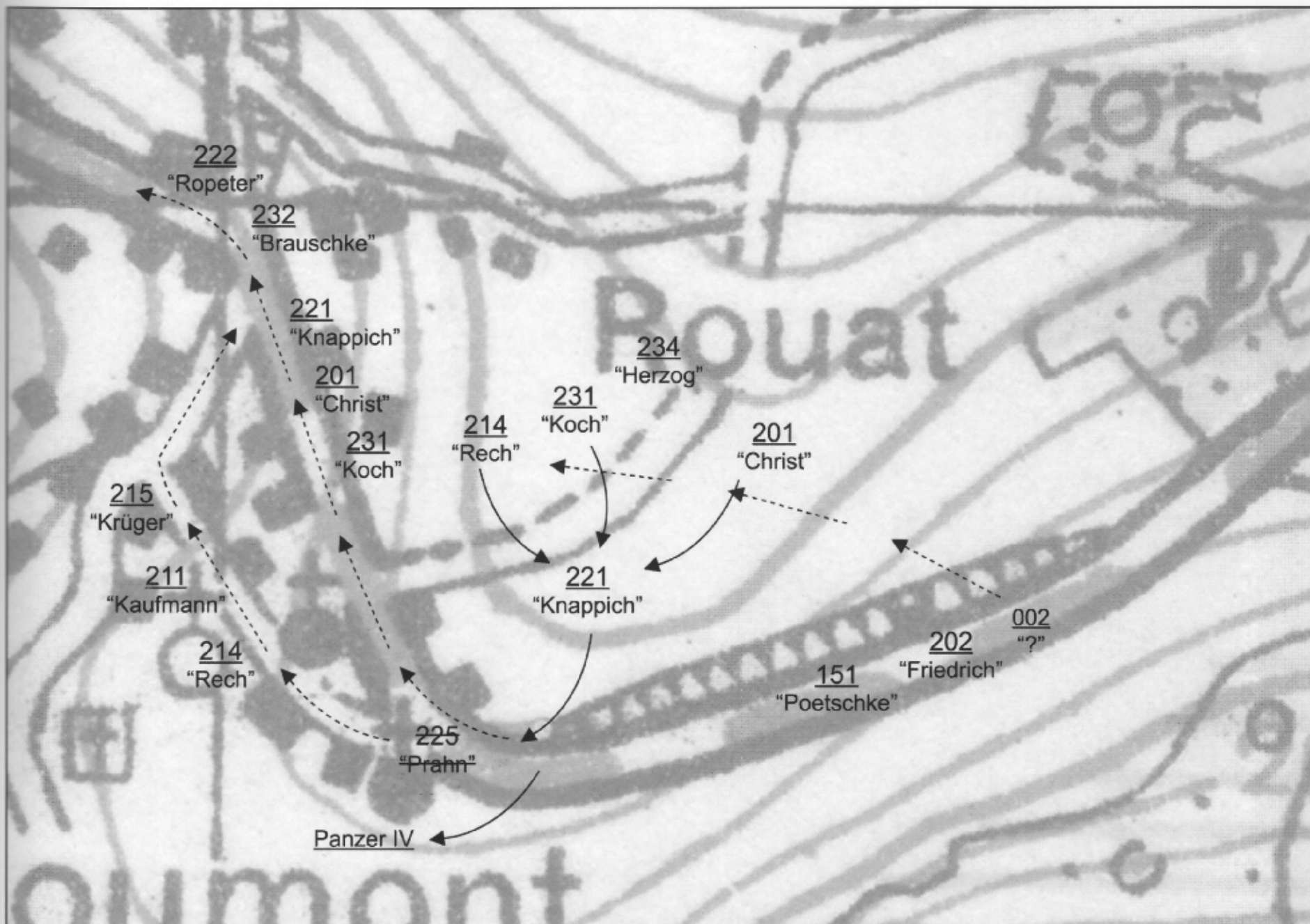
At 0910, Co I had been forced back to the church and was still withdrawing. At the same time, C Battery, 400th FA Bn fired its first volley into STOUMONT without the aid of a forward observer. Twenty minutes later, the commanding officer of the artillery unit would leave the regimental PC and drive to STOUMONT in an effort to fix the bad situation in person.

The Germans now smoked the right flank of 3rd Bn. The Americans drew the correct conclusion from this that there would soon be a flanking manoeuvre along the southern outskirts of the village.⁴

The N.33 highway splits at the height of "Robinson House". The main road continues to the right of the church. On the left, the route descends in to the centre of the village. The narrow road is called the village street or "Rue du Village". The German film footage deals with the push along this stretch of road. Here the Panzergrenadiere were supported by the Panthers 215 (Uscha. Krüger), 211 (Ustuf. Kaufmann) and 214 (Uscha. Rech) together

with at least one Panzer IV. Uscha. Rech was driving down this lane later than the others and it seems that he was no longer engaged in any combat activities here. The tanks systematically fired into the houses. John E. Lovell, a veteran from Co I, recollects the situation and what happened later:

*"After reporting to the company command post (in the centre of the town), we took over the house across the street from it. At sun up the Germans began to move into the town. I have been told that they were advancing with thirty Royal Tigers. The German infantry were following the tanks, wearing American uniforms and white camouflage for we were in heavy snow (note: There was no heavy snow on the ground and no white camouflage used by the Germans as far as we know). This was the first SS Panzer division, Hitler's personal division, with Adolf Hitler written on the cuffs on their uniform. We came under heavy fire from their infantry. As their tanks would advance, they would put one round from their 88's into each house and building. For some reason they did not fire into our house. We did take several casualties from the small arms fire. There was no way for us to get out without crossing an open road to the front or an open field to the rear, which would have given the Germans direct fire on us. We retreated to the basement, hoping to get out later; the Germans had placed several soldiers on the first floor, but they did not check the basement. We stayed there for two days, sleeping on a pile of coal. One of us would stay awake to keep the others from snoring; there were approximately ten or twelve of us in the basement. About this time our artillery caught up with us and began shelling the town. A German tank stopped in front of the house. The soldiers from the tank came in the house and were surprised to find us, thinking the house had been searched. They turned us over to the SS infantry and to the rear. This was the SS, they were a tough bunch!! While searching us one of the SS troopers thought my overshoes looked German and accused me of taking them off a dead German soldier. He put his rifle to my forehead. I remember that on the inside of my overshoes was the US Rubber Co. trademark. I quickly persuaded him to let me show it to him. He was satisfied that they were not German."*⁵



Map 4: Breakthrough



The Americans slowly retreated to the battalion command post in the middle of the town, where the defence line again stabilized mainly because of the friendly tank support.⁶

Due to a message from the CO, 400th FA Bn, who had arrived at STOUMONT a short while ago, the time at which the battalion gave up the CP can be established: At 0940 he left his position, destroyed his radio and took to the friendly lines on foot.⁷ The 743rd Tk Bn announced the destruction of two halftracks at 0905 and 0915 respectively and of two further tanks at 0920.

27 This Panther moving down the N.33 into STOUMONT village can be identified as having been manufactured by the Daimler-Benz assembly plant by the placement of the Balkenkreuz on the port side rear stowage box. The lack of a crew compartment heater also helps narrow down when the production date of this particular vehicle might be, effectively limiting it to September 1944.

There were relatively few Panthers involved in the battle for STOUMONT so the lack of a crew heater helps narrow down the possibilities of which particular Panther we can see in this photo passing Rottf. Prahm's Panther 225 which is now well alight. Given its production features and markings it can only be one of three vehicles either Panther 202, 232 or 231, all of the other Panthers involved in the battle either had crew heaters or were manufactured by M.A.N. who used a different placement for the rear Balkenkreuz. Through the trees on the left of the photo we can see the "Robinson House".

(Transit Film)

Together with the claim already mentioned before in the Unit Journal of 119th Inf Rgt occurring at 0810, this equals exactly the number of destroyed armoured vehicles 2nd Pltn at ROUÂ later put forward together with many enemy infantry advancing from the east. It appears that only these hits were recorded. The claims from 1st Pltn with Co I regarding, "two enemy tanks and one halftrack and many enemy infantry advancing from the south" apparently were not true. It remains unclear whether we are dealing with incomplete records, problems with transmission (maybe only 2nd Pltn could maintain radio contact), later additions or double kills. What can be ruled out however is the actual loss of another two to four Panthers in this phase. There are only two Panther wrecks documented in STOUMONT, Panthers 225 (Prahm) and 234 (Herzog). The loss of Herzog's Panther two days later is beyond the scope of this book.

Two Sd.Kfz. 251/9 (Kanonenwagen) from 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 were indeed knocked out. The Kanonen-Schützenpanzerwagen (KwK-SPW = armoured troop carrier mounting a 7,5cm assault gun) under Rottf. Eduard Moser was destroyed, killing Moser. The following KwK-SPW under Uscha. Anton Motzheim was hit, too. The crew bailed out unharmed; only the driver, Strm. Moser suffered from burns.⁸

The use of KwK-SPW's by the attacking forces is further confirmed by the statement of a civilian on how his house at LA ROCHETTE (north of STOUMONT on the road to CHEFNÂ) was hit by the shell of an SPW. The 1st assault gun platoon of 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 under the command of Oscha. Pfälzer was likely supporting the infantry on the right flank of the attack.

Uscha. Anton Motzheim was the squad leader of the second squad in 1st Platoon of 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2. After the loss of his SPW he walked back with his crew towards LA GLEIZE and on the road near FROIDECOUR met Peiper, Diefenthal and his company commander, Thiele, who sat in his SPW. After being questioned about the situation and the course of the combat, Peiper ordered him and his crew

back to STOUMONT to fight on as infantry. However, a little later this order was rescinded and Motzheim now had to drive three damaged KwK-SPW's back to LA GLEIZE. He arrived there between 1000 and 1100.⁹

Not only in STOUMONT, but also in ROUÂ the defenders came under heavy attack. At least the mortars from Co M were now ready to fire with a forward observer arriving at the company CP, but they could no longer provide any efficient support to the infantry.¹⁰

At 0925 the regiment informed the division on the commitment of Co L on the battalion's left flank. Indeed it was about this time that Lt Knox received the order to cover the retreat of the rest of the battalion. Co K in the western part of the town had just been overrun and now the last of the Shermans withdrew from ROUÂ. At same time, a motorized patrol was sent by 1st Bn towards the important intersection at CHEFNÂ, north of STOUMONT. Lt Knox goes on:

"I kept close to the radio. The Germans had by this time set up a machine gun or a tank just behind the rise to our front 250 yards and were firing this down the street just outside our CP. About this time I heard Lt Kane, the company commander of Co "K", call up very excitedly. I knew he was being overrun by plenty of tanks from his flank and rear. Our orders were to hold. It wasn't good. About this time the tanks with us started to pull out. Now it was bad - very bad. I wasted no time in getting hold of the radio. I said "What do you mean hold and you take the tanks away. What do you mean?" The answer, "Continue to cover the withdrawal of the battalion". Lots of things went through my mind in a hurry. It sounded like an order to sacrifice Co "L" to save what they could of the other units. I asked "Give me clarification. It is useless without the aid of tanks. How long do you expect us to hold?" Then I got the answer I wanted, "I will have to leave that to your judgement," Col Fitzgerald said. My mind was made up. We had better get out in a hurry. Lt Parramore had told me too much about the situation on the right to make the answer anything else. Everyone was to start

working back in small units. The machine gun crew would cover us and then go back also. Kirby left with most of the CP group to let the rest of the men know about the plan. It didn't take us long. We cleared out in good shape, not bunched up badly either. The German machine gun was still firing down the street we were on. When I got back about 150 yards I found practically the whole company in one house. Everyone was pretty well frozen in position. No one dared to move. I talked to McWilliams the jeep driver about getting his jeep out, at that moment the anti-tank truck tried to pull out. The machine guns from the German tanks who were less than 200 yards from us now opened up.

28 The American defenders of STOUMONT had clearly seized on the importance of the houses at the entrance to the village adjacent to the N33. These houses were turned into heavily defended strong points and one that features prominently in the German cine film taken of the action is the "Robinson House" which we can see in this view. The distinctive construction of this building with its masonry lower floor and timber first floor has become a landmark that still looks the same sixty years later. The house sits to the left of the crossroads for the N.33 and the "Rue du Village" heading west into the village. We can see a Panzer IV Ausf. J from the 6./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 manoeuvring in the meadow, the vehicle has Thoma shields fitted but still has the "clamshell" commanders hatch rather than the later swing arm type and is most likely from the September - early October 1944 production run.

29 In the foreground we can see a wounded man lying on his back between the two crawling paratroopers who are attempting to tend to his wounds while still under fire from American positions. This is possibly the wounded crewman from Panther 225 that Hübler mentioned.

(2 x Transit Film)







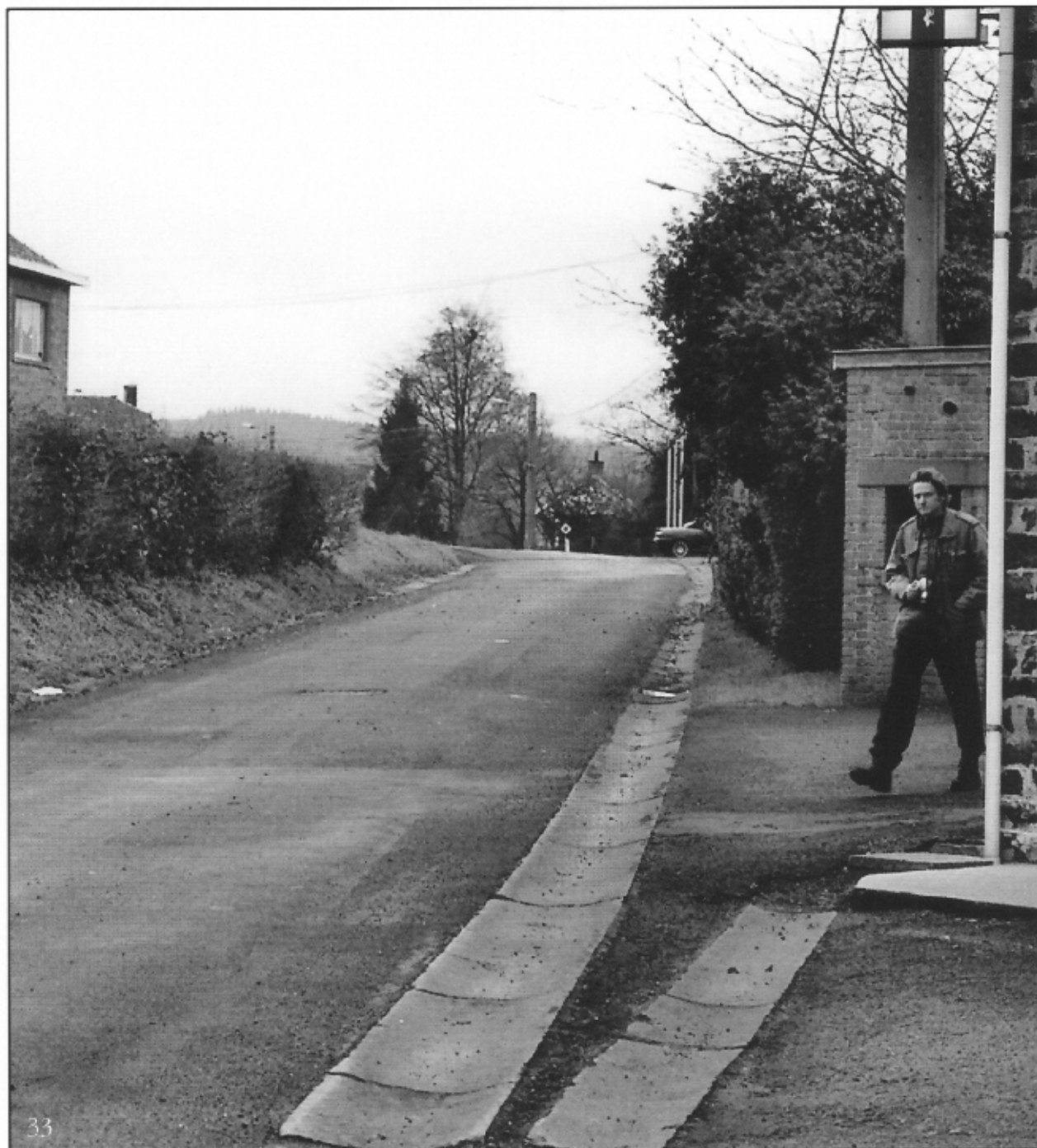


30 - 31 Stubaf. Werner Poetschke, the commander of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 joins the scene. According to Peiper, Poetschke "encouraged" his Panzer crews to continue the attack, by leaving his Befehlspanther and after approaching his own Panzers on foot, threatening to fire on them himself with a Panzerfaust if they did not continue the advance.

32 The few Panzer IV's from the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 that had made it to LA GLEIZE followed in the wake of the Panther spearhead as a second echelon. This Panzer IV Ausf. J is moving round the rear of the "Robinson House" in order to outflank the defenders.

(3 x Transit Film)





33 Hans Weber retracing the route of the German Kriegsberichterstatter in December 2004.

(Rudi Huber)

34 - 35 At the entrance to the "Rue du Village" we again meet our Kriegs-berichterstatter. He is positioned to one side of the American M3 halftrack on the left hand side of the road and from there photographed the dismounted Panzergrenadiers & Panzerpioniere of the Kampfgruppe. These troops cleared up the remaining pockets of resistance by the American defenders from Co I and in the process of doing so, they outflanked Co K in the western part of the village.

Through the smoke we can see an abandoned M4 high-speed tractor, that was one of two that belonged to the 143rd AAA Gun Battalion. According to a report written by Major Hayden, a mortar shell was responsible for the loss of the M3 halftrack on the left. The exploding ammunition from this halftrack forced the only remaining 90mm gun of the 143rd AAA in STOUMONT to be abandoned.

(1 x Ullstein Bild, 1 x Transit Film)









36 A heavily camouflaged SPW approaches another abandoned M3 halftrack near the western entrance of STOUMONT church.

37 After the attack on ROUÂ, the 1st Platoon of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 returned to the entrance of STOUMONT in order to continue its advance through the "Rue du Village". In the lead was the Panther of Uscha. Krüger (215), which we can see in this particular cine still. Although hardly visible we can make out part of the first turret number. Further identification was based upon a comparison of the different pictures showing Panther 215 after its destruction (see Chapter 9).

38 - 39 Next in line was the Panther of Ustuf. Herbert Kaufmann (211). This interesting rear view gives us a glance at the spare road wheel stored on the Panthers engine deck. Hanging from the jack bracket there is a dented bucket and we can see the distinctive damage to the

starboard exhaust pipe that will help us identify this vehicle after its loss. We also have a better view of the burning M4 high-speed tractor of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn.

40 Following in the wake of Uscha. Krüger (215) and Ustuf. Kaufmann (211) was the Panther of Uscha. Rech (214). This excellent cine still reflects the very distinctive and unusual camouflage pattern on the gun mantlet. When carefully examined the photo also reveals two jerrycans hanging on the side of the turret and a Schürze lying on the turret roof. Although wearing a pair of binoculars around his neck, Rech is still using a scissors telescope as this would give him improved vision from within the Panthers cupola and reduces the need for him to expose himself to small arms fire before he has had an opportunity to survey the surrounding terrain.

41 Further down the "Rue du Village" we stumble across another Panzer IV Ausf. J of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, being refuelled and is most likely undergoing some technical maintenance by its crew. The Panzer IV's crew all wear the leather U-Boat clothing, this uniform was highly prized by the Panzer crews as it was relatively weather proof, comfortable and afforded a level of protection from burns that their other uniforms could not provide. Partially hidden behind the advancing Panther of Uscha. Rech is an Sd.Kfz. 251/1.

(6 x Transit Film)













42 In this still Uscha Rech's Panther 214 has moved further down the street allowing us to see the glacis and both front fenders. The starboard side fender has a very distinctive bend at its edge and a perforation near the bottom outside corner, this will help in identifying the Panther from photos taken after it has been abandoned in LA GLEIZE.

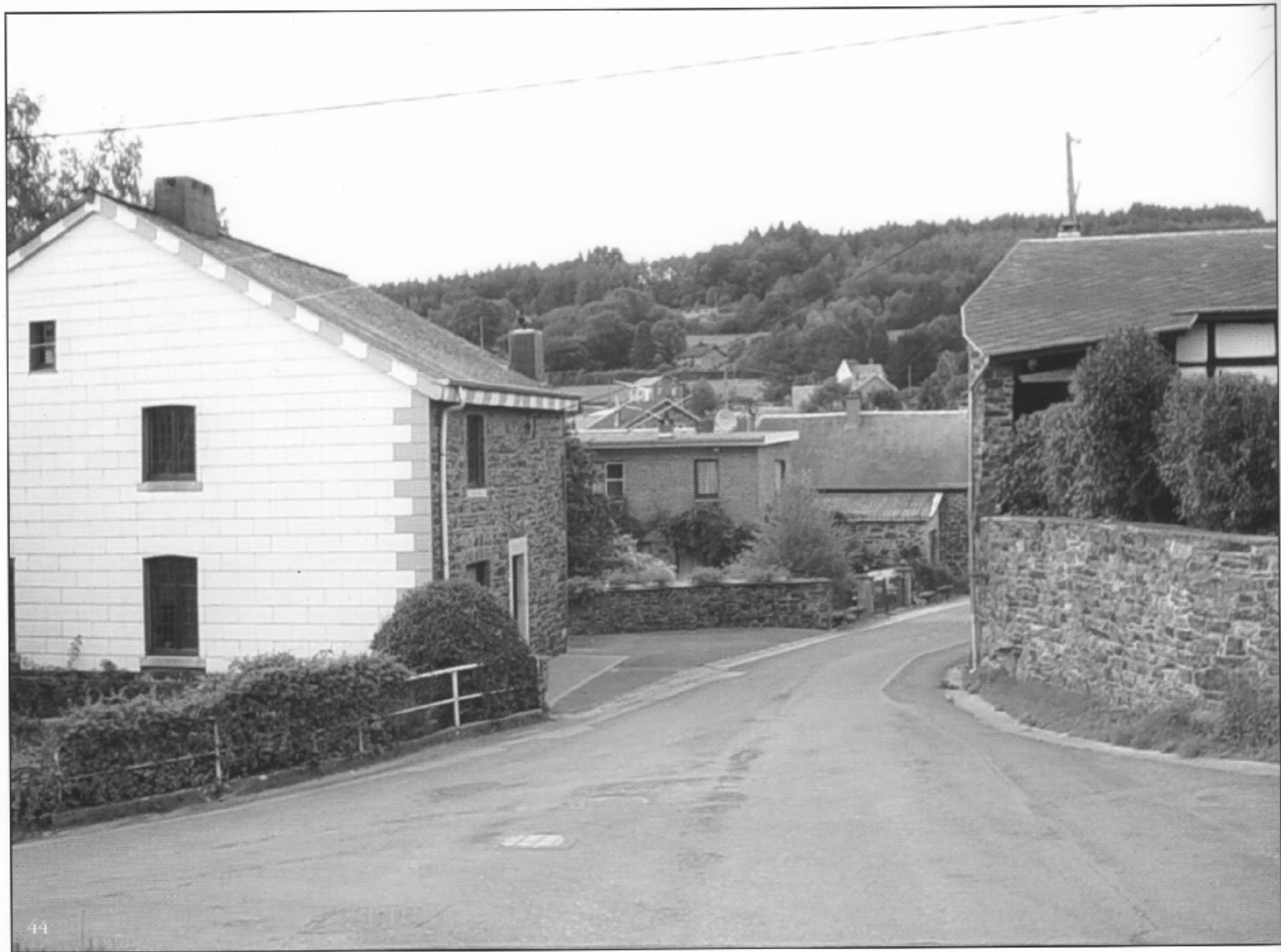
(Transit Film)

43 - 44 Very little has changed in STOU MONT in the past sixty years and it is quite easy to find the same spot used by the German newsreel cameraman.

(Simon Vosters)

45 After Panther 214 had traversed the bend, Uscha. Rech seems to have received some specific instructions from Hstuf. Diefenthal, who is standing to the left of the road. This interesting rear view gives a clear view on the turret stowage of Panther 214 which includes jerry cans, a 7.92 MG ammunition box and the case for the binoculars that Uscha. Rech is wearing. There is also a Schürze that has come of its bracket on the side of the hull that has been retrieved and placed on top of the turret roof, partially hanging over the edge. Of further note is the Schürze dangling from its bracket, which led to the positive identification of the vehicle during the attack on ROUÂ.

(Transit Film)







46 This very dramatic photo shows the moments of fear and uncertainty for the American defenders of STOU MONT as they surrender and are led back up the "Rue du Village" by the troops of Kampfgruppe Peiper. The officer in the foreground wearing the sheepskin jacket and the Feldmütze alter Art (a symbol of status and seniority) is Hstuf. Josef Diefenthal whose Panzergrenadiers have just captured these GI's who, judging from their open jackets have been searched before being ordered to proceed to the rear. Of note is the German NCO wearing the rubberized motorcyclists coat and carrying an MP 40 machine pistol, while he is almost certainly a member of Diefenthal's escort, the equipment he is carrying would be typical for any of the SPW borne Panzergrenadier. Contrary to popular belief, troops from SPW equipped Panzergrenadier units rarely carried anything other than their weapons and ammunition into combat as to do otherwise would unnecessarily hinder them.

47 After three hours, the battle for STOU MONT was over. Many American soldiers, who had failed to make a timely retreat, were made prisoners of war by Peiper's men. The 3rd Bn 119th Inf Rgt suffered particularly heavy losses with no less then 203 men reported as "missing in action".

(2 x Ullstein Bild)

The truck ran in to the ditch. The driver had been killed. I pleaded with the men, "We can't stay here. Let's go up the hill and into the woods". Lt Kennedy told them we would have to do that and quickly. Only a few men started. Lt Kennedy went and that helped. Some more men also moved out, then McWilliams said to me, "Lt Knox, what about the smoke grenades"? We all are thankful that the jeep hadn't left! Grow, from the third platoon, fired about 35 of them on that hillside. Now it was covered with smoke. I know the Germans were worried about a counter attack when they saw that and our men were thankful that they were screened. Everyone was leaving now."¹¹

At 0955 the 119th Inf Rgt sent an urgent call to its 2nd Bn to get the TD's and the four M4 tanks to HALTE at once.

It was about 1000 when Oscha. Ropeter advanced to the centre of the town at the crossroads where the road leading north branches off towards ROUÂ and CHEFNÂ. At this moment the American lines had dissolved and the Shermans from 2nd Platoon were gone from ROUÂ, covered by the tanks from 1st Platoon that had taken positions at the other end of the town where the N.33 disappears into the woods that cover the steep slopes of the AMBLÈVE valley.

Ropeter met another Panther at the crossroads. Both tank commanders had a short exchange and then Ropeter took off along the N.33 towards STOUMONT station.¹²

Today, Ropeter is no longer sure who the commander was. It wasn't the leader of 3rd Platoon, Ustuf. "Bulle" Koch for sure. He thinks of Hstuf. Ernst Otto, former CO of 4./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, a unit which did not take part in the offensive. At that time he was CO of the regimental supply company. It is therefore not probable that he was the tank commander in question. As Knappich's tank was following Ropeter, it could have been him or Kaufmann, the platoon leader of 1st Platoon.

Footnotes

1. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.
2. Trial testimony by Jochen Peiper.
3. Ferriss Report, p.28.
4. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.
5. From a letter from John E. Lovell to Warren Watson.
6. Ferriss report, p.28.
7. 400th FA Bn, S-2 Jnl.
8. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 329; Anton Motzheim, Affidavit 28.02.1946; homepage of the German Volksbund.
9. Anton Motzheim, Affidavit 28.02.1946.
10. See above, David F. Knox, 1st Lt, Co L, 119th Inf Rgt, Journal.
11. David F. Knox, 1st Lt, Co. L, 119th Inf Rgt, Journal.
12. Walter Ropeter, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 11.07.2003.



Retreat!

The time from 1000 until 1030

1010 - Situation critical; our enemy being forced back out of town of Stoumont (sic!)

119th Inf Rgt Jnl,
message from 743rd Tk Bn

1020 - Need more tanks, TD's, ammo

119th Inf Rgt Jnl,
message to Div

URGENT

From 119th
Current (= codename of 3rd Bn) forced back from its position in town. All TD's destroyed. Tank Ammunition critical. Request more tanks, is urgent.

119th Inf Rgt, written
message to Div, filed in G-3
Jnl at 201247

After three hours, the battle for STOUMONT was over. 3rd Bn 119th Inf Rgt, had been forced out of the town. Co L was able to extract itself to the north, in the direction of CHEFNÂ. It was helped by the artificial smoke Lt Knox had laid and after getting over and behind the rise near "LA ROCHETTE", the woods covered the retreat. The company could retreat in fairly good shape, but was disorganized.

Lt Knox continues:

"I hadn't left yet, I was worried about Parramore. About that time, Capt Del Bene called me on the radio and asked if we could set up a line on the top of the hill. It was too late for that now. Control of the company was lost. Lunt and I started up the hill. The smoke was rising. We really covered the territory. The tanks were shooting both direct fire and machine gun fire up that hill. Lunt began to falter. I was afraid he would pass out on me. I told him to throw the radio away. He began to cry. "I've never left one behind yet" he told me. I had to order him to get rid of it. So he destroyed it and we caught a breather in a little house which I was afraid the tank would blast to bits any minute. We were off again. We had picked up a boy by the name of Farmer and a wounded man. We carried the wounded man to a small shack, made him comfortable and told him the sad facts. There was no way for him to continue. I gave him a canteen of water and told him he would have to let the German medics take care of him. We had to leave. We made another run for the woods. There was still 150 yards to cover to the beginning of the sparse woods. We went deep into the woods and then caught another little breather. I thought I could hear our tanks withdrawing so we headed for the road where we could hear them.

*We planned on catching a ride out. We started down the ridge (Author's note: towards the N.33) and then saw the big black cross which wasn't the white star of an American tank! Up the hill we went again. They had seen us and put some fire at our feet. We were deep in the woods in nothing flat. We held a council of war and took off with the compass in my hand. Anywhere north and west should be good. All the rest of the men had left. I had lost my carbine when we picked up the wounded boy. Lunt had a pistol and Farmer had a M1. We discarded our excess equipment and kept deep in the woods. About three o'clock we came out on a road. A house was across the field in an open area. We crawled out through the brush and had control of the road. A vehicle was approaching. What do you know! It was an American jeep. We talked to the officer in it and found out that our company was only about 300 yards down the road (Author's note: At the crossroads near CHEFNÂ). We were happy to see them and they were happy to see us."*¹

Things were more complicated for the remainder of the battalion. Co I, which would bring back only 24 men after the fight and Co K together with elements of the 823rd TD Bn had to retreat along the N.33 and the Germans followed on their heels. Lt Springfield of A-1 is said to have been the last man out of town.²

Their retreat was covered by the ten Shermans under Lt Macht. Miraculously, the tankers had not lost a single tank during the engagement in the town, but now they were almost out of gas and ammunition.³ C-10 had lost communication with the other tanks due to the antenna being blown away. For a moment, the tank was considered to have been lost. The 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt noted down that it only fought along nine friendly tanks. This error would lead to a hair-raising incident later on. C-10 must have been the last tank pulling out, backing up the hill, turning around and then racing to reach the own lines again with the turret pointed backwards. Both other platoons had probably already left the battlefield by then.⁴

The 2nd Platoon at ROUÂ (Lt Clyde S. Thornell) covered the 1st Platoon (Lt Francis Sweeny), which after reaching the woods, covered the retreat of the 2nd Platoon in return. Some of the

American infantry could hang on to some of the tanks. Lt Sweeny was wounded in the head by shrapnel, Lt Thornell received a shrapnel wound in the back.⁵

Although alarmed early and even said to have gone to the aid of 3rd Bn before 0800 (see above), 1st Bn did not reach STOU MONT in time. The reasons for this apparent failure are hard to discern. Also, the force used for this relief amounted only to Company C stationed way back at HALTE. It is said that this company under Capt Donald R. Fell left HALTE in trucks at about 1000. At TARGNON the column met the first stragglers from 3rd Bn and continued for 500 yards, de-trucked and marched on. Capt Fell reached the outskirts of STOU MONT, but could not find the CO of 3rd Bn to whom he had to report. Instead he met with Lt Macht of the 743rd Tk Bn and both men agreed to tie in their tank and infantry forces and act as rearguard. This decision was later approved by their respective battalion commanders.⁶

The 1st Bn started out the day with the following strength: HQ-136, A-176, B-155, C-149, D-148. In addition to improving its positions at TARGNON, it was patrolling the area heavily. One such motorized patrol we know of was sent to the crossroads near CHEFNÂ (see above). One platoon from Co B together with the battalion's AT Platoon was ordered out on the right flank to furnish security for the 400th FA Bn. It might well have used the bridge at Pont de TARGNON to cross the AMBLÈVE to get to their positions. At some point the decision must have been made to pull back Co's A and B to block the N.33 in front of the regimental PC instead of sending them into STOU MONT. This liberated Co C from its task of providing security to the PC and it was attached to 3rd Bn. This would explain the fact that TARGNON was found undefended by the Germans even though the 1st Bn must have bivouacked there during the night.

Curtis A. Martell led a platoon in Co C and has this to say:

"We got as close to the front of the German attack force as possible before leaping off the trucks. It was past noon before we

started to head up a hill toward LA GLEIZE, Belgium (Author's note: this was before noon and the location must read STOU MONT). We did not get very far before we saw a Jeep that had about 10 men on it racing down the hill. They were evidently part of the 3rd Bn. It all happened so fast that I was unable to see the serial markings on the jeep. A lone rifleman was running along side the jeep and it amazed me to see him throw down his rifle and continue running. My runner and I were at the head of our column of troops and needless to say, we were alarmed at what was happening. The Company Commander gave us the order to turn around and head back down the road where we had come from. My runner and I were at the back of the column and we heard tanks at the top of the hill where we had left. The lead tank shot his 88mm cannon at us that hit a chicken coop near us and the feathers were flying all over the place."

T/5 Ray Hasrodt could well have been behind the wheel of the jeep Curtis Martell had seen that morning:

*"When we arrived at the corner where the road turned to the left behind the house, we found about 150 3rd Bn men waiting for orders. Sgt Ryan, seeing the German tanks and infantry behind us getting closer, said the best thing he could see to do was to get as many men on the jeep and trailer as possible to make a dash down the exposed hill. Believe it or not we got 21 men on that jeep and trailer. They really piled on. I was told to get moving and gave the jeep every bit of accelerator it had. I remember looking to my left and seeing German infantry firing at us as we dashed down the hill. I was pleasantly surprised that we were not fired on by the tanks. We must have surprised them. We felt like ducks in a shooting gallery."*⁸

With this the fight for STOU MONT ended for the day. The Kampfgruppe had captured more than 200 American soldiers at STOU MONT. The 3rd Battalion that had started out with 447 men had suffered the loss of 241 men. The casualties included 8 killed, 30 wounded and 203 missing (of these latter, ten returned to duty the next day and 143 were recovered in STOU MONT and LA GLEIZE). Co I was down to 24 men and Co K down at 50-55 men.

Co L was in comparably good shape with 80 men, as was the heavy Company M with 100 men. The battalion's AT platoon had lost all three 57mm AT guns.⁹

The two platoons from Co A, 823rd TD Bn, reported 9 men wounded and 16 missing in action (corrected figures December 25th, 1944). Material losses were one halftrack destroyed and five in enemy hands, one 76mm TD gun destroyed and seven in enemy hands, one German 7,5cm AT gun, 1/4 ton and one 1/2 tons with trailer also in enemy hands. Co A made up some of the losses with two German 7,5cm AT guns from its stocks of captured material. Furthermore, due to the recent conversion to M10 tank destroyers, battalion maintenance could replace four towed 76mm TD guns at once.¹⁰

Battery C, 143rd AAA Bn had lost its two 90mm AA guns, at least two high-speed tractors and one halftrack loaded with ammunition at STOU MONT.

Material losses incurred by the Germans amounted to Panther 225 together with at least two SPW's. Panther 221 was damaged, but could still move. The claims made by Co C, 743rd Tk Bn amounting to 5 tanks and 3 halftracks have already been dismissed above. Also the claims of the two tanks knocked out by Pfc Darago and Pvt Seaman don't seem to be valid. The tank claimed by 823rd TD Bn during the early combat could not be found either. It cannot be ruled out that some German armoured vehicles received hits and were damaged, but apart from the one lost Panther, there were no permanent breakdowns.

Although the Americans put up some resistance, the lack of artillery support made this a relatively easy victory for the Germans. After the initial scouting, there was no need to call upon the 11./SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 that was kept in reserve to deliver a mechanized push.

Although 2nd Bn experienced delays in their relief by 82nd AB Div, it was possible to pull out the attached 197th FA Bn at 1000 and move it up north to NONCEVEUX. At noon, this unit was in position and ready to fire again.¹¹

Even before the fight was over, Ostubaf. Peiper drove to STOUMONT in the vehicle of Paul Fröhlich, member of the regimental reconnaissance platoon (Erkunderzug). Because of the heavy fight still raging, he stopped next to the "Maison Robinson" and got off the vehicle. Near the "Maison Robinson" stood Rottf. Prahm's burning Panther and the abandoned 90mm AA gun which had knocked it out. Peiper had intended to install a forward command post in the "Maison Robinson" and sent Fröhlich away with instructions to bring up the radio section that was still at Château FROIDECOUR. The officers of his staff arrived, as did Stubaf. Poetschke, Ostubaf. von Westernhagen, Hstuf. Nüske and his signal officer. An American medic standing by was waved over and interrogated, and then Peiper went over to inspect the 90mm AA gun with the idea of turning the piece against its former owners. The plan had to be dropped because all the optics were missing and no ammunition could be found. When Peiper returned to the "Maison Robinson", the area came under heavy artillery fire and he was forced to take cover nearby.¹²

Let us remember that the first volley fired by 400th FA Bn was at 0910. It is thus possible that Peiper was at STOUMONT as early as 0900.

Here he met his adjutant and some other men of his staff. He ordered his adjutant to set up the CP in the vicinity, because the American artillery had zeroed in on the "Maison Robinson". While Peiper was still near the "Maison Robinson", Hstuf. Klingelhöfer, CO of the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 arrived, Klingelhöfer reported to Peiper and was ordered to go back to WANNE to get his own company and the rest of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Then STAVELOT was to be retaken with the aid of Kampfgruppe Knittel before bringing both tank companies up to LA GLEIZE. But first, he and the crew were ordered to take a nap, because they had not slept since leaving the assembly area on December 16th.

An armoured ambulance (Sdkfz 251/8) carrying Hstuf. Dr. Neumeier from the Stabskompanie, 1./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, had closely followed the Panthers, and upon reaching STOUMONT, had parked near "Maison Robinson". Neumeier had the wounded brought into the sturdy house. At the same time, about thirty

Americans were captured and brought out of the cellar, where - it will be remembered - civilians had also taken refuge.¹³

Peiper mounted Stubaf. Poetschke's jeep and together they drove towards the town centre. At the western edge of the town they met Hstuf. Diefenthal and Peiper ordered him to take up the pursuit of the Americans immediately. Diefenthal should use all available vehicles and speed up the advance. Staying behind at STOUMONT and quartered in the town were the paratroopers, elements from the 9./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 and 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1. The Pioniere (combat engineers) were tasked with mopping up STOUMONT. They established a CP in a butcher's shop, but later that day moved it to the Kinderheim (Sanatorium ST. EDOUARD).¹⁴ The main infantry forces remaining was the as yet uncommitted 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, which at some point before 1100 received orders to proceed.¹⁵

At least Ostuf. Preuss, company commander of 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt.2, continued on to STOUMONT station and set up his CP there (Affidavit of Herbert Stock, Schwäbisch Hall, 15.03.1946). It seems that what was left of his company went with him. This assumption is based on the declarations of Rudolf Rayer (Dachau, 26.04.1946) who states that the rest of his battalion cleared away the destroyed tank in front of the station and continued the attack sitting on the tanks. His company was then ordered to follow the battalion and was later ordered to take out tanks and anti-tank guns after the Spitze had run into resistance. According to Rayer, STOUMONT had been taken

48 At the entrance of STOUMONT, an unidentified Panther has halted on the muddy N.33. Its left stowage bin appears to have suffered minor damage and has no Balkenkreuz painted on it indicating that this Panther was manufactured by M.A.N. and is therefore possibly one of Kampfgruppe Peiper's Pantherbefehlswagens. In the foreground we can make out several empty 75mm shellcases.

(Transit Film)



by 9./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2. 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 had been mauled by the 2nd Bn 119th Inf Rgt the night before and was in bad shape. It is possible that it was also kept in reserve for the attack and was still uncommitted when the order to progress further was issued. The Malmedy trial statements also make it clear that at least the 2nd platoon of 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 stayed behind in STOUMONT.

After a brief respite, just enough time to smoke a cigarette. The Panthers of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 reorganized in the middle of the town along the N.33. Koch's tank was stationed in front of a grocery store. Horst Vollprecht noticed a SS-Kriegsbericht (war reporter) filming the scene. Then the first tanks headed off towards STOUMONT station. At first, only a handful of tanks seem to have followed the Americans. They were probably (and in this order):

Panther 222: Oscha. Ropeter
 Panther 201: Ostuf. Christ
 Panther 231: Ustuf. Koch
 Panther 221: Hscha. Knappich
 Panther 215: Uscha. Krüger

There is no doubt that Oscha. Ropeter was in the lead tank. While still in STOUMONT, Hscha. Knappich was next in line, followed by Ostuf. Christ and then Ustuf. Koch. While leaving STOUMONT, Knappich was overtaken by Ostuf. Christ and Ustuf. Koch, as Knappich's loader later stated. There is no apparent reason for Christ and Koch moving directly behind Ropeter in such an exposed position and it is possible Kübler's recollection was incorrect. Based on statements in the Malmedy trial, we think that Uscha. Krüger must also have been in this first batch, following Hscha. Knappich.¹⁶

In the meantime, the retreat of the 3rd Bn was anything but orderly. Discarded personal equipment littered the N.33 between STOUMONT and STOUMONT station. Only the freshly committed Co C, 1st Bn, together with the M4 Shermans of the 743rd Tk Bn could delay the German advance. There was an

exchange of fire between the latter and the Panthers while still in the town. Pfc Harlan Whitcombe, loader in a M4 Sherman, Co C, 743rd Tk Bn, remembers firing at a German tank that suddenly appeared at the other end of the road while his commander was outside the tank reconnoitring. They backed off hurriedly after having taken the commander on board again.¹⁷

Footnotes

1. David F. Knox, 1st Lt, Co I, 119th Inf Rgt, Journal.
2. 823rd TD Bn, ABR No. VII, p.5.
3. The claims that the Germans destroyed 10 tanks at STOUMONT (Ralf Tiedmann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/ 2, p.103) is wrong.
4. T/5 Harold Rosenberg, D-Day Normandy website.
5. 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History, p.22.
6. Ferriss report, p.29f.
7. Curtis A. Martell, My memory of the Battle of the Bulge, taken from CRIBA website, cited with his permission from the CRIBA website, additional information through correspondence between Hans Weber and Curtis Martell, January 2007.
8. Stoumont then La Gleize and finally some turkey, 30th Inf Div News, early winter 2003.
9. Ferriss Report, p.34.
10. 823rd TD Bn, ABR No VII, p.5.
11. 197th FA Bn, ABR Dec. 44.
12. Karl Paul Fröhlich, trial statement.
13. Fritz Willecke, trial statement.
14. Josef Pichler, Eidesstattliche Erklärung dated 19th April 1948.
15. Undated letter from Rolf Ehrhardt to Gerd Cuppens; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.329; Michael Reynolds: The Devil's Adjutant, p.145 f.
16. Walter Köbler, sworn statement, Gross-Umstadt, 04.10.1947; Terrain analysis June 1991; Horst Vollprecht, trial statement.
17. Hans J. Wijers, Die Brücke von Stavelot und Trois Ponts, p.76.





49 As Diefenthal's Panzergrenadiere marched numerous captured American soldiers to the PoW cage at the Château FROIDECOUR, a heavily camouflaged Sd.Kfz. 251/1 continues its advance. Behind the line of PoW's we can make out the remains of an unknown vehicle that has been pushed to the side of the road.

(Transit Film)

50 After the capture of STOUMONT, Peiper had intended to install his forward Command Post in the "Maison Robinson". This famous photograph was taken outside the house where the officers of Peiper's staff, as well as Stubaf. Werner Poetschke, Ostubaf. Von Westernhagen, Hstuf. Nüske and his signal's officer were ordered to attend. We can see Stubaf. Werner Poetschke having a conversation with some of the men of the Kampfgruppe who are escorting some PoW's. Although it is hard to confirm, we are possibly looking at the canvas covered Sd.Kfz. 251/8 of Hstuf. Dr. Neumeier (Stabskompanie I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1).

(Stefan De Meyer)

51 - 52 The heavily armed Grenadiers and Fallschirmjäger of Kampfgruppe Peiper share out the spoils of war, captured cigarettes and beer in front of the Café Grégoire. The Grenadier with the Panzerfaust is wearing a wool M42 field blouse with the cotton drill M44 erbsenmuster camouflage jacket over this and M42 camouflage smock on top. They are all in good spirits having captured the town relatively quickly.

53 An MG 42 team prepares to continue the advance. The men are all well equipped and most of them wear the M44 2 piece cotton drill camouflage uniform. Their faces are devoid of emotion in contrast to the scenes outside the Café Grégoire.

54 - 55 - 56 Hello Joe! A little light relief for a small group of Grenadiers and Fallschirmjäger. The Fallschirmjäger have captured a Jeep and a US field telephone that is still intact. One of the Fallschirmjäger is conversing with the Americans on the other end of the field telephone to his and the surrounding men's amusement. He has a minor head wound but appears to be unconcerned

about it which speaks volumes about the men's morale.

57 - 58 - 59 In contrast to popular belief, the troops of the Leibstandarte did not receive all of the latest and best clothing and equipment. These young grenadiers are clothed in M42 woollen uniforms and the late pattern woollen greatcoat. Two have been issued with M42 steel helmets and the third with a M40 helmet none of which have a cloth camouflage cover. The 2 piece padded winter suit was very much a rarity in the ranks of the Leibstandarte but it can be seen in some numbers amongst other units involved in the Ardennes offensive leading to the conclusion that the Leibstandarte did not always receive special consideration regarding supplies.

(9 x Transit Film)







53













59

Towards Stoumont station

The time from 1030 to 1100

1035 - Current (= codename of 3rd Bn) is being pushed back, We need ammo for the tanks badly. The situation here is critical and our cans are just about out of ammo. We have lost all our TDs and ATs. They have been pushed out of the town. Herlong (ie 1st Bn) is filling the breach. I have sent for the tanks Mac has (McCown, 2nd Bn) but it is only 4. There is a force of 30 to 40 tanks forcing them back.

Conversation between Col Sutherland, 119th Inf Rgt, and Col. Stephens, HQ 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

1035 - They want more tanks down here - It means taking them away from someone else but we can do that. We are sending McDowell down to La Gleize. We will see what we can get. I suggest you call Master (codename 1st US Army HQ) and see if you can get the 740th.

Conversation between Maj Gen Hobbs and Col Stephen, 30th Inf Div G-3 Jnl.

1050 - 90mm guns koed 3 heavy tanks and bazookas koed 2 light tanks

119th Inf Rgt Jnl,
report from 143rd AAA Bn

1055 - S - It was all right earlier. I just got word that they lost their TD's and got pushed out of Stoumont. He has another battalion in back of it. What he needs is tanks and TD's. G - How did he lose his TD's? S - Tanks knocked them out. G - Did you get the tanks? S - Yes, but we can't trade even with them. G - How far did they push them back? S - Just out of town. G - They are going to counterattack there? S - Oh, yes. The haven't been pushed back too far. They are not running, but have just been pushed back.

Conversation between Col Stephens, HQ 30th Inf Div, and Maj Gen Gerow, V Corps; 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

As we have seen, the remaining Panthers had set out towards STOUMONT station almost as soon as the town had been taken. This railway station lies on the bottom of the AMBLÈVE Valley. The road descends from STOUMONT and, leaving the locality, enters the woods and traverses the valley of the small tributary creek Ruisseau de TARGNON by way of two spectacular hairpins. It then reaches the village of TARGNON lying on an open hill spur and further descends, again entering the woods, and finally levels out at the first building of the station. The station has now fallen into disuse and been partially demolished, but in 1944, it was actually a handful of buildings forming a surprisingly vast complex for such a small town two miles further up the hill.

At 1035, 119th Inf Rgt described the situation as critical. They were running out of ammunition and had lost all their anti-tank guns. The four M4's on the way from 2nd Bn were impatiently anticipated. The division urged V Corps to free 740th Tk Bn for commitment with the hard-pressed regiment. At the same time, a relief attack on LA GLEIZE by the 117th Inf Rgt was conceived. Preparations commenced at once. The 400th FA Bn on the far-right flank beyond the AMBLÈVE River received orders from the 119th Inf Rgt to displace to the rear and to join up with the 197th FA Bn then assembling at NONCEVEUX. At 1040, Maj Gen Hobbs visited the CP of 119th Inf Rgt with promises of getting the 740th Tk Bn to come for help. Finally the division thought it would be about time to inform Col Duncan, CO of 743rd Tk Bn, on the bad supply situation with his Company C. Upon hearing this, Col Duncan promised to get the much needed supplies down right away.¹

The 119th Inf Rgt was further supported by another 90mm AA gun. This was gun No 1, Battery C, 143rd AAA Bn, under the command of the battery commander himself, Lt Leon E. Kent. Lt Kent had stayed with the regimental CP and when hearing of the loss of the first AA gun at STOUMONT early in the morning, he ordered one of the two 90mm AA guns at HALTE to move up to STOUMONT to help Lt McGuire carry through his mission. The officer in charge did not urge his crew to hurry and after a while,

Lt Kent went out to investigate why no report on their movement had come. Angered, Lt Kent ordered the other lieutenant away to take charge of the other gun and took matters into his own hands. The gun and tractor moved to the edge of STOUMONT and stopped there. Alarmed by the sight of retreating troops, Lt Kent and his driver proceeded on foot to contact Lt McGuire and to check out the situation. Upon finding his men and learning of the loss of the other gun, Lt Kent quickly ordered them to mount their tractors and leave STOUMONT. He then had his own gun turned around and was on the move towards HALTE again, scouting ahead with his Jeep for a good anti-tank position. The 90mm AA gun was finally set up at STOUMONT station. There was no time to sandbag the position and the entire area was covered with cobblestones but Lt Kent hoped for the American infantry to rally in front of his position. He assumed that he would be able to get a flanking shot at the first tank, because there was a sharp turn to the right about 300-400 yards before reaching STOUMONT station.

Ostuf. Christ and his tanks passed TARGNON without encountering any resistance. It is reported that the company commander's tank developed a mechanical problem with its final drive shortly after STOUMONT.²

It is also possible that they were engaged by elements of the 400th Field Artillery Bn (Armd), which fired four fire missions before withdrawing.³

Whatever the reason, it seems that again an exchange of positions took place at this location, as Knappich now moved in front of Christ to be second in line, just behind the only remaining tank of his platoon, Ropeter's 222.

The American infantry laid some mines and pulled some daisy chains, but these obstacles didn't hold up the advance for long. No American infantry took up position at STOUMONT station either - instead they passed Lt Kent's position as quickly as possible. Finally a jeep with a Captain pulled up. The officer, possibly Capt Fell, CO of Co C, 1st Bn, shouted: *"This is the last*







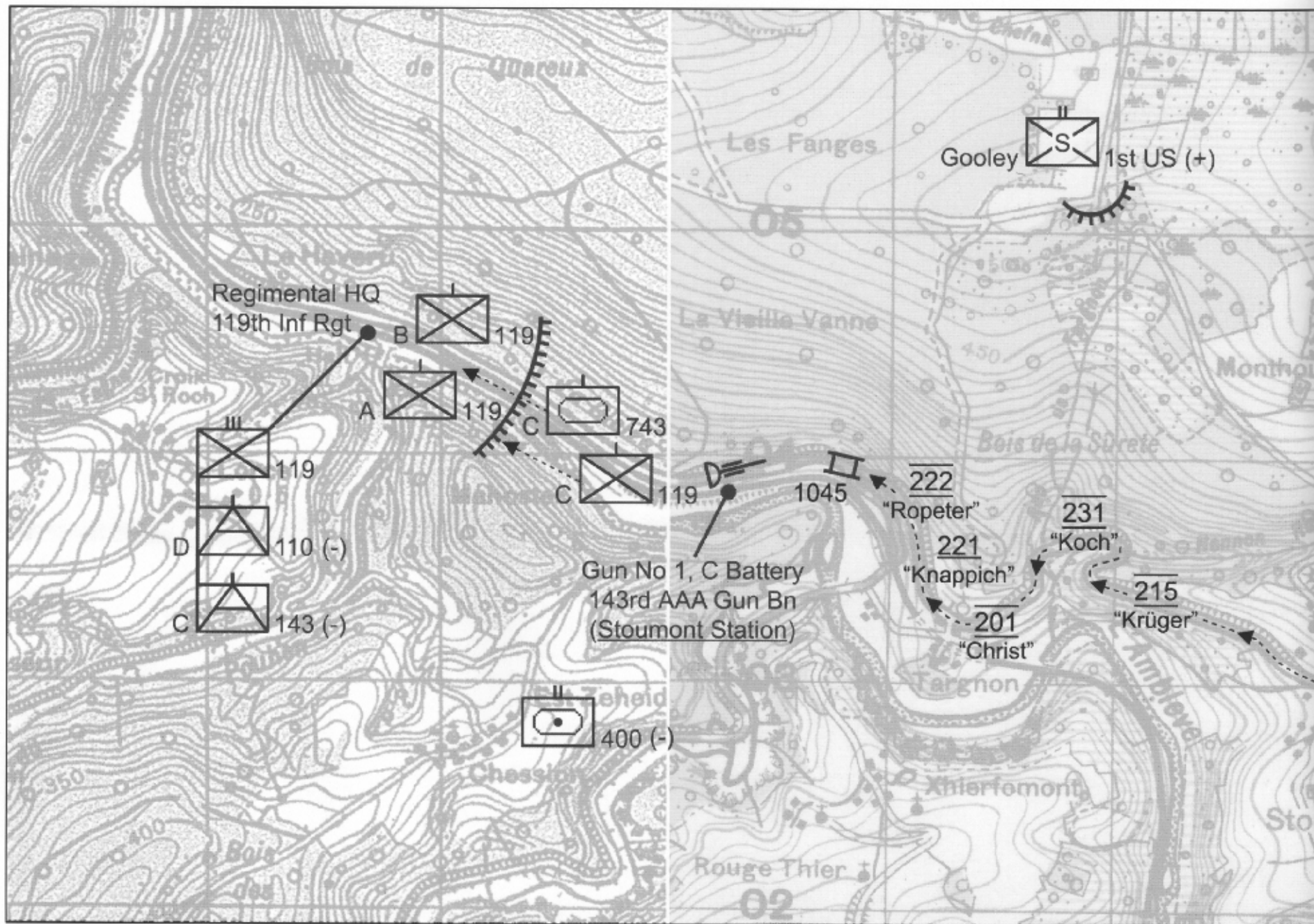
60 The village of TARGNON in December 2004.

(Rudi Huber)

61 - 62 As soon as STOUMONT had been taken, the remaining Panthers of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 continued along the N.33 towards TARGNON and STOUMONT station. A further 1.5 km down the road, at NAZE, a minor road crossed the AMBLÈVE to the West and continued south towards WERBOMONT, Peiper's next goal.

At STOUMONT station the leading Panther of Oscha. Walter Ropeter (222) was knocked out by men of C Battery, 143rd AAA Gun Bn, who had set up their deadly 90mm AA Gun behind one of the buildings belonging to the station's complex. While overtaking the burning mount of Ropeter, the Panther of Hscha. Knappich (221), also received several hits. Although damaged, the vehicle managed to limp back to LA GLEIZE, taking the survivors of Ropeter's tank on board.

(Rudi Huber, Hans Weber)



Map 5: Towards Stoumont station

of us. The next guys or tanks you see will be Germans. We dropped a daisy chain of mines across the road. You hold them. We will back with reinforcements." With this, the officer took off.

The first tank, a Panther, didn't take long to arrive on the scene. Contrary to what Lt Kent had thought, it turned left at the beginning of the bend and thus presented the frontal armour to the gun when emerging from the bend. Undaunted by this, the 90mm AA gun fired seven to nine shots in quick succession, setting the tank on fire.⁴

It was Ropeter who was on the receiving end in the first tank. He managed to bail out suffering serious burns to his hands, forearms and face. Thanks to his leather suit, his body was not completely burned. Uscha. Schwaten, his gunner and Rottf. Strasdin, his loader, were also seriously wounded. For his radio operator Strm. Mathebowski and his driver, Strm. Schaudin, the tank became their grave. Ropeter passed out and only regained consciousness in the aid station at LA GLEIZE.⁵

The following tank commander has not been identified with certainty, although contrary to Lt Kent's observation, this tank was not knocked out. On a visit to the location in 1991, veterans claimed Ropeter was knocked out approx. 300m east of STOUMONT station.

A later investigation conducted by the men of 143rd AAA Gun Bn showed that the first hit had most likely struck the gun and disabled it. It was no longer possible to lay it on the 90mm AA gun position. While trying to overtake Ropeter, the following Panther was badly hit and both tanks blocked the road. Lt Kent speaks of eight to nine hits on the second tank and claimed it to be destroyed. This proved to be wrong. The tank, Hscha. Knappich's 221, received frontal hits while overtaking Ropeter on the left, but it was able to crawl back to LA GLEIZE with a damaged frontal drive. The action took place at 1045.

Knappich also took the survivors of Ropeter's tank on board and delivered them to the field dressing station at the LA GLEIZE

church. There was also a tank repair facility set up in this village. The 2./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had ceased to be a fighting unit. While still at the railway station, Uscha Horst Vollprecht (driver in Panther 231), took an interest in the frontal armour of Panther 221 and noticed multiple deflected hits.⁶⁻⁷

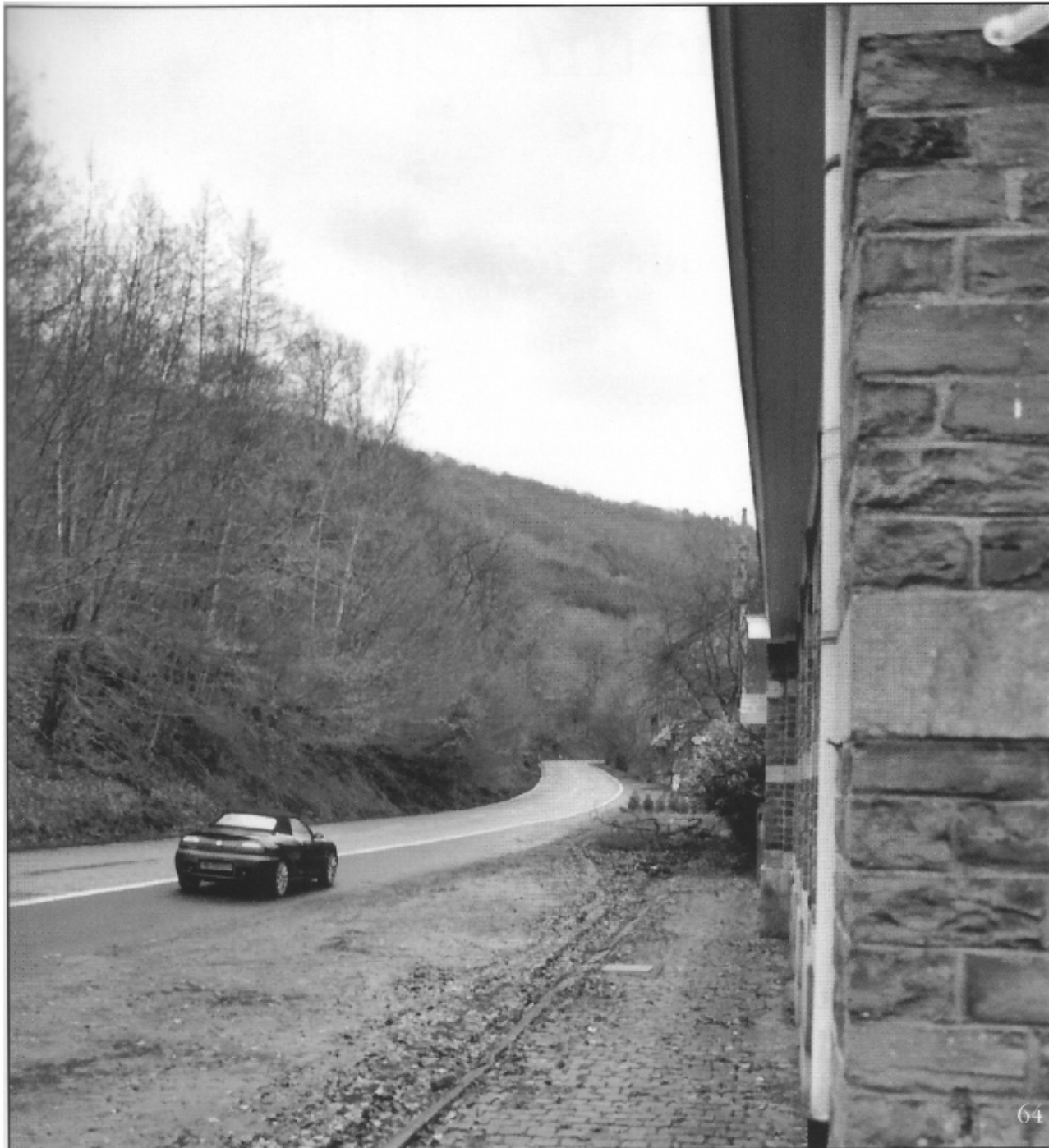
Most accounts put the German push beyond STOUMONT past noon. However, the reports of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn and the tell-tale claim in the Journal of 119th Inf Rgt rules this out. STOUMONT station was already in German hands at 1100, barely an hour after STOUMONT had fallen. According to the Ferriss Report, p. 31, the 90mm gun destroyed at least one Mk V (Panther) and one halftrack before it was destroyed in turn.

In the meantime, the first Panzergrenadiers from 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 had also reached the combat scene. After the sudden loss of the lead tank, Oscha. Rudolf Rayer received orders to take out the enemy position with his dismounted company. At the nearby railway underpass, infantry climbed onto the railroad tracks, followed by at least one SPW. This approach permitted them to bypass the American gun position at STOUMONT station, which was to their right and on the other side of the station building. According to Oscha. Rayer, the ensuing fire fight was short and his men cleared the station against light resistance. Two prisoners of war were taken, one of them wounded and lying in the meadow to the left of the station. A Volkswagen brought the Americans to a first aid installation. The Germans immediately began to clear the road and pushed the knocked-out Panther aside.⁸

Lt Kent recalls that one enemy machine gun team was driven off or killed by small arms fire (actually by a .50 cal HMG mounted on a M4 high-speed tractor), but due to the gun now being in an unfavourable position, it had to be given up. A rifle grenade was fired into the breech and the men fell back.⁹

At TARGNON, part of the III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 had taken a narrow and steep track towards the small group of houses called





63 When informed of the loss of the first AA gun at STOUMONT early in the morning, Lt Leon E. Kent, the battery commander, ordered one of his two 90mm AA guns at HALTE to move up to STOUMONT. At STOUMONT Lt Kent stumbled across Lt McGuire, who reported the loss of the other 90mm AA gun. Lt Kent then had his own gun returned to its original position at HALTE. He scouted ahead for a suitable position to set up his gun and it was finally brought into a new position at STOUMONT station. When the American infantry retreated behind this new position, the gun became isolated. Lt Kent hoped to score a flanking shot on the first German tank to come round the bend in the road, thus blocking the German advance along the N.33. In this photograph we can see the remnants of this gun. The gun crew were obliged to withdraw after the Grenadiers accompanying the Panthers threatened to outflank them and they destroyed their weapon with a rifle grenade that was fired into the breech before they withdrew.

(Lee Archer)

64 This photograph reveals the exact location of the 90mm AA gun. In the background we can clearly make out the bend where the Panther of Ropeter was knocked out.

(Hans Weber)

Pont de TARGNON and had secured the bridge there. A 7.5 cm gun is said to have set up at a nearby farm and fired onto American positions in the woods overlooking the N.33.¹⁰

Strm. Stock from the 2nd Platoon says that he reached STOUMONT station in his SPW around noon. He was in the platoonleader's SPW, now the mount of Rottf. Kurt Wittwer, who had taken command after Hscha. Heinz Hendel had fallen out on December 17th.¹¹

Footnotes

1. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

2. Horst Vollprecht, 01.05.1988, via Wolf Detlef Mauder.

3. Reynolds, The Devil's Adjutant, p.148; 400th FA Bn, S-3 Report 19th Dec. 1944.

4. Lt Leon E. Kent, Battery C of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn in the Battle of the Bulge.

5. Walter Ropeter, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 11.07.2003. Wolf Detlef Mauder, conversation with Timm Haasler, June 2006.

6. Michael Reynolds, The Devil's Adjutant, p. 148, based on an interview with Heinz Hofmann; Terrain analysis June 1991 via Wolf Detlef Mauder, Affidavit Walter Köbler 04.10.1947, Horst Vollprecht, trial statement.

7. Lt Leon E. Kent, Battery C of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn in the Battle of the Bulge; Extract from AA Notes, HQ ETO, 24th Jan. 1945, No. 14 regarding Anti-Tank Action by the 143rd AAA Gun Bn.

8. Rudolf Rayer, Declaration at Dachau, dated 26.04.1947.

9. Lt Leon E. Kent, Battery C of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn in the Battle of the Bulge; AA Notes, HQ ETO, 24th Jan. 1945, No 14 regarding Anti-Tank Action by the 143rd AAA Gun Bn.

10. Grégoire, Les Panzers de Peiper face à l'US Army, p.31.

11. Herbert Stock, Affidavit 15.03.1946

The Americans reorganize 8

The time from 1100 to 1200

1100 - 740th Tk Bn attached to 119th Inf. S-2 sent out to bring them here.

119th Inf Rgt Jnl.

1118 - St - Can't they cut around north and cut that road up there? Su - This situation here is a whole lot worse than you realize. ... Su - I have one battalion, Herlong's battalion on the road. The 3rd is practically out of the fight. It is badly disorganized and Fitzgerald had been wounded and evacuated ... Su - We will do the best we can. We are not doing so well on one of them, much less on two (refers to roads). St - You at least have enough to keep them from getting loose. Su - They are shooting at my CP right now. St - O.K.

Conversation between Col Sutherland, 119th Inf Rgt and Col. Stephens, HQ 30th Inf Div on blocking the road North of Stoumont, 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

1125 - 3rd Bn disorganized, is withdrawing past the C.P.; Co A, 823rd TD's lost guns.

1132 - "The Stoumont situation is not so good. We have been pushed back out of there, and are not holding them, as a matter of fact. However we have another tank battalion which will hold them. The trouble was they knocked out the TD's with the battalion there. We got some tanks, but didn't have as many TD's as they had tanks. It is not good there, but I think we can hold them off."

Col Stephens on the phone to V Corps, 30th Inf. Rgt. G-3 Jnl, TC.

1200 - 3rd Bn reorganizing and is to be used to block N road from Stoumont at road junction (619051); 2nd Bn to be used to back up 1st Bn if necessary.

119th Inf Rgt Jnl.

At 1100, Co C, 1st Bn, had retreated along the railway yard back to the bend near Ferme des Abomprés approximately 500m beyond STOUMONT station. Still in support was Co C, 743rd Tk Bn. The tanks were running out of everything by now. At the CP of the 119th Inf Rgt, spirits were low. There hardly seemed a chance of containing the German push any longer. While on a visit to the regimental CP, Maj Gen Hobbs received the news that V Corps had authorized the use of 740th Tk Bn with the 30th Inf Div. He told Col Sutherland to inform his chief of staff, Col Stephens, about this development. This was good news, although it was clear that this help

had to arrive first and could not alter the fact that the Germans were now only 1,5 kilometres away. The regimental S-2, Capt Stonesifer, was despatched at once to guide the tankers in. Col Stephens was also concerned about the road leading out of STOUMONT towards SPA and insisted on putting something there to block it. Col Sutherland was not very enthusiastic about this, as he didn't like the idea of reducing the force blocking the N.33 ahead of him. The 2nd Bn hadn't arrived yet. The telephone conversation had to end when the regimental CP came under fire.

Later that day, the S-2 of 119th Inf Rgt wrote in his Unit Report that the enemy did not press his attack beyond the west side of TARGNON (note: not true) but from there shelled STOUMONT (sic) with tank fire and some mortar fire. Obviously a lack of geographical knowledge was getting in the way of a proper report here. It is, however, not unlikely that the Germans shelled the area of HALTE at the intended crossing site with indirect fire. This fire wasn't very effective, given the fact that the Germans had only very limited artillery support available.

By now, the totally disrupted 3rd Bn had passed the lines of the 1st Bn. Reorganization commenced at once near the regimental CP. A provisional company 3rd Bn was formed from the remains of the battered line companies. The fresh Co's A and B, 1st Bn had taken positions roughly halfway between Ferme des Abomprés and HALTE. This was at a narrow spot where the N.33 runs between the AMBLÈVE River and the railroad track on the right and the heavily wooded and abrupt slope of the valley to the left. The Americans prepared for their last stand.¹ Apart from the few rounds registered near the regimental CP, nothing developed.

Col Sutherland regained confidence. At noon, he decided that the hastily reorganized remains of 3rd Bn could be used to comply with the divisional order to block the road leading north towards CHEFNÂ and SPA. At the same time, he relieved Lt Col. Fitzgerald of his command and replaced him with Capt Carlton E. Stewart, executive officer of 3rd Battalion. Capt Stewart was ordered to

lead the provisional company out of the valley uphill and through the thick woods towards the crossroads near CHEFNÂ. An anti-tank platoon of the regimental AT Company was attached to this force. It was hoped that they would find Co L somewhere around there. Arriving at the crossroads in the afternoon, a roadblock was to be set up and Capt Stewart had to continue the reorganization of the battalion.

On the southern flank, shortly after 1100, the CO of 400th FA Bn met with his battalion column and ordered eleven of the M7 Priests to remain on the hill at CHESSION to act as tank destroyers. The rest of the battalion was to proceed towards the new assembly area near NONCEVEUX. Here, shortly before noon, the 197th FA Bn was already in position and ready to fire in support of the 119th Inf Rgt.²

At 1115, division called back 1st Platoon, 30th Reconnaissance Troop, from the mission of reconnoitring the area bounded by MALMEDY, LONGFAYE, SOURBRODT and WAIMES. At 1200 the platoon had received new orders to establish contact between both 117th and 119th Infantry Regiments. This mission has to be seen in the context of the impending relief attack towards LA GLEIZE conducted by the 117th Inf Rgt. A quarter of an hour later, the platoon had commenced movement.³ Following the leading Panthers, the German infantry was reaching STOUMONT station and assembled there. Peiper was seen there conferring with Diefenthal on how to proceed. The fuel situation had become critical and was now seriously hampering any offensive plans. Ostuf. Christ polled each tank commander on how much gasoline was left.⁴

Footnotes

1. Ferriss Report, p. 31.
2. 197th FA Bn, ABR.
3. 30th Reconnaissance Troop, Jnl.
4. Horst Vollprecht, trial statement; Erwin Aumer, trial statement.

The end of the road

The time from 1200 to 1300

9

1200 - T: We just received a report that down at Stoumont there is an unimproved trail going North and there are some tanks going North on that trail. H: We have directed that they block that place at (691051). He has a Battalion not committed and also a separate Tank Battalion he is bringing in. There is a Tank Battalion that has been given to us coming from somewhere in his sector.

Telephone Conversation between
Gen Thorsten, G-3 1st US Army and
Col Hassenfelt, G-3, 30th Inf Div.

1210 - Have fallen back to 1st Bn position - followed by enemy tanks

119th Inf Rgt Jnl,
message from 743rd Tk Bn

1240 - Con. 200, enemy tanks at 610032, it is an area target.

197th FA Bn, Jnl

1300 - Knocked out another enemy tank

119th Inf Rgt Jnl,
message from 743rd Tk Bn

Around noon, the main concern for 1st US Army was the possibility of a German thrust north, not west from STOUMONT, which - in case it had materialized - would have jeopardized the Army headquarters at SPA, ringed by substantial depots of gasoline and ammunition in the surrounding woods. At 1200 a worried Gen Thorsten, G-3 1st US Army, called 30th Inf Div HQ and reported on a few tanks moving out on the trail north of STOUMONT. This trail lead to the locations of DESNIÉ, roughly five kilometres north of STOUMONT, where it split, the left track leading to LA REID, roughly three kilometres further to the northwest and located on the main road joining SPA and REMOUCHAMPS. The right track continued up north along the flank of the hill for two and a half kilometres to join the same main road barely a kilometre west of SPA. The next locality north of STOUMONT is a handful of farmhouses called MONTOÛYET.

It was here that one of the mobile radio patrols hastily committed by the 1st US Army to screen the depots was operating. It was this patrol that informed the 1st US Army about the critical situation developing here. The division replied that the situation remained unclear, but that it had already ordered a road block into effect at the crossroads just north of MONTOÛYET. This was clearly stated with the provisional company in mind and it was certainly hoped for that the remainder of Co L would fall in line there, too. Not even one hour later, 1st US Army called again and urged the division to block all roads to the north because of a large gas dump in the vicinity. At the same time it reported the attachment of 83rd Armd FA Bn to the division for further artillery support.¹

After the Germans had cleared the road of Ropeter's Panther they continued their advance. The renewed move started shortly after

noon.² The Panther of Uscha Krüger (215) took the lead, followed by Ostuf. Christ (201) and Ustuf. Koch (231).³ Some grenadiers had climbed onto the tanks. In the meantime, the Americans had retreated behind the bend at the end of the railway complex.

Behind this bend and further along the N.33, probably not far from or even in line with elements of the 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, was situated gun No 3, Battery D, 110th AAA Bn, commanded by Sgt Loyd Noteboom.

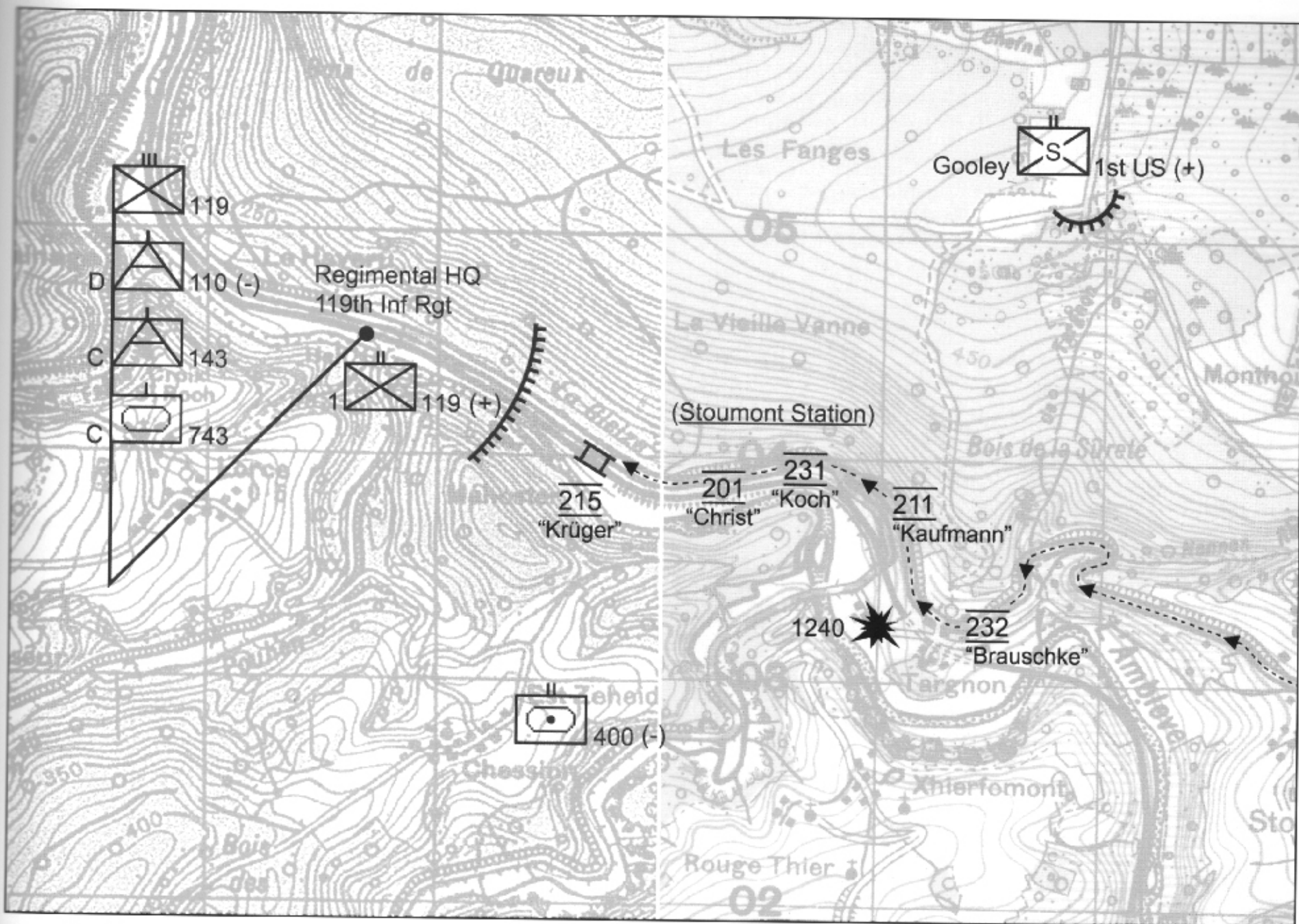
For the sake of accuracy, it has to be noted that the coordinates given for the location of this gun is the road junction 200 meters east of STOUMONT station where the road towards Pont de TARGNON branches off. The time of action is about 1400. We think that the gun was relocated when Co's A and B, 1st Bn left the road block that had been prepared the night before and pulled back towards HALTE. It is impossible that the gun was still in place when the first engagement at STOUMONT station occurred around 1030, because then the Panthers would have passed right in front of it (for another opinion, see Grégoire, Les Panzers de Peiper face à l'US Army, p. 14). It was the 143rd AAA Gun Bn, not the 110th AAA Gun Bn that stood its ground at STOUMONT station. The unit history by Lonnie R. Speer confirms the withdrawal of both guns of the 110th AAA Gun Bn to positions beyond STOUMONT station during the morning of Dec. 19th. The new location is given as near Ferme des Abomprés. The AAR thus retained the coordinates of the old emplacement east of STOUMONT station. After relocating, the crews had enough time to dig in, lay mines and prepare well-fortified positions.

One gun was set up along the N.33 and is said to have been east of Ferme des Abomprés. The other gun was beyond the farm at a lumberyard. There is conflicting information regarding which gun was set up as the first in line. Contrary to the unit history by Speer, Sgt Loyd Noteboom later declared that his gun No 3 was first and that he can't recall having seen Lt Klein at his gun position

at all (Lonnie R. Speer, Driving Hitler's Crawl'n' Coffin, Correspondence Hans Weber and Lonnie R. Speer). The AAR only mentions gun No 3. Noteboom also vehemently contradicts the statement by Speer's uncle Glen about spiking gun No 3 in STOUMONT. There is indeed no evidence that 110th AAA Gun Bn set up any guns in STOUMONT, but we think it is possible that an effort was made to move the guns there and elements could well have been arriving in the early morning. At least one observation team was deployed there (see Chapter 1 "In the Amblève Valley").

As for the exact location both guns took up after retreating, we rule out any position east of Ferme des Abomprés, contrary to the information found in the unit history. East of "Zabompre farm" would have placed the gun exactly at the spot where Panther 211 was later found. There is however no evidence that the tank ran into point-blank fire or that the position was bypassed by Panthers 215 and 232, later found beyond this spot. There is also no evidence that the position was abandoned by the crew. Therefore, a less exposed location further down the N.33 can be assumed. It is possible that the veterans confused the location with the farm at NAZE (HALTE) and Reynold's mention of "Zabompre farm" in "The Devil's Adjutant" might have helped this confusion. We found no first hand evidence at all for a set up at Ferme des Abomprés. The second gun was certainly near NAZE (HALTE) and thus close to the remaining gun of Battery C, 143rd AAA Gun Bn. This gun is mentioned in the unit history as being with the 110th AAA Gun Bn and the men of 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt were dug in at this location. Finally, regarding the time, we base it on the action described in the AAR of 743rd Tk Bn as taking place before 1300. The tank kill was noted down in the Journal of the 119th Inf Rgt at 1300.

As the retreating infantry and tanks passed, the crew were told that two to four tanks (wrongly identified as Tigers) were in pursuit of them. The gun was loaded, ammunition readied and



Map 6: The end of the road

the men not needed to operate the piece were deployed to secure both flanks. At last, nine M4 Sherman tanks passed the position. The next tank was believed to be German, as the word was out that only nine Shermans were still operational. When the last Sherman, C-10, came into sight it was fired upon. Much to the crews own relief, they saw the large bright ball of fire from the 90mm AA gun missing them by "a hair's breadth". C-10 then backed up in line with the 90mm AA gun. There were also two other Shermans and a 105mm cannon nearby getting prepared for the inevitable contact. When later, around 1300, the first German tank hove into sight someone scored a direct hit on it.

The 110th AAA Gun Bn credits C-10 with hitting the Panther. However, Harold "Doc" Rosenberg, a crewmember of C-10 actually states that their gun was bent and it was the other four guns that had opened fire.

The tank backed up and its crew bailed out. It was Panther 215 commanded by Uscha. Krüger. The tank was only claimed "probable" by the 743rd Tk Bn as it didn't catch fire. Strm. Oskar Guttmann (driver) was wounded and taken back to the aid station at Château FROIDECOUR. The radio operator, Strm. Karl Daub, also survived.⁵

Running out of tanks, Ostuf. Christ stopped further progression and the Germans were seen withdrawing behind the curve towards STOUMONT station again, where they waited for further reinforcement. The attack had stalled.

There is no further note in the After Action Report of what happened to gun No 3. There is not even a claim by the 110th AAA Gun Bn regarding the Panzer, so we don't know if the 90mm AA gun played an important part in this the action. With Uscha Krüger, KG Peiper had reached the furthest point in its race to reach the MEUSE. Krüger was stopped cold just about one kilometre short of the bridge crossing the AMBLÈVE River.

News from the 2nd Battalion now arrived at the regiment. At 1230, a liaison officer arrived at the CP at HALTE, informing about

65 Panther 215 still in its original position after being knocked out and before being rolled over to the left to clear the road. A serious fire has weakened the torsion bar suspension causing the vehicle to sit on top of the rear road wheels. The ferocity of the combat can be judged from the shell strikes to the turret side, a "lucky" hit to the barrel that has rendered this Panther's main armament unusable, significant damage to the cupola as well as damage to the tracks which are all visible in this photograph.

There are several production features on this Panther which indicate that it was amongst the first batch of Panthers delivered to the regiment at Grafenwöhr. It has the Kampfraumheizung (crew compartment heater) fitted, these started to appear on Panthers manufactured from early to mid-September 1944 onwards and were a standard piece of equipment by October of that year. This vehicle also has attachment points for Lost Erkennungstafeln (poison gas identification panels) visible on the turret roof which along with the standardised factory applied camouflage and absence of Zimmerit anti magnetic paste indicate this Panther as having been manufactured in September 1944 or shortly thereafter.

(Stefan De Meyer)







66 - 67 Panther 215 shortly after being bulldozed off the road. The left hand side drive sprocket has been badly damaged during the exchange of fire that would end Kampfgruppe Peiper's progress west.

During the introduction of "Factory Applied Camouflage," efforts were made to increase its effectiveness by applying small areas of contrasting paint to larger sections of the camouflage pattern, this is often referred to as "Licht und Schatten-tarnung" or "Ambush" camouflage. The Daimler-Benz plant have interpreted these instructions by applying small dots of contrasting colour to the larger colour field giving a very distinctive spot pattern over the main colour scheme which is very apparent in this and other photographs of Panther 215. The very distinctive tactical numbers used by the Leibstandarte are also shown here to good effect; these consisted of a broken white "stencil" outline with a black centre applied in this case to the middle of the turret side, no other tactical or regimental insignia were applied to this vehicle. The plate above the driver and radio operator's position has been buckled by a violent internal explosion almost certainly caused by the vehicles ammunition load combusting.

(NARA)

the impending arrival of the tank destroyers (four self-propelled M10's) from 2nd Platoon, Co A, 823rd TD Bn, and the remaining two M4 medium tanks from 3rd Platoon, Co C, 743rd Tk Bn. It had taken the armour the whole morning to reach HALTE. The 2nd Bn would take even longer, the liaison officer reported, as it hadn't even been relieved by the 82nd AB Div.

The armour had spent the night near WERBOMONT in support of the 2nd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt. At least one M10 tank destroyer had helped to stop the scouting raid of 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 behind the LIENNE River by knocking out an SPW.⁶

At 1240, 197th FA Bn made its presence felt for the first time during this battle and fired a concentration on tanks in the area between TARGNON and Pont de TARGNON.

Whether there really was a forward observer directing fire on three tanks moving away from TARGNON remains an open question (for this version, see Hugh M. Cole, ETO, The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge, p. 341). The concentration just mentioned above was actually directed from a 1/100'000 map without observer reporting back the results. At 1830, a wounded infantryman reported to the battalion that the fire had landed on 18 tanks and that they had begun to retreat. Because KG Peiper did not have 18 tanks near TARGNON, the number probably refers to any armoured and unarmoured vehicles operating there.

Footnotes

1. The 83rd Armd FA Bn eventually ended up with TF McGeorge, 3rd Arm Div, Spearhead in the West, G-3 Supplement.

2. 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History.

3. Oskar Guttman, trial statement.

4. T/5 Harold Rosenberg, D-Day Normandy website.

5. 110th AAA Gun Bn, AAR; 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History; Ferriss

Report, p.31, locating the action east of STOUMONT station, which seems impossible.

6. 119th Inf Rgt, Jnl, AAR; 823rd ABR No VII, p.5.

68 - 69 The later type of cast exhaust armour guard as seen in this photograph is another indication that Panther 215 was manufactured by Daimler-Benz. It is not until post December 1944 that Panthers that can be identified as having been manufactured by M.A.N. have been photographed with this feature. This photograph is also interesting because it shows the right hand side track is still in place in spite of the damage caused to it during combat as seen in image 65 and the stress of a 45 tonne machine being bulldozed off the road, the right hand side rear stowage box can be seen lying in the foreground having become detached during the operation to clear the road.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire - AMC)
(Stefan De Meyer)

70 Panther 215 has, by early Spring 1945 become a tourist attraction. The wheels and tracks have not yet been removed and no damage to the lower glacis is visible.

(Stefan De Meyer)









71 - 72 We are very fortunate that Panther 215 was left at the side of the road as it was easy to reach and became an object of curiosity. In this view the damage caused to the barrel which can be seen in image 65 is more apparent. The main armament would be unusable, which if the damage was sustained before the hull penetration would have left Panther 215 defenceless against enemy armour. We can also see how the hull floor has sustained damage from the internal explosion and fire.

73 A tourist poses beside the by now cannibalised wreck of 215. The penetration on the sponson floor above the track run would have caused the ammunition load stored here to explode and catch fire leading to the loss of the vehicle. If we look again at image 65 we will see that there is damage to the upper run of track on Panther 215's right hand side. Were it possible to roll the vehicle back until the missing piece of track aligned with the sponson damage we would almost certainly see the spot where the fatal shell had struck the road before ricocheting through the track and thin sponson floor.

74 - 75 - 76 Panther 215 after it has been cannibalised by enterprising locals trying to make use of the detritus of war. Production features visible in this photograph indicate this vehicle was manufactured by the Daimler-Benz plant. Panther assembly plants would appear to have used some "interpretation" of instructions which has resulted in idiosyncrasies that can be used to identify where a given vehicle was manufactured and when. One of these features is the positioning of the Balkenkreuz, Daimler-Benz vehicles had the Balkenkreuz painted in the middle of the wire cutter stowage bracket on the vehicles left hand side, underneath the hammer on the right hand side and on the left hand side stowage box on the vehicles rear.

(6 x Stefan De Meyer)











Stalemate 10

The time from 1300 to 1400

1325 - Con. 201, interdiction fire for the 3rd Bn have been kicked out of Stoumont and the Jerries are now coming at the 1st Bn.

197th FA Bn, Jnl.

1335 - S- I am just trying to find out the situation. H - They are going to move out here right away with Herlong's battalion. He is right in position. They will move forward with the objective of taking that town before night. Fitzgerald's battalion has one company going across to block the road there. The rest is pretty much scattered. We haven't heard much further from the cavalry. (= the 2nd Bn). The last report was they had not completely released them. S - What about the tank battalion? H - We have a company of that moving out with Herlong. There is another tank company, but it is not in good shape. They weren't prepared for anything. S - Is that ours or theirs? H - No, it's the 740th that we picked up. S - They can get ammunition at an ASP at Olne. H - They know that. S - There is also a truck load of ammunition coming over there. H - Is that tank ammunition?

S - Yes. It left here at 1230. It has an MP escort to get it through. We are going to move Cantey's battalion(= 3rd Bn, 117th Inf Rgt) to this vicinity so it is centrally located. We are not committing it. Everything is pretty solid everywhere else. H- Have you heard any more from the road running north from Stoumont? S - We have heard nothing more about that, but in between that road and ourselves we are sending the Recon Troop to see what they can find. H - Sutherland has sent over all he has available to do some blocking there. S - They apparently are not pushing him back, so maybe they are turning north there. H- That is the reason I am sending Herlong to drive to the town. It will block them there. S - It will also block it if somebody gets over on the north there. H - All right

Telephone Conversation
between Col Stephens and Maj Gen
Hobbs (at the 119th Inf Rgt CP),
30th Inf. Rgt. G-3 Jnl.

According to Oscha. Rudolf Rayer, leader of the 4th platoon, 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, his company was ordered to press on with the attack following the rest of the battalion. After advancing approximately one and a half to two kilometres, the advance encountered strong enemy resistance. The company was then ordered to proceed through the woods at the right side of the road and to eliminate tanks and anti-tank guns in hand to hand combat. This was not successful and the company suffered severe losses. Only with difficulty could it withdraw from the Americans. The company was then ordered to tie in with the rest of the armoured battalion and had to deploy a security screen in the same woods to the right of the N.33.¹

Strm. Herbert Stock (II./ 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2) also participated in this unsuccessful attack. He was riding in the platoon leaders' vehicle (Sd.Kfz. 251/17) of the 2nd Platoon, now commanded by Rottf. Wittwer after Hscha. Hendel was incapacitated. He mentioned three enemy tanks and a numerically superior infantry force in their way. After returning to the railway station, he remembered Rottf. Wittwer reporting to Ostuf. Preuss, commanding officer of the 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2. Preuss had put up his CP in a house next to the station. He is said to have at this time also taken command of the 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, although it seems that Oscha. Rayer was responsible for the company at this moment. Preuss made the laconic remark that it was now the 11th Company's turn to be "burned up" (verheizt).²

Preuss was known in the Leibstandarte for his recklessness. The night before, his own company had been "burnt up" in the unsuccessful reconnaissance mission beyond the River LIENNE.

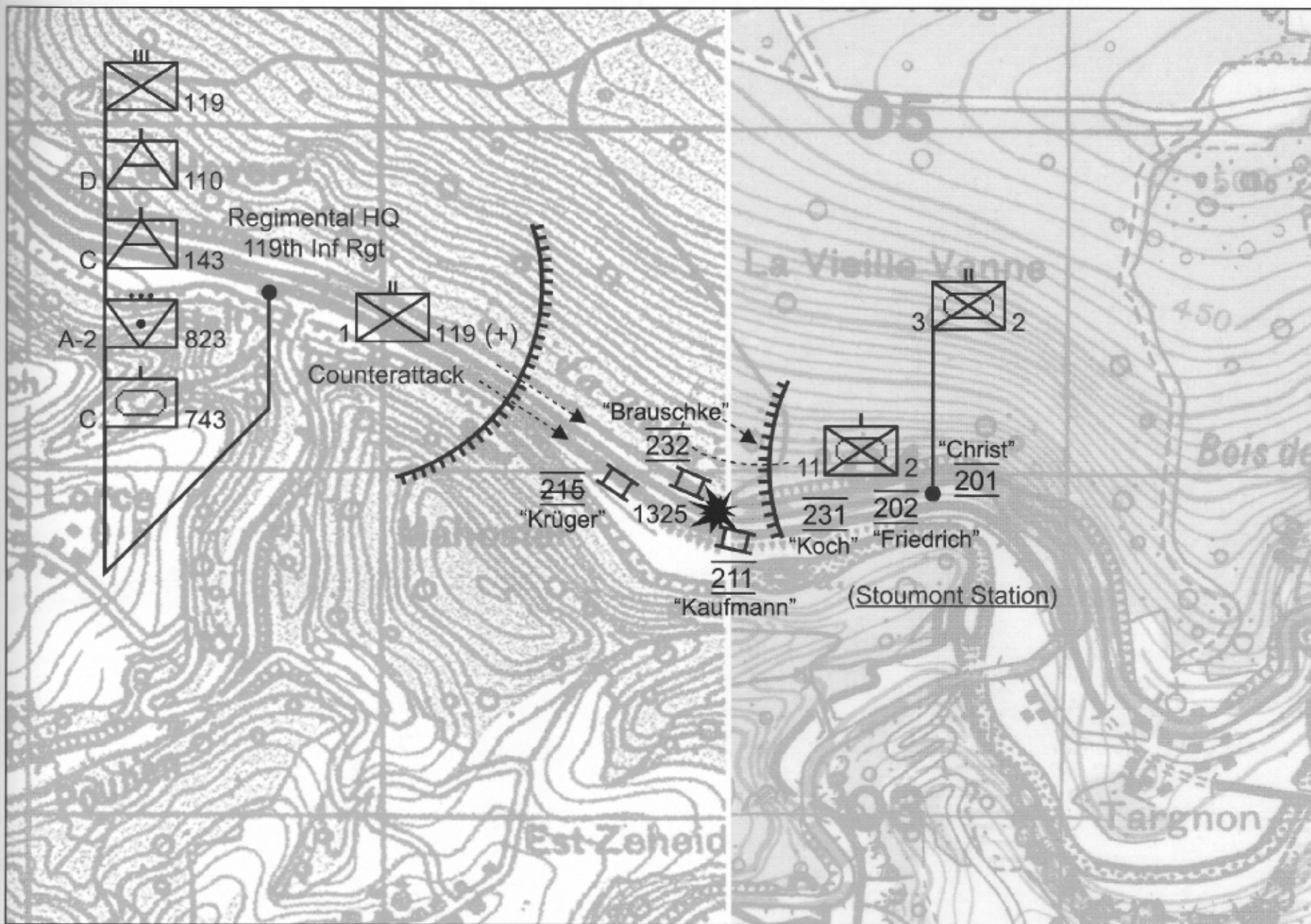
At about the same time that the 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 was ordered to take out the troublesome positions, the Panthers renewed their attack. By now, the visibility must have been drastically reduced, because most of the actual events went undetected by the Americans. The rest of Christ's Panthers had caught up with him. In a new effort, Uscha. Brauschke took the lead, followed by Ustuf. Kaufmann, platoon leader I, Ustuf Koch,

platoon leader III and Uscha. Friedrich (company troop leader).³ After rounding the bend, the crew of Brauschke's tank suddenly noticed that Kaufmann's tank following behind had been hit and American artillery was dropping all around them. The crew panicked. The driver, Rottf. Szyperski, managed to run the tank into the ditch on the right side of the road where it got stuck. The tank was abandoned and the crew started to move back on foot, passing Ustuf. Koch's tank.⁴

On the other side, the American infantry at the emergency line that had formed in front of the regimental CP only noticed sporadic tank fire, supposedly from a single hidden tank and a very limited effort by infantry to infiltrate. Upon being notified of the arrival of the 740th Tk Bn, Lt Macht decided there was no need to conserve ammunition any longer and a "strong demonstration of fire" in the direction of the hidden German tank was made. Co B, 1st Bn, on the American left flank, fired 60mm mortar rounds on the few approaching German infantrymen. The estimated strength of the Germans was one tank and a platoon of infantry.

At 1335, Gen Hobbs ordered a counterattack with the 1st Bn up the valley towards TARGNON. A German ambulance was later found destroyed behind Panther 211, probably knocked out while trying to recover wounded crew members. Beyond this ambulance, further towards the station buildings a destroyed SPW was later photographed.⁵⁻⁶

With the notable exception of Reynolds (whose account is based on an evaluation conducted by veterans on the spot, a written account of which is in our possession) the loss of the three tanks later found at this spot has been attributed to the 740th Tk Bn. An evaluation of all the statements has led us to believe that this is not the case. According to the relevant journals, the destruction of the tanks as claimed by the 740th Tk Bn took place at 1645, at a time when it was already rapidly getting dark. Although the German accounts generally lag behind those of the American by at least one hour, it is clear that at this time the decision to



Map 7: Stalemate

withdraw towards STOUMONT had already been made. The attack had been repulsed by then and the tanks had been lost earlier. There was no engagement between the 740th Tk Bn and the Panthers. Significantly, both sides speak of a duel taking place under adverse visual conditions, with no apparent results. What transpired is that the firepower of the Americans that was concentrated on the road succeeded in knocking out Kaufmann's tank. Who actually knocked Kaufmann's tank out is not known, it could have been the 90mm AA gun mentioned above, the newly arrived tank destroyers or a medium tank. A glimpse of what actually happened can be found in the following statement by Curtis A. Martell, Co C, 119th Inf Rgt:

"We did not have any tanks with us, so we called for a Tank Destroyer to come. The tanker came at dusk. We had taken positions around a bend in the road and that is where the tanker positioned himself. Nightfall had come and two German tanks were advancing on our positions. I yelled out to the tank commander to be on alert. Soon the lead German tank came close to the bend and the TD opened fire and knocked him out. A second tank tried to get around the burning tank and our tanker knocked him out. The tanks were burning the rest of the night."

Except for the impression that the action took place later, the description appears to be a valid description of what happened to Kaufmann and Brauschke. The atmospheric conditions on this afternoon were terrible, most of it was gloomy and misty and dusk might have been a condition that prevailed for some time. Both sides were simply firing away at each other without any clear line of sight. If hits had been observed by the units, they would have been noted down in the Combat Reports. Claims were made only when the Americans passed near the wrecks and engaged them a second time. Following the experience of Kaufmann's loss combined with the American artillery bombardment that had set in, Brauschke's crew simply

broke. As has been seen in the account by Hübler before, not all the tankers were well-trained. It should also be recalled that after five days of combat, men and material had reached their limits. Other examples of tanks getting mired or breaking down can be cited. To be fair, the only casualty incurred by the American tankers that day was when one Sherman dropped into a ravine during a night march. As it is not very likely that mere 60mm mortar rounds would make a lasting impression on the German tanks, we believe that the artillery concentration encountered was from 197th FA Bn. This helps to locate the action in time. The second concentration was noted down with no coordinates in the ABR, but the entry gives the time as 1325.

Some 45 minutes after the first concentration, 197th FA Bn fired a second at 1335, this time in support of 1st Bn. No coordinates are mentioned, but it seems that this time the area of STOUMONT station was the likely target. The mission was one of interdiction fire. After repulsing the weak push from the Germans, the Americans began to whittle down the attackers. That the action was shifting can also be gleaned from the locations of the next fire missions. At 1420 interdiction fire was laid on the first hairpin bend at the exit of STOUMONT, at 1455 interdiction fire was laid into the centre of STOUMONT, followed by the last concentration noted down for this day at 1510: Interdiction fire on the road going north from STOUMONT to MONTOÛYET, just at the bend near LA ROCHETTE overlooking STOUMONT.

77 This photo clearly illustrates the limited tactical nature of the terrain west of STOUMONT station. There was literally nowhere for the Panthers of the 2nd Company to deploy when they met the American roadblock. On the right hand side steeply wooded hill on the left hand side a sharp drop covered in vegetation.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire - AMC)





78 This photograph shows Panther 211 commanded by Ustuf. Kaufmann and Panther 232 commanded by Uscha. Brauschke in their original positions at the time of their loss. The photograph reveals several details about Panther 211 that helped us to identify this machine in the cine film taken during the combat for STOUMONT.

The first thing to note and compare is the distinctively dented bucket, this can be seen in the stills taken from the cine film (see images 38 and 39) along with the starboard exhaust pipe which has been damaged in a very distinctive manner. The top of the exhaust pipe has been bent to the port side above the level of the sheet metal guard and together with distinctive areas of camouflage that can be matched to the still from the cine film has helped identify this Panther.

Panther 232 is seen in the ditch that ultimately led to this vehicles loss, in an effort to gain cover from the fusillade of shots coming from the American defenders, the driver attempted to turn the Panther just in front of Kaufmann's

211 which had just been knocked out and in the process of doing this allowed the Panther to slide into the ditch. As the crew could not defend themselves from this position and as the vulnerable side armour had been exposed to very heavy American fire, they chose to to abandon the vehicle. This Panther has no crew compartment heater making it one of only three vehicles from Kampfgruppe Peiper involved in the battle for STOUMONT with this particular configuration. It also has no Balkenkreuz on the port stowage bin and has two spare track links on the starboard quarter of the turret. There are no spare track links mounted on the spare track stowage brackets on the rear of the vehicle, it would appear that they are being used as additional armour protection for the turret sides.

(Lee Archer)



79 A rare photo of Panther 211 that shows the port side of the vehicle. The port turret side armour has cracked as a result of penetrations by two high velocity rounds, one of which has entered the turret on the corner just above the welded armour interlock. A driver's periscope rain guard can be seen as well as parts of the camouflage pattern on the glacis.

80 Panther 211 from a slightly different angle that allows us to see the complete vehicle. White cloth tape has been used to mark the position of the vehicle as it presented a traffic hazard during the hours of darkness. The gun barrel can be seen intact in this photo with the muzzle brake still in place. There is a fair amount of the vehicles stowage strewn on the ground indicating that it has already been visited by GIs either looking for potential intelligence or more likely souvenirs.

(2 x Lee Archer)



80

Indeed the Americans now made plans to recover the lost ground and were optimistic of being back in STOUMONT by nightfall. They could find no explanation for the weakness of the attacks coming from STOUMONT station and fearing the worst, suspected the Germans had indeed turned north towards SPA. There was no clear picture of what was happening on this road, as contact with Company L had been lost (Lt Knox had destroyed his radio). The provisional company formed from the shattered 3rd Bn was still on its way to block the crossroads north of MONTOÛYET and Co B on the left flank and in the woods covering the steep rise from the valley had sent out patrols to the north. Tanks had been reported earlier on this road by the security patrol from the 1st US Army. Little did they know that the Germans were actually on their way to check out this road, but that they had no intention of exiting the AMBLÈVE Valley by this route.

Footnotes

1. Rudolf Rayer, Declaration at Dachau, dated 26.04.1947.
2. Herbert Stock, Affidavit 15.03.1946.
3. Rolf Ritzer, Affidavit dated 13.03.1946.
4. Erwin Szyperski, Affidavit, 08.03.1946; Georg Bunda, Sworn Statement, 22.12.1947.
5. The pictures taken after the battle question the wisdom of these vehicles venturing thus far, but it must not be forgotten that for most of the time, visibility was only a few metres. Regarding the SPW, chances are it was hit by artillery and abandoned. Whatever its faith, the vehicle was officially claimed by 740th Tk Bn the next day. The 823rd TD Bn, ABR No VII, p.5 reads: "A-2 after destroying one German halftrack at 1400 took up positions north of STOUMONT (600039)". We think that this actually refers to the destruction of the leading SPW at NEUFMOULIN the night before and that the unit went into position at 1400 at STOUMONT station (the real location behind the mentioned coordinates) 740th Tk Bn, overlay 20th Dec, 2400.
6. Ferriss Report, p. 3; 823rd TD Bn, ABR No VII, p.5.

81 - 82 This view of the front of Panther 211 was taken after it was pushed further back off the road. The vehicle has had part of its barrel removed by an explosive charge. It is almost certain that this was done to deny the use of the vehicle to German field maintenance units who were renowned for their ability to repair vehicles and return them to combat service that Allied forces would consider to be a complete write off.

(2 x Gérard Grégoire)

83 A then and now comparison of the same scene, the road, scenery and buildings have changed very little since December 1944.

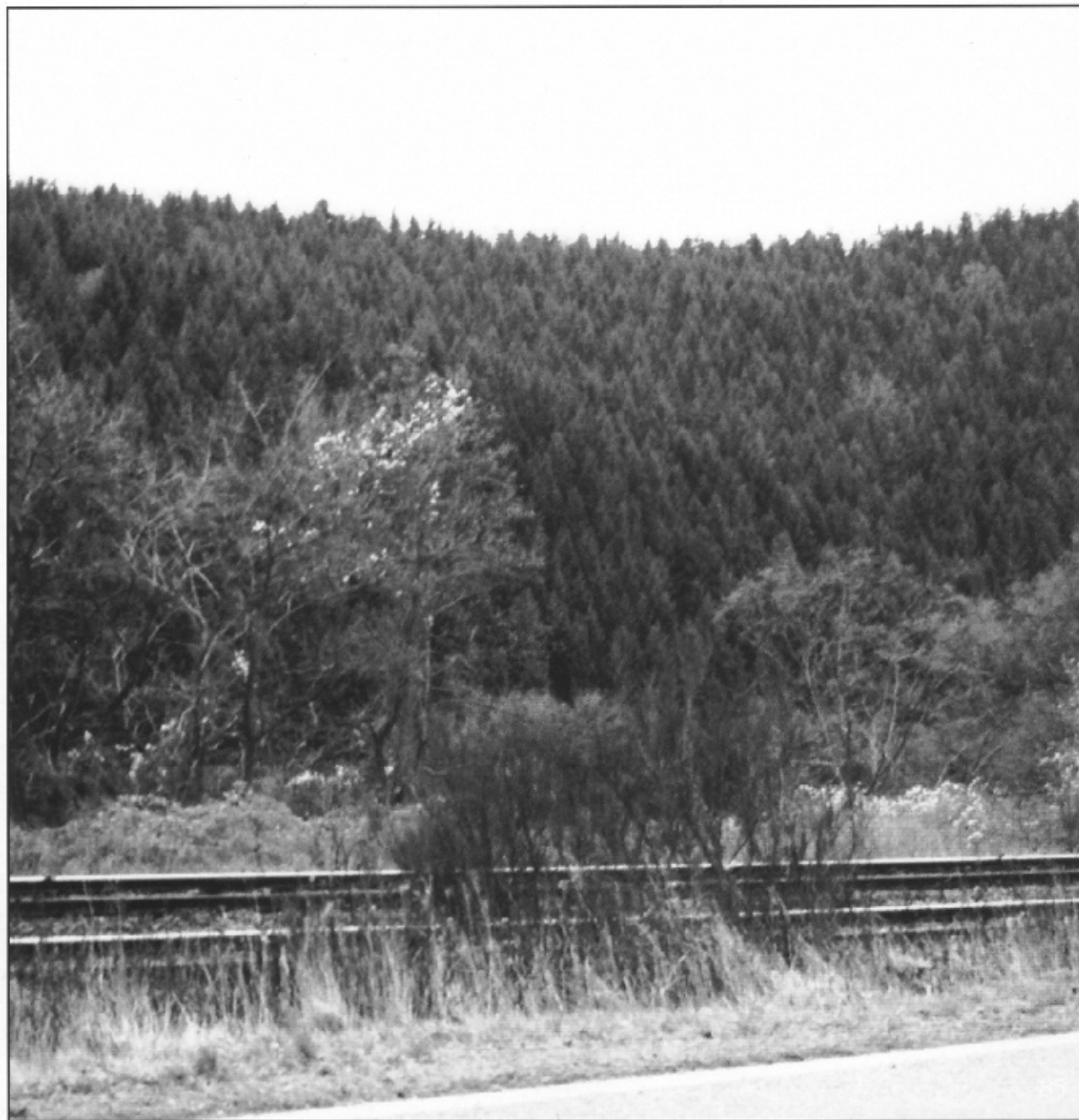
(Stefan De Meyer)











84 This particularly clear shot of the starboard side of Panther 211 reveals several details about this machine. We can see a Balkenkreuz painted in the front corners of the hull which with the Balkenkreuz painted on the starboard rear stowage box indicate that this Panther was assembled by M.A.N. The Panther is fitted with a Kampfraumheizung (crew compartment heater) raised tower fan assembly that can be seen on the engine deck. It has a factory applied three colour camouflage scheme with sprayed edges which is a characteristic of M.A.N. assembled Panthers. The quality of the photograph allows us to see that spare track links have been hung on the rear quarter of the turret. This has left marks in the paint where the chevrons on the tracks face have made contact. The distinctive style of spare track bracket used by the LAH workshop company can also be seen.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire -
AMC)

85 The same scene, the trees are more mature and Kaufmann's Panther has gone.

(Stefan De Meyer)



86 This excellent shot shows the turret of Uscha. Brauschke's Panther 232 after it was rolled over to clear the road. We can clearly see the hole left by a high velocity round in the thick cast armour of the commanders cupola. This must have occurred after the vehicle was abandoned as we know from crew statements made shortly after the war that they had been forced to abandon the undamaged vehicle.

The extremely distinctive LAH turret spare track hangers can be seen to good effect in this photo, they were made of round bar bent into the shape of a figure 5 which was then welded to the top and side of the turret. No other units involved in the Ardennes offensive used this style of spare track hanger. The vehicle can be positively identified as having been assembled by Daimler-Benz from the very distinctive style of diagonally ridged Zimmerit

application that was unique to this assembly plant. Another feature of note is the blanking plate mounted on the engine deck access plate. The Kampfraumheizung fan assembly fed warm air from the vehicles radiators into the internal ducting that led to the crew compartment. As this Panther was not fitted with a Kampfraumheizung and had the standard fan assembly it was necessary to use this plate to blank the aperture.

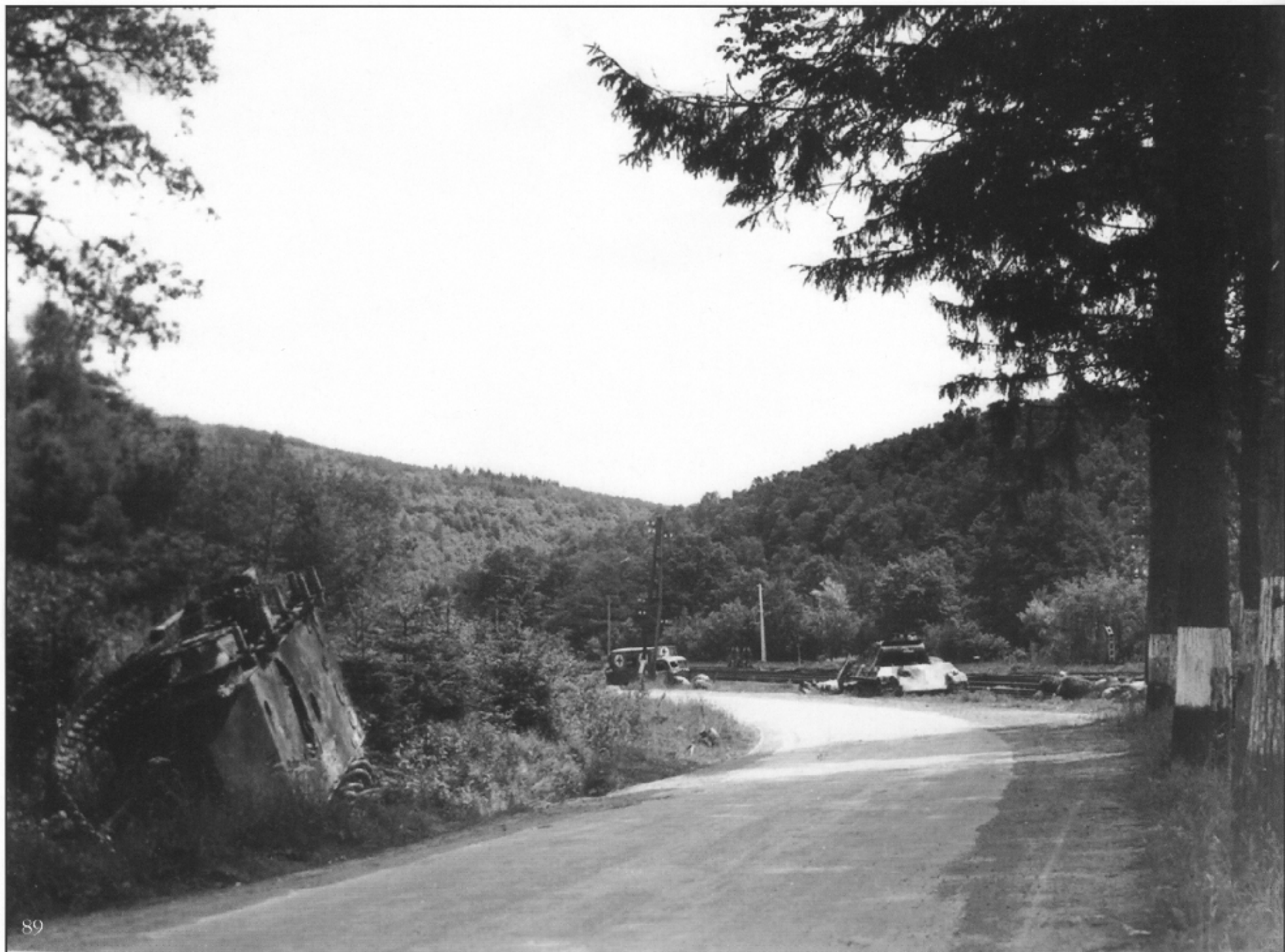
(Stefan De Meyer)

87 - 88 These photos show Panther 232 and 211 some time after the battle when they had been pushed from the road to reduce the chances of traffic accidents. The tree trunk in the right foreground is worth mentioning as it has also become a casualty of the high velocity duel.

(Collection Freddy Lemaire - AMC)









89 Local farmers have already stripped most of the wheels from Panther 232 to use on farm trailers. We can also see the Phänomen Granit ambulance that was knocked out while trying to evacuate wounded from the battles of December the 19th.

(Stefan De Meyer)

90 The same scene pictured during a field trip in December 2004.

(Hans Weber)



91 - 92 A destroyed halftrack which had exposed itself by moving close to the three knocked out Panthers. The halftrack is almost certainly an Sd.Kfz 251/17, it has the raised bullet splash guard peculiar to this version and would have provided valuable fire support with its 2cm cannon to the Grenadier of 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2.

93 The Phänomen-Granit Ambulance being used to evacuate German wounded from the battlefield. Its thin metal cab and wooden body would provide little sanctuary if caught in the open. While it is clearly marked with Red Cross symbols on a white background, this would have been of little value during a firefight conducted in poor visibility either at dusk or night.

(3 x Gérard Grégoire)





Consolidating the line 11

The time from 1400 to 1600

Bn receives order at 1410 to attack with attachments Co A 740 Tk Bn, Plat of 823 TD Bn. Attachments jumped off at 1500

1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.

1500 - 80 men from K and L Co plus 2 - 90mm guns and 1 - 75 mm gun reported at Rouat (1410)

1520 - From Div: 119th attached to 82nd AB Div - 743rd detached from us, also 400th FA Bn

1535 - Capt Stuart and 140 men of 3rd Bn have crossed the ridge and set up a road block on road leading N from Stoumont.

1550 - From Div: Capt Gooley of Master security patrol has organized 150 men of K and L Co men with 2 - 90 mm guns, 1 - 75mm gun, 2 - 50 cal. MG's and 6 bazookas

119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.

At 1400 a letter of instruction from Lt Gen Courtney H. Hodges, commanding general of the 1st US Army, to the commanding general XVIII Corps (Airborne) arrived at the regimental CP of 119th Inf Rgt. It informed Lt Col Fitzgerald of the attachment of his regimental combat team to XVIII Corps (Airborne). With all attached units, the Corps consisted of the following:

82nd AB Div
RCT 119
3rd Armd Div (-CCA)
290th FOB Bn
83rd Armd FA Bn
254th FA Bn (155mm How)
991st FA Bn (-Battery), (155mm gun)
70th TD Bn 3" Towed
740th Tk Bn

Combat Command B (CCB) of 3rd Armd Div was ordered to move at once via VERVIERS to THEUX, block any enemy advance at VERVIERS and prepare an attack to the south in conjunction with RCT 119 and drive the enemy south of the line STOU MONT - LA GLEIZE. The rest of 3rd Armd Div (-CCA and CCB) was ordered further out to the southwest near HOTTON and LA GRAND PRÉ to prepare for an attack east, southeast or south on Corps orders.

Combat Command A had already been detached from the division and placed under V Corps; it was in an assembly area near EUPEN, where it stayed and searched for German paratroopers in the surrounding woods until being reattached to the division on December 21st,

moving to a sector near GRANDMENIL.¹

Finally, 82nd AB Div was ordered to prepare to attack east to the general line BASSE-BODEUX - STOU MONT on Corps orders. The plan made clear that the Americans were eager to contain the Kampfgruppe in the AMBLÈVE Valley while at the same time deploying armoured elements, screening the northern shoulder farther out to the west for fear of enemy push flanking the 82nd AB south and leading into its rear. During the morning, at least one armoured enemy vehicle was reported at HOUFFALIZE but the Div Rcn Platoon of 82nd AB Div could report HOTTON still free of enemy in the afternoon.²

After failing in their attack, the remainder of the 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 took up defensive positions in the woods to the right of the road where they remained until night had fallen. At 2100 the Germans would take off. The 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 then moved into the village of CHENEUX.

It was after 1400 when Capt James D. Berry started to move out with his Company C, 740th Tk Bn, from REMOUCHAMPS to "HALTE". The 740th Tk Bn was commanded by Col George K. Rubel.

The 740th Tk Bn was formed in 1943 as one of six tank battalions earmarked to use high-powered carbon arc lamps for night combat actions - aka Canal Defence Light (CDL). Actually a British invention, the US Army became interested in the project after being shown demonstrations. The American version was designated T10 Shop Tractor and codenamed "Leaflet" in a similar attempt to disguise the true purpose. The lights were mounted on an M3. The Leaflet units were not used in night combat by the US Army.³

After undergoing special training in the American desert, the battalion was shipped to England in July 1944 and by November it had arrived on the continent where it just had begun training on nine borrowed Shermans from the

1st US Army reserve, three M5A1 and two 105mm assault guns. At the start of the Ardennes offensive, it had to hand over its 9 Shermans to 745th Tk Bn and on December 17th, while at the Army headquarters in SPA, Rubel was even told to prepare for the eventuality of being engaged as infantry.⁴

Stationed at NEUFCHÂTEAU it had received orders on December 18th to draw tanks at an ordnance vehicle depot near SPRIMONT, roughly 15km from HALTE. From the twenty-five tanks in the depot, only three were combat ready. Company C was the first element to arrive at the depot and it spent all night and most of the next morning making as many tanks operational as possible. The tanks had no basic ammunition load and material had to be taken from other tanks to complete them. The radios available turned out to be British and because the American crews were unfamiliar with them, they had to rely on hand signals during their first engagement. Despite all this trouble, at noon on December 19th, the company was at REMOUCHAMPS with fourteen Shermans, five Duplex Drive tanks (an amphibious version of the Sherman tank) and one M36 self-propelled tank destroyer.

There were approximately another 10 Sherman tanks manned by mechanics from the 90th Ordnance Battalion deployed between NONCEVEUX and HALTE. They also had no means of communication and little is known about them except their presence in the area.⁵

It was about 1030 and during Gen Hobbs's stay at the regimental CP of the 119th Inf Rgt, when the seriousness of the situation made the attachment of the 740th Tk Bn look like a good idea, and Gen Hobbs contacted the 1st US Army to ask permission. This was granted half an hour later and the regiment sent its S-2, Capt Smithers to contact and pick up the tankers (see above). He found Capt Berry and his company near REMOUCHAMPS around noon. Asked to bring in the tanks as soon as possible, Capt Berry promised to get them rolling soon and is said to have uttered the famous words "*They are bastard tanks but we are shooting fools*".⁶

Col Rubel, commanding officer of the 740th and author of the colourful account "Daredevil Tankers", recalls a slightly different version of events, in that the S-2 of 119th Inf Rgt chanced upon the outfit and pleaded with Rubel and Berry to help out the 119th Inf Rgt, a request that was denied at first by Rubel because he was not aware of any orders to that effect. Only when Gen Hobbs arrived in person at REMOUCHAMPS at 1400 and confirmed the attachment - probably with words that left no doubt as to how important he thought this was - the tanks moved out.

The biggest problem for the 740th Tk Bn was however that it still needed ammunition and was trying to obtain it from one of the ammunition supply points, one of which was at OLNE, still some 15 kilometres to the north of REMOUCHAMPS.⁷

Gen Hobbs had issued his attack order to the CT 119 when the 740th Tk Bn was still some miles to the rear and unsupplied. He must then have set out to get the 740th Tk Bn going. According to the Unit Journal, the 1st Bn received its attack orders at 1410. Its first move, supported by the M10's of the 823rd TD Bn, which still had enough ammunition from the 743rd Tk Bn, was made a short time afterwards. But this counterattack was stopped by the 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 in turn.⁸

Before taking further action, the regiment was to be re-inforced by the 740th Tk Bn. Later, the 119th Inf Rgt wrote in its Unit Report that 1st Bn had stopped the enemy 200 yards east (correct: west) of STOUMONT station by 1500. The 740th Tk Bn still hadn't arrived. The time span between 1500 and 1600 saw no action between the two sides, the German effort at STOUMONT station was spent.⁹

A few minutes past 1500, word reached the regimental CP that the 2nd Bn was on the way to the rear CP at REMOUCHAMPS and would arrive there in about 30 minutes. That sounded good.

At 1230, an entry in the Unit Jnl shows that the battalion had not been relieved by 82nd AB by this time; according to G-3 Periodic of 82nd AB Div, this occurred half an hour later.

In a telephone conversation with the 117th Inf Rgt, chief of staff Col Stephens mentioned that the sister regiment was doing alright and that things were not as bad as they had looked. More good news came from Capt Stewart, who by 1535 had led the provisional company of 3rd Bn over the ridge onto the crossroads north of STOUMONT on its blocking mission. He had established contact with Company L who even had organized a reserve line further up the road and approximately 800 yards north of CHEFNÂ.

The location taken from a later overlay suggests a position straddling the road approx. 800 yards to the north of the crossroads, thus next to one of the 90mm AA guns. The roadblock at the crossroads itself was manned by the remnants of Companies I and K, i.e. the provisional company formed by Capt Stewart.

At 1500, the regiment was informed by the division that apparently 80 men from Co K and L had been reported to be near ROUÂ as early as 1410. This information had been passed on by the 1st US Army security patrol operating there to the divisional G-2, who then relayed it to the regiment. The men in question, the major part of whom were actually from Co L, had stumbled upon the small road block installed by the security patrol, 1st US Army, and supported by the two 90mm AA guns of Battery A, 110th AAA Gun Bn.

From STOUMONT, the road climbs steadily. Making a sharp turn to the right at the location called LA ROCHETTE it traverses a narrow wooded valley and, after passing the hamlet of MONTOUÏET seen to the right on a cleared slope, it again disappears into the forest, finally reaching a lonely plateau covered with firs and moor land. There is a crossroads with one road going along the crest line to the west, finally zigzagging again down into the AMBLÈVE Valley, either reaching "HALTE" or QUAREUX. The other road however would continue north to DESNIÉ and finally SPA or THEUX. There is a long rectangular clearing behind the crossroads, which offers a good field of fire for the two 90mm AA guns placed at some distance further to the

north.¹⁰

The first elements of the fresh 740th Tk Bn reached "HALTE" at 1530, as did the ammunition. The tanks were rapidly re-armed and the officers briefed on the attack, which was scheduled to commence at 1600.¹¹ In a conversation with Gen Hobbs at 1535, Col Stephens mentioned the attachment of the 119th RCT to the XVIII Corps. He had also only learned of it half an hour ago. Gen Hobbs decided that it was time to shift focus back to the middle of his sector and to leave the 740th Tk Bn with the 119th Inf Rgt and to take back his own 743rd Tk Bn and move it into the area of the 117th Inf Rgt. The same was intended for the 400th FA Bn, which at that moment still had some M7 HMC's deployed as tank destroyers.¹²

By 1600, Co C, 743rd Tk Bn had been relieved by Capt Berry's tankers. It would now leave the battle and move towards REMOUCHAMPS to be re-supplied. Three Shermans had to be left behind at REMOUCHAMPS due to supply and maintenance requirements. Moving again during the night, tank C-17 from the 3rd Platoon overturned into the SPA River while trying to negotiate a bridge. The platoon leader, Lt Clifford H. Disbrow, was killed together with one other crew member. Another man was injured and had to be evacuated. These were the only fatalities during the day. The company moved into divisional reserve and was attached to 2nd Bn, 120th Inf Rgt (also in divisional reserve), moving on to RUY, where it would spend the next day. It arrived there at 2330 and reported a strength of 109 enlisted men and 4 officers.¹³

Lt Col Rubel was under the impression that the 743rd Tk Bn was pulling out of fear and that their tanks could have been re-supplied in the same way that his had been. He also said that they were pulling out more tanks than he was putting in. (Ferriss Report, p. 34). As is the case with much of what Lt Col Rubel later said or wrote, this has to be taken with some reservation. The 743rd Tk Bn was acting under orders and it was the 740th Tk Bn that actually had more tanks at HALTE.

Footnotes

1. Spearhead in the West, G-3 supplement, p.219.
2. 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl, HQ 1st US Army. Letter of Instruction 19th December 1944.
3. Chamberlain/Ellis, British and American Tanks of World War II, p.113, Steven J. Zaloga, US Tank and Tank Destroyer Battalions in the ETO 1944-1945. p.25 ff
4. Paul Pearson, Daredevil Tankers, the Story of the 740th Tk Bn; Harry Yeide, Steel Victory, p.207, quoting Rubel in "Daredevil Tankers".
5. Ferriss Report, p.30; Harry Yeide, Steel Victory, p.208.
6. Ferriss Report, p.31.
7. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl TC Summary.
8. 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl; 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl, Summary of TC's; Rudolf Rayer, Declaration at Dachau 26.04.1947.
9. Ferriss Report, p.32; 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Report 19th December.
10. 119th Inf Rgt Jnl.
11. Cole, The Ardennes: The Battle of the Bulge, p.342; 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl, TC; Harry Yeide, Steel Victory, p. 210.
12. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl, TC.
13. 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl, History, p.22.

Counterattack 12

The time from 1600 to 2100

1630 - From Crisis 5 (S-3): 2 Platoons of medium tanks of 740th Tk Bn to go to Capt Stuart's roadblock. Remnants of L + K Cos, and rescued equipment to join that road block. Crisis 5 will in be in charge of both.

1645 - From 1st Bn: Knocked out 3 Mk V tanks with our tanks

119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.

Lt Col Robert Herlong used his Company C for the push to retake STOUMONT. Companies A and B remained in their defensive positions in front of the regimental CP. Orders to that effect had been issued almost two hours earlier, but due to reasons explained above, the final attack incurred delays. After the arrival of the armour, Herlong combined tank-infantry teams. Each of the fourteen Shermans was assigned a half squad of six infantrymen. Further up along the road at the very front of the American position was Curtis A. Martell and his runner. His platoon of Co C had occupied a line of defense on the hill flank on the left side of the road looking southeast. After forming up, the attack began at around 1600 and, advancing cautiously, the Americans again neared the bend in front of STOUMONT station, spearheaded by the 2nd Platoon, 740th Tk Bn. It was getting dark now and a considerable ground mist had set in.

The leading Sherman could make out the shape of a tank looming into view approximately 200 metres away. The commander of the 2nd Platoon, Lt Charles D. Power issued the order to fire and the first round left the barrel. It ricocheted off the gun mantle of the tank and penetrated the hull roof armour below. This shot trap was the classic weak spot of the Panther tank. The tank caught fire. It was Krüger's Panther 215, already knocked out for some time. Lt Powers continued his advance and after 50 metres, another tank was spotted and engaged at once. The first round pierced the lower front glacis plate. The tank did not return fire, nor did it catch fire. It was Panther 211, already deserted by Kaufmann's crew. Lt Powers advanced another 50 metres when he finally spotted Brauschke's 232 a few metres to the left and in front of his previous prey. This tank, lying in a ditch and in the shadow of a slope, was probably not as silhouetted as the two others were. Things became heated now, as Lt Powers' gun jammed and mistaking the shots fired from other tanks (probably by Koch, see below) for returning fire from the already abandoned Panther, Lt Powers signalled to Staff Sgt Charlie W. Loopey to take over with his M36 tank destroyer. The M36 moved up and stopped on the left side of the road, next to Martell. The sound of German tank engines was heard and Martell tried to warn the tank commander. He was not sure if the tank commander could hear him at all because of all the engine noise. The tank destroyer then opened fire. One round from its 90mm gun pierced the cupola. Several more followed and caused the tank to burn. Martell remembers both Panthers burning through the rest of the night. The three kills were reported to the regiment at 1645, after the action was over.

This account is based on Ferriss report, p. 33. It is not exactly in accordance with the story in Rubel's book, but confirmed by the pictures in this book, which shows the damage to Brauschke's cupola and Kaufmann's lower front plate. Martell didn't see the enemy tanks coming, but only heard the noise of engines and later saw them ablaze. He doesn't remember seeing any other friendly tank or tank destroyer; but supposes that there was another tank or tank destroyer to the right and back of the one he was standing next to (Curtis A. Martell, correspondence with Hans Weber, January 2007.) His testimony fits nicely with the description of the action that took place after 1600, when it was getting dark. Based on different sources, we think it is possible that the shots fired at Krüger's tank made the Germans move away from the American positions, instead of towards it. It is very likely that the tanks Martell heard, were the German rearguard pulling out.

The German tanks now blocked any further advance by the American armour and first had to be pushed from the road. There may have still been up to four Panthers remaining at the station, namely:

- Panther 201: Ostuf. Friedrich Christ, CO 2nd Company
- Panther 202: Uscha. Hans Friedrich, company troop leader
- Panther 231: Ustuf. Helmuth Koch, platoon leader III
- Panther 234: Uscha. Herzog

The presence of Friedrich, Herzog and Koch is mentioned by Rottf. Erwin Szyperski, driver of Brauschke's tank. Koch is said to have been the last tank to leave, covering the retreat of the others at about 1600. As it was now getting quite dark there was no sense in leaving the remaining Panthers exposed at the tip and the armour must have left around the same time the Americans fired on the three tanks. To top off his bad luck, Ostuf. Christ was wounded by shrapnel on this evening.¹

Gen Hobbs left the 119th Inf Rgt shortly after 1600 to regain his divisional HQ at FRANCORCHAMPS. He knew that it would not

94 After the battle had ended many locals toured the battlefield to witness war's destruction. At STOUMONT station a series of photographs was taken resulting in the immortalization of two ladies posing next to the destroyed German vehicles and equipment that littered the area.

More interesting to us however is the pair of Panther tracks that is lying in front of the damaged building belonging to the station infrastructure. These tracks formerly belonged to the Panther of Oscha. Walter Ropeter (222) which had been knocked out by men of the 143rd AAA Gun Bn while spearheading the German advance towards STOUMONT station. Most probably Ropeter's Panther was knocked out once again during the counterattack, as another Panther was claimed at 2025.

For still unknown reasons the Americans evacuated his Panther at a very early stage after the battle. The remaining tracks - likely removed to make transport easier - are the only witnesses to Ropeter's presence at STOUMONT station.

(Gérard Grégoire)



be possible to retake STOU MONT that day, but had hopes that this would be the case the next day. Company C, 1st Bn, pushed on during the evening. Its position at 2200 was reported as being just west of TARGNON. It is doubtful that this was more than an outpost held by a patrol, although the overlays prepared at the end of the day indicated that the company was there. According to the Unit Report dated December 20th, the next day was spent clearing five minefields starting at STOU MONT station and the Regimental Journal confirms that TARGNON was only reached at 1035 next morning. E Co, 2nd Bn was employed for protection of the regimental CP. According to information on an overlay, one platoon was used to form a road beyond the AMBLÈVE on the road to LORCÉE.

Curtis A. Martell, serving as a platoon leader in Co C remembers that his outfit set out the next day only about noon or afternoon without any tank support, which made them feel very uneasy.

At 2025 another Panther was claimed - most probably Ropeter's Panther was "knocked out" again beyond the station building.²

The 740th Tk Bn had another company engaged in the area, as Gen Hobbs referred to them as two weak companies during a telephone conversation with his chief of staff. Rubel had moved the rest of his battalion into to the SPRIMONT depot in the morning on his own initiative and this second company was probably the next one in line to receive more repaired tanks. Eventually, the crews also had M5 light tanks, M8's (an open-topped assault gun variant of the M5), two brand new M24 Chaffee tanks, M7 MHC's and M10 TD's in their arsenal. Later even an M1-12 GMC 155mm gun was used for direct fire into LA GLEIZE.³

At 1630 it was decided to install more armour at the roadblock north of STOU MONT and to send over the S-3, Capt Smithers, with a company from 740th Tk Bn, less one platoon.⁴

Footnotes

1. Undated interrogation report of Friedrich Christ taken prior to the Malmedy Trial; Affidavit Erwin Szyperski, dated 08.03.1946; Terrain analysis June 1991; Personalakte Friedrich Christ
2. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl; 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Reports 19th and 20th Dec. 1944, Unit Jnl.
3. Harry Yeide, Steel Victory, p.210.
4. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl; 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl. The tanks were from Co B, 740th Tk Bn. 2nd Platoon, Co B stayed behind at the rear CP of 119th Inf Rgt at NONCEVEUX. Overlay 740th Tk Bn, 20th Dec. 1944.

The search for gas 13

Clash at Au Rosier

During the early hours of the afternoon, Stubaf. Poetschke picked up Ustuf. Rolf Roland Reiser, new adjutant of the I./SS-Pz. Rgt. 1 on the N.33 at Château FROIDECOUR. As a platoon leader in the 4./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Reiser was one of the officers transferred to the front from the divisional units left behind due to a lack of training and equipment. He came straight from GERMANY and had assumed his new function at 0300 on December 19th while at CHENEUX (where the CP of I./SS-Pz Rgt. 1 was located), replacing the wounded Ustuf Kurt Kramm who had stood in for Ustuf. Arndt Fischer, who had in turn been gravely wounded at LIGNEUVILLE on December 17th, 1944.¹

In a letter to Timm Haasler, dated 11.01.2006, Rolf Reiser corrected the statement given in his affidavit. He had already joined the Kampfgruppe on December 18th, 1944 at 3 PM, just after the Kampfgruppe was attacked by American fighter-bombers. He reported to Poetschke and assumed the tasks of the adjutant at 1600 the same day. While Poetschke took part in the attack on STOUMONT in his own tank, Reiser stayed behind at the CP located at Château FROIDECOUR because there was no combat vehicle left for him.

Together they drove on to LA GLEIZE where they met Ostubaf. Peiper and his adjutant, Hstuf. Hans Erich Gruhle. The officers analyzed the situation and sought a way to resolve the grave supply situation. It was decided to send out patrols in search of enemy gasoline depots. One patrol was sent out north from STOUMONT towards LA REID. After this meeting, Stubaf. Poetschke and Ustuf. Reiser drove back to STOUMONT.² The road leading from STOUMONT to LA REID had already been

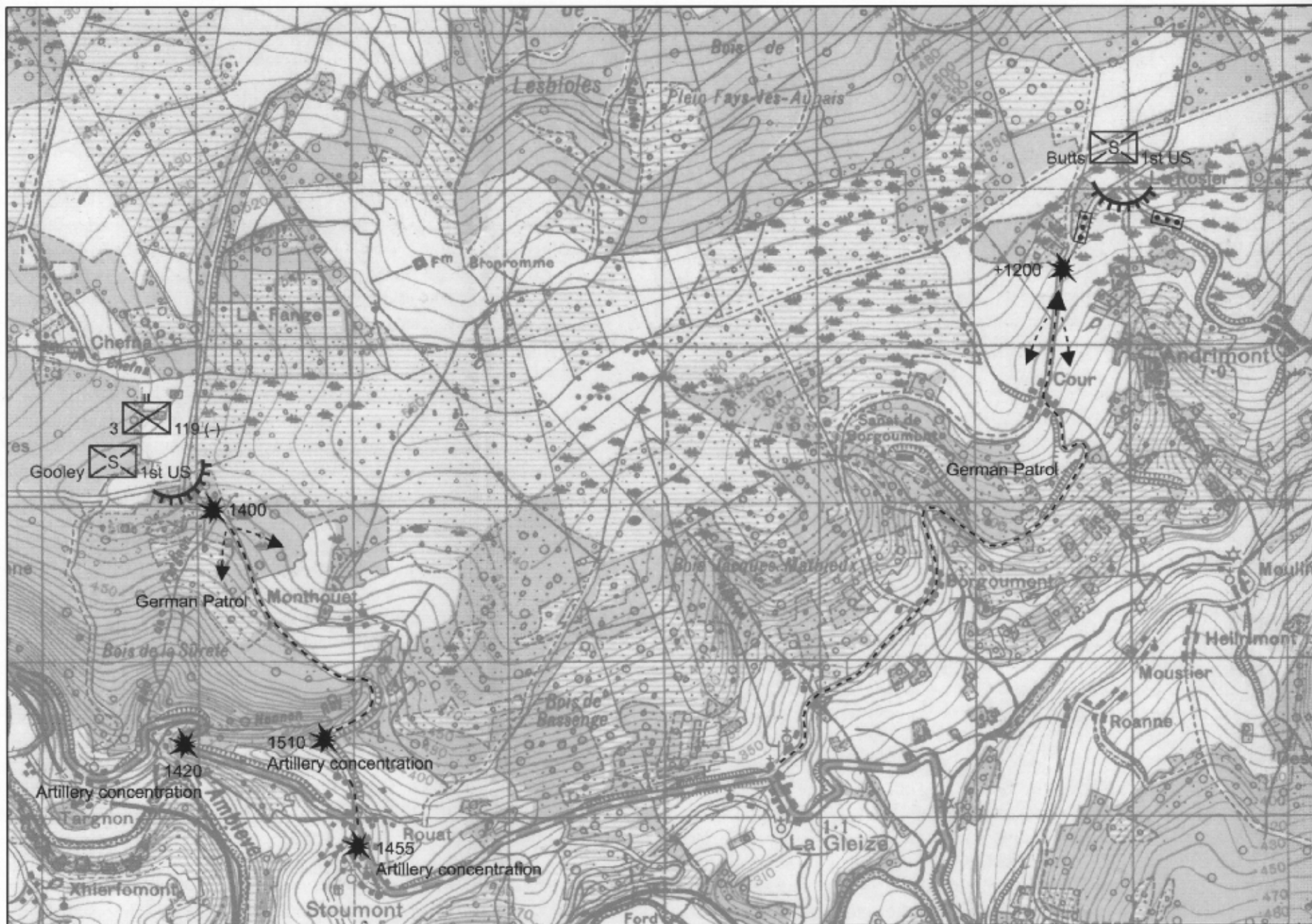
secured by a weak American force because of the nearby the 1st US Army gas dump. To begin with, the road block only consisted of a mobile radio security patrol on a halftrack, commanded by Capt James W. Gooley, HQ Company Ninth US Armd Group. Later they were reinforced with two 90mm Guns.

The 1st US Army security detachment was commanded by Lt Col William Fiske (codename Master Security). He set out five road blocks to defend the Army gas dump in the woods south of SPA. At first, the small force had only five halftracks and three 75mm SP assault guns (of unspecified type, probably M8's) at its disposal. All they could provide was a radio security. Two such patrols were in the area of STOUMONT and LA GLEIZE, the other being the one commanded by Lt Walter R. Butts Jr. The patrols set out for their positions at 1000 on December 18th, 1944.

The security detachment was in turn subordinated to Lt Col Lowell S. Love, Armed Section 1st US Army, who was responsible for the disposition of the Army gas dump south of SPA.³

When during the afternoon of the 18th December both the 110th and 143rd AAA Gun Bn's were assigned a ground combat role, it was primarily the 110th which provided additional support to these road blocks. The two 90mm AA Guns of Battery A positioned near CHEFNÂ were commanded by Capt Theodore A. Silverman.

During the early afternoon approximately 80 men from Co's K and L, 119th Inf Rgt, retreated beyond the positions of the 90mm AA guns. After reorganizing, they positioned themselves in line with one of the guns and dug in with troops from Battery A. At



Map 8: The search for gas

around 1400 a German reconnaissance team consisting of two unidentified armoured vehicles moved within a short distance of the road block. No fire fight developed, as the tanks withdrew as soon as they had been spotted. Then infantry was seen moving up on the road from STOU MONT. The Germans were then subjected to indirect fire from Battery C, 110th AAA Bn, directed by the commanding officer of 110th AAA Bn, Lt Col William F. Curren, from his spotter plane. The shelling had proved effective and the German infantry was forced to leave the road and take to the woods. They then advanced to within 500 metres of the American positions and commenced digging in, but a short time later they retreated back towards STOU MONT. As stated previously, 197th FA Bn shelled the bend at LA ROCHETTE at 1510. At the same time, Lt Col Curren was directing the fire of Battery C on six German tanks reported to be in STOU MONT. The tanks were seen to disperse within the town and no further offensive action was registered north of STOU MONT.

At 1530 the road block was reported as operating two 90mm and two M51 AA guns, one 75mm SP gun, two heavy machine guns on halftracks, an armoured car (probably from elements of the 30th Reconnaissance Troop operating in this area), three 81mm mortars and, six bazookas.⁴ In the meantime, Lt Knox had returned to his company. About 30 men were missing, mainly men from the mortar section and a whole squad from the 2nd Platoon, but the company was by far the strongest in the whole battalion. He later wrote in his diary:

"I'll never forget the welcome that was given me by the various officers when they found out that I was O.K. Of course, the first check had revealed that I was missing and as each of them saw me they were both surprised and very happy to shake my hand. I remember particularly Teddy, the Dutch officer, when he saw me. Captain DelBene (S-3) even gave me his field coat to sleep in that night. He said I would need it more than he would. Having no jeep, McWilliams went back to look for a new one and some ammunition. The Chaplain came around to visit us. Our job was now to dig in with a First Army security force. The captain in charge of that force, of course, had not seen combat and was

*anxious for my suggestions on what to do. He told me that we were going to stop the Germans. I don't think he liked it very much, but I looked at him and said, "What have you got here to stop them with?" He wasted no time in telling me all about the 90mm gun he had. That was fine, very good, but one wasn't enough - that was my point. I felt happier when he told me that an armoured combat team should show up very shortly. We prepared our positions; our men trained his men on how to fire a bazooka and placed them in fox holes for the night. I put an MG from "M" Company over on the left. The only equipment most of my men had left was their rifle and ammunition. They had to drop the rest in running up the steep hill out of town."*⁵

During the late morning, a German scouting patrol had moved out of LA GLEIZE to COUR, a small location on a windswept plateau overlooking LA GLEIZE about five kilometres to the northeast. Further along the road, hardly more than two kilometres away, part of the largest gasoline dump operated by the US Army on the continent was hidden in the woods. Up to 2,000,000 gallons of gasoline were said to have been stored south of SPA.

Lt Butts's radio security patrol arrived at the crossroads called "AU ROSIER" shortly after 1000 on December 18th and set up a road block. Behind them, rear area troops were working frantically to evacuate the gasoline. Lt Butts at first only had his crew and his halftrack at his disposal. During the evening, around 2030, tank engines could be heard from the valley. Lt Butts attempted to reinforce his position and half an hour later got 16 men on a 2ft truck from a gasoline company. Around midnight, Lt Col Love checked the roadblock and was requested to send additional support. This turned up at 0400 in form of the two 90mm AA guns and four M51 multiple AA guns of Battery D, 110th AAA Gun Bn and 639th AW AAA Bn.

*The two guns, Nos 1 and 4, Battery D, were under the command of Sgt Bill Nelson and Sgt L. Theriault*⁶

These elements also brought along machine guns, mines and

bazookas. The approach over the unpaved mountain road under blackout conditions had been very difficult for these reinforcements. The passage between the stacks of fuel cans was so narrow, that the vehicles would bump into them on occasion and the air was full of gasoline fumes. Finally a group of GI's had to be tasked with clearing a way for the convoy. The men missed the rendezvous point marked on the map, a house in a firebreak used by Lt Col Love as his CP. The convoy moved one or two miles further on until they came to the intersection. The officer in charge of the anti-aircraft artillery, Capt Julius Reiver, didn't assume responsibility of the roadblock although he outranked Lt Butts. He just set up his guns to support Lt Butts small force. One 90mm gun had slid off the roadway and both M4 high-speed tractors had to be employed to get it back onto the road. Two M8 armoured cars from Troop B, 125th Cav Reconnaissance Squadron had joined the defenders by noon on December 19th, 1944. All in all there were approximately 100 men at the roadblock.⁷

The 125th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron under Ninth Army control was patrolling the area MAASTRICHT - AACHEN - LIÈGE, hunting for German paratroopers. It is odd to see a reference to it here, in the sector of a different Army. Likely, the M8's were again from the 30th Reconnaissance Troop operating in exactly this area in between 119th and 117th Inf Rgt.

As Lt Butts later wrote, it was *"simply a case of sweating out the night. We couldn't see anything, but we could hear the tanks every now and then. We just waited for something to happen, and thank God, nothing did."*

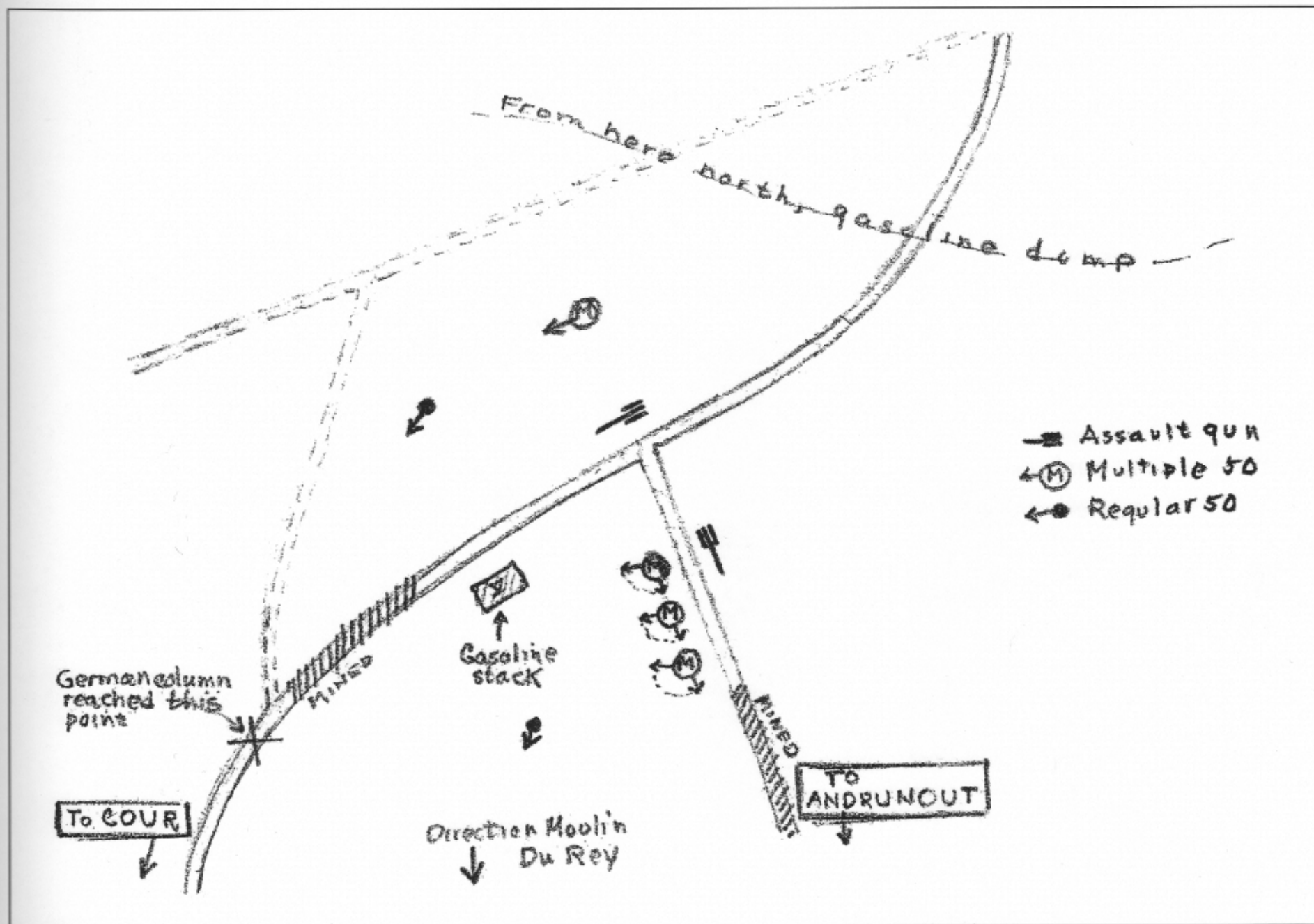
At 1030 the next day, Lt Col Love returned and reported a tank south of the road block.⁸ It's likely that Lt Col Love made his observations at the cluster of houses between LA GLEIZE and BORGOUMONT called "LES TCHEOUS". One of its residents was Doctor Bastin, an employee of the sanatorium at BORGOUMONT. He later wrote that a jeep with three Americans stopped at his house that morning and that he showed them a

badly camouflaged German tank just outside LA GLEIZE. The jeep then took off again towards SPA.

Lt Butts in turn led a patrol down the road toward COUR on a hill overlooking BORGOUMONT (probably near the sanatorium). They saw an enemy tank standing just outside of the town. The crew was working on it in their blue overalls and was apparently unaware of any enemy presence in the vicinity.⁹ The patrol had returned by 1130 and Lt Butts next sent out two foot patrols to watch over the approaches to the crossroads from the southeast and southwest. Both approaches were mined by this time. Capt Reiver also sent out a squad towards LA GLEIZE on reconnaissance. At noon, a German column approached the road block from the west. It consisted of six vehicles and was spotted by Sgt Ernest F. Breit, machine gun section of Battery D. He was sitting on an M51 and watched the enemy through a small clearing. An order to hold fire was issued to the team.

According to Lt Butts these were two armoured cars, two trucks and two self-propelled 88's (with prime movers). The description of two self-propelled 88 guns with prime movers sounds suspicious. Dr. Bastin, now standing on the balcony of the sanatorium at 1100, saw two amphibious cars (Schwimmwagen) and four armoured cars. The 110th AAA gun Bn identified one light tank, one armoured car, two halftracks, and several personnel carriers. If there were armoured cars among this small force, they must have been elements of KG Knittel, then still at LA GLEIZE.

At COUR, the Germans were tipped off by civilians about the nearby location of the gas dump. Moving cautiously further along the road, the Germans noticed the mines lying in a bend in the road. The column stopped just out of sight of the 90mm AA guns, the minefield being placed a little too far to the west to be covered by them. Also, as Capt Reiver later said, the 90mm AA guns could not be depressed below horizontal and one begins to wonder about their usefulness in this situation. Two men got out of the first armoured car and began to inspect the minefield. The gunner of the M51 deployed furthest to the south along the road to ANDRIMONT spotted them through a clearing and opened fire



Map 9: Defense of the Spa gas dump by Lt Butts.

without orders. The German column immediately returned fire and killed the gunner, an enlisted man from the 639th AW AAA Bn. It would be the only fatality on the American side; another man from D Battery was slightly wounded by the same shell said to have come from a light tank (probably a Sdkfz 234/2). Two more M51's and the accompanying infantry with their small arms opened up and sprayed the Germans. The armoured car immediately withdrew. Not much damage was caused on either side, but after ten minutes of heavy firing, the Germans were convinced that the American positions were probably too strong for them and they pulled out. Based on civilian statements, the 110th AAA Bn AAR speaks of several killed and wounded Germans. The light tank and a halftrack were critically damaged, although all vehicles were obviously able to retire to LA GLEIZE. The Americans succeeded in evacuating the gas dump over the next two days. There was no further attempt by the Germans to get at it, although its location must have been known to them.¹⁰

Footnotes

1. Affidavit Rolf Roland Reiser, Schwäbisch Hall, 20.03.1946.

2. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.330.

3. Ferriss report, p.26 and 34b; 1st Lt Walter R. Butts Jr. "Defence of Spa gas dump".

4. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl.

5. David F. Knox, 1st Lt, Co L, 119th Inf Rgt, Journal.

6. Lonnie R. Speer, 110th AAA: Driving Hitler's Crawl-in' Coffin, p.193.

7. Lt Walter R. Butts, "Defense of Spa gas dump", appendix to Ferriss Report. Lonnie R. Speer, 110th AAA: Driving Hitler's Crawl-in' Coffin, p.193f; Correspondence Hans Weber with Lonnie R. Speer.

8. Lt Walter R. Butts, Defence of Spa gas dump, appendix to Ferriss Report.

9. Dr. Bastin, Borgoumont et l'offensive von Rundstedt, p. 5. Although it can not be established with certainty, it is likely that both patrols saw the Tiger II stalled in front of LA GLEIZE on the N.33.

10. 110th AAA Gun Bn, AAR, S-3 Periodic Report 20th December 1944; 1st Lt Walter R. Butts Jr. "Defence of Spa gas dump". The time given for this action in the AAR of 110th AAA Gun Bn is 1615 which is at odds with the statements of Dr. Bastin and 1st Lt Butts. Also note that at this time, 3rd Bn 117th Inf Rgt had already reached the road block, see Chapter 15. Speer has 1545.

The Germans withdraw 14

Stoumont, Cheneux and La Gleize

Only with great difficulty did the elements of III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 succeed in disengaging from the Americans at STOUMONT station. The Kampfgruppe ended any further advance for the day. Ostubaf. Peiper had realized that the right flank between STOUMONT and STOUMONT station could not be secured with the insufficient infantry forces at his disposal. As a result, he ordered the forward elements to pull back to the western edge of STOUMONT. The withdrawal commenced at dusk and the Kampfgruppe deployed a comprehensive defence at STOUMONT. The general supply situation was such that the combat vehicles were in need of immediate resupply of gasoline and ammunition, but due to a lack of any resources, this proved to be impossible.

Towards 2200 the withdrawal to STOUMONT was completed and elements of the KG had been re-deployed to new positions on the edges of the town. To the southwest, west and north, the line was secured by 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with the remaining five Panthers of the 2./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (201, 202, 214, 231 and 234) and the Panther from the staff of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, turret number 151. Out of the eleven Panthers that had started out that morning, six had been destroyed or damaged during the course of the day. The Wirbelwind Flakpanzer that had accompanied the push towards the station had also returned to the town.

The cornerstone of the defence was the sanatorium ST. EDOUARD, commanding the N.33 leading up the valley from STOUMONT station. The Americans referred to it as a castle. It was defended by the two SPW platoons of Ustuf. August Seitz and Oscha. Max Beutner, 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1. The 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was deployed at ROUÂ with at least three of its five Pz IV's that

had made it that far. The next morning, they would move to LA GLEIZE. Two companies of III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, the 9./ and the (heavy) 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 took up positions in the centre of the town and to the west of it, augmented by some paratroopers. The 10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 had suffered badly during the previous twenty-four hours and, now severely depleted, was kept in reserve back at Château FROIDECOUR, where the CP's of both the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and the Kampfgruppe were located. The first was in the hunting lodge at the entrance to the castle park, the latter in the tenant farm east of the castle. The castle's cellars contained the main dressing station (Hauptverbandsplatz or HVP) and the PoW cage. The prisoners of war were under the orders of a German medic who spoke English, administering help to the wounded and dying of both sides. They were also used to dig graves and to haul ammunition. Stubaf. Poetschke was given the task of defending STOUMONT.¹

The 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 was completely pulled out from this sector and recommitted at CHENEUX to reinforce the positions of the le. Fla.Stu.Abt. 84 there. The principal task of this detachment was to secure the crucial bridge over the AMBLÈVE River. During their road march, the company experienced repeated shelling by American artillery. After having issued the necessary march orders to his company, Oscha. Rayer was wounded on his way to the new positions. An SPW brought him to Château FROIDECOUR where he was treated and put into the cellar next to wounded Americans.²

In LA GLEIZE the disposition of troops was as follows: the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with eight Panther tanks under the command of Ustuf. Hennecke, plus Hscha. Knappich's damaged Panther (221), 9.(Pi.)

/ SS- Pz.Rgt. 1, 10.(Fla.) / SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with another Wirbelwind Flakpanzer and s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 with six Tiger II tanks (one of which was already disabled) under the command of Ostufaf. von Westernhagen.³

At dusk, heavy artillery shelling began to fall on LA GLEIZE and the surrounding area. Dr. Bastin describes how all hell broke loose at LA GLEIZE and the echoes of the explosions filled the whole valley, producing a noise never heard before. Indeed, the Unit Journal of 30th Inf Div Arty confirms that at 1600, 113th FA Bn in position northeast of FRANCORCHAMPS was given the mission of zeroing in on the LA VENNE crossroads with a platoon volley every 3 minutes until further notice, while from 1750 on, together with the newly attached 941st FA Bn (4.5-inch guns), it was to interdict the road network at LA GLEIZE.⁴

Peiper must have realized this evening that any further advance was impossible under the given circumstances and asked division for permission to guide the Kampfgruppe back to the main body of the Leibstandarte. The commanding general, SS-Oberführer Mohnke turned down this request and at the same time ordered the positions held until relieved by the division. During the night, the II./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 received orders to move to LA GLEIZE. The Panzergrenadiers crossed the AMBLÈVE River at the small bridge at PETIT SPAL. In addition to these reinforcements who didn't arrive at LA GLEIZE until the next morning, a small quantity of gasoline was brought along during the night.⁵

Paratroopers

In the meantime, the Americans had reinforced their positions in the sector STOUMONT - LA GLEIZE - TROIS-PONTS. The plan was to reassume initiative for December 20th and to attack. On December 19th, the 82nd US AB Div had arrived around WERBOMONT. For the commanding general, Maj Gen Gavin, the situation in his sector remained unclear. His division was first sent en route to defend BASTOGNE, but was diverted further north while on the march. By 1300, the 2nd Bn 119th Inf Rgt was finally relieved at NEUFMOULIN from securing the LIENNE crossings

there. The 504th and 505th Para Inf Rgts thereupon established bridgeheads over the LIENNE River on its east side, but did not encounter any resistance. Two battalions (1st and 2nd) of the 504th Para Inf Rgt set out at 1915 for RAHIER and entered the town around midnight. Further to the south, an earlier move on BASSE-BODEUX by 3rd Bn, 505th Para Inf Rgt, which had moved out at 2000, did not meet any resistance. At midnight the area HAUTE-BODEUX/BASSE-BODEUX, three kilometres to the west of TROIS-PONTS was reached and secured. The divisional reconnaissance platoon scouted as far as HOTTON and found the town free of the enemy. The 508th Para Inf Rgt had secured the crossroads east of BRA on the important highway MANHAY - TROIS-PONTS with Co H, providing additionally security for the road block established by Battery A, 143rd AAA gun Bn. The regiment moved to the OUFNY-CHEVRON area in support of the other two regiments. The 325th Glider Inf Rgt was kept as reserve at WERBOMONT, 3rd Bn battalion had however been sent to BARVAUX at 1530 to set up roadblocks to cover the approaches to HOTTON. There it was in contact with elements of the 7th Armd Div. Also, F Co, 2nd Bn, 325th Glider Inf Rgt occupied the important road junction of GRANDMENIL and MANHAY to the south.⁶

For Col Sutherland the relief of his 2nd Bn by the paratroopers was significant even if it proved too late to fend off the Germans in front of his CP. He intended to employ it together with 1st Bn to recapture STOUMONT the next day. 2nd Bn assembled just east of REMOUCHAMPS but Co E was moved up to protect the regimental CP at HALTE and two platoons were attached to 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt. As outlined above, the provisional company of 3rd Bn spent the night under Capt Stewart securing the crossroads near CHEFNÂ.⁷

Footnotes

1. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 106; Gerhard Cuppens, Malmédy - 17.12.1944, p. 65; Patrick Agte, Peiper, p. 329; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 01.05.2005; B. Hall, A Blood Dimmed Tide, p. 246.
2. Rudolf Rayer, Declaration made at Dachau 26.04.1947.
3. Various letters from Werner Wendt to Timm Haasler, 1999-2004; letter from Karl Wortmann to Timm Haasler, dated 23.11.1999; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 330.
4. Dr. Bastin, Borgoumont etc. p. 55; HQ 30th Div Arty, Unit Jnl and Unit Report No 187 to 189.
5. The information provided by Mac Donald that II./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 had already reached LA GLEIZE during the night is incorrect. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 116; Charles Mac Donald, Battle of the Bulge, p. 443; Kane, 1. SS-Pz.Div, p. 16.
6. 82nd AB Div, G-3 Periodic, G-2 Journal, 19.12.44, p. 1, Historical Narrative; Michael Reynolds, The Devil's Adjutant, p. 156; Hugh M. Cole, The Ardennes etc. p. 345.
7. 119th Inf Rgt, AAR, 1st Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl.



95 The M4 Sherman of Sgt Edwin D. Goodridge received a deadly penetration in the side panel at the front. It was hit by a German tank firing from the area around HASSOUMONT. The Sherman immediately exploded and three members of its crew perished.

(Stefan De Meyer)

Towards La Gleize 15

The diversionary attack by 3rd Bn 117th Inf Rgt

Other elements from 30th US Inf Div staged an attack on LA GLEIZE on December 19th. These were the 3rd Bn 117th Inf Rgt (approximately 400 men), reinforced by Co A, 743rd Tk Bn (120 men). After being relieved during the morning at MALMEDY by 3rd Bn, 120th Inf Rgt, the battalion was ordered by the S-3 at 1115 to load two companies and the heavy weapons company onto ten trucks provided by the 119th Inf Rgt and to move them to FRANCORCHAMPS. The divisional CP had already been relocated to FRANCORCHAMPS along with the regimental CP of 117th Inf Rgt, which also relocated to this location at 1510. Co A, 743rd Tk Bn, was briefed by its commander on this new assignment and moved out of MALMEDY towards FRANCORCHAMPS at 1000.¹

The Combat Team (CT) formed with 3rd Bn, 117th Inf Rgt, and Co A, 743rd Tk Bn, was assembled at FRANCORCHAMPS and set out down the valley in a south-westerly direction. The march passed through NEUVILLE, where the column passed a roadblock manned by Co G, 120th Inf Rgt. After negotiating a minefield, the combat team marched further on to RUY. This location was reached by 1400.²

There the combat team was split. 2nd and 3rd Platoon, Co A, 743rd Tk Bn, together with Co K, 117th Inf Rgt, progressed north via ANDRIMONT towards COUR, to block the route from LA GLEIZE to SPA. This led them to the road block at AU ROSIER defended by Lt Butts's men, reached at about 1600. The advance encountered no armoured resistance. A few enemy infantry were driven out of COUR, following this skirmish, defensive positions were set up and the reinforced company settled down for the night.³

At 1400, Co L, 117th Inf Rgt, had reached MOULIN DU RUY and progressed south towards ROANNE, reaching this location half an hour later. From there, a strong patrol set out directly for LA GLEIZE and moved down the hillside towards the small river ROANNAY. It met with strong small arms fire - probably from the vicinity of Moulin Maréchal - and had to withdraw, taking along its wounded and dead.⁴

Reynolds links this engagement with the account by Rolf Ebrhardt, 7./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 on "Sperrgruppe Müble" in which a Puma (armoured reconnaissance car) repelled an American patrol, but this incident happened the following day since Ebrhardt stayed at STOUMONT until the morning of December 20th, 1944. It appears that this event went completely unnoticed by the German side, as no German source mentions a clash with elements of 117th Inf Rgt on December 19th, 1944 near Moulin Maréchal.

At 1500, the medium tanks of 1st Platoon, Co A, 743rd Tk Bn, arrived in ROANNE. They sported purple reconnaissance panels on their decks and an American observation aircraft circling about the ROANNAY valley was spotted by Dr. Bastin. The American tanks took up positions among the houses of the village and opened fire on the German positions in the valley below around Moulin Maréchal. The mill buildings were hidden by woods and lying in a depression, so any direct fire from ROANNE could not have been very effective. At 1630, while it was getting dark, German tanks were sighted at the edge of a wood near LA GLEIZE.

It is possible that this location is again near Moulin Maréchal, where by looking over and behind the tree line, the N.33 can be seen heading towards LA GLEIZE.

Ten minutes later, the combat team announced the destruction of a Panther. Given the transmitted coordinates in the S-3 Journal of 743rd Tk Bn, this can only have been the damaged Tiger II 223 lying in the bend of the N.33 heading to LA GLEIZE since the day before.⁵

The tank was claimed to have been disabled during this action, but it did not burn or fire back. Lt Robert A. Peters, the AT officer of the 3rd Bn, later claimed to have successfully shot off one of its track with a towed 57mm AT gun of the battalion's AT platoon. Three Shermans were also firing on the tank, but credit was given to the AT gun, which was the first to have fired. It used the new "sabot" ammunition obtained from the British. Given that Lt Peters recalls having stopped a whole column of King Tigers approaching LA GLEIZE, the most likely course of action is that a column of vehicles moving up in Peiper's direction attracted the attention of the Americans, which then also noticed the tank already stationary at the road and opened fire on it.⁶

A short time later, three German tanks took up positions beyond the effective range of the Shermans. One tank fired from the village of LA GLEIZE. Dr. Bastin saw the tracer fire flying over the housetops of ROANNE ending in the field short of MOULIN DU RUY. After some twenty rounds, the gun stopped firing, but another gun at HASSOUMONT (a cluster of houses in the northeastern part of LA GLEIZE) opened up instead. The first round went nowhere near the target. The second one hit the top of a farm building and the third a Sherman. It was fired from a distance of over two kilometres and penetrated the reinforced side panel at the front of the M4 commanded by Sgt Edwin D. Goodridge, setting it on fire immediately. The tank exploded and three members of its crew perished.

Sgt Goodridge and his gunner had left the tank just moments before to look over the ground situation. At once, all the machine

guns on the German side opened up on this illuminated target, but its smoke covered the retreat of the remaining four tanks of the platoon.⁷

At 1650, the regiment was informed on the reached positions as follows: battalion CP at MOULIN DU RUY, Co L at ROANNE, Co K at COUR and Co I at RUY.

Contrary to Reynolds, no indication was found that 2nd Bn, 120th Inf Rgt had moved to occupy RUY.

During the night, the presence of the newly arrived Shermans from Co B, 743rd Tk Bn in RUY was noticed by Co I and duly reported to the regiment at 0045. Far more disconcerting was the fact that two German tanks had been heard moving towards BORGOUMONT at 0240.

96 - 97 - 99 Tiger II 223 was abandoned outside LA GLEIZE on December 19th, 1944. It still has the brackets on the rear hull for mounting the jack but has no coat of Zimmerit which was no longer applied to AFV's after September 9th. This indicates that it was manufactured between early September and the beginning of October 1944 when Henschel were instructed to stop fitting the jack bracket because the associated jack was no longer to be issued with the vehicle. After the recapture of LA GLEIZE the American 1st US Army organised a tour for some press corps photographers during which these photographs were taken. It is almost certain that the GI's we can see in the photos are from the escort provided to the photographers and that they have set fire to the Tiger II to provide some "interest" for their guests.

(Øyvind Leonsen, Time Life, WWP)









Enter the 3rd Armoured Division

The same night, another opponent of Peiper's Kampfgruppe readied itself near SPA - Combat Command B, 3rd US Armd Div. This unit was tasked with destroying the German forces north of the AMBLÈVE River. As we have seen above, it had been attached to XVIII Corps (Airborne) and ordered to an assembly area near THEUX with the mission of protecting VERVIERS and - more importantly - to attack south towards STOUMONT and LA GLEIZE. CCB consisted of

2nd Bn, 36th Armd Inf Rgt
HQ 33rd Armd Rgt
HQ and HQ Co, 1st Bn, 33rd Armd Rgt
HQ and HQ Co, 2nd Bn, 33rd Armd Rgt
Light Tank Co's A, B, 33rd Armd Rgt
Medium Tank Co's D, E, F and I, 33rd Armd Rgt
1st Platoon, Rcn Co, 33rd Armd Rgt
1st and 2nd Platoons, Co D, 23rd Eng Bn⁸

The main components were the two composite tank battalions, the 1st Bn, 33rd Armd Rgt, commanded by Maj Kenneth McGeorge and the 2nd Bn, 33rd Armd Rgt, by Lt Col William B. Lovelady. Both battalions were reinforced with armoured infantry and engineers. Lt Col Lovelady arrived with his battalion at 2200 in the assembly area around LA REID. An hour later, Maj Kenneth McGeorge arrived with his battalion. CCB took up hasty defensive positions. During the night, further preparations took place and three task forces were formed. The further action is beyond the scope of the present narrative.⁹

⁹⁹ Tiger II 223 at the edge of LA GLEIZE after it had been blown up.

(Stefan De Meyer)

Footnotes

1. 30th Div, AAR 4th Jan. 1945; 117th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl; 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History.
2. 30th Inf Div, G-3 Jnl; 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History.
3. 117th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl; 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History.
4. Grégoire, Les Panzers etc., p.15
5. 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History. The tank was later photographed on this exact location.
6. 117th Inf Rgt, Unit Jnl; Robert A. Peters, letter to Warren Watson.
7. Dr. Bastin in Borgoumont et l'offensive Von Rundstedt. p.55; 743rd Tk Bn, S-3 Jnl History.
8. 117th Inf.Rgt, Unit Jnl; 743rd Tk Bn. S-3 Unit Jnl History; AAR 117th Inf Rgt, S. 2.
9. 30th Inf Div, AAR 4th Jan. 1945.
10. Michael Reynolds, The Devil's Adjutant, p. 166 f; Combat Command B, 3rd Armd, Report of Action for December by S-2; Spearhead in the West, p.219.

Appendix 1: SS Panzerregiment 1

between Normandy and Ardennes

1. Retreat from France

The remnants of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 reassembled in the area of HASSELT on the 22.08.44. Typical for the state of the overall situation some members of the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 reached HASSELT in a captured American tractor. Around the 30.08.44 the first replacements started to arrive at the headquarters company of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Other elements of the regiment had withdrawn directly to Germany during the retreat. For instance most of the soldiers from the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 succeeded in boarding a train at CAMBRAI and moved to the area of SIEGBURG in early September. The company was lucky enough to return one of the few tanks of the Leibstandarte back to GERMANY. This tank once belonged to the company commander Ostuf. Werner Wolff and had the turret number 702. The tank was damaged near TILLY when the turret received a hit, but as the engine was still running, the decision was made to drive the tank home to GERMANY. Two tank drivers from the 7th Company were used each taking turns to cover the long distances involved. They drove from TRUN to ELBEUF where they crossed the SEINE. Passing through BELGIUM they reached AACHEN in early September and then were transferred to HENNEF near SIEGBURG.¹

According to the diary of the company commander of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Ostuf. Benoni Junker, his company took over 16 Pz IV's at LIÈGE between 31.08.-03.09.44. However on 03.09.44 the company received orders to hand over the tanks to the 116. Pz.Div. A former member of the company goes so far as to state that they took over 22 new Pz IV's at the central station in LIÈGE. The tanks had no turret numbers but they had full loads of

ammunition and fuel. Another member of the same company also added that some of the tank crews at LIÈGE belonged to the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. He goes on to say that from the station they drove directly to a food depot located in the city. Afterwards they came under the command of the 116. Pz.Div. near VISÉ where they received the mission of securing the area west of the MEUSE.²

According to a report by the General der Panzertruppen West 116. Pz.Div. took over 17 Pz IV's on 04.09.44 at LIÈGE which came from the tank factory in LINZ (train number 1163) and were primarily designated for the 1. SS-Pz.Div. Contrary to this, the war diary of Heeresgruppe B mentioned the same day that 16 Pz IV's and 12 Panthers were available for takeover by the 1. SS-Pz.Div. at the Fonckkaserne in LIÈGE. The next day the war diary of Heeresgruppe B mentioned that the 116. Pz.Div. took over 15 Panthers to the northwest of NAMUR. By checking the allocation lists of the General der Panzertruppen (Gen.d.Pz.Tr.) it becomes obvious that only a total of 17 Pz IV's and not a single Panther were allocated to the 116. Pz.Div. or the 1. SS-Pz.Div. during the first week of September. Despite all the conflicting accounts it is obvious that only 16 or 17 Pz IV's were handed over at LIÈGE.³ During the first week of September, 5. Panzerarmee received an order regarding rest and refitting of armoured tank units and independent tank battalions issued by Heeresgruppe B (Ia Nr. 6917/44 g.Kdos.) on 03.09.44.⁴ According to this order:

- 1) 2. Pz.Div., 116. Pz.Div., 9. SS-Pz.Div., 10. SS-Pz.Div. and Stu.Pz.Abt. 217 remain deployed with their serviceable units.
- 2) 1. SS-Pz.Div., 2. SS-Pz.Div., 12. SS-Pz.Div., s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101, s. SS-Pz.Abt. 102, s. Pz.Abt. 503 and s. Pz.Jg.Abt. 654 were transferred to the Reich for full rest and refitting.

All heavy weapons with their towing vehicles and armoured combat vehicles which were serviceable or serviceable after maintenance within a fortnight had to be handed over to the units mentioned under 1) by special instruction of Pz.AOK 5. Transfer of the units mentioned under 2) had to be carried out in compact groups after receipt of a special instruction issued by Pz.AOK 5. The moment these units crossed the German border they came under the command of the Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres (BdE).⁵

In an order (Id Nr. 356/44 g.Kdos.) issued on 05.09.44 to Panzerstützpunkt Nord and Mitte, the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West made clear that it was of vital importance to gather all personnel (especially dispersed personnel) of the units designated for rest and refitting tightly and to make sure that these soldiers would reach their parent units. Therefore the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West ordered all available personnel of these units to be transferred from the Panzerstützpunkte to the collection points which were located at:

SIEGBURG	1. SS-Pz.Div.
LÜDENSCHIED	2. SS-Pz.Div.
ARNSBERG	12. SS-Pz.Div.
ARNSBERG	s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101
ARNSBERG	s. SS-Pz.Abt. 102
LÜDENSCHIED	s. Pz.Jg.Abt. 654
PFORZHEIM	Pz.L.Div.
PADERBORN	s. Pz.Abt. 503

Personnel of these units were only allowed to stay at the Panzerstützpunkt if they were needed for maintenance of vehicles in need of repair or to drive vehicles to the Panzerstützpunkt. All other personnel, especially tank crews without tanks had to be transferred to their units in compact groups.⁶ But not all military installations in the West followed this order. A member of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 remembered that he reached a collection point near AACHEN with two of his comrades. They were sent to a barracks in AACHEN where they would form part of an alert company together with other dispersed soldiers. Thanks to the chaotic circumstances in the barracks they managed to escape to the railroad station where

they manned an anti-aircraft wagon on a train heading to COLOGNE.⁷

Just before the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West had issued his order; the SS-Führungshauptamt had issued another order which contained conflicting instructions. According to the order SS-FHA II Org.Abt. Ia/II Nr. 2891/44 g. Kdos. dated 04.09.44, all SS tank crews without tanks had to join the SS-Pz.Ausb.u.Ers.Rgt. at the SENNELAGER training ground immediately. The commander of the SS-Pz.Ausb.u.Ers.Rgt. was responsible for the registration and care of these soldiers upon their arrival. Furthermore he had to issue the ongoing notification to the SS-FHA, Inspection 6. But this order wasn't forwarded to Heeresgruppe B and Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West before 06.09.44.⁸

On 06.09.44, the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West altered his order Id Nr. 355/44 g.Kdos regarding rest and refitting of tank units in the West after it became clear that refitting the units according to the structure "*Panzer-Division 44 - Freie Gliederung*" was impossible due to overall shortages in men and material. The divisions and independent units received permission to propose their own structures based on the actual personnel and material condition of their units. This amended structure was called "*Gliederung Kampfgruppe*". The new structure had to be sent by messenger in quadruplicate immediately. The structure would show the equipment and state of every unit (company etc.); vital tank spare parts still required were also to be reported immediately. The same day the 1. SS-Pz.Div., 2. SS-Pz.Div., 12. SS-Pz.Div., s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101, s. SS-Pz.Abt. 102 and s. Pz.Jg.Abt. 654 were officially released from the support of Panzerstützpunkt Nord. All soldiers of the aforementioned units that were with the Panzerstützpunkt received order to move to the rest and refitting area of their parent units independently. Based on the order of Pz.AOK 5, these units had to transfer all damaged tanks to the maintenance installations of Panzerstützpunkt Nord. These installations were located at ICHENDORF (15 km west of COLOGNE) and GREVENBROICH (25 km to the northwest of COLOGNE).⁹

For this reason the 1. SS-Pz.Div. started to transfer from the area

of HASSELT to the area around SIEGBURG. SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 moved via MAASTRICHT and AACHEN to SIEGBURG.¹⁰

On 08.09.44, the 116. Pz.Div. reported that an armoured reconnaissance troop of the division which had been sent to LIÈGE had skirmished with an enemy tank unit at ROCOURT (4 km north of LIÈGE) at 0100. The reconnaissance troop was made up of eight tanks and was dispersed during the engagement. Pictures taken after the battle document the loss of at least five Panzer IV's at ROCOURT. After the war the divisional commander of the 116. Pz.Div. accused an officer of the Waffen-SS of being responsible for the loss of quite a number of tanks. According to him the officer had tried to transfer 15 out of 30 tanks to his division which he had just taken over at LIÈGE. Unaware of the overall situation the officer ran the tanks directly into the enemy. The rest of the tanks had been taken over by the 116. Pz.Div. according to General Graf von Schwerin. The story is quite strange, as von Schwerin doesn't mention the ROCOURT incident in his after action report at all. As we already know only 16-17 Panzer IV's were allocated to the 116. Pz.Div. / 1. SS-Pz.Div. during the first week of September.

Surprisingly the company commander of 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 mentioned in his diary that his tank was destroyed during the night 07./08.09.44 near LIÈGE. The rest of his tanks were blown up the same night. At the break of dawn, Ostuf. Benoni Junker crossed the MEUSE and was questioned by the commander of II./ Pz.Rgt. 16, Major Brühl the next day on the orders of General Graf von Schwerin. First of all these entries in the diary clearly show that 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was still attached to 116. Pz.Div. although the tanks should have been already handed over to 116. Pz.Div. three days before.¹¹

What really happened during the evening at ROCOURT on 07.09.44 is reported by a tank driver of 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:

"In support of the troops retreating from France we were operating to the west of LIÈGE. We were resting in camouflaged positions on the reverse slope of a road when around noon

*approximately 30 American armoured vehicles drove by in the direction of ROCOURT on the road in front of us. They drove by unbindered and vanished in the next village. In the afternoon we received the order to advance on the same road in the direction the Americans had taken. On the outskirts of the village we met the first jubilant villagers shouting "Vives les Américaines". Inside the village the Americans who had been forewarned by the villagers were firing at us from the back streets. As we were low on fuel we retreated through back roads and the adjoining gardens. When it became dark all the serviceable tanks were blown up. In a nearby narrow lane I met two other members of my company and we continued our withdrawal to the east on foot carrying only small arms and some food, trying to bypass each village en route."*¹²

It remains unclear why the company didn't attack the advancing Americans from their ideal position in the afternoon. Later it was claimed that Ostuf. Junker was sleeping in the back of his car when the Americans arrived.

Another member of the company added that it was already between 2000 and 2100 when they reached the little Belgian town. His tank received a direct hit and started to burn. As the turret was blocked he wasn't able to leave the tank through the turret and therefore he bailed out through the bottom hatch of the tank. He reached a bridge over the MEUSE on foot the same night. When the Americans had driven by earlier and the company was in danger of being encircled. The first platoon leader, Ostuf. Karl-Heinz Asmussen, acted on his own authority and drove with six of his tanks to the east bypassing ROCOURT. It was later said that he reached 116. Pz.Div. without further losses.¹³

It seems to be obvious that Ostuf. Junker didn't try to transfer the tanks to the 116. Pz.Div. as claimed by General Graf von Schwerin. It mitigates in favor of Ostuf. Junker that he was sent back to his division on 11.09.44, a free man after the investigation by Major Brühl. He reached LOHMAR via DÜREN the same day, where he joined the staff of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Ostuf. Junker makes no

further mention of the incident nor is there any indication that he was court-martialed over the ROCOURT incident. Other members of his company that survived the engagement at ROCOURT had arrived in the SIEGBURG area by mid-September after an odyssey via AACHEN, COLOGNE and KOBLENZ.¹⁴

It is very interesting to see that the 116. Pz.Div. also had an armoured reconnaissance troop operating in the area. The radio operator in a Pz IV of I./ Pz.Rgt. 16 remembers:

*"At VISÉ we were spread on the new tanks; I also became a "real" tank-man again. We hardly made ourselves familiar with the new tanks when we received the order to reconnoitre into the direction of LIÈGE. In the late evening we rumbled forward with eight tanks. Darkness was closing in and forced us to advance more cautiously on a broad front and stalked to the south. When we reached ROCOURT, located approximately four kilometres before LIÈGE, we suddenly received heavy tank and anti-tank fire. Three of our tanks received direct hits and started to burn within seconds. Driving backwards to avoid showing the vulnerable side armour to the enemy, we sought cover behind the undulating terrain. During an observation stop we could identify approximately 20 enemy tanks which were deploying for a counterattack. After we succeeded in destroying four of these tanks, the Americans beat a hasty retreat and disappeared from view. I radioed a report to the division that ROCOURT was in enemy hands. We received instructions to return to VISÉ in order to cross the MEUSE via the only bridge still intact between LIÈGE and MAASTRICHT. We had hardly crossed the bridge when engineers who had been waiting for us to cross blew the bridge up."*¹⁵

On 09.09.44 Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West issued the order Id Nr. 403/44 g.Kdos which regulated the hand-over of all armored vehicles and weapons by the units designated for rest and refitting. Due to this order, the 1. SS-Pz.Div. had to hand over all tanks, armored reconnaissance vehicles, guns, tractors, light and medium SPW's to the 9. SS-Pz.Div. The receiving division was ordered to contact 1. SS-Pz.Div. at their collection point in SIEGBURG. The 1. SS-

Pz.Div. had been instructed to make sure the vehicles being transferred were brought to a serviceable status using all of the available resources and to ensure they were ready for hand-over. The receiving unit was responsible for reporting the numbers and types of vehicle that were transferred to their inventory. Looking at the strength report of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. dated 12.09.44 it would appear the division fully complied with this order as it reported no combat ready armoured vehicles. Unfortunately the information about how many vehicles were handed over to the 9. SS-Pz.Div. by the LAH is missing, but another report of Panzerstützpunkt Nord shows a very detailed allocation of vehicles that once belonged to the 12. SS-Pz.Div. Dated 14.09.44 this report shows 4 Pz IV's, 12 Panthers, 3 Jagdpanzer IV's and 3 SPW's of the 12. SS-Pz.Div. in the various installations of the Panzerstützpunkt.¹⁶

On 13.09.44 an order was issued stating that all units designated for rest and refitting near the frontline (west of the RHINE) should remain under the overall command of the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West while the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. was in charge of all other units to the east of the RHINE. Responsibility for these units was forwarded to Generaloberst und SS-Oberstgruppenführer Josef Dietrich by the command of Hitler himself.¹⁷

1.1 Assembly in the area of SIEGBURG

The SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 first assembled with its staff at LOHMAR and later at BENSBERG. The I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was located at HOLWEIDE (staff), DELLBRÜCK (2./ 1) and BRÜCK (1./ 1 was quartered in the local school building); II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was located at LOHMAR, BERGISCH-GLADBACH, BREIDT-DEESEN, GEBER (7./ 1) and POHLHAUSEN. Hstuf. Werner Poetschke was still in command of the regiment. First replacements joined the regiment, like Ustuf. Rolf Buchheim, who became the new signals officer of the 1st battalion and the future company commander of the 7./ 1, Hstuf. Oskar Klingelhöfer, introduced himself. As of 19.09.44 the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, temporarily led by Hstuf. Gerhard Nüske, started to work again according to a duty schedule. On 22.09.44 the remaining vehicles of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 were

mustered and at the same day the soldiers of the company were deloused. On 24.09.44 8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 performed a field exercise and three days later II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 conducted a night march.¹⁸

By mid-September the last surviving tank of the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had returned from NORMANDY. It was the tank with the turret number 702, which once belonged to Ostuf. Werner Wolff and which had received a turret hit near TILLY. The two tank-drivers Suttner and Thorn had managed to drive the tank back by taking turns driving. Starting at ELBOEUF, where they crossed the SEINE, they drove through BELGIUM to AACHEN and from there to HENNEF near SIEGBURG. Here they met the bulk of the regiment and the day after their arrival they drove the tank to GEBER near NEUNKIRCHEN-SEELSCHEID where the 7th Company was already quartered from almost a fortnight. The first replacements had also arrived for the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and they were now being trained on tank 702, but the so called "old ones" didn't attend the training.¹⁹

It remains uncertain what happened to the eight Flakpanzer IV's which were handed over to the 1. SS-Pz.Div. on 09.09.44 at SIEGBURG.²⁰

During the time in this area 16 EK 1 and 93 EK 2 were awarded to members of the regiment to honor their performance in Normandy. The losses in men during the Normandy campaign had been very high, amongst them the regimental commander, Ostuf. Joachim Peiper, and both battalion commanders, Stubaf. Herbert Kuhlmann (I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1) and Stubaf. Heinz Kling (II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1) had been wounded. Furthermore the company commanders Ostuf. Hans Malkomes (2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1), Ostuf. Otto Ernst (4./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1), Ostuf. Fritz Streipart (5./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1) and Ostuf. Werner Wolf (7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1) had been wounded while Ostuf. Josef Armberger (8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1) and at least four platoon leaders of the regiment had lost their lives.²¹

Further orders to refit the regiment dated back to this period. In mid-September men of the Flak platoon of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and the SS-Flak-Abt. 1 (in particular men of 4th and 5th Battery) who

had proven themselves were sent to the Panzerschule at the training ground OHRDURF in THURINGIA in order to form a Panzerflak platoon for SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. The non-commissioned officers received thorough basic tank training at first. After the young recruits from various training and replacement units finally arrived, amongst them also some former Luftwaffe members, the new gun crews were formed. These crews later received the name tank crew because they didn't operate a gun mounted on a halftrack or tracked chassis any more but an anti-aircraft gun mounted on a Panzer IV chassis. The training for the gunners first started on static anti-aircraft guns. During the same period the tank drivers and radio operators received their individual training. In the midst of the training, which lasted for approximately 8 to 10 weeks, eight Flakpanzer IV's arrived by train from SILESIA. There were four tanks with a 3.7cm Flak gun and four tanks with a 2cm quadruple gun. In the end tanks were allotted between the crews as all soldiers had been trained on both types of guns. The crews also had a live firing exercise on the training ground against aerial targets. Further training included the deployment of the company against ground targets. It is unclear if the Army or Waffen-SS was in charge of the training. It was typical in this sixth year of war that the crew of each tank came from different places and also different branches of service. For example the crewmembers of Uscha. Karl Wortmann's tank came from AUSTRIA, SUDETENLAND, BRANDENBURG, WESTPHALIA and LOWER SAXONY. His 1st gunner was a former Luftwaffe member who was transferred to the Waffen-SS. On top of this there was some special purposes personnel within the 10.(Fla.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. One of them was a former non-commissioned officer from the Luftwaffe who wasn't lucky enough to get his own tank but who wore his old Luftwaffe uniform and also kept his former rank initially. Later on he also wore the uniform of the Waffen-SS and assumed a Waffen-SS rank.²²





100 - 101 Two pictures portraying a knocked out Panzer IV of 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt.1 at ROCOURT (4 km north of LIÈGE). On 03.09.44 the Leibstandarte had received seventeen Panzer IV's in LIÈGE, which were transferred to the 116. Pz.Div. the following day. The 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt.1 under Ostuf. Benoni Junker stayed under the command of the "Windhund" Division until at least 08.09.44. In his manuscript for the Historical Division, General Graf von Schwerin accused an officer of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. with the loss of these Panzers.

102 Even though the quality of the image is somewhat poor, we can clearly see the fire damage and the two exhaust pipes.

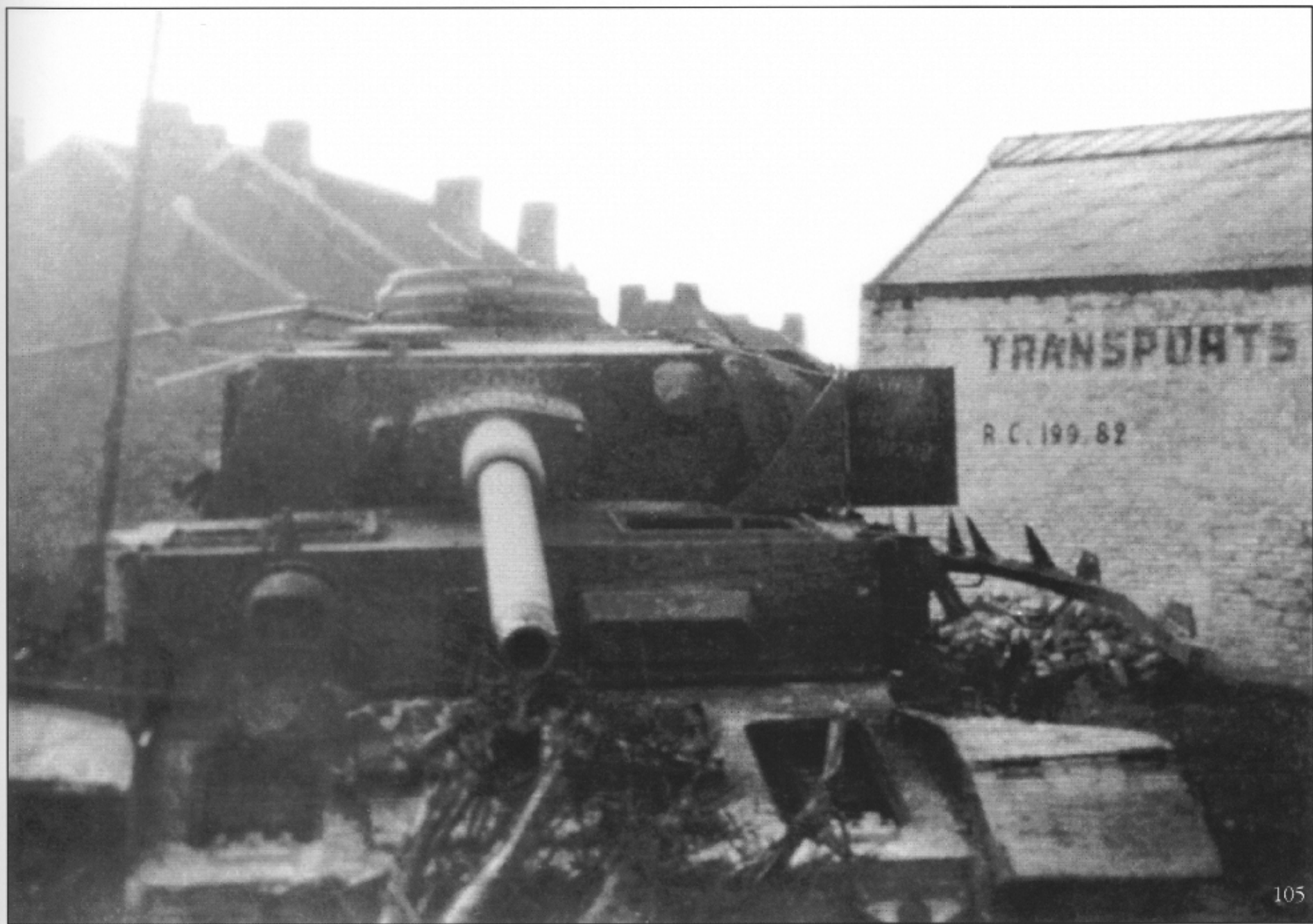
103 - 104 - 105 According to General Graf von Schwerin, commander of the 116. Pz.Div., his division had to take over thirty Panzer IV's from the Leibstandarte. Only fifteen Panzer IV's were received in LIÈGE. The other half would be transferred in the division's combat zone by an officer of the Leibstandarte. This never transpired as the officer in charge, while trying to transfer the tanks to his own division, lost all of the Panzer IV's after driving them into a suburb of LIÈGE that had already been occupied by American forces.



102













1.2 Heavy SS-Pz.Abt. 101

Although s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 didn't belong to the 1. SS-Pz.Div. during the Normandy campaign, we will analyse this unit too as the battalion was attached to the division as the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 during the Ardennes offensive. While the bulk of the

battalion was withdrawing towards the SEINE after the breakout from the FALAISE cauldron 1./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 had been detrained to the northwest of PARIS after having taken over fourteen Tiger II's in GERMANY beforehand.

On 25.08.44 the remnants of the 2./ and 3./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101

106 - 107 - 108 General Graf von Schwerin had sent out an armoured reconnaissance patrol into the direction of LIÈGE. According to records of the 116. Pz.Div. this patrol was made up of eight Panzer IV's, of which seven are claimed to have been knocked out. Photographical evidence confirms the loss of at least five Panzer IV's in ROCOURT.

A knocked out Panzer IV in ROCOURT clearly showing heavy damage, probably caused by an internal explosion or a demolition charge. According to a veteran of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt.1 most Panzers were blown up due to the lack of fuel. Note that the muzzle brake was removed at an early stage.

(3 x Stefan De Meyer)

109 - 110 Until today no information had surfaced on the whereabouts of the 3rd Platoon 1./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 in Northern FRANCE. This very rare picture of Tiger II 133 was made by T/Sgt Harold C. Sater of the 837th Ordnance Combat Depot Company. According to the handwritten notes on the back of the photograph, it was taken near TROYES.

(Harold C. Sater/Steve Donicik)

reached the SEINE and crossed the river with ferries near ROUEN and ELBEUF. Two Tiger I's were left behind on the south bank of the SEINE due to technical breakdowns. The companies were assembled at SONGEONS where another three tanks had to be left behind. At the same time the 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 took over two Tiger II's with Porsche turrets of s.Pz.Abt. 503 in the SAINT-SOUPLETTES area.

According to Agte, the 1./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 made its first enemy contact near TROYES on 25.08.44. Most probably these were the Tiger II's of the 3rd Platoon. Until today no information had surfaced about the whereabouts of this platoon, until the recent discovery of a photograph showing an abandoned Tiger II 133 in the vicinity of TROYES.²³

On 26.08.44 the 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 attacked the American bridgehead at LIMAY. Together with infantry elements of the 18. Luftwaffenfeld-division the company advanced from the area west of SAILLY to the southeast, in the direction of FONTENAY-SAINT-PÈRE. One of the two Tiger II's with the Porsche turret had to be abandoned. The Tiger II of Ustuf. Friedrich Stamm was also destroyed, while Tiger II 124 under Oscha. Fritz Zahner was turned over by a bomb from an American fighter-bomber. The attack was broken off at dusk with the Tigers retreating north to ARTHIES.

The next day elements of the 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 were fighting near ESTERNAY. Further west two Tiger I's of the 2nd Company supported the attack of Kampfgruppe Schrader (49. Inf.Div.) against the British SEINE bridgehead at VERNON. During that attack, Tiger I 221 of 2./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 was destroyed. Tigers in Combat 2 claims that the other Tiger was later given up because the accompanying infantry did not manage to link up. In the original manuscript of Wendt on s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 we read that this Tiger simply withdrew. It was probably knocked out near TILLY on 29.08.44.

On 28.08.44 the 1st Company attacked again from the area of SAILLY in the direction of MONTGISON. During the following









112 Uscha. Werner Wendt, commander of Tiger 123 during the fighting in Northern FRANCE.

(Timm Haasler)

111 - 113 On 28.08.44 elements of 1./s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 counterattacked towards MONTGISON. In the open fields near SAILLY, Tiger 123 of Uscha. Werner Wendt was hit by enemy anti-tank fire. His Tiger developed engine problems and finally had to be abandoned. It is now on display in the armour museum at SAUMUR. The statement that this tank belonged to Hscha. Hibbeler is incorrect. Ostuf. Hibbeler was transferred in July 1944 from a staff in BERLIN to the 1st Company which was refitting at SENNELAGER during this time. As he had no experience with tanks, he was trained to become a gunner. He had to bear the rank of a Hscha. but he still received the payment of a Ostuf. Although he was superior to Wendt, Hibbeler was the gunner and Wendt the tank commander.

(2 x Robert Jacques via Bruno Renoult)



combat two Tiger II's were lost, one of them was Tiger II 123 of Uscha. Werner Wendt. To the west two Tiger I's of 2./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 under Oscha. Jürgen Brandt attacked the VERNON bridgehead and managed to destroy two antitank-guns.²⁴

On 29.08.44 the 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 launched a counterattack west of MAGNY-EN-VEXIN which was supported by infantry of a Luftwaffenfelddivision. Two damaged Tiger II's couldn't be recovered and were blown up by their crews. The same day the two Tiger I's under Oscha. Brandt secured the withdrawal of German infantry. One Tiger I, that had seen action with Kampfgruppe Schrader, was later destroyed south of TILLY.

Next day saw the 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 on the retreat to the north. Elements of the 1st Company were engaged in the area of BEAUVAIS - LAMCOURT, with Tiger II 111 being destroyed by the British on the D981 near GOINCOURT. Tiger II 104 of Oscha. Sepp Franzl was abandoned in a field at the northern end of AUX MARAIS, west of BEAUVAIS.²⁵ Tiger II 104 was later recovered by the Allies and is now on display at the museum in SHRIVENHAM. After repelling an enemy attack, the two Tiger I's under Oscha. Brandt had to be blown up due to a lack of fuel and ammunition.²⁶

Pictorial evidence reveals the loss of another two Tiger I's in Northern FRANCE. Tiger I (2?4) was left behind at BOIS-BOURDON on the French-Belgian border, while Tiger I 304 was abandoned between ARRAS and VIMY.²⁷

Tiger II 121 was probably abandoned before 01.09.44 near LA CAPELLE. The vehicle is now on display at the Panzermuseum in MUNSTER. Schneider's claim that the vehicle was lost on 05.09.44 at LA CAPELLE can be shown to be incorrect as by 01.09.44 the CCB of the 3rd Armd Div had already liberated the town.

In his manuscript on s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 Wendt wrote that two Tiger II's were committed on 02.09.44 near BRUNEHAMEL where they fought a small combat action against elements of TF X (3rd Armd Div) and 1/60th Inf Rgt (9th US Inf Div). According to

American sources the fighting actually took place on 01.09.44. It's therefore impossible that the two Tiger I's under Brandt took part in the fighting as claimed by Schneider.²⁸

At least one Tiger was subordinated to Panzergruppe "Berlin" of the 12. SS-Pz.Div. "Hitlerjugend". In his combat report Hstuf. Kurt Berlin mentioned the encirclement of the 5./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 26 with one Tiger in the area around FELLERIES on 02.09.44.²⁹

Near MONS Uscha. Arno Salamon managed to free a trapped Army unit with his Tiger II. At JEMAPPES Tiger 113 had to be abandoned after it ran out of fuel.³⁰

On 04.09.44 Hstuf. Rudolf Möbius reached HUY at the MEUSE with two Tigers which had to be left behind.³¹ The same day elements of a Flak-Kampftrupp of 12. SS-Pz.Div. under the command of Ustuf. Ernst Stephan met Hstuf. Möbius on the road LIÈGE - HUY. Hstuf. Möbius told Ustuf. Stephan that the road to HUY was already blocked by the enemy (probably Task Force "Lovelady" of Combat Command B, 3rd US Arm Div which took positions south of HUY in the evening of 06.09.44) hereupon the Kampftrupp returned in the direction of LIÈGE.³²



114 Tiger 304 is one of the few Tiger I's that managed to cross the SEINE. Its final resting place was between ARRAS and VIMY near one the World War I cemeteries that dot the area.

(AMC - E22423)

115 The official caption claims that this Tiger I was wrecked near MONS by a direct hit from Allied Aircraft, killing at least one of the crew whose body is sprawled over the gun mounting. The exact location is BOIS-BOURDON, a small hamlet near the French-Belgian border just a few kilometers south of MONS.

The unique turret number style leaves no doubt as to its former unit. They are typical for the s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 and appear to be very dark with very thin white outlines. Regrettably the loader's hatch is blocking part of the turret numbers (2?4) making an exact identification of the wreck more than difficult.

However we can at least rule out Tiger I 214 as it was lost earlier near JORT. Due to the starboard mudguard standing up we can't make out how the unit emblem was painted. Assuming it was still there and painted directly onto the zimmerit, it would have been a obvious clincher for Tiger I 224.

However that vehicle had a starboard turret number with prominent white outlines, unlike this one. We can't rule out Tiger I 234 at the moment as we still have to see a confirmed shot. Tiger 204 comes into view as it had similar features as the BOIS-BOURDON vehicle. Both had very thin white outlines around the turret numbers (which are very unusual in the 2nd Company where generally the outlines do stand out fairly well) and their third starboard sidefender was missing as can clearly be seen during the MORGNY roadmarch.

(Øyvind Leonsen)

116 Some time later the Tiger was pulled off the road. This starboard shot reveals the prominent damage to the zimmerit and the missing third side fender which could indicate that we are actually looking at Tiger I 204.

(Stefan De Meyer)



115





2. Preparation for refitting

2.1 Creation of 6. Panzerarmee

While the 1. SS-Pz.Div. was gathering its forces in the SIEGBURG area OKH/Chef H Rüst. U. BdE demanded the accelerated creation of Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 6 (Pz.AOK 6) on 21.09.44. Two days later OKW ordered the area MÜNSTER - PADERBORN - MINDEN - DELMENHORST - CLOPPENBURG - OSNABRÜCK for creation and refitting of Pz.AOK 6. Wehrkreiskommando VI and X were to discuss the details in consultation with Pz.AOK 6, a dependence to the training ground at SENNE should have been aspired. The headquarters of the army were to be located in BAD SALZUFLEN.³³

On 26./27.09.44 the General Inspector of the Armored Branch (Gen.d.Pz.Tr.), General Thomale, first met with SS-Oberstgruppen-führer Dietrich and then with General of the Armored Branch West, Generalleutnant Stumpf. He discussed with both generals the plans for refitting the armored units in the West. There was agreement upon that the 1., 2., 9., and 12. SS-Pz.Div. as well as Pz.L.Div. would be rebuilt with only one mixed tank battalion consisting of two Panzer IV and two Panther companies due to the overall poor production situation. The staff of the mixed battalion should have had four Panthers, while each company was to be equipped with 14 Panzer IV's or Panthers. Each battalion should also receive a mixed Panzerflak company with eight Flakpanzer IV's. To make up for the missing 2nd tank battalion each division should either receive an independent heavy tank battalion or an independent heavy tank hunter battalion that could either field 45 Tigers or 45 Jagdpanzers. The assignment of the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 101 to the 1. SS-Pz.Div. was recommended.

Furthermore it was proposed to equip each Panzerjägerabteilung with 21 le. Pz.Jg. IV. In total each rebuilt division should have had 126 tanks / tank hunters and 8 anti-aircraft tanks in its inventory. Priority was given to refit the 1. and 12. SS-Pz.Div. as well as Pz.L.Div. by the end of October. Sepp Dietrich agreed with the so

117 - 118 - 119 Tiger II 113 soon became the favorite subject of many local photographers. The barely visible unit emblem above the starboard mudguard, the turret number style and the Balkenkreuz position make the identification of its former unit quite an easy task. Tiger II 113 formerly belonged to the 1./ s.SS-Pz.Abt. 101 and was left behind in the Grande Route at JEMAPPES after it had run out of fuel.

After its removal from the Grande Route the appearance of the vehicle started to change. Its barrel had been cut off and the Zimmerit been damaged where the Balkenkreuz was formerly applied.

(Christopher Scheiwe via Laurent Halleux)
(2 x Stefan De Meyer)





called *"freie Gliederung"* but expressed his concern, that this would only make sense if the material replenishment of each unit would take place consecutively. He was concerned that otherwise the units would be bled very quickly. Furthermore he was worried about a loss of 14 days of training due to the transfer to the new area.

The General Inspector was counting on the arrival of the tanks by the 15.10.44. Sepp Dietrich used the occasion to mention the poor quality of the Panzer IV's that had been issued during September by the depot in LINZ, AUSTRIA. He proposed to General Thomale that the General Inspector should attach the Pz.AOK 6 limited on all concerns regarding the refitting with armored vehicles. Last but not least he asked for a Panzerstützpunkt for his army.³⁴

In relation to the transfer of the divisions attached to the Pz.AOK. 6 to the newly assigned area, OB West pointed out once more that the divisions had to hand over all combat ready tanks and assault guns to the fighting units that would stay at the Western Front. The divisions should leave the vehicles behind as they could count on a full set of new vehicles during refitting. Excluded from this order were vehicles that were not combat-ready. During a conference at ZOSSEN on 14.10.44 it was finally decided that the 1., 2. and 12. SS-Pz.Div. as well as the Pz.L.Div. should be refitted during October. Readiness of disposition should have been established by 15.11.44. General Thomale noticed that the divisions mentioned above had been refitted in terms of manpower but in terms of material there were still large gaps. Refitting of these units, as ordered by the Führer, would also mean that the replenishing the losses of units currently employed in the West would simply be impossible.³⁵ Another order dated 15.10.44 and issued by the Wehrmachts-führungsstab, is surprising when seen in this context. The order was forwarded by the Pz.AOK 6 to the attached units on 18.10.44 and asked for a readiness of disposition till 30.10.44 and also requested a new authorized strength for main battle tanks which was much lower compared to the initial figures ordered by the General Inspector in September:

Pz.AOK 6 to

I. and II. SS-Pz-Korps
1., 2., 9., 10., 12. SS-Pz.Div.
SS-Pz.Abt. 501 and 502

Subject: Refitting

On orders of the Führer the following units will be refitted in October 1944:

1., 2., 9. and 12. SS-Pz.Div. and s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501.

Refitting of 10. SS-Pz.Div. and s. SS-Pz.Abt. 502 is scheduled in November.

I. Organizational regulations:

- A. Structure and KStN according to war structures and validity list ordered by SS-Führungshauptamt.
- B. Variations to be due to numeral II (material allocations).
- C. Last day of refitting: 31.10.44

II. Material allocations:

The following allocations are designated:

- A. Weapons and equipment
100% heavy weapons, 75% small arms and automatic arms.
- B. Vehicles
Motorcycles, cars and trucks - 75% of the target.
Tractors according to production availability.
- C. Armored vehicles:
 - 1. For 1. and 12. SS-Pz.Div. (Regiments 1 and 12):

Rgt.Staff	2 Command tanks (Panther)
Btl. Staff	2 Command tanks (Panther)
Tk.Cos.	20 Pz IV
Tk.Cos.	20 Pz V
Flak-Plt.	4 Flak-Pz IV 3,7cm and

4 Flak-Pz IV 2cm Quadruple
Flak-Plt. disclosed for 1. and 12. SS-Pz.Div.

2. For 2. and 9. SS-Pz.Div. (Regiments 2 and 9): each
56 Pz V
4 Command tanks (Panther)
2 Recovery tanks (Panther)
no Pz IV

3. For s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501:
42 Tiger II
3 Command tanks (Tiger II)
4 Flak-Pz IV 3,7cm and 4 Flak-Pz IV 2cm Quadruple
for a Flak-Plt.
Replenish m. SPW up to 11 vehicles

D. Arm.Rec.Vehicles and le. SPW for 1., 2., 9. and 12. SS-Pz.Div.

Replenish Arm.Rec.Vehicles and le. SPW up to 30 le.
SPW (1 Rec.Co.)

E. SPW for 1., 2., 9. and 12. SS-Pz.Div.

Replenish SPW up to an emergency strength of 135
SPW.

IV. Human resources allocations

Officers will be allocated by the SS-Führungshauptamt
a.s.o. V/IIa, non commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers by SS-Führungshauptamt II, Org.Abt.

V. Reports regarding the current status of the refitting and status reports have to be provided according to the orders issued by SS-Führungshauptamt.

By order signed Blume
SS-Obersturmbannführer
Ia Org.Abt.³⁶

2.2 Stock taking and transfer to East Westphalia

In general the division should have been without any combat ready armoured vehicles in its inventory prior to the transfer to the new refitting area but according to a report dated 06.10.44 to the General Inspector of the Armored Branch, this wasn't the case. The SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had eight Flakpanzer IV's (four Möbelwagen and four Wirbelwind), six Panzer IV's (five combat ready and one in long term maintenance), three Panthers in short term maintenance and one Sd.Kfz. 251. There is no proof that the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 received any tanks or SPW's before the start of October, therefore some of these armoured vehicles may have been returned from NORMANDY. According to a former member of the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 tank 702 which he and another comrade of his company had driven back from FRANCE was left behind in the SIEGBURG area. But it is likely that this tank was later transferred to RHADEN. The Flakpanzers mentioned in the report were not with the division but at the OHRDRUF training ground, where the 10.(Fla)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was created.³⁷

By the end of September the first small advance parties were sent to the new assembly area by 1. SS-Pz.Div. in order to reconnoiter the lodging facilities. Between 03.-07.10.44 the different units started the transfer. The area around RHADEN was assigned to the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 located at ESPELKAMP and the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 at OPPENWEHE. The companies were spread over all the villages around RHADEN. For instance the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was at RHADEN, 2./ 1 was billeted in the RAD barracks at OPPENDORF and OPPENWEHE, 4./ 1 at WEHDEM, 6./ 1 at PREUSSISCH STRÖHEN as of 05.10.44, 7./ 1 and 8./ 1 at OPPENWEHE and 9.(Pi.)/SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 at KLEINENDORF.³⁸

3. Refitting and training

As already mentioned under chapter 2.1 the completion date for refitting was 31.10.44. Due to the multiple transfers of some subunits and the fact that some elements of the division were still engaged in combat, the date was quite questionable from the start. It was intended to refit the division with men and material to 100% of the new ToE. The view of Tiemann, who says in his book that the new recruits were delayed has to be considered very carefully. This criticism was justified when it came to replacements for officers and non-commissioned officers. The losses in battalion and company commanders as well as other leaders could not be replaced during this short period of rest and refitting. At the same time the division received more other ranks as replacements than it should have.

According to a report dated 04.11.44 the division had an authorized strength of 18,548 men but in reality 20,500 men were available. A closer view reveals that despite a surplus of almost 2,000 men there was a shortage in officers and NCO's of 1,099. The training now starting was limited to basic combat drills during the first few weeks. This training was limited due to the lack of fuel which totally restricted the use of vehicles. By the end of October the allocation of replacements began to fill all ranks noticeably. The standard of training of the new recruits was very poor:

- Most of the new replacements of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had n e v e r manned a tank or received any driving, shooting and/or communications training.
- The tank drivers had a maximum of two hours driving practice before they received their driving license.⁹⁹

On 04.11.44 1. SS-Pz.Div. reported the actual status of the personnel and material refitting:

Short value judgment by the divisional commander:

I. Status of training:

All elements of the division are executing training on group and platoon level or training the gun and tank crews. The status of training on a divisional level is not sufficient.

II. Mood of the troops:

Confident

III. Special difficulties:

Availability of training ammunition too low, totally insufficient supply of fuel for exercises. This also caused massive problems in zeroing new tanks and guns.

IV. Degree of mobility:

Motorcycles: 45.1%

Cars: 100%, of these only 34.7% are all terrain

Trucks: 50.3%

Tractors: 21%

V. Combat value and chances for employment:

Qualified for local security tasks until all allocations of weapons and tractors have arrived.

For the divisional command

The 1st general staff officer

Ziemssen

Stubaf.

Short statement of the superior authority:

One battalion reinforced by tanks and artillery is qualified for defence and attack tasks. The rest of the division is qualified for local security tasks. It is suitable to only a limited extent for attack after the arrival of missing vehicles, tractors and heavy weapons. Missing fuel has made tactical (zeroing tanks and heavy weapons) and driving training impossible. Missing power units made wireless training of the radio operators impossible.

For the corps command
The chief of staff
Lehmann⁴⁰

Given the fact that the division has been out of the line for two months the status report was quite disappointing. Besides the lack of special types of vehicles the lack of fuel was causing real problems as it was hampering all training activities.

Due to the overall material situation SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 formed a mixed tank battalion but received an additional Panzerflak company which hadn't existed before. In return the Flak platoons within the two tank battalions were disbanded. It is still not known when exactly the number of tanks per company was raised from fourteen to seventeen vehicles as had been initially planned by the General Inspector of the Armoured Branch. The increase in tanks could be determined within the 1. SS-Pz.Div., 12. SS-Pz.Div. and Pz.L.Div. By checking the allocation lists of the General Inspector of the Armoured Branch this increase must have been ordered around the 29.10.44. According to the modified instruction of the Gen.d.Pz.Tr., SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was organized as follows:

Staff SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	
with Staff company	2 Command Panthers
9.(Pi.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	14 Sd.Kfz. 251
10.(Fla.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	4 Möbelwagen
	4 Wirbelwind
	3 Sd.Kfz. 7/1

Supply company

Staff I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with	
Staff company	2 Command Panthers
1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	17 Panthers
2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	17 Panthers
6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	17 Panzer IV's
7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	17 Panzer IV's

Staff II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	
with Staff company	only personnel
3./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	only personnel
4./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	only personnel
5./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	only personnel
8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	only personnel
Repair company ⁴¹	

The period in the new area started with technical and combat training on 09. and 10.10.44. On 10.10.44 the staff and staff company of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 under the command of Hstuf. Poetschke as well as the 1./, 2./, 6./ and 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 were transferred to the WIETZENDORF training ground after Ustuf. Rolf Reiser had reconnoitered the quarters and training facilities overthere. The tank-less crews of the 3./, 4./, 5./ and the 8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, now under the command of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, remained in the RHADEN area. Both battalions each formed a training company. The training company of the 1st battalion was led by Ostuf. Wolff as of 02.11.44.⁴²

On 12.10.44 a tank pick up party of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 under the command of Ostuf. Junker moved to LINZ in AUSTRIA. Less than 24 hours after their arrival in LINZ the command had returned to Germany with the Panzer IV's they had taken over on 14.10.44. The rail transfer back to GERMANY was via PRAGUE, PIRNA, DRESDEN, LEIPZIG, HALLE, HANNOVER and reached BERGEN at 2 PM on 17.10.44. After detraining the company moved the 14 km distance to the new quarter HEIDELAGER by road. According to a report of the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. the first 28 Panzer IV's didn't reach the division until 19.10.44, but it must have been the same allocation mentioned by Ostuf. Junker. 28 Panzer IV's were the equivalent of two tank companies in October 1944. Therefore not only the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 received its new tanks by mid-October but also the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1.

The majority of these Panzer IV's were equipped with the so called "*Thoma-Schürzen*" which were manufactured from 8mm flat steel mats made up from wire mesh and had the disadvantage of getting lost in rugged terrain very easily. A few tanks were still equipped with the old standard side skirts. The call signs were black with a white stencil outline.⁴³

The companies of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 back in the RHADEN area started training their soldiers. This training became very much impaired by the lack of equipment and the integration of the new replacements. According to a former member of the 8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, who was billeted in private quarters at OPPENWEHE they received a large number of new recruits to fill in the gaps that had been caused by the fighting in NORMANDY. Amongst the new soldiers were at least twenty former non-commissioned and enlisted men of the Luftwaffe. Tank training was limited to a single Panzer IV which was available at the repair troop in RHADEN. And even with this tank they were only able to train the new soldiers on how to change the tracks and road-wheels. The main effort was put on basic infantry training as well as standing guard at the battalion's headquarters in RHADEN.⁴⁴

In the meantime Ostubaf. Peiper joined his regiment in RAHDEN on 13.10.44 after he had checked out of the military hospital. At RHADEN he ordered the former battalion commander of III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, Hstuf. Paul Guhl, to become the commander of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 as the actual battalion commander, Stubaf. Heinz Kling, was still recovering from his wounds.⁴⁵

The same day Peiper reached RHADEN, Ustuf. Hans Hennecke of the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 received orders to move to GRAFENWÖHR with a tank pick up command. According to Hennecke they arrived at GRAFENWÖHR only to find out that another tank pick up command of the Fs.Pz.Rgt. Herman Göring was also waiting there on its tanks. Because the LAH was first on the allocation list, the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 took over the available batch of Panthers. The tanks were transferred via train to SOLTAU and from there they moved to their new quarters in WIETZENDORF. In fact both mentioned tank regiments took over their new Panthers almost at

the same time in GRAFENWÖHR. It looks like Hennecke belonged to one of the two first commands of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 that took over ten Panthers each at GRAFENWÖHR on 14. and 15.10.44. The first command returned to SOLTAU on 19.10.44 and the second on 22.10.44. The pick up command of the 1st Company wasn't primarily formed by complete tank crews because Uscha. Daniel Mayer, tank commander of Panther 124 in Hscha. Konrad Heubeck's 2nd Platoon, remembered that he stayed at WIETZENDORF the entire time that the tanks were issued, while his loader remembered very well that they moved to GRAFENWÖHR where they received their Panthers and that members of Fs.Pz.Rgt. Herman Göring were also present.

There was also another tank pick up command of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 en route to take over Panthers at the army depot KLEIN MASSEWITZ near BRESLAU. Reaching the depot the men learned that no Panthers were available and they received a marching order to the Army depot at SPREENHAGEN near BERLIN. At SPREENHAGEN the same game started again and they were finally sent to GRAFENWÖHR where they received their Panthers. According to a former member of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 these Panthers were first transferred to RHADEN but then redirected to WIETZENDORF. The turret numbers of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 were black outlined in white. The width of the digits was approx. 5cm and the outline 1.5cm. On 19.10.44 two Recovery Panthers reached the regiment. No further allocations took place in October 1944. Based on the allocations, training at WIETZENDORF didn't start before 20.10.44.⁴⁶

Statements according to which the regiment received 32 Panzer IV's and 24 Panthers are only conditionally wrong. As indicated in the chapters before, the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had returned some Panzer IV's and Panthers to the new refitting area which should have been handed over to other units in the West according to the order of the OB West. One of these tanks, a Panther Ausf. A, is visible on a picture taken during a muster at ESPELKAMP on 09.11.44. According to a report dated 06.10.44 the regiment had five Panzer IV's and three Panthers available, which was before the regiment had officially received tanks according to the

allocation lists of the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. Another report dated 04.11.44 showed 32 Panzer IV's and 24 Panthers despite the fact that more new tanks reached the regiment no earlier than 10.11.44. This would indicate that the regiment had a surplus of 4 Panzer IV's and Panthers each. There was even a report showing 32 Panzer IV's and 25 Panthers of which 28 Panzer IV's and 22 Panthers were with the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 at WIETZENDORF and the rest with the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 at RHADEN. The tanks in RHADEN also obviously belonged to the infantry battalion mentioned in Lehmann's report which was reinforced with tanks and artillery. As the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was at WIETZENDORF without the 9.(Pi)/ and the 10.(Fla)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 as well as Panzergrenadiers of the division, the 1st battalion couldn't have been part of the special purpose battalion.⁴⁷

According to unconfirmed sources 9.(Pi)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had received 7 m. SPW's for the first two platoons. None of these SPW's had bridging equipment. The other platoons of the company were equipped with trucks. Based on a report dated 04.11.44 there were only 4 m. SPW's available for the company. One of the new replacements for SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 that arrived on 27.10.44 was Ustuf. Günther Borchers. After he was welcomed by Ostuf. Peiper, Borchers was sent to 9.(Pi)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Ostuf. Erich Rumpf, the commanding officer of 9.(Pi)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, assigned him the II. Platoon. Some of the non-commissioned officers in his platoon were already well known to him, as he had met them before on military course for non-commissioned officers. He had to become acquainted with the other NCO's and men in his platoon first. Most of these men were between 17 and 18 years of age, who had received their baptism of fire during the Normandy campaign. The II. Platoon was billeted in a hall of the Meyer guest house in KLEINENDORF. The military service was executed tightly but without any frills. Each Saturday all leaders of the regiment had to attend war games and technical duties on the tanks. Borchers memories confirm that the 9th Company wasn't transferred to WIETZENDORF and that Peiper also didn't attend the training of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 during the entire time but he was present during the final inspection at WIETZENDORF which saw the end of the training ground exercises.⁴⁸

When Ostuf. Helmut Jahn had been transferred, Ustuf. Horst Krause took over the task of regimental intelligence officer. For unknown reasons Peiper wished to have a change in the command of the division but when Heinrich Himmler visited the division on 04.11.44 Peiper didn't put forward his request. Maybe it had become impossible due to the fact that Himmler had promoted Mohnke to an SS-Oberführer. The adjutant of the LAH, Hstuf. Heinz Meier, was aware of Peiper's request.⁴⁹

By the start of November the training of the 10.(Fla)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 came to an end and entrainment started at OHRDRUF. When the company reached the railroad station of RHADEN Ostuf. Peiper, his adjutant Hstuf. Gruhle and Hstuf. Poetschke were already awaiting the new company with their Flakpanzers. After Peiper had made a small speech he handed over the company to Ostuf. Karl-Heinz Vögler who had been the adjutant of the SS-Flak-Abt. 1 before. Then Peiper and Vögler took the salute of the company. Each tank commander had to report to Peiper by giving his name. Hscha. Paul Schröder, who had been a member of the former regimental Flak platoon became platoon leader I, Oscha. Hechler of SS-Flak-Abt. 1 became platoon leader II. The III. Platoon was formed by the elements of the staff company of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and was already present at RHADEN. The III. Platoon had three Sd.Kfz. 7/1's with 2cm Flak Vierling in its inventory. The statement of a former member of the company according to which this platoon wasn't engaged in the West remains unproven. After the muster the company drove with its Flakpanzers from RHADEN to ESPELKAMP where the company was billeted. The quarters were in a local inn where the orderly room, the kitchen etc. were also located. Hscha. Waldemar Hechler from the 2./ SS-Flak-Abt. 1 became the Stabsscharführer of the company. Not much time was left for military training and to get to know each other. The prime target was to merge the individuals into tank crews.⁵⁰



120 In mid-August 1944 Hstuf. Werner Poetschke assumed command of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 as successor to Herbert Kuhlmann. Poetschke held regimental command until Ostuf. Peiper returned to duty in mid-October 1944. At that time Poetschke resumed his I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 command and was promoted to Stubaf. on 09.11.44.

In this picture we can see Stubaf. Werner Poetschke posing with his adjutant Ustuf. Arndt Fischer in the fall of 1944. Fischer had been adjutant since the fighting in NORMANDY.

(Arndt Fischer via Timm Haasler)

121 Rottf. Heinz Noack joined the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 in the SIEGBURG area in September 1944. He was assigned to the Panzer IV of Oscha. Kugel (632) as a radio operator during the Ardennes offensive.

(Heinz Noack via Timm Haasler)



Peiper later characterized this period as follows:

"Again they send replacements and again new tanks arrived, quality and quantity was appropriate. Nevertheless training was performed diligently and the next engagement was planned with professional attitude. But one had better not ask what kind of means was used. The shot of a gun was simulated with the coaxial machine gun and the Panzer IV was moved into firing position by manpower."⁵¹

As one can figure out from Peiper's statement the training and refitting was suffering from the absence of ammunition, which prevented the crews from zeroing their guns. Far worse, the lack of fuel was seriously impairing the training. Training at company level was almost impossible but to make matters even worse the new tank drivers didn't have a chance to improve their driving skills. The status of training of the replacements was extremely basic - most of the new tank crews hadn't manned or driven a tank before or fired the gun. The entire burden of training remained on the shoulders of the few veterans as well as strengthening the morale of the new recruits. Besides combat training Peiper also ordered all members of the regiment to attend tank drills and physical skills were toughened up with handball games. Taken from the diary of Ostuf. Junker there were quite a number of exercises at WIETZENDORF; 21.-25.10.44: combat training, 26.10.44: officers exercise - abscond and counter strike, 27.10.44: war game at the regiment, 20.10.-01.11.44: combat training officers training, 02.11.1944: war game - abscond and finally from 03.-11.11.44: combat training. Peiper participated in at least on one of these exercises. Ustuf. Reiser confirmed what we find in Junker's diary; according to him the training took place almost exclusively on stationary tanks due to the lack of fuel. There was only one combat exercise combined with live firing where the tanks were moved from WIETZENDORF to the firing range. This live firing was attended by Ostubaf. Peiper.⁵²

On 09.11.44 the entire SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was mustered on a large meadow in ESPELKAMP in order to receive awards and promotions.^{53/54} Also in attendance were boys from the

Hitlerjugend and the Jungvolk. On a small platform in front of the Panther Ausf. A of Uscha. Valentin Bersin, Ostubaf. Peiper delivered a speech to his men. He pointed out the tasks to come for the regiment, the severe situation of the war and appealed for the personal commitment of his men. He then presented the awards to some of his men for their commitment in NORMANDY. Eight EK I and 72 EK II as well as the first Panzerkampfabzeichen were awarded. The commanders of the I./ and II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Poetschke and Guhl, were promoted to Stubaf. The company commander of the 4./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Ostuf. Otto was promoted to Hstuf. and took over the supply company of the 1st battalion. Ostuf. Friedrich Christ was replacing Ostuf. Hans Malkomes as the company commander of the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Malkomes had only visited his old company once at WIETZENDORF after he had recovered from the injury to his head. After Ostuf. Werner Wolff had taken over the command of the training company of 1st battalion early in November, Hstuf. Oskar Klingelhöfer took over the command of the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Last but not least Ustuf. Gerhard Stiller took over the 5./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1.⁵⁵

The staffing of the regiment was as now following:

Rgt. Cdr.:	Ostubaf. Jochen Peiper
Adjutant:	Hstuf. Hans Gruhle
Physician:	Stubaf. Dr. Kurt Sickel
Rgt. Intelligence Officer:	Ustuf. Horst Krause
Staff company:	Ostuf. Rudi Mäule
9.(Pi.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Erich Rumpf
10.(Fla.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Karl-Heinz Vögler
Supply company:	Stubaf. Konrad Unger
Bat. Cdr. I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Stubaf. Werner Poetschke
1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Karl Kremser
2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Friedrich Christ
6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Benoni Junker
7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Hstuf. Oskar Klingelhöfer
Staff company:	Ostuf. Josef Bosbach
Bat. Cdr. II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Stubaf. Paul Guhl
3./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Gerd Jahn
4./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Martin Denker

5./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ustuf. Gerhard Stiller
8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1:	Ostuf. Hans Rattenhuber
Staff company:	Ustuf. Werner Wettach
Tk. Repair company:	Ostuf. Wilhelm Ratschko ⁵⁶

Although most of the soldiers probably enjoyed the awards and promotions the tasks to come mentioned by Peiper symbolised the end of the refitting period and the start of the transfer back to the Western Front. Since 08.11.44, preparations for the transfer got into gear and on 09.11.44 the first relevant orders of I. SS-Pz.K. reached the division. Peiper was obviously already aware of the transfer a few days before as he received the information at a meeting at the divisional headquarters at LÜBBECKE. Ustuf. Arndt Fischer, adjutant of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, also attended this conference.⁵⁷

On 10.11.44 six additional Panzer IV's and four Panthers arrived. The Panthers should have been taken over at BAD KREUZNACH. The four Panthers were most likely the four Pantherbefehlswagen, which were missing in the report dated 04.11.44 but were available in a report dated 14.11.44. By 14.11.44, 14 additional Panthers had arrived which had been in transit since 04. respectively 05.11.44. It remains unclear if these new tanks arrived in the old area or already in the deployment area WEILERSWIST near EUSKIRCHEN. With this the refitting of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 came to an end. In the allocation lists of the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. there is a note next to the last allocations for the 1. SS-Pz.Div. saying:

Pz. IV: 34 units	2 companies
Pz. V: 38 units	full

These figures indicate that the 1. SS-Pz.Div. had received the same number of tanks as the 12. SS-Pz.Div. and the Pz.L.Div. as ordered by the Gen.d.Pz.Tr. although the 1. and 12. SS-Pz.Div. had managed to keep some old tanks in their inventories.⁵⁸ Just before the transfer, a radio troop of the SS-Pz.Nachr.Abt. 1 with a m. SPW and led by Jupp Diener came under the command of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1.⁵⁹

In the meantime refitting of s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501, at the SENNELAGER training ground, had also assumed its definitive shape. As there were no tank allocations during the first period of refitting, elements of the 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 were assigned to clear up rubble in BIELEFELD on 30.09.44 which had been bombed by the Allies. The same day three EK I and 31 EK II were awarded to members of the battalion. It took until 14.10.44 before the first four Tiger II's arrived. The next day two additional Tiger II's were handed over to the battalion. But then there was a break in the allocation of tanks till 12.11.44. Nonetheless training started on the few available tanks as well as training of the crews on the Panzerfaust in October. On 12.11.44 Ostubaf. Heinz von Westernhagen visited Ostubaf. Peiper at RHADEN but it is unknown what was discussed. The same day eight more Tiger II's arrived at the battalion, bringing it up to the equivalent of just one tank company at strength. On 17.11.44 the battalion was officially placed under the command of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 as the 2nd battalion. While the 1. SS-Pz.Div. moved to the area southwest of COLOGNE, at the same time the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 remained at SENNELAGER in order to wait for additional tanks. On 21.11.44 Ostubaf. von Westernhagen took over command of his battalion again after his injury in NORMANDY. After the arrival of Ostubaf. von Westernhagen, Hstuf. Möbius took over 2./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 while 1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 came under the command of Ostuf. Jürgen Wessel. The newly arrived Hstuf. Heinz Birnschein took over 3./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 and Hstuf. Wilhelm Spitz was the head of the 4th Company. On 26.11.44 eight Tiger II's and on 28.11.44 four Tiger II's were sent from the KASSEL to SENNELAGER which most likely arrived at the end of the month. On 30.11.44 an organizational order arrived which ordered the creation of two Panzerflak platoons by Wehrkreis IX. For this platoon members of 4./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 under Oscha. Fickert were sent to SCHWABHAUSEN in THURINGIA to attend a Panzerflak course. Both platoons didn't participate in the Ardennes offensive. On 09., 14., 20.11. and 01.12.44 members of the battalion were promoted or received awards.⁶⁰ Refitting was also almost over by early December although 19 tanks were still missing.

4. Transfer to the Western Front and allocation

By the end of October the planning for *“Wacht am Rhein”* went into its final phase. Total secrecy had the highest priority at first. Extracts from an undated document, issued by the end of October, makes it more than clear:

- 1.) The enemy must not notice our preparations for allocation of the intervention forces designed for the expected defensive battle. He must be deceived.
- 2.) Make sure by suitable measures to simulate heavy occupancy in the area northwest of COLOGNE although the area is free of own troops.
- 3.) Headquarters of Heeresgruppe B to remain at its current location. Headquarters 6. SS-Pz.AOK to move to the area northwest of COLOGNE.
- 4.) All units that will be transferred to the West, especially SS-units are forbidden to show their unit insignia and names.
- 5.) Wireless deception in cooperation with communications command (Nafü). Only troops that are already deployed are allowed to broadcast.⁶¹

On 01.11.44 a first order for secrecy was issued by OKW which gave some additional orders:

- All troops that aren't deployed at the front are under radio silence.
- Special attention regarding the allocation of maps. Detailed maps will be issued only just before X-Day.⁶²

On 03.11.44 the general-quartermaster of the OB West calculated that the earliest possible date for all requested ammunition and fuel to be in place would be the 25.11.44. Based on this information the German high command started to plan the offensive in detail. A few days later Heeresgruppe B was informed by OKW that the 6. Panzerarmee would come under the command of the Heeresgruppe as of 10.11.44. On 05.11.44 OB West received the information from OKW that subordination of the 6. Panzerarmee to Chef H Rüst u. BdE would be terminated

as of 10.11.44 and that only elements of the Panzerarmee that had not been refitted so far would stay under the command of Chef H Rüst u. BdE inside the Reich. The order for the transfer of the army to the west should follow soon. In fact the transfer order must have been given the same day because the 6. Panzerarmee reported that it would not be combat ready for the immediate future as the bulk of the heavy armoured weapons were still missing.⁶³

On 05.11.44 the order *“Befehl für Täuschung und Gebeimbaltung”* was issued by OKW. The basic idea of the deception plan was given as:

The German high command is expecting a major enemy attack against the line COLOGNE - BONN this year. In order to counter such an enemy breakthrough by attacking from the north and south into the enemies flanks two strong counter attacking forces will be formed, one to the northwest of COLOGNE and one in the EIFEL. As part of the deception plan it is vital to deceive the troop concentration in the EIFEL but at the same time to pretend that there are more troops to the northwest of COLOGNE than there really are.⁶⁴

Without going into the order in detail, some aspects of the order should be mentioned nevertheless because they had a vital meaning for the ongoing refitting and training of the 1. SS-Pz.Div.

- The area RHEYDT - JÜLICH - COLOGNE is to be integrated into the debarkation area for the train deployment. In this area some debarkations have to take place during day time; in all other areas only during night.
- During terrain reconnaissance in the forward combat line by staff personal, especially by higher officers of the tank branch and SS-leaders, special care has to be taken.
- As of 20.11.44 all scouting activities have to cease in order to avoid to losing the element of surprise through the loss of own soldiers.⁶⁵

On 07.11.44 this order was completed. Heeresgruppe B and

6. Panzerarmee were asked to make sure that only divisional and army troops that had arrived in this area before 10.11.44 with the bulk of their forces were allowed to show their unit insignia. All other formations that reached the area later weren't allowed to show their unit insignia. 6. Panzerarmee had to make sure that this order was carried out before embarkation.⁶⁶

In summary, with the planned concentration of forces of 6. Panzerarmee west of COLOGNE not only the enemy was to be deceived but also friendly forces. To the German forces the allocation of the army west of the RHINE made sense with the potential employment in the current heavy fighting east of AACHEN. Although the army was close to the intended allocation areas for the Ardennes offensive, the new area had some major setbacks. The new area was close to the front line, which disrupted all training due to the activities of enemy fighter-bombers. Terrain reconnaissance and radio training was prohibited, while all training was focused on defensive operations or counter attacks into the open flanks of an Allied thrust in the DÜREN area but not on an attack with a far fixed distant.

Despite the report dated 06.11.44 the planning for the transfer of 6. Panzerarmee had already started. Generalfeldmarschall Model ordered to locate the headquarters of the army in the area RHEYDT - JÜLICH - COLOGNE on 07.11.44. Pz.AOK. 6, which had started its transfer to Heeresgruppe B the same day, finally chose GREVENBROICH for its headquarters. When reaching the new assembly area the army was renamed "*Auffrischungsstab 16*" in order to deceive the enemy. The same day I. SS-Pz.K. received the order to transfer to the area west of COLOGNE.⁶⁷

On 08.11.44 the transport-liaison installation of OB West reported regarding the transfer of 6. Panzerarmee:

1.) Generalkommando I. SS-Pz.Korps and 1. SS-Pz.Div. LAH
Approx. 120 trains
Coming from:
OSNABRÜCK - LÖHNE/WESTFALEN - MINDEN/WESTFALEN

Heading for: EUSKIRCHEN and to the north of EUSKIRCHEN
Departure: 1st train starting on 08.11.44, 0000 from embarkation railroad station

Speed: 12

Transfer time: approx. 2200.

Hence the approximate arrival of the first train at debarkation station was 08.11.44, 2200 and arrival of the last train on 18.11.44.⁶⁸

On 09.11.44 the I. SS-Pz.K. issued the precursory order for the transfer of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. to the area just west of COLOGNE. The advance party of the division started to move the next day. On 14.11.44 it was calculated that the last train of the Pz.AOK 6, I. SS-Pz.K. and the 1. SS-Pz.Div. would reach the new assembly area on 19.11.44, by 1200. In reality, rail transfer of the different units of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. took place between 12.-20.11.44. By 22.11.44 all regiments and battalions had reached the new assembly area JÜLICH - WEILERSWIST - MECHERNICH - ZÜLPICH - DÜREN.⁶⁹

While the transfer to the new assembly area west of the RHINE took place the SS-FEB 1 under the command of Stubaf. Gustav Knittel was left behind in the area around LÜBBECKE. The field replacement battalion had the task of gathering replacements as they arrived, training them and then sending them to the front at the request of all sub-units of the division. Likewise other sub-units, which hadn't received their equipment, vehicles and weapons in time, were left behind with the FEB.⁷⁰

SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 left the tank-less II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with 3rd, 4th, 5th and 8th company behind in the area of RHADEN and placed them under the command of SS-FEB 1 too. Some training tanks (3 Panzer IV's and 4 Panthers) were left behind at RHADEN as these tanks were in long term maintenance. After the failure of the Ardennes offensive all units of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. left behind in the LÜBBECKE area were transferred to HUNGARY by the end of March 1945.⁷¹ There wasn't enough transport capacity for all of the available equipment and therefore four tanks together with their crews were left behind at RHADEN. The local Volkssturm

was trained in infantry anti-tank tactics on these tanks by their crews. On 04.04.1945 a local battle took place to the south of RHADEN between elements of an Air Force Replacement Battalion (Luftwaffen-Ersatzbataillon) reinforced by the four tanks of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and elements of 11th British Arm.Div.⁷² Due to fuel shortages and mechanical problems the tanks were kept in reserve in the town. By 1500 the British forces broke through the weak German security perimeter to the southwest of the RHADEN. The breakthrough was followed by a one-hour artillery barrage on the southern part of the town. One of the German tanks went into position at the church square in front of the Zentralhotel, while a second tank went into position on the south-western outskirts of the town near the Donzelmann house. This tank immediately opened fire on the advancing British tanks. When the tank received return fire it fell back through the town heading in the direction of KLEINENDORFER BRUCH via KLEINENDORF.

With no fuel left the tank broke down at this location and was abandoned by its crew. In the meantime the British forces had entered RHADEN. The German infantry forces and the tank in front of the hotel didn't succeed in slowing down the British advance and also started to fall back to the east. A few moments later the British forces destroyed an abandoned SPW in the southern part of the town. The reason why the other two tanks of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 didn't participate is not known. The same day the SS soldier Walter Dinse of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. committed suicide at HOLZHAUSEN II, a small village to the south of RHADEN which was taken by the Americans. The same evening an unknown number of tanks of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 crossed the bridge over the WESER at MINDEN. What became of them after this is not known.⁷³

Back to what happened in November 1944. The SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 appointed Ustuf. Günther Borchers from 9.(Pi)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 with the entrainment of all regimental units located in the RHADEN area. However most of the regiment's train units remained at RHADEN. Ustuf. Rolf Reiser, the former platoon leader of the II. Platoon, 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, became the officer in charge of the

entrainment for all elements located in the area of SOLTAU - WIETZENDORF. This clearly shows that despite the ceremony at ESPELKAMP on 09.11.44 the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was still on the FALLINGBOSTEL training ground. In all, five trains were needed to move the mixed tank battalion from SOLTAU to the new assembly area. The 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 left WIETZENDORF on 13.11.44 at 1915. The rail transfer went over SOLTAU to GÖTTINGEN which was passed on 14.11.44. On 17.11.44 at 0800 the company reached LIBLAR near ERFTSTADT and detrainment started immediately. Contrary to this the 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 started detrainment in COLOGNE and had to move to the BLIESHEIM - WEILERSWIST assembly area via road with its tanks. The entire transfer of the regiment was finished on 18.11.44. Only a handful of vehicles were left behind at SOLTAU as they were no longer combat ready. These vehicles were moved to RHADEN under the command of Ustuf. Reiser who was transferred to the 4th Company at the same time. The regiment was billeted in the area around WEILERSWIST with the staff located at WEILERSWIST. The 1st and 6th Companies were billeted at FRIESHEIM with the tanks dug in in the nearby forest. 2nd and 7th companies were billeted in private quarters in BLIESHEIM while the tanks were also hidden in a nearby forest. While almost all the tanks were dug in due to the ever present Allied fighter threat all eight anti-aircraft tanks of 10.(Fla)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 were in open positions near WEILERSWIST ready to provide air defence cover. The Flakpanzer crews slept in the garret of a nearby stable.⁷⁴ Ostubaf. Peiper remembered:

*"The companies were billeted far apart from each other in small forests with the crews living below their dug-in tanks. But training went on. Despite everything, the morale of the troops was excellent. No pathos, no political motivation and no fanaticism at all, at odds with how the enemy propaganda portrayed us. Instead a more or less melancholic mood of sinking, of saying farewell to everything one had fought and suffered for and a defiant resoluteness to give the winners as hard a fight as possible to the end."*⁷⁵

Peiper's statement was in contrast to a statement of a former

member of the 7th Company who remembered the following four weeks as the most relaxing time during war. Except for two trial alerts nothing happened, no training and no fighter-bomber attacks. Neither personnel nor material replacements had arrived. A similar statement was given by a former member of the 6th Company. He also couldn't remember personnel or material replacements and training was limited to theoretical topics only.⁷⁶

On 22.11.44 OB West received the information from OKW that s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501, already attached to the 1. SS-Pz.Div., should also arrive in the West in November. Even the next day it was reported that entrainment of the battalion, now designated as the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, had started on 22.11.44. In fact entrainment of the battalion didn't start until 30.11.44. The first unit to move was the 2./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 at SENNELAGER. The train reached COLOGNE on 01.12.44 but was detoured on 02.12.44 via DUISBURG and reached WEILERSWIST on 03.12.44. On 01.12.44 at 0600 the staff and the staff company of the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 started entrainment at SCHLOSS HOLTE. The next day the s. Pz.Abt. 509, also refitting on the SENNELAGER training ground, had to hand over all eleven Tiger II's it had received in September and October 1944 to the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501. On the same day the 1st Company started to entrain at ARSEMISSEN and it is very likely more Tiger II's reached SENNELAGER which had left from KASSEL the day before.

On 03.12.44 the final three Tiger II's arrived from KASSEL, giving the battalion a total inventory of 45 Tiger II's. The last unit to move was the 3rd Company from BRACKWEDE. Some members of the battalion stayed at SCHLOSS HOLTE which became the so called STÜTZPUNKT SCHLOSS HOLTE. The task of this base was to train new recruits. On 05.12.44 the 2./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 was detrained in the ZÜLPICH - EUSKIRCHEN area and took shelter in a nearby forest. On 09.12.44 the last components of the battalion arrived in the West, these were most likely elements of the 3rd Company.⁷⁷

4.1. Ongoing refitting and training

As already mentioned a very well prepared deception plan preceded the Ardennes offensive. The aim of the plan was to deceive the enemy of the presence of an operational reserve west of the RHINE, which they would assume was in place to counter the Allied breakthrough from the area around AACHEN towards COLOGNE - BONN. This resulted in the logical order for the 1. SS-Pz.Div.:

- Reconnoitre possibilities for engagements in case of an Allied breakthrough on the RHINE between COLOGNE and BONN.
- Build up of a position to counter the Allied thrust behind the main line of resistance between DÜREN - ZÜLPICH - MECHERNICH in coordination with the army units already engaged at the front line and in the worst case, to man this line.
- Create and deploy an armoured reserve in the area LECHENICH - WEILERSWIST.⁷⁸

At the same time refitting and training should continue in the new area, that's why basic and special training started again immediately in order to close the training gaps that still existed, especially for the young recruits. The training suffered from the constant alerts of the division which were caused by numerous troubles in the area of DÜREN. The permanent threat by Allied fighter-bombers also had negative effects on training and the constant fuel shortages influenced the training of the tank drivers too. This is the reason why no exercises at company level took place. The order for deception did not allow radio exercises which might have been intercepted by the enemy. Full preparation of combat readiness of all vehicles suffered from the constant lack of spare parts, which were never available in sufficient quantities. On top of all these problems - but unknown to the soldiers - they were preparing for the wrong kind battle, i.e. they were preparing for defensive operations and not for an offensive.⁷⁹

SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 had received orders to prepare for an engagement at the ROER-Front near AACHEN. Furthermore it had the task to contain every breakthrough over the ROER towards the RHINE in

their zone of operation and to stop the enemy in the ERFT sector at the latest. According to a report dated 14.11.44 the regiment had reached the area around WEILERSWIST with the complete outfit of tanks; i.e. 34 Panzer IV's, 38 Panthers, 8 Flakpanzer IV's and 3 Sd.Kfz. 7/1's (Flak). Only one Panzer IV wasn't combat ready on this day. Two days later at 1030 the divisional headquarters called the regiment and ordered them to send all available wheeled vehicles to DÜREN. DÜREN had been hit by a heavy Allied air bombardment the same day and all available troops were to be sent to the city in order to support search and rescue efforts.⁸⁰

At the same time the regiment received orders to prepare for an engagement in the ROER area. This order combined with the lack of fuel and ammunition impeded all training activities. Since the regiment couldn't perform any company level exercises, officers training emphasized the theoretical transfers to new assembly areas and map exercises for company commanders and platoon leaders. The objective of one of these map exercises was to counterattack and contain an American breakthrough in the area around DÜREN. Based on the diary of Ostuf. Junker, company commander of the 6th Company, there had been only light duty and officer's exercises between 19.-25.11.44.⁸¹

Karl Wortmann, tank commander in the 10.(Fla.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 remembered the first downing of an enemy airplane by the company:

"In the late afternoon just before dusk, the guns were already covered; two enemy planes suddenly dived through the clouds and attacked the tanks of the 10th Company with their guns. They rose up again and turned back in a big loop intending to attack again. While the tank crews were too surprised to return fire during the first attack they were prepared for the second approach and managed to down one of the planes before the plane was in range to use its own guns. The plane caught fire and the pilot bailed out of his plane with the parachute. He came down close to the tanks while his plane crashed to the ground burning and damaged a house on the outskirts of the village."⁸²

After the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 had arrived in the West in early December the crews expected to stay longer and even started to build wooden barracks. The statement that Ostuf. von Westernhagen didn't know that his battalion was integrated into the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 as 2nd battalion before 11.12.44 is simply incorrect.⁸³

It is very interesting to check the various reports regarding the combat readiness of the regiment as for instance on 10.12.44 the report mentioned 30 Tiger II's still in the process of transfer. The high number of combat ready tanks is also an indication of few to no training exercises during that period.

	Pz IV	Panther	Flak-Pz.	Tiger II
01.12.44:	33	34	n.i.	n.i.
03.12.44:	33	38	8	n.i. ⁸⁴
05.12.44:	34	37	n.i.	45 ⁸⁵
10.12.44:	34	37	n.i.	15 ⁸⁶

(n.i. = no information available)

4.2. Deployment for the Ardennes offensive

The deployment of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. was influenced by the *"Zeitplan für das nächtliche Heranschieben in die Ausgangsstellungen und für den Angriff"* (timetable for the nightly approach to the starting position and for the attack) issued by Heeresgruppe B. The order itself was altered several times before the start of the offensive. Further considerations are based on the attachment to order Obkdo. H.Gr. B, Ia/nr. 0063/44 g.Kdos.CH dated 23.11.44.⁸⁷ The respective steps and measures had been drilled down to a daily timetable in which every single day was given a certain letter. This was necessary as the final day of attack was depending on various factors. In order to combine the time table with the real course of events the ciphered dates were linked to the actual date which makes it a lot easier to understand what the single steps meant for the participating units.

Timetable for the nightly approach to the starting positions and for the attack:

K-day (12.12.44)

- Pre-alert

By L-day (13.12.44)

- All units had to assemble in the areas designated for the intervention deployment.

Night of L- to M-day (13./14.12.44)

- Transfer march of the infantry divisions that aren't already engaged at the front line to deployment areas 1 (approx. 10km behind the front line).
- Transfer of all Volkartilleriekorps (VAK) not already deployed to the deployment areas approximately 8 - 10 km behind their designated firing positions.
- Transfer of all Volkswerberbrigaden (VWB) to the deployment areas close to their firing positions.
- Move all horse drawn artillery pieces (including light and medium guns of the VAK's) to their firing positions.
(Create special horse sections by the divisions already engaged at the front line in order to move all artillery pieces without motor noises near the front line).

Night of M- to N-day (14./15.12.44)

- Approach of all tracked vehicles of the armoured units to the deployment areas approximately 10-15 km behind the front line.
 - Transfer of all infantry divisions not already deployed to deployment areas 2 (4-5 km behind the front line).
 - Movement of all heavy motorized artillery into their firing positions.
- Special attention should be paid to noise deception.
- All wheeled vehicles of the armoured units to follow up to the intervention deployment areas.

Night of N- to O-day (15./16.12.44)

Prepare for attack (to end on 16.12.44, 0600).

Approach of all wheeled vehicles of the armoured units and

O-day (16.12.44)

0730 - ... , artillery barrage on enemy positions, strongpoints, local quarters, headquarters based on a special firing plan.
0800 - ... , start of the offensive. Start of the artillery fire barrage in order to seal off the combat area (bell-pattern). Fight against enemy artillery positions (counter battery) and rearwards quarters based on a special firing plan.

In reality the 1. SS-Pz.Div. issued the order for the transfer ("*Divisions-Befehl für die Verlegung am 11./12.12.44*") already on 11.12.44, which was modified later by replacing 11./12.12.44 by L- to M-day, i.e. the transfer was postponed and should now take place during the night from 13./14.12.44.⁸⁸ But this was in contrast to the above mentioned order issued by Heeresgruppe B which had assigned the transfer of the tank units to the night of 14./15.12.44. Some former members of the division even spoke about a start of the transfer during the night from 12./13.12.44 and that the transfer was finished on the morning of 14.12.44. Other members confirmed that the transfer was performed during the night of 13./14.12.44.⁸⁹ The entire order of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. is attached as a separate attachment. Some details of the order are noticeable:

- It was already known to the division on 11.12.44 that it should move to the area of BLANKENHEIM.
- The code names DONAU and ALTONA were taken over from the Heeresgruppe B order, as well as the aspects regarding realization and order of transfer.
- The collection points were "A" MÜHLHEIMER-HÄUSCHEN located at the road TONDORF - BLANKENHEIM and "B" the forester's house "KAISERHAUS" located at the road south of SCHMIDTHEIM. At these collection points the officer in charge of a marching unit had to report his units while the last vehicle in a column had to report major interferences.

- Divisional headquarters should be located at the forester's house "KAISERHAUS" as of 14.12.44, 1800 while the headquarter of the Ib should be located at FROHNGAU.

There were three transfer routes (green, red and blue) for the transfer from the assembly areas to the deployment areas. At first we will have a look at each transfer route, while we will have a closer look on the roads from the assembly area of each unit to the starting point and from the end of the transfer route to the deployment area later on.

The most westerly transfer route (green) went via KOMMERN - ROGGENDORF - KALL - SISTIG - MILZENHÄUSCHEN - BLANKENHEIM.

The central transfer route (red) was assigned to the armoured units of the division and went via EUSKIRCHEN - EEUENHEIM - SATZVEY - BREITENBENDEN - ZINGSHEIM - ENGELGAU.

The most easterly transfer route (blue) went via KUCHENHEIM - STOTZHEIM - RHEDER - IVERSHEIM - BAD MÜNSTEREIFEL - SCHÖNAU - RODERATH - FROHNGAU.

Transfer route green:

SS-Pz.A.A. 1 reinforced by the 2./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 should assemble in the DÜRSCHVEN - ENZEN area and pass road junction 192 north of ENZEN at 1730 but not before SS-Pz.Jg.Abt. 1 (transfer route red) had passed this point. To reach the road junction the battalion was to move via ENZEN - SCHWERFEN. After reaching BLANKENHEIM the battalion should reach the deployment area in the woods south of GLAADT via RIPS DORF - ESCH - GLAADT.

Following the SS-Pz.A.A. 1 was the SS-Pz.Nachr.Abt. 1 which had assembled in the area of FRAUENBURG. Moving via DÜRSCHVEN it had to use the same roads like the SS-Pz.A.A. 1 but should already leave the transfer route at MILZENHÄUSCHEN. From here it should move via SCHMIDTHEIM to the area south of the forester's house KAISERHAUS.

At 1830 the SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1 reinforced by the 4./ SS-Flak-Abt. 1

was to move next on transfer route green. After leaving the assembly area KOMMERN it should reach the transfer route to the north of KOMMERN. From BLANKENHEIM the regiment was to reach the deployment area via RIPS DORF - ESCH.

Immediately behind the SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1, the SS-Werfer-Abt. 1 should follow. Starting from its assembly area north of ZÜLPICH via the road to the northeast of ZÜLPICH station directly to KOMMERN. Behind BLANKENHEIM the deployment area which was located in the woods around LOMMERSDORF should be reached via AHRHÜTTE.

At 1840 the SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 minus the 3rd (armoured) battalion was to leave the area north of ZÜLPICH and to follow the SS-Werfer-Abt. 1. The 3rd battalion was obviously detached because it should approach with the regiment before the start of the transfer. The starting point for the regiment was SIECHHAUS (2km southeast of SIEVERNICH) and from there via ZÜLPICH and KOMMERN to the starting point of transfer route green. After passing BLANKENHEIM the regiment should reach the deployment area JUNKERBERG - BLANKENHEIM (excluded) - FROSCHBERG - NONNENBACH - FREILINGEN via FREILINGEN - ROETZ.

The last unit using transfer route green was the SS-Flak-Abt. 1 minus the 1st and 4th Battery. Starting at 2130 at FIRMENICH it should reach the transfer route near KOMMERN. After reaching BLANKENHEIM the battalion should provide aerial defence from firing positions around BLANKENHEIM. 1./ SS-Flak-Abt. 1 which was to use transfer route blue should join the battalion again at BLANKENHEIM.

Transfer route red:

The SS-Pz.Jg.Abt. 1 was to move first from the area NEMMENICH - ÜLPENICH and to pass the starting point ÜLPENICH SOUTH at 1700. Moving via ENZEN the battalion was to reach the transfer route near SATZVEY. After reaching ENGELGAU it should reach the deployment area ROHR (included) - TONDORF (excluded) MÜLHEIM (excluded).

Behind the SS-Pz.Jg.Abt. 1 the armoured group of the I./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 was the next unit to move. The battalion was assembled in the area NIEDERBERG and should reach the transfer route via DÜRSCHVEN and EUENHEIM. The deployment area was the large woodland north of BLANKENHEIM named MÜREL.

The III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 was assembled in the area of POLL - DORWEILER. It should start to move at 1705 as the 3rd marching group by passing the starting point PINGSHEIM SOUTH. From there the battalion should move via ERP - FRIESHEIM - NIEDERBERG - DÜRSCHVEN - EUENHEIM. The target of the battalion was the same deployment area as the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1.

The fourth route column was the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1. Assembled in the area WEILERSWIST - BLIESHEIM - FRIESHEIM it should start to move at 1730 and should reach the transfer route via starting point WEILERSWIST. From there the column was to move via DERKUM - EUSKIRCHEN - EUENHEIM before it reached the transfer route. The deployment area was MÜREL like for most of the other armoured units.

Starting from the assembly area BILLIGER WALD at 2100 the 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 and the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 were the last units to use transfer route red. Both units should use the same roads like the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 to reach the transfer route. Needless to say that the aim again was the deployment area MÜREL.

Transfer route blue:

The first unit to move was the rest of the SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 (staff, one company, one bridging column and the penal platoon) which was assembled around ANTWEILER - LESSENICH - WACHENDORF. The starting point for this column was WACHENDORF which must have been passed at 1700 because the road SATZVEY - KATZEY had to be clear again by 1730 as it was part of transfer route red. The battalion should reach the transfer route at IVERSHEIM and should follow the route till its end at FROHNGAU. From there it was to move via TONDORF -

BLANKENHEIM - AHRHÜTTE - DOLLENDORF to the deployment area MIRBACH. The area wasn't limited on the village itself but also included the woods to the west, south and southeast.

The wheeled elements of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 shouldn't use transfer route red but transfer route blue. Assembled around GROSS-VERNICH near WEILERSWIST they should start at 1700 and as the 2nd column via WÜSCHHEIM - WEIDESHEIM - KUCHENHEIM. After reaching ENGELGAU it was to reach the deployment area MÜREL.

The next unit to follow was the rest of the SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 made of the staff battery, II./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 and the attached I./ SS-Flak-Abt. 1, all assembled around WEILER-LOMMERSUM. Surprisingly the entire order didn't mention the III./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 at all. The route column should pass the starting point LOMMERSUM at 1800 and reach the transfer route via DERKUM - WÜSCHHEIM - WEIDESHEIM - KUCHENHEIM. The deployment area should be reached via FROHNGAU - TONDORF - BLANKENHEIM - AHRHÜTTE - DOLLENDORF. The deployment area itself was limited by VETTLERHOF - POINT 510 - REINERSBERG - LOMMERSDORF - road AHRHÜTTE - BLANKENHEIM (excluded).

The last route column contained the supply elements of the division divided into a light group for Panzergrenadiers and a heavy group for the armoured group. These groups should stand by as of 1900 near WEIDESHEIM. From there they should reach MÜNSTEREIFEL together via KUCHENHEIM, where the light group should move via SCHÖNAU - west of SCHULDT - ANTWEILER to the deployment area AREMBERG - DORSEL. The heavy group was to move from MÜNSTEREIFEL via NÖTHEN to the deployment area NÖTHEN - HOHN - BOUDERATH - FROHNGAU.⁹⁰

Ustuf. Hans Hennecke, platoon leader in the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, remembers how he reconnoitred one of the transfer routes:

"It could have been a few days before the start of the offensive,

when I was woken up around 2300. I received orders to report at the division headquarter at once. There I received the order to reconnoitre a suitable transfer route with my platoon to the deployment area BLANKENHEIM for a top secret offensive. Prepared maps in envelopes were handed over to me. After my return the crews were woken up, we manned the tanks and started. Until we reached the BLANKENHEIMER FORREST the crews didn't know about the secret mission. The trip was sometimes very difficult. The biggest difficulty was the curiosity of the population who were alarmed by the presence of five Panthers.

When we reached MÜNSTEREIFEL we stood in front of the old large northern town gate. The gateway was too narrow for the heavy tanks and except for the main road running through the town no other road was available to detour the gate. The mayor of the town was called and proposed blowing up the gate. I couldn't decide in favour of this barbaric solution. I went along the town wall on foot and found a way out. On the slopes west of the town there were allotment gardens. We ploughed through these gardens after a steep ascent. The citizens will hopefully excuse my behaviour today, but at least both gates of the town remained intact."⁹¹

Unfortunately Hennecke's report doesn't specify exactly when the reconnaissance trip took place but one can presume that it was made before 11.12.44. This is because the division obviously took it into account as the assigned transfer route red to the armoured units which didn't pass through MÜNSTEREIFEL. However this didn't mean that the 1. SS-Pz.Div. was free to choose the transfer routes as there were more divisions, in particular the 12. SS-Pz.Div., that were preparing to move to the EIFEL at the same time. In order to avoid interference between the different divisions there was no freedom of choice in terms of time and places for the different transfer routes, but within the assigned transfer routes a division obviously was free to allocate its units.

After the war the adjutant of 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Ustuf. Arndt Fischer, confirmed that the regiment indeed used transfer route red:

We passed through EUSKIRCHEN during night. I didn't have a map as there was a shortage in maps. From there we moved to SATZVEY and along an unknown road to DALHEM.⁹²

There were hardly any technical breakdowns during the transfer march. According to a former member of the 6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 the company didn't had a single technical breakdown during the transfer. According to Hstuf. Hans Gruhle all transfer movements of the regiment were finished on 14.12.44 around 1000. On the other side Panther 115, Uscha. Richartz, of the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was suffering from overheating near EUSKIRCHEN. The crew managed to get some water at an inn and joined the company again during the course of the 15.12.44. Panther 112, Uscha. Pflüger, of the same company had motor trouble and stayed behind. The crew of another Panther of the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 also faced steering troubles during the transfer march. But both eyewitnesses left it open if the tank broke down at the start of the transfer march to BLANKENHEIM or during the early hours of 16.12.44.⁹³

After reaching the new assembly area camouflage had first priority. The tanks were concealed in the dense forests of the SCHMIDTHEIMER WOODS, traces were removed and the tanks camouflaged against aerial view. Due to the strict restrictions in the deployment area the soldiers tried to build a place to sleep which also protected them against the wind with brush wood, bushes and undergrowth. Blankets and canvas were used as cover but despite these efforts the soldiers spend most of the time freezing and couldn't find sleep due to the cold. During daytime they could see V-weapons being fired from nearby launch-sites.⁹⁴

During daytime every movement was strictly forbidden for all soldiers of s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 which had reached the deployment area ENGELGAU with its 45 Tiger II's. The battalion took cover on both sides of the road ZINGSHEIM - ENGELGAU. In order to camouflage the battalions presence it was also forbidden to run the motors of the tanks, even loud talking was prohibited. The field kitchen was only allowed to cook during the night due to the smoke caused by fire and therefore food supply only took place during night time hours.⁹⁵

The disposition of forces was as followed:

KG Peiper in the wooded area called MÜREL:

Rgt.Gef.Std.	forester house BLANKENHEIMER WALD
I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	NW of BLANKENHEIM
I./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1	N of BLANKENHEIM
III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2	NE of BLANKENHEIM
s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501	area ENGELGAU, headquarter at TONDORF

KG Hansen:

Rgt.Gef.Std.	RIPSDORF
I./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1	ALENDORF
II./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1	STADTKYLL - KRONENBURG
III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1	HÜNGERSDORF
SS-Werfer-Abt. 1	DOLLENDORF
II./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1	AHRHÜTTE
SS-Pz.Jg.Abt. 1	WALDORF

KG Sandig:

SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (- III. Battalion)	area around TONDORF
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KG Knittel:

SS-Pz.A.A. 1	area around GLAADT
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Divisions headquarters at TONDORF.⁹⁶

4.3 Task and order of battle of Kampfgruppe Peiper

On 14.12.44 at 1100 Ostubaf. Peiper was instructed to come to the headquarter of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. at TONDORF in order to receive the order for operation "Wacht am Rhein" together with the other regimental commanders. The orders asked for an attack through the Ardennes with the main point of effort situated around LIÈGE. During that meeting the composition of the different combat groups were discussed, the advance routes were submitted to the commanders and maps

were issued containing the vital information for the attack of the combat groups.⁹⁷ After Ostubaf. Peiper returned to his command post he reconsidered the options for a successful deployment of his combat group. He knew that the success of the thrust very much depended on speed:

"I sat down and reconsidered how to organize my combat group. The length of my column would be 25 km and would only allow travelling at medium speed. Due to the poor condition of the roads the vehicles travelling at the rear would have no chance of advancing to the head of the column. Therefore all units needed for the attack had to be at the head of the column. As I was ordered to advance as fast as possible I decided to advance with the SPW's in lead. In case of enemy resistance I intended to bring forward the tanks, destroy the enemy and to pursue the advance with the SPW's. If everything went according to plan I expected to spend only one company of Panzer IV and Panther for the advance through the mountains to reach the MEUSE. Afterwards I intended to employ my King tigers." ⁹⁸

In the afternoon of 14.12.44 all battalion commanders were given the operation plan, the task and the order of battle by their regimental commanders. The meeting of the SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 took place at the headquarter of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 in the forester's house BLANKENHEIMER WALD. Attending this meeting were all battalion commanders which were assigned to the newly formed "gepanzerte Gruppe Peiper" or simply named "Kampfgruppe Peiper".⁹⁹

The order for armoured group Peiper was to attack on 16.12.44 at X-time in the sector LOSHEIM - LOSHEIMERGRABEN and to break through the American front. The first target was to seize and leave open the bridge over the MEUSE to the south of LIÈGE. The regiment was instructed to fight without regard to their flanks or the exploitation of both sides of the advance route and finally to dash towards the MEUSE with the tanks by taking advantage of speed. The Kampfgruppe was assigned to use Rollbahn D (advance road), which ran along LOSHEIM - LOSHEIMERGRABEN - BÜLLINGEN - MÖDERSCHIED -

ONDENVAL - ENGELSDORF (LIGNEUVILLE) - STAVELOT - TROIS-PONTS - WERBOMONT - HAMOIR - TINLOT to the MEUSE. The regiment was to get over the river at either HUY or OMBRET-RAWSA.

In order to carry through the task the following units were attached to Kampfgruppe Peiper:

SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	Ostuf. Joachim Peiper
I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1	Stubaf. Werner Poetschke
s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501	Ostuf. Heinz von Westernhagen
III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2	Hstuf. Josef Diefenthal
13./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2	Ostuf. Heinz Koch
3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1	Ostuf. Franz Sievers
I./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt 1	Hstuf. Ludwig Kalischko
le. Fla.Abt. 84 (Luftwaffe)	Major von Sacken ¹⁰⁰

To ensure the supply of the Kampfgruppe, Ostuf. Peiper gave orders to his adjutant Hstuf. Hans Gruhle to stay with the rearward elements of the Kampfgruppe. Peiper asked Ustuf. Arndt Fischer, adjutant to Poetschke's 1st battalion, to become his new adjutant. Stubaf. Poetschke therefore had to call upon Ustuf. Rolf Reiser the same evening to become his new adjutant. Reiser however was still at RHADEN and didn't join the battalion before 18.12.44. Ustuf. Kurt Kramm, Poetschke's orderly officer, had to take over Fischer's job till Reiser's arrival. As Ustuf. Fischer was only detached to the regimental headquarters for the attack, he had to report at the headquarters on the morning of the 16.12.44 in his own tank.^{101/102}

The same day Ustuf. Reiser received the order from Ustuf. Kurt Köchlin, adjutant of II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, to report at the headquarters of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 in the COLOGNE area by noon of the 15.12.44. Using a motorcycle sidecar he reached HAMM where his motorbike broke down with gearbox damage. All efforts to repair the motorcycle were in vain and Reiser hitchhiked to reach the battalion. It wasn't before the 17th that he met Uscha. Kreye of the motorcycle reconnaissance troop of I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 near the BLANKENHEIMER FOREST. Together with Kreye they

followed the Kampfgruppe in a Schwimmer (Schwimmwagen) via LIGNEUVILLE and STAVELOT. Using secondary roads they got stuck in the mud during the night. In LIGNEUVILLE they passed Arndt Fischer's tank at 1400. In Stavelot he hitch hiked a Tiger II of s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 and finally reached Poetschke at 1500 near CHENEUX after the allied air raid was over.¹⁰³

On 14.12.44 at 2200 there was another meeting at the headquarter of I. SS-Panzerkorps in SCHMIDTHEIM. All divisional commanders, re-gimental commanders and commanders of the independent battalions attended the meeting. All three Kampfgruppen commanders of the Pz.Brig. 150 were present too, while Ostuf. Otto Skorzeny was introducing himself as Stubaf. Skorza. As the conference was postponed for approximately one hour, the attendant officers were taking the opportunity to ask questions to the chief of staff of the I. SS-Panzerkorps. Stubaf. Gustav Knittel used the opportunity to talk to his old mate from the SS-Junkerschule BAD TÖLZ, Ostuf. Willi Hardieck from the Pz.Brig. 150. Through this he learned the correct identity of Skorzeny and that Hardieck would lead a Kampfgruppe in American uniforms that would fight in the same combat zone as the I. SS-Pz.Div. The discussion lasted for almost half an hour and was very controversial. During the actual conference the commanding General, SS-Gruppenführer Hermann Prieß, told them that the start of the offensive had been scheduled for 16.12.44 at 0530. During a subsequent conference, Ostuf. Skorzeny told the attending officers about the disposition and the planned deployment of his brigade. Furthermore he provided information about secrecy and how the single groups should stay in contact with the I. SS-Pz.Div. during the advance. During this conference Hauptmann Walter Scherf from Pz.Brig. 150 sought contact with Ostuf. Peiper and Stubaf. Dietrich Ziemßen the Ia of the division because his Kampfgruppe was assigned to advance along the same front as the division.¹⁰⁴

During the afternoon of 15.12.44 the I. SS-Pz.Div. received an appeal by the commander of the 6. Panzerarmee, Sepp Dietrich:

"Soldiers of the 6. Panzerarmee! The moment of decision is upon

us. The Führer has placed us at the vital point. It is for us to breach the enemy front and push beyond the Meuse. Together with us other units of the Army and Air force will destroy the enemy who is standing on German soil. The homeland worked day and night for us, to protect it will be our first duty. I request that every soldier will use the engines to full capacity and will recklessly commit himself to be the first at the Meuse. We want to be the first armoured troops to cross the Meuse.

Signed Sepp Dietrich"¹⁰⁵

The same afternoon at around 1400 another conference took place at Kampfgruppe Peiper's command post. At first Peiper issued his orders orally. Again all questions regarding the way of fighting and the anticipated points of main effort were discussed with all battalion and company commanders in detail, in order to react correctly during all the possible first engagements. There was a special order for s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501. While the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 was responsible for the breakthrough, the battalion should be brought forward after passing through the hilly terrain and then lead the attack to the MEUSE. Food was issued to the soldiers for two days. Ostuf. Hardieck from the Pz.Brig. 150 was also present during this conference and he later explained the reasons for "Operation Greif". Hardieck was accompanied by his adjutant and the company commanders of his Kampfgruppe, who all wore parachute uniforms.

At the end of the conference Peiper asked for the full commitment of all the men. He added that the weapons issued would probably be the last that they received from the homeland. Afterwards the commanders distributed the maps to their company commanders and briefed them on the advance routes, the order of battle and the task of their companies. Written orders were issued to the commanders after the conference but by that time it was already midnight of the 15./16.12.44.¹⁰⁶

The order of battle for Kampfgruppe Peiper looked something like this (only referring to armoured vehicles and guns):¹⁰⁷

Armoured Spearhead (Panzerspitze)

CO Ostuf. Werner Sternebeck (6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1)

2 Pz V	Uscha. Bahrend (Panther 1??) and Uscha. Valentin Bersin (Panther 122)
5 Pz IV	Ostuf. Werner Sternebeck (Panzer IV 614), Hscha. August Tonk (Panzer IV 623), Ustuf. Karl-Heinz Asmussen (Panzer IV 612), Oscha. August Wien (Panzer IV 631) and Scharführer Horst Rempel (Panzer IV 725)
2 m. SPW	Oscha. Rudolf Dörr (1st Half-Platoon leader of 1st platoon 9.(Pi)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1) SPW Commanders: Uscha. Held, Rottf. Karl Wemmel

Spearhead Company

CO Ostuf. Georg Preuß (10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2)

13 m. SPW	10./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (missing a platoon) + attached Mortar Platoon (4 m. SPW)
2 m. SPW	2nd Half-Platoon of 1st platoon 9.(Pi)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1
7 m. SPW	1st platoon 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (mounting 7,5cm KwK guns)

Commanders Group Peiper, Poetschke, Diefenthal

1 Pz V Bef.	Cdr. Ostuf. Joachim Peiper (Stab SS-Pz.Rgt. 1)
1 Pz V Bef	Ustuf. Arndt Fischer (Stab SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, detached from Stab I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1)
1 Pz V Bef.	Cdr. Stuf. Werner Poetschke (Stab I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1)
2 m. SPW	Ustuf. Horst Krause and Hscha. Hartmann (Signals Platoon, I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1)
4 m. SPW	Cdr. Stuf. Josef Diefenthal (Stab and Signals)

Platoon, III./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2)

1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Ostuf. Karl Kremser)

15 Pz V 2 Pz V serving with Armoured Spearhead

10./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Ostuf. Karl-Heinz Vögler)

4 Flak-Pz. Hscha. Paul Schröder (platoon leader I)
2 Möbelwagen
2 Wirbelwind

Two half platoons driving in the forward half of the Kampfgruppe. Ostuf. Vögler with this group.

11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (CO Ostuf. Heinz Tomhardt)

14 m. SPW missing 3rd platoon

6./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Ostuf. Benoni Junker)

13 Pz IV 4 Pz IV with Armoured Spearhead

9./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Ostuf. Erich Rumpf)

4 m. SPW 1st platoon serving with Armoured Spearhead
and Spearhead Company

7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Hstuf. Oskar Klingelhöfer)

16 Pz IV 1 Pz IV with Armored Spearhead

10./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Ostuf. Karl-Heinz Vögler)

4 Flak-Pz. Oscha. Hechler (platoon leader II)
2 Möbelwagen

2 Wirbelwind

Two half platoons driving in the rearward half of the Kampfgruppe.

3./ SS-Pz.Pl.Btl. 1 (CO Ostuf. Franz Sievers)

12 m. SPW 2 platoons mounted on SPW and 1 platoon
mounted on trucks

2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (CO Ostuf. Friedrich Christ)

17 Pz V

13./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (CO Ostuf. Heinz Koch)

6 "Grillen" (self-propelled 15cm infantry guns)
3 m. SPW

12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (CO Hscha. Jochen Thiele)

35 m. SPW 1st platoon serving with Spearhead
Company

9./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 (CO Ostuf. Max Leike)

14 m. SPW missing 3rd platoon

s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 (Cdr. Ostubaf. Heinz von Westernhagen)

3 Pz VI Stab s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501
14 Pz VI CO Hstuf. Rudolf Möbius
(2./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501)
14 Pz VI CO Ostuf. Jürgen Wessel
(1./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501)
14 Pz VI CO Hstuf. Heinz Birnschein
(3./ s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501)

le. Fla.Stu.Abt. 84 (Cdr. Major von Sacken)

12 x 2cm mot	CO Major Wolf (1./ 84)
12 x 2cm mot	CO Hptm. Koch (2./ 84)
12 x 3,7cm mot	3./ 84

L/ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1 (Cdr. Hstuf. Ludwig Kalischko)

1 Pz IV Beob.	Stab of the Abteilung
6 le. FH mot	CO Ustuf. Josef Neugebauer (1./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1)
6 le. FH mot	CO Ustuf. Paul Stocker (2./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1)
3 s. FH mot	CO Ostuf. Egon Endell
1 Hummel	(3./ SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 1)

Rear Echelon (Trosse)

1 Pz V	Hstuf. Hans Gruhle (Stab SS-Pz.Rgt. 1)
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According to Ustuf. Hennecke his 1st Platoon was driving at the rear of the 1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 while Ostuf. Christ claimed that his 2nd Company was driving at the rear of the Kampfgruppe because he had only taken over his company just prior to the offensive and didn't had have enough time to get to know his men. The marching order for the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 was arranged as follows, 2nd Company, 1st Company and then 3rd Company, simply because Hstuf. Möbius was the most experienced company commander, while Ostuf. Wessel didn't have as much experience and Hstuf. Birnschein was new in command. Like Ostuf. Christ, Hstuf. Birnschein had only taken over his company a few days before the offensive started.¹⁰⁸

All non combat necessary vehicles of the Kampfgruppe were to drive at the rear of the column. The only vehicles of the rear elements that were allowed to overtake the combat vehicles were messenger, fuel and ammunition vehicles. The starting point of

the Kampfgruppe from the deployment area was a road junction at the R51 north of DAHLEM called FORSTHAUS KAISERHAUS. Immediately after the conference at Peiper's combat post the company commanders went to see their men and brief them about the imminent offensive.¹⁰⁹ Tank-driver Rolf Ehrhardt, who belonged to the crew of Panzer IV 701, remembers the issue of orders:

*"After his return from the conference in the nearby foresters house, Hstuf. Klingelböfer called for his platoon leaders to meet in his mobile office and issued the order. After the platoon leaders had left in order to brief their crews, Klingelböfer also briefed the crews of Panzer 701 and 702. For the first time we felt a certain optimism which was untypical of Klingelböfer. The length of war obviously had left traces on him."*¹¹⁰

The first men of the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 to be briefed in the late evening were the platoon leaders. Later on they informed their tank commanders. According to Werner Wendt the tank commanders did not get much information about the initial order but quite a number of instructions and information on the deployment of the Panzerbrigade 150. While the bulk of the Kampfgruppe assembled in the early morning hours on the R51, the s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 initially remained in their assembly area. Although the battalion had reached the assembly area without any losses there were quite a number of tanks that were not combat ready and so an unknown number of tanks would leave the assembly area later that day.¹¹¹

Hptm. Scherf of Kampfgruppe Y belonging to the Panzerbrigade 150 had sent out a patrol during the night that had to reconnoitre the advance route from STADTKYLL to KRONENBURG in order to look for the best place to incorporate his Kampfgruppe into Kampfgruppe Peiper's column.¹¹²

There are different statements when the Kampfgruppe finally started to drive from the assembly area to the starting point at the R51. While most veterans claimed that the Kampfgruppe started

to leave the assembly area after the artillery fire had started, some members of the 6./ and 7./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 stated that they were standing on the R51 when the artillery barrage started.¹¹³

Footnotes

1. Statement of Manfred Thorn, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 29.12.2004; Statement of Walter Schlünzen, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 08.01.2006; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.89 f; Diary of Benoni Junker.

2. Diary of Benoni Junker; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 01.05.2005; Statement Werner Ackermann on 22.02.2005.

3. BA-MA WF 03/4693, Attachment 104, frame 019995; BA-MA RH 10/349, General der Panzertruppen, p.4; BA-MA RH 19 IX/89; War Diary Heeresgruppe B, p. 70; BA-MA RH 24-81/103; Attachment War Diary LXXXI. A.K., p.214 f; NARA, Heeresgruppe B, Microfilm T311, Roll 3, Frame 2893.

4. Obviously this order wasn't issued before the next day to all concerned levels of command because a conform summary of this order was found in the files of the OB West dated 04.09.44.

5. BA-MA RH 19 IV/55, Attachment War Diary OB West 01.09.-10.09.44., p.124; BA-MA WF03/4692, Activity Report Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 13.

6. BA-MA WF03/4692, Activity Report Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 14.

7. Statement Werner Ackermann, interviewed on 22.02.2005.

8. BA-MA WF03/4692, Activity Report Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 15.

9. BA-MA WF03/4692, Activity Report Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 17 and 17a.

10. Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.89 f.

11. Heinz Günther Guderian: 116. Pz.Div. p. 131; Diary of Benoni Junker.

12. Letter of Werner Ackermann to Timm Haasler, dated 01.03.2005.

13. Statement of Werner Ackermann, interviewed on 22.02.2005; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed on 01.05.2005.

14. Diary of Benoni Junker; Statement of Werner Ackermann, interviewed on 22.02.2005.

15. Experience Report Benno Kauffeldt, I./ Pz.Rgt. 16.

16. BA-MA WF03/4692, Activity Report Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 23, 35 and 40.

17. BA-MA WF03/4692, Activity Report Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 50.

18. Statement of Rolf Reiser, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 08.01.2006; Statement of Walter Ropeter, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 11. and 21.07.2003; Statement of Wilfried Holle, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 09. and 20.07.03; Statement of Daniel Mayer, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 08. and 12.01.2006; Statement of Walter Schlünzen, interviewed on 08.01.2006, Letter from Heinz Noack to Timm Haasler, dated 02.03.2005; Diary Benoni Junker; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.300 ff.

19. Statement Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.90.

20. BA-MA WF 03/4693, Attachment 104.

21. R. Sellner: Fritz Streipart, p.9; Without author: Die 7. Kompanie, p.86; R. Sellner: Gefährten unserer Jugend, Ergänzungsband, p.20; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.301 and 386 ff.

22. Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p.213 f; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.302; Letter from Karl Wortmann to Timm Haasler, dated 06.09.99; Letter from Karl Wortmann to Timm Haasler, dated 22.09.99.

23. Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.285.
24. Vorschlag für die Verleihung des Deutschen Kreuzes in Gold für Oscha, Jürgen Brandt.
25. Jean-Paul Pallud, Rückmarsch. The German retreat from Normandy, p.282.
26. Vorschlag für die Verleihung des Deutschen Kreuzes in Gold für Oscha, Jürgen Brandt.
27. Simon Vosters correspondence with Yann Jouault, 31.10.2006.
28. Report of Operations 9th US Infantry Division, September 1944; Regimental History 60th US Infantry.
29. Gefechtsbericht der Panzergruppe Berlin im Rahmen der Kampfgruppe Milius.
30. Wolfgang Schneider: Tigers in Combat, p.260 ff; Letter from Werner Wendt to Timm Haasler, dated 24.11.2001; Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.282 ff.
31. Statements regarding the number of tanks that reached the MEUSE together with Hstuf. Möbius are conflicting. According to Agte there was just a single Tiger, according to Schneider there had been two tanks and according to Sellner four Tigers (Wolfgang Schneider: Tigers in Combat, p.262; Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.286; R. Sellner: Rudolf Möbius, p. 12.)
32. War Diary SS-Flak-Abt. 12, Bericht über den Einsatz des Flakkampftrupps "Stephan", dated 17.09.44.
33. BA-MA WF 03/4693, Activity Report des Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 92 and 93; Krämer in Danny S. Parker: Hitler's Ardennes Offensive, p.37.
34. BA-MA WF 03/4693, Activity Report des Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 84 and 106.
35. BA-MA WF 03/4693, Activity Report des Gen.d.Pz.Tr. West, Attachment 107, 118 and 119.
36. OKW/WFSt/Op(H) Nr. 0011831/44 g.Kdos., dated 15.10.44.
37. BA-MA RH 10/108, Übersichten der Verteilung der Flakpanzer im Bereich OB West, p. 17; Statement Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.04; Letters from Karl Wortmann, dated 06. and 22.09.1999.
38. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.301 f; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.23; Borchers in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.25 f, Statement of Werner Holle, interviewed on 20.07.2003; Letter Karl Wortmann, dated 06.09.99; Letter from Rolf Reiser to Timm Haasler, dated 11.01.2006; Statement Werner Koscielski, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 14.05.2006; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.90 f.
39. BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., p. 34; BA-MA MS B577, Rudolf Lehmann, I. SS-Pz.K, p. 1 f; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.24 f.
40. BA-MA RH 10/312, p. 34.
41. BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., p.33; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.302.
42. Diary Benoni Junker; Statement Rolf Reiser, interviewed on 08.01.2006; Jens Westemeier: Peiper, p.78; Patrick Peiper, p.302.
43. BA-MA RH 10/349, p.2; Statement of Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed on 01.05.2005; Diary Benoni Junker.
44. Statement of Werner Koscielski, interviewed on 14.05.2006.
45. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.301.
46. BA-MA RH 10/349, p.21 and 289, Statement of Walter Ropeter, interviewed on 10.09.2003; Statement of Wilfried Holle, interviewed on 04.09.2003; Statement of Daniel Mayer, interviewed on 08. and 12.10.2006; Statement of Walter Schlünzen, interviewed on 08.01.2006; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.301 f.
47. BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., S. 35; Jeff

Dugdale: Panzer Divisions, Vol. I, Part 2, October 1944, p.66 f and same author Panzer Divisions, Vol. I, Part 3, November 1944, p. 57f; Statement of Rolf Reiser, interviewed on 08.01.2006; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed on 01.05.2005; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.301 f.

48. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.302 and 311; Jeff Dugdale: Panzer Divisions, Vol. I, Part 3, November 1944, p. 58; Borchers in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.25 f; Jens Westemeier: Peiper, p.78.

49. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.303.

50. BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., S. 33; Jeff Dugdale: Panzer Divisions, Vol. I, Part 3, November 1944, p.58; Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p.214, Letters from Karl Wortmann, dated 06.09.99 and 22.09.99; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.302.

51. Joachim Peiper in Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.303.

52. BA-MA RH 10/312, p. 34; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p. 91; Statement Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Diary Benoni Junker; Statement Rolf Reiser, interviewed on 08.01.2006; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.303.

53. Of all veterans that had been at WIETZENDORF, nobody could remember that he was attending this ceremony! The assumption is obvious that only elements of the II./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 and the commanding officers of the I./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 attended the appeal.

54. According to Agte the ceremony was held at RHADEN. (Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.302.).

55. Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p. 214; Statement of Rolf Reiser, interviewed on 08.01.2006; Letter from Karl Wortmann, dated 06.09.99; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.302 f.

56. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 303; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.542 ff.

57. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.26 f; Statement

of Wilfried Holle, dated 04.09.2003; BA-MA WF03/4694, Orders and reports "Wacht am Rhein", p.33 f; Statement of Dr. Arndt Fischer, interviewed on 12.01.2006.

58. BA-MA RH 10/349, p.2 und 21; BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., p.33 ff.

59. Statement of Wilhelm Dietrich, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 21.09.2001.

60. BA-MA RH 10/349, p. 44; BA-MA RH 10/350, p.22; Patrick Agte, Wittmann, p.293 ff; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.304; Wolfgang Schneider: Tigers in Combat, p.263; Without author: The German Order of Battle WW II, Vol. 2, p.11.

61. BA-MA T 311, Roll 8, Attachment War Diary, Die Wacht am Rhein, OB West Ia, p.16.

62. BA-MA T 311, Roll 8, Attachment War Diary, Die Wacht am Rhein, OB West Ia, p.34 ff.

63. BA-MA T 311, Roll 8, Attachment War Diary, Die Wacht am Rhein, OB West Ia, p.40, 54, 65 f and 74 f.

64. BA-MA T 311, Roll 8, Attachment War Diary, Die Wacht am Rhein, OB West Ia, p.84 f.

65. BA-MA T 311, Roll 8, Attachment War Diary, Die Wacht am Rhein, OB West Ia, p.84 ff.

66. BA-MA WF03/4694, KTB OB West, Vol. 6, p.79 f.

67. BA-MA WF03/4694, KTB OB West, Vol. 6, p.28 and 76; BA-MA MS B577, Rudolf Lehmann, I. SS Pz.K, p.3.

68. BA-MA WF03/4694, War Diary OB West, Vol. 6, p.33 f.

69. BA-MA WF03-4694, War Diary OB West, Vol. 6, p.39; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.26 f; Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p.212.

70. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.26 f; Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p.212.

71. A platoon leader of the 4./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 didn't see any Panthers at RHADEN or WEHDEM during his stay in this area between mid-November and mid-December. A former tank commander of the 8./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 remembered that at least one Panzer IV was available at RHADEN but no tanks with the company at OPPENWEHE. (Letter from Rolf Reiser, dated 11.01.2006; Statement of Werner Koscielski, interviewed on 14.05.2006.)

72. The report mentioned four Tigers of the Leibstandarte, which is obviously wrong as the division didn't have any Tigers in this area before - s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 was in Sennelager for rest and refitting and only a small detachment stayed at Schloss Holte. It is very likely that these tanks would have been Panthers which looked nearly the same as the Tiger II.

73. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.27; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.91; Hermann Kleinebenne: Die Weserlinie, p.171 ff, p.184 and 187.

74. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.304; Letter from Karl Wortmann, dated 06.09.99; Statement of Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Statement of Wilfried Holle, interviewed on 04.09. and 06.11.2003; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed on 01.05.2005; Letter from Rolf Reiser, dated 11.01.2006; Diary Benoni Junker, Karl Wortmann in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 27; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.91; Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p.214.

75. Joachim Peiper in Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.304.

76. Statement of Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed on 01.05.2005.

77. BA-MA WF03/4694, War Diary OB West, Vol. 6, p.42 & 45; BA-MA RH 10/349, p.44 f & 10/350, p.22; Letter from Werner Wendt, dated 21.11.01; Wolfgang Schneider: Tigers in Combat, p.263; Patrick Agte, Wittmann, p.297.

78. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 28f; BA-MA B-577, Rudolf Lehmann, I. SS Panzerkorps in der Ardennenoffensive, p.1 ff.

79. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.28 f.

80. BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., p. 33; Hans Gruhle in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.30; Patrick Peiper in Agte: Peiper, p.305.

81. Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.305; Diary Benoni Junker.

82. Without author: Gefährten unserer Jugend, p.214.

83. Statement of Werner Wendt, interviewed by Timm Haasler on 20.03.99; Patrick Agte, Wittmann, p.304.

84. BA-MA RH 10/312, Status Report 1. SS Pz.Div., p.37 f.

85. BA-MA RW 4 v. 636, Panzerlage West 1944/45, December 44 Report.

86. BA-MA WF 03/4694, War Diary OB West, Vol. 6, p.57 ff.

87. BA-MA WF03/4694, frame 020406.

88. Which was indeed the night the transfer took place.

89. Statement of Thorsten Fischer dated 01.03.03, according to the diary of his grandfather, Hscha. Wilhelm Auge, the transfer started on 12.12.44; Statement of Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.39 f; Karl Wortmann in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.43; Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.304.

90. BA-MA RS 4/1270.

91. Hans Hennecke in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.39.

92. Undated interrogation report of Arndt Fischer, p.2.

93. Statement of Otto Fischer, interviewed on 01.05.2005; Hans Gruhle in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.42; Declaration of Karl-Heinz Lieber, dated 15.04.1948; Affidavit Hans Tretin, dated 31.01.1946; Sworn Statement Klaus Schneider, dated 31.01.1946; Statement Richard Eiben during Screening 15.-24.11.1945.

94. Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.93; Karl Wortmann in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.43.

95. Statement and letter from Werner Wendt, dated 20.03.99 and 24.11.01; Statement Herbert Dusmann, author of the war diary of s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501.

96. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.39; Wolfgang Schneider: Tigers in Combat, p.263; Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p. 304.

97. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.41; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 311, Hans Gruhle in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 42; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.91.

98. ETHINT 10, p.9.

99. Hans Gruhle in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 42.

100. Hans Gruhle in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 42; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.311.

101. Affidavit Rolf Reiser, dated 20.03.1946; Letter from Rolf Reiser, dated 11.01.2006; Statement Arndt Fischer, interviewed on 12.01.2006; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.312.

102. The statement in Agte's book according to which the company commanders of s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501 were already present during the meeting on 14.12.44 is obviously wrong. Agte himself wrote only two pages later that the company commanders didn't learn about the offensive earlier than the evening of 15.12.44. (Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.306 and 308.)

103. Affidavit Rolf Reiser, dated 20.03.1946; Letter from Rolf Reiser, dated 11.01.2006; Statement Rolf Reiser, interviewed on 08.01.2006.

104. Scherf in Michael Schadewitz: Pz.Brig. 150, p. 300; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p. 311; Gustav Knittel in Michael Schadewitz: Pz.Brig. 150, p. 319.

105. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.44 f.

106. Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.44 f; Hans Gruhle in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p.44; Gustav Knittel in Michael Schadewitz: Pz.Brig. 150; S. 319; Birnschein in Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.311; Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.308.

107. As long as not differently quoted the ToE is based on Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol IV/2, p. 494; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.311 f; G-2 Reports 30th US Inf Div; G-2 Reports 82nd US Airborne Div.; Statement by Erich Maute on 22.01.1946, Statement Franz Mohr during Screening 15.-24.11.1945, Hermann Bock interviewed by Timm Haasler on 15.09.2006.

108. Undated Interrogation Report of Hans Hennecke; Undated Interrogation Report of Friedrich Christ; Statement and letter from Wendt, dated 20.03.99 and 21.11.2001.

109. Josef Diefenthal in Ralf Tiemann: Die Leibstandarte, Vol. IV/2, p. 43; Birnschein in Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.311; Patrick Agte: Peiper, p.312.

110. Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p.93.

111. Statement and letter from Wendt, dated 20.03.99 and 21.11.2001; Statement Herbert Dusmann, writer of the war diary of s. SS-Pz.Abt. 501; Patrick Agte: Wittmann, p.308.

112. Scherf in Michael Schadewitz: Pz.Brig. 150, p.303.

113. Statement of Manfred Thorn, interviewed on 29.12.2004; Undated Interrogation Report of Arndt Fischer, p. 3; Without author: 7. Panzerkompanie, p. 9; Affidavit Hans Hennecke on 11.01.1946, Testimony Joachim Peiper at the trial of Otto Skorzeny, August 1947.

Appendix 2: War crimes *committed by Kampfgruppe Peiper at Stoumont*

As mentioned in the preface 18 members of Kampfgruppe Peiper were accused during the Malmedy Trial of killing American prisoners of war on December 19th, 1944 at STOUMONT. Even today these killings are very contentious for various reasons. The following chapter presents the evidence for and against these war crimes based on primary sources.

1. Alleged war crimes committed by 2./ SS-Panzerregiment 1

1.1. The destruction of Panther 225 and the killing of American prisoners of war at the entrance of Stoumont.

Approaching 0730 hours, the Panzers geared up to force the issue. At the point rolled the remaining three tanks of 2nd Platoon with Panther 225 (Rottf. Prahn) taking the lead. Directly behind followed the platoon leader, Hscha. Knappich, in Panther 221 and then Oscha. Ropeter (Panther 222). Ustuf. Koch's 3rd Platoon was next, consisting of Panther 232 (Uscha. Brauschke), Koch himself (Panther 231) and Uscha. Herzog (234). Then came a command echelon consisting of the company commander, Ostuf. Christ in Panther 201 and probably also Stubaf. Poetschke in Panther 151. Then the 1st Platoon with Panther 214 (Uscha. Rech), Panther 211 (Ustuf. Kaufmann) and Panther 215 (Uscha. Krüger). The rear was brought up by the leader of the company troop, Uscha. Friedrich, in Panther 202.¹

The gunner in Panther 225 was Strm. Hans-Georg Hübler and here is his view of events:

"On 19.12.1944 I took part in the attack on STOUMONT as a gunner of Panther 223 (during the Malmedy trial Hübler also spoke of No. 222 but in fact it was No. 225, sic.) commanded by Rottf. Prahn. The attack started off at dawn as it was very foggy. Our tank received orders to lead the attack. We drove on the road till we reached the first houses. I tried hard to aim for a corner of a house at the entrance to the village, because I suspected an enemy position there. The tank rolled at slow speed until the driver pushed the pedal down a little bit too much. The Panther's body thus rose up and I lost my aim for a short time. The same moment the tank was hit in quick succession by antitank fire from the direction of the church and the turret traverse blocked. Again and again I tried to free the turret, but when one round hit the left side of the motor compartment, the whole crew had to bail out using the rear escape hatch in the turret. At this time the Panther started to smoke, but it didn't burn yet. I was the last to leave the tank and when I reached the rear escape hatch the loader of our tank, Strm. Werner Zander, who was already lying in the ditch next to the tank called me to bail out immediately. We got into a ditch filled with water on the right side of the road and took cover there. Our seriously wounded driver was lying next to me, he had lost a leg to an AT round while bailing out. The radio operator who had also tried to bail out was shot and fell. The tank was still taking fire, and so did we in the ditch. When we realized that the Americans were zeroing into our position, we made a run for it towards the East. Running with our heads down and followed by small arms fire, I reached our lines together with Strm. Zander and announced to a SPW crew that there was still a wounded man behind the tank. We were then sent to the rear in the direction of LA GLEIZE. I can't tell what happened to Rottf. Prahn, who later died of his wounds in

*LA GLEIZE. Because my gun never fired a shot in combat and thus a barrel burst can be ruled out and since we didn't blow the barrel, it can only have been sheared off by a lucky hit or later by the Americans."*²

During the Malmedy Trial this incident became the first war crime allegedly committed by members of Kampfgruppe Peiper during the attack on STOU MONT. Hans-Georg Hübler added to his testimony on June 5th, 1946 that they reached the first houses of STOU MONT.

"It was very quiet with the exception of some firing coming out of the house. Our commander gave orders to the radioman to return the fire and shoot into the building. After that a Sergeant and two other men went into the building and took about 13 Americans out. The prisoners were taken to the left of our tank. And I could not observe anything further."

After his tank was knocked out and he had bailed out of the tank he continued:

*"I saw how the radio man of Knappich's tank was shooting at the prisoners who were there on the side of the street. There was a great deal of fighting going on - by that I mean combat. I could see how two of these prisoners were falling down. I did not see anything further and I returned to LA GLEIZE."*³

The radio operator in Hscha. Knappich's Panther 221 was Strm. Arnold Mikolaschek. In his affidavit, dated April 3rd, 1946, Mikolaschek stated that his tank together with other tanks of 2nd Company entered STOU MONT between 0700 and 0800 on December 19th, 1944.

"Rottf. Brabms' tank was knocked out as soon as he reached the corner. The other tanks dispersed in the field on the right side of the road as shown in my sketch, and my tank took position marked as No. 5. As soon as we were in this position Hscha. Knappik who stood in the turret, shouted: 'On the left prisoners of war are standing.' I looked through the gunner's sight in the

*direction which he gave and saw 12 to 15 American prisoners of war standing on the place indicated with No. 4 in my sketch. I knew that these were captured Americans, because they wore American uniform. I also saw 2 or 3 German Infantry soldiers who were guarding these prisoners who stood with their hands crossed behind their heads, without weapons. Hscha. Knappik immediately ordered me to establish radio contact with the Company Commander. At this time I did not know the exact position of Ostuf. Christ's tank but I do know that he could not have been more than 200 m behind us because we always had very good communications. I quickly succeeded in establishing the radio contact with Ostuf. Christ and I heard Hpschf. Knappik say: 'Left of us, prisoners of war; what should I do?' The following answer I heard from the company commander's tank came back to Hpschf. Knappik over the radio: 'Bump them off, out.' Thereupon, Hpschf. Knappik immediately gave the order: 'Prisoners half left, turret MG and radio operator MG - open fire.' Upon order I swung my MG into the direction of the prisoners and fired 2 to 3 bursts into the group of prisoners of war. I estimate the distance between my tank and the position of the prisoners as 80 to 100 m. At the same time, while I fired, I saw and heard how the turret MG fired into the group of prisoners. This MG was manned by Rttf. Heinz Hoffmann. When I fired my MG, I traversed it a bit and I saw the prisoners whom I hit slump to the ground. However, since the turret MG fired simultaneously into the same direction as I did, I can no longer state with certainty who of the Americans was shot by me, and who were shot by Rottf. Heinz Hoffman. All of the prisoners hit the ground and lay quietly and as I saw it I concluded that they were either mortally wounded or dead."*⁴

The gunner in Hscha. Knappich's tank was Rottf. Hofmann whose name was misspelled as was the name of Knappich in Mikolaschek's affidavit. We will follow his affidavit from the moment after Prahm's Panther was knocked out:

"As soon as we had taken position Hauptscharführer Knappich gave me the order to turn the turret to the right and to shoot with the machine gun at American trenches. After I had fired

several bursts, Knappich gave me the order to turn the turret to the left and gave the order 'Heinz, M.G. ready - fire at the group of men standing in front.' I looked in the direction he pointed and I saw a group of 15 to 20 Americans who stood at this spot indicated on my sketch as No. 1. These Americans were guarded by some paratroopers; as far as I could see they had no weapons. I know they were American prisoners because they wore American uniforms. I assumed that Hauptscharführer Knappich knew that these were prisoners of war because as I saw them with German guards and without weapons it was at once clear to me that these soldiers were American prisoners of war. I followed Hauptscharführer Knappich's order and shot 2 to 3 bursts into the American prisoners of war. I saw the ones I hit slump to the ground, and I am sure that they were either badly wounded or dead, although I don't know the exact number I hit. At the time I shot at the American prisoners of war, I heard the radio operator MG firing, although I can't state with certainty that he shot at the prisoners because it was impossible for me at that moment to see the direction in which he shot. At that time Sturmmann Mikolaschek, sat in the radio operator's M.G. position. I heard M.G. fire from the other tanks of my company at the same time as I shot, but it was impossible for me to see which one of the tanks shot because they stood either behind or on the side of our tank." 5

Rottf. Erich Werner was the driver of Panther 221 that morning and he confirmed in his affidavit that he heard an order over the radio from his company commander Christ that his tank should bump off the American prisoners who had been taken by infantry troops from the house. He went on to state that Hscha. Knappich gave the order to shoot the American prisoners to Rottf. Hofmann and that Hofmann and Mikolaschek opened fire on the prisoners with their machine guns.⁶

Before we learn more about this incident from the loader of Panther 221 we should focus on the affidavits of other members of 2nd company that took part in the attack on STOU MONT. Rottf. Erwin Szyperski was the driver of Panther 232 which was next to Panther 221. Szyperski stated that his tank commander

Uscha. Brauschke gave the order to 'bump off' the prisoners and that the gunner, Schütze Angerer, and the radio operator, Strm. Ritzer, shot some bursts into the American prisoners of war. He went on to say:

"I saw the prisoners of war getting hit by the fire and all with the exception of 5 to 7 prisoners slumped to the ground. These 5 to 7 prisoners ran in the direction LA GLEIZE and I don't know what happened to them. The tanks of our company behind us were also firing at this time, but I could not determine whether they shot in the prisoner group." 7

Strm. Rolf Ritzer the radio operator in Panther 232 stated in his affidavit:

"Unterscharführer Brauschke, commander of my tank at once gave the order to shoot at the prisoners of war - 'American prisoners of war standing there at the corner.' I looked out and didn't see anything. Schütze Angerer at the turret M.G. didn't see either and Rottenführer Szyperski, the driver of our tank tried to manoeuvre the panzer around so we could see better. Then I suddenly saw a group of American prisoners of war guarded by German sentries, standing at the corner, and I fired 3 to 4 bursts with my M.G. and I noticed Angerer fire 2 to 3 bursts at the group of American prisoners of war. While I shot, I noticed the German sentries who guarded the American prisoners of war run to the opposite side of the street and part of the group of the American prisoners of war who stood near the corner slumped to the ground and it looked to me that they were fatally wounded. The rest of the group of prisoners threw themselves to the ground, as it appeared to me to protect themselves from the M.G. fire. Prabh's tank started to burn while I fired the M.G. Unterscharführer Brauschke gave the driver the order to back up, whereupon we stopped the firing. After we had backed up 10 meters, I saw from this position, Hauptscharführer Knappich's tank and Oberscharführer Ropeter's tank shot with both their machine guns into the group of prisoners of war who lay on the ground." 8

In October 1947 Walter Köbler, the loader in Hscha. Knappich's Panther 221 made his sworn statement at GROSS UMSTADT:

*"In the early morning hours the 2nd company reached STOU MONT. It was very foggy when the tank of Rottf. Prabh tried to penetrate into the village in the first light of day. The tank was knocked out and two members of the crew died in combat. I could see this action very clearly. As we knew by now that the village was defended by heavy weapons the 2nd company now attacked to the right of the road. STOU MONT was fiercely defended by the enemy so it took us several hours to take the village. Between the first house on the left side and Rottf. Prabh's knocked out tank 15 to 20 American prisoners should have been killed by Rottf. Hofmann, Rottf. Werner, Strm. Mikolaschek, Rottf. Szyperski and Strm. Ritzer. Christ should have ordered the killing to Knappich via radio. I had been in Knappich's tank 221 together with Hofmann, Werner and Mikolaschek but I didn't hear anything about a request from Knappich regarding the prisoners or rather an order to kill from Christ. At 0800 hours and also later I have not seen either dead or living prisoners at this place. I also know that our tank didn't fire at this place at all. We fired at the steeple and antitank guns and infantry to the right of the road. Furthermore we passed between the first house to the left of the road and Prabh's tank after the attack was over. I also have not seen any dead American prisoners."*⁹

In 1953 Köbler was testifying in favour of his former company commander who was still in prison. He gave some additional information in comparison to his 1947 sworn statement:

"On 19 December 1944, my company reached STOU MONT in the early morning hours. It was foggy. Rottenführer Prabh (Prabh, sic.) of our company tried to drive his tank into the locality; but he was shot down. We were approximately level with the first house to the right side of the road. When we tried to pass by the shot-down tank, we too, were hit and thereupon reversed. We were then ordered by company commander Christ over the wireless to drive forward; the commander of my tank, Hauptscharführer Knappich, replied over the wireless that we

were hit and that first of all the anti-tank cannon in a field to our right had to be destroyed.

*Thereupon we, the first platoon, were ordered by Christ to turn in to the village on the right and to put the anti-tank cannon out of action. This was done. At that time we shot at the church steeple and at a machine gun in the village. It is not true that between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning, from 12 to 15 American prisoners of war were standing near the first house on the left side of the locality of STOU MONT. It is unknown to me and I have not heard that my tank commander should have asked the company commander what was to be done with the prisoners. I know for sure that Knappich did not give an order to shoot prisoners. I would certainly have noticed it, for I would have had to load and unlock the machine gun."*¹⁰

In December 1947 Georg Bunda, the gunner in Ustuf. Koch's Panther 231 made his sworn statement at BAINDELKIRCH:

*"On 19th December 1944 the 2nd company attacked STOU MONT. The attack began around 0900 hours. The fighting was going on there for several hours. Tank 231, in which I was an assistant gunner, was at that time on the right, off the main road. After the tank drove into the locality between the first house on the left and the disabled tank of SS Corporal Prabh. I had my hatch open and could see Prabh's tank very well. SS Corporal Szyperski, SS Pfc. Ritzer, SS Cpl. Werner, Cpl. Hofmann and SS Pfc. Mikolaschek are said to have shot about 15 prisoners between the first house on the left and Prabh's tank around 0800 hours on 19 December 1944. SS 1st Lt. Christ is said to have given the order to shoot respectively could have shot prisoners. During the attack I did not see (any) prisoners at the aforementioned place, nor did I notice after the attack prisoners who (allegedly) had been shot there."*¹¹

In May 1948 Hans-Georg Hübler made his affidavit saying that he was mistreated physically and psychologically before he made his testimony in the Malmedy Trial. He confirmed that he was in the leading tank during the attack on STOU MONT and that his tank

was knocked out by an American anti-tank gun but he disagreed about what he had said about the American prisoners of war. He ended his affidavit with the statement: *"Finally I stress again that I did not see prisoners at the first house left, either dead or alive."*

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1.2. Alleged killing of American prisoners of war in the centre of Stoumont

Uscha. Hans Pletz was the gunner in Panther 201, commanded by Ostuf. Friedrich Christ that day. He was accused of murder during the Malmedy Trial but he said that he had received the order to shoot American prisoners of war by his company commander.¹³

Another crew member in Panther 201 was Uscha. Otto Lessau, the tank driver. We resume his statement when his tank came to a halt behind the tanks of Oscha. Ropeter and Hscha. Knappich and he discovered some 15 American prisoners.

*"Approximately at the time when I saw the prisoners of war I heard our turret M.G. deliver a burst after which a stoppage occurred. I do not remember whether the radio operator's M.G. fired or not. I don't know at what the turret M.G. fired, because at that time I watched the paratroopers' light M.G. on the left side of the road being brought into position. Uscha. Hans Pletz was the gunner of our tank and on this particular day when we passed the American prisoners of war at the location which I just described, he was in the gunner's seat. He was the only member of our crew for whom it was possible to train the turret M.G. at a target, though it was possible that the loader could release the trigger. Uscha. Helmuth Diez was on this particular day in the radio operator's seat at the time when we passed the American prisoners of war at the place I just described. He is the only member of our crew who could have shot with the radio operator's M.G."*¹⁴

When the case against Hans Pletz was reviewed in 1951 by the War Crimes Branch Judge Advocate Division there were two prosecution witnesses. One was Otto Lessau who had testified

that they arrived in STOUMONT on the morning of Dec. 19th, 1944. When they reached the centre of the town, Lessau saw to the right side of the road, in front of the grocery store, 12-18 unarmed American prisoners of war. When the tank stopped, he heard 3-5 shots from the turret machine gun. Hans Pletz was at that time in the gunner's seat, and he was the only one who could fire or aim the turret machine gun. Lessau did not actually see the prisoners shot. The other witness for the prosecution was Erich Werner, the driver in Hscha. Knappich's Panther 221. Werner had stated that he saw 30-35 American prisoners of war being fired upon in the centre of town. He assumed that the fire came from two machine guns which were mounted on the same vehicle. As Werner couldn't see the firing he asked his tank commander. Hscha. Knappich told him that the fire came from Ostuf. Christ's tank which was standing directly behind his tank. Because of his position in his tank, Werner saw only half of these prisoners, but he did see them slump to the ground and assumed that they were dead.

The review also mentioned that Werner repudiated his pre-trial statement in a post-trial affidavit dated January 24th, 1948, on the ground that it was obtained from him after he had been called a "Nazi swine", confronted by the testimony of his comrades, and as the result of psychical and moral compulsion.¹⁵

Strm. Rolf Ritzer, the radio operator in Uscha. Brauschke's Panther 232 had a different story to tell about what happened at this place. Note he mentioned the group of American prisoners of war on the left side of the road.

*"We proceeded and as we left the town of STOUMONT, standing in front of a house on the left side of the street, I noticed a group of 15 to 20 prisoners of war guarded by 3 to 4 German paratroopers. I knew that no one from our tank group shot at these prisoners of war, but later on in the evening on the same day, after my tank had been knocked out, I came back on foot, and I saw at this precise spot, laying there dead, about the same number of Americans. I do not know who murdered these American prisoners, nor have I heard anything about it."*¹⁶

In favour of Pletz was the witness Vollprecht who belonged to Ustuf. Koch's Panther 231 as a driver. He testified that while in STOUMONT he stopped his tank in front of a grocery store but did not observe any American prisoners of war standing there nor did he see the tank of Ostuf. Christ shooting in the direction of the store. Vollprecht stated that his tank was approximately 10-15 meters from Christ's tank.¹⁷

In 1953 Horst Vollprecht testified in favour of his former company commander as had Walter Köbler. We pick up his statement after the 2nd Company had overcome the American resistance at the edge of the village:

"Approximately in the centre of the locality of STOUMONT we drove into line - about 16 tanks of our company being left over. We then halted for a short while. In front of my tank was an armoured car, and again in front of it there was the tank of 1st lieutenant Christ. I very well remember that on the left-hand side of our column, American prisoners were being taken to the rear by German paratroopers. To the right-hand side of our column there was a grocery store which I remember for the striking reason that its shop windows were still intact. To the right-hand side of our column there were no prisoners at all. It would in any case have been impossible for Christ to shoot at prisoners near the shop with his turret machine gun, for Christ's tank was halted in front of the shop and he would have had to turn his turret to point 'at three o'clock', i.e. by 90 degrees to the right. In view of the length of the gun-barrel of approximately 5 meters this was impossible, because the barrel would have touched the wall of the house. Moreover I observed that Christ did not turn the barrel of his gun. At the spot in question shots were indeed fired, but they were aimed at Americans who already left the locality and were escaping in the direction of the woods in front of us. Several tanks fired at these Americans from a distance of about 500 meters. I cannot say whether Christ's tank also fired at the escaping Americans; I stood behind his tank and could therefore not observe it. My tank, too, fired at the escaping Americans. This was done on the order of my tank commander. In every tank there are in the turret the commander, the gun-

layer and the loader, and below in the hull, the driver and one wireless operator. My tank was first halted about 10 to 15 meters before the shop; when I later passed by it, I saw there neither living nor dead Americans."

Vollprecht went on to say how he was put under physical and psychological pressure by his interrogators at Schwäbisch-Hall in 1946 in order to incriminate his former comrades and that he acted as a witness for the defence during the Malmedy Trial.¹⁸ Surprisingly the review didn't mention the sworn statement by Georg Bunda who like Vollprecht was a member of Panther 231. In 1947 he stated that:

*"Then we continued driving on the main road in direction of the STOUMONT railroad station. We stopped briefly, not too far from the town exit. At this occasion Uscha. Hans Pletz, gunner of the commanding tank, is said to have shot into a group of prisoners. The prisoners were supposedly standing to the right of the road. I saw the command tank (201) in front of us, but I did not see any prisoners. While driving on I did not see any prisoners who had been shot."*¹⁹

Another statement given under oath was made by Walter Köbler, who was the loader in Hscha. Knappich's Panther 221. In 1947 he stated that the company was gathering in the main street after the fighting inside the village. He had opened the gunner's rear hatch and noticed American prisoners of war that were guided back in the direction of the church by German infantry on the left side of the road while there were no PoW's on the right side of the road. His tank was near a small store and the tank of Ostuf. Christ stood behind his tank to the right on the same height as the store. He concluded that if Uscha. Pletz would have tried to shoot prisoners next to the store he must have had turned the turret of his tank at 2 o'clock but he didn't see the turret being turned. Instead the Panther fired a burst with the turret machine gun with its turret at 12 o'clock. After this short stop the company drove till they reached the outskirts of the village and stopped again.²⁰

Rottf. Erwin Szyperski, the tank driver in Brauschke's Panther 232

and also accused of murder during the Malmedy Trial stated in his affidavit in 1946:

*"We ..., reached the centre of STOUMONT ... and halted. We exchanged artillery fire here with enemy guns, which were some distance away. While we were halted there I noticed a group of 25 to 30 American prisoners of war on the place number 5 as indicated in my sketch (to the left of the road, sic.). These prisoners were guarded by three German sentries and stood with their arms in the air and they had no weapons. Nobody shot at the prisoners while I was there and as our tank continued, they stood unharmed."*²¹

In 1953 Hans Pletz was a free man again and gave his deposition in favour of Friedrich Christ:

*"On or about 19 December 1944 Christ did not order the shooting of prisoners of war at STOUMONT, Belgium. This incident was also laid to my charge and it was alleged that I alone had shot 35 American soldiers with a machine pistol. This assertion does not correspond to the truth, for in that area not a single prisoner of war was shot by our unit and no corresponding order was given by Christ. This is also confirmed in a letter which I received from a teacher of Stoumont, Belgium, after the trial, declaring his readiness to testify on oath that no American soldiers being prisoners of war had at that time been shot at Stoumont."*²²

1.3. Alleged killing of American prisoners of war at Stoumont station

The third incident was alleged to have happened when the 2./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 reached STOUMONT station during the early afternoon. Rottf. Erwin Szyperski, the driver in Uscha. Brauschke's Panther 232 stated in 1946:

"To the left of us stood a group of 10 to 15 American prisoners of war with two or three German guards. I could tell by their uniforms that the prisoners were Americans and they stood with

their arms in the air and had no weapons. Uscha. Brauschke gave the order to 'bump off' the prisoners of war. Strm. Ritzer loaded his machine gun and Strm. Nestler loaded the turret machine gun for Angerer. At the same time I picked the M.P. up which was lying left from me and stood up through the drivers opening, the door of which was open. Uscha. Brauschke gave the order 'Commence fire'. Ritzer and Angerer fired several bursts with their M.G. into the prisoners and I fired two short bursts with the M.P. As I now recall I fired simultaneously with the machine guns. I did not aim at any particular prisoner but aimed at the group and pulled the trigger. I saw them being hit and they slumped to the ground and were lying in various positions. The prisoners were lying quietly and nobody yelled or thrashed around on the ground and as they appeared to me, they were all dead. Nobody climbed out of the tank to check the Americans because at this time Ustuf. Kaufmann's tank which was directly behind us received a hit and was burning. I don't know whether Ustuf. Kaufmann's tank or Ustuf. Koch's also shot at the prisoner group."

Szyperski went on to say that his tank got stuck in a ditch only a few meters from the place where they killed the American prisoners of war. The crew abandoned the tank and walked back to the rear but he and Brauschke were ordered by Stubaf. Poetschke to return and to recover their tank. He went on to say:

"As we got near to the place where our tank was stuck, I noticed a group of 10 American prisoners of war who were being marched by a German sentry in the direction of STOUMONT. This was at a clearing bordering the main road where our tank was stuck. These prisoners wore American uniforms, marched with their arms over their heads, and had no weapons. When Brauschke and I reached the point 'X' indicated in my sketch 'C' (only a few meters in front of this group of prisoners, sic.), the M.G. operated by the paratroopers opened fire at the prisoners (the M.G. was behind them at the edge of the wood next to the road, sic.). I was carrying the M.P. and Uscha. Brauschke said to me 'You shoot too'. I fired with my M.P. and shot two to three prisoners who were the only ones who were still standing,

because the others had already been hit by the M.G. fire and were lying on the ground.

*I was only 5 meters away from the prisoners and fired two to three bursts with the M.P. and I could see how the shots of my M.P. hit the prisoners in the chest. From this group of Americans nobody could escape and all were killed. I walked to the prisoners who I had shot at and determined they were dead because they did not move. This all took place around 6 o'clock on 19 December 1944 and although it was already dark we could see everything clearly because Ustuf. Kaufmann's tank was close by. It had been knocked out previously and was still burning brightly."*²³

It looks like that Brauschke and Szyperski after all manned their abandoned Panther as ordered by Stubaf. Poetschke. When Szyperski pleaded for mitigation during the final stages of the Malmedy Trial he said: *"In the Eifel offensive, my tank was knocked out and blew up in a fire. I suffered third degree burns".* A picture taken directly after the battle showed that Panther 232 indeed was blocking the road and stuck with its front in the ditch on the right side of the road. Another picture also showed that the tank received at least one fatal hit while showing its vulnerable side towards the American line.²⁴

The radio operator in Panther 232, Strm. Rolf Ritzer had a somehow slightly different view about what happened at STOU MONT station:

"There were about 15 American prisoners at the spot No. 6 on my sketch. Several of them had their hands above their heads and none of them had weapons. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when we arrived at this spot. Unterscharführer Brauschke gave the gunner Angerer the order to shoot at the American prisoners of war with the turret M.G. but Angerer couldn't shoot because he had loading trouble. Thereupon, Unterscharführer Brauschke turned to me and repeated the order to me to shoot at the prisoners of war. I adjusted my sight and as soon as I had the M.G. aimed at the Americans, I shot 4

*bursts with my M.G. into the group of prisoners of war and my M.G. jammed. As I shot, I noticed the tracer streaks from the tank behind me also go into the group of prisoners of war. This was Untersturmführer Kaufmann's tank (No. 2). Later in the evening I spoke to Sturmman Odoy, radio operator in Kaufmann's tank and he told me that he had, like me, shot into the group of prisoners of war with his M.G. I recall how these prisoners of war fell down when they were hit. They slumped to the ground and lay quietly and I am sure that they were either dead or badly wounded. At this time Untersturmführer Kaufmann's tank (No. 2) was hit and American artillery was dropping around us. We tried to move our tank away from there and in doing so we got stuck in the ditch. Our crew left the tank and started to move back on foot and as we passed Untersturmführer Koch's tank (No. 3) I noticed his turret M.G. still shooting in the direction of the prisoners at which I had shot."*²⁵

Again Georg Bunda gave a sworn statement in favour of his former comrades. In 1947 he describes the scene at the station with Panther 211, 215 and 232 already out of action:

*"Our own infantry was not in front of us; neither were there any U.S. prisoners. SS Pfc. Ritzer and Cpl. Szyperski, who were accused in the Malmedy trial, however are said to have shot prisoners there, who were allegedly standing in the street in front of their tanks. During the entire time our tank was there I did not see either living or dead prisoners. As the prisoners are said to have been standing on the street I definitely would have had to notice them. In conclusion I wish to declare again that I saw neither living nor dead prisoners during the action in the vicinity of STOU MONT railroad station."*²⁶

2. Alleged war crimes committed by 3./ SS-Panzerpionierbataillon 1

In his affidavit in March 1946, Joachim Hofmann, a SPW driver in the 2nd Platoon of 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 stated that they arrived in the morning of Dec. 19th, 1944 in STOU MONT after the fighting was over and that he parked his SPW near a store in the main

street. After 5 or 10 minutes the SPW was moved to a house nearby. Hofmann went on to say:

"After parking my SPW I went up to the main road and stood there, where I joined a group of my comrades. ... In this group were Obersturmführer Sievers, Oberscharführer Schaefer, Sprenger, Neve and Goldschmidt. Rottenführer Deibert was not far away from us in an American jeep ... While standing there, I saw 2 American soldiers come down the street ... They were carrying a wounded German soldier with them. ... Oberscharführer Schaefer told them to bring the wounded man to him. Then Sievers or Schaefer told us to load the wounded German on the jeep and that Deibert should take him away. I helped load this wounded comrade on the jeep and Deibert drove away with him. I then returned ... and was standing there when I heard Schaefer tell Sprenger to take these 2 American prisoners away and 'bump them off.' Before Schaefer gave this order to Sprenger, Sievers was standing next to Schaefer and certainly heard the order. I heard it without difficulty and was standing approximately 3 meters from Schaefer and Sievers was standing approximately half a meter from him.

While standing at the little road not far from the main road I saw Sprenger's SPW parked not far from us ... After Sprenger had received the order from Schaefer, he marched the 2 American prisoners down the street ... These Americans were unarmed, had their hands clasped above or behind their heads in a sign of surrender and were being marched a few steps ahead of Sprenger. I walked down the street with Sprenger part of the way and as I walked with him he borrowed my pistol. I left him after I handed him my pistol and returned to the vicinity of my SPW. Sprenger marched these 2 men into a small lane or alleyway leading off the right hand side of the road and shot the 2 Americans in this alleyway ... Sprenger fired 2 or 3 bursts into these prisoners with his pistol. I saw the men fall to the ground when he shot them. At the time Sprenger shot them they were not running away or making any attempt to escape and did nothing to provoke the shooting. He had marched them into this alleyway approximately 10 meters when he shot them. I was

standing approximately 20 meters from Sprenger at the time he shot these American prisoners. I'm not positive, but I believe that Gustav Neve, my assistant driver, was also at my SPW at the time this shooting took place.

About 6 or 7 minutes later, I saw Schlingmann walking along the same route that had been taken by Sprenger marching the single American prisoner in front of him. This prisoner was also unarmed and had his hands above his head. Schlingmann marched this prisoner to approximately the same place where Sprenger had shot the 2 before and shot this prisoner with a machine pistol. At the time this took place I was standing in my SPW ... Schlingmann fired 2 to 3 burst of 4 or 5 rounds each.

A few minutes later, while I was standing on the street ... , I saw Rottenführer Biloschetzky march 2 American prisoners down the street, ... These 2 Americans were carrying a stretcher with a third wounded American on the stretcher. Biloschetzky marched these 2 men with the stretcher down the same small alleyway that had been used by Sprenger and Schlingmann. I saw the 2 men who were carrying the stretcher lower the stretcher to the ground in the alleyway and then Biloschetzky took them behind the house ... and shot them with his machine pistol with 5 or 6 bursts of 4 to 5 rounds each. I don't know exactly how Sprenger appeared on the scene, but immediately after Biloschetzky had shot the 2 men, Sprenger then shot the wounded man who was lying on the stretcher.

Some time later on that day I went into the alley and I saw the bodies of these 6 men who had been shot there. They were all dead; I am positive they were dead. When I looked at these bodies I remember that Goldschmidt, Oettinger, and Neve were with me. I believe Biloschetzky was also along.

About 10 minutes later, Goldschmidt, Neve and I were standing at the garden nearest where I had parked my SPW, when Oettinger and Biloschetzky came walking up the street ... Oettinger had heard that there were some apples in the house ... So the 5 of us walked over to the house to get some apples. Lying on the floor of the first room we entered was a wounded

American soldier. He had what appeared to be a bad wound on his upper right thigh which had been bandaged. He was not conscious but was moaning and was obviously still alive. Oettinger, who then had an American 45 Automatic pistol, leaned over and fired 2 shots through his head from a distance of about 70 centimetres. After these shots were fired, the American soldier lay dead. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind but that he was dead."

Hofmann went on to say that he together with Goldschmidt and Öttinger were searching the former American positions inside the village when Goldschmidt and Öttinger went into a shed while he stayed outside. All of a sudden he heard shooting in the shed. He later learned from Öttinger that they found an American in the shed who had played dead and whom they killed on the spot. Around noon he was in a house he had entered together with a paratrooper in order to look for something to eat. As they left the house they discovered a 1st Lieutenant and a non-commissioned officer, both paratroopers, standing in front of the house across the street with two American prisoners of war. Hofmann went on:

"The 1st Lieutenant then yelled to us 'Diehle, (this was the name of the paratrooper who was standing with me) both of you come here.' We walked over to him and then the Lieutenant said, 'Let's go. Shoot these 2 prisoners.' I then asked the Lieutenant if we couldn't take the 2 prisoners up to the church where they would be held in custody along with the civilians who were already assembled there. The Lieutenant then asked us if we didn't know that there was an order that no prisoners of war would be taken. Then Diehle and I marched These 2 Americans across the street and shot them by the side of the house ... Diehle shot first with one burst of 15 to 20 rounds from his machine pistol. Both Americans fell to the ground but they not die immediately. Then I shot one with my machine pistol and Diehle shot the other again with his machine pistol. I fired one burst of 3 to 4 rounds into the head of the American soldier. I am confident that he was dead after I fired these 3 or 4 rounds into his head. When Diehle first fired at these Americans with his machine pistol, they were unarmed, had their hands above their heads in a sign of

surrender, were making no attempt to escape and did nothing to provoke the shooting.

About half an hour later I was looking at the 2 American SPW's ... While I stood there, Rottenführer Max Hammerer and a paratrooper, whose name I do not know, passed me, marching 2 American prisoners in front of them ... While I was standing at the rear of one of these American SPW's ... I heard 2 or 3 bursts of machine pistol fire, 8 to 10 rounds each, from the other side of the house. I then saw Hammerer and the paratrooper come back without the American prisoners, reversing the same route they had taken. Each of them was carrying a machine pistol in his hand. They made no statement to me but it was obvious they had shot the Americans.

*That same afternoon we destroyed the American anti-tank gun and at this time I saw 2 American soldiers lying dead on the ground ..."*²⁷

It should not remain unmentioned that Hofmann had given a second affidavit two months before in January 1946 which was much shorter and only confirmed the killing of 2 American prisoners of war by Strm. Sprenger and another American POW by Pio. Schlingmann. Note that Hofmann made this affidavit under oath and that he mentioned that Oscha. Schäfer, Strm. Gustav Sprenger, Strm. Gustav Neve, Rttf. Hans Öttinger, Pio. Schlingmann, Rottf. Biloschetzky and he had been at this place but he didn't mention Ostuf. Sievers at all.²⁸

During the Malmedy Trial Sievers unsurprisingly denied having anything to do with the killing of the two American PoW's at STOU MONT.²⁹

It is astonishing to see that Hofmann's second affidavit is almost 11 pages long and that he could remember so many details, for instance he clearly remembered all the soldiers that had killed American prisoners of war, exactly which weapon they used and the number of rounds they needed for the killings while he mixed up the date when they were in STOU MONT several times in his affidavit made in January. Also some details mentioned in January

were not mentioned again in March although the affidavit from January was very short compared to the affidavit given in March.

The co-driver of Joachim Hofmann was Strm. Gustav Neve who also gave his view of the situation in STOUMONT in his affidavit in March 1946:

"We first parked our SPW for about 10 minutes near a store located at a street intersection and from there moved to another position ... After we had been in STOUMONT just a short while, I heard Oberscharführer Schaefer call Sprenger to him. ... At this time I could plainly see Obersturmführer Sievers and Oberscharführer Schaefer standing together at the corner near the store. Near Sievers and Schaefer were 2 American prisoners of war who had another wounded American soldier on a stretcher. I saw Sprenger walk towards them. At this time I was cleaning our SPW and I do not know what transpired between Sievers, Schaefer and Sprenger. A minute or so later, I saw the 2 American soldiers walking down the street ... They were carrying the wounded American soldier on the stretcher and Sprenger was walking behind them. Sprenger was armed with his machine pistol. He marched them 3 or 4 meters into a small lane or alleyway and there I saw Sprenger shoot these American soldiers. He fired 2 or 3 bursts from his machine pistol. When he shot, I remember seeing the American soldier who was carrying the rear end of the stretcher drop it and take a step or so forward to the right side of the stretcher and then he fell to the ground. I also saw the other American soldier fall to the ground. About half an hour later, Geilbofer, Hofmann, Schulte and I went into the alley and saw the bodies of these Americans. Two of them were dead but the man on the stretcher was still alive. I could see him breathing.

15 to 20 minutes later I went in house number 11 (see sketch) with Geilbofer, Hofmann, Schulte and Oettinger; and there we saw a wounded American soldier lying on the floor. He had a bandage on the upper thigh of his left leg. This soldier was screaming with pain. Oettinger fired 1 or 2 shots from his American 45 calibre pistol into the head of this wounded

American from a distance of about 10 to 15 centimetres. These shots killed the American soldier. He did not breathe any more, made no further sounds or movement, and I am confident he was dead.

*On the afternoon of the same day, 19 December 1944, I saw two more American prisoners with Sturmmann Gustav Sprenger and Rottenführer Billoschetzky walking down the street using the same route that had been taken previously by Sprenger and I saw Sprenger and Billoschetzky march these 2 American soldiers into the same alley. At this time I was a roving guard for all the SPW's and was on the street near my SPW ... A few seconds after Sprenger and Billoschetzky marched these 2 men into the alley, I heard machine pistol fire. This firing came from behind house number 14 but I could not see who was doing the firing because house number 14 was between Sprenger and Billoschetzky and the place I stood. I then saw Sprenger and Billoschetzky come out of the alley and go back up the street. They did not have the Americans with them at this time."*³⁰

Another member of the same company was Siegfried Jäkel, who drove in the same SPW as Joachim Hofmann and Gustav Neve. In March of 1946 he made his affidavit:

"We entered STOUMONT on the Lagleis (LA GLEIZE, sic.) road ... made a sharp left turn, just beyond the Panzer (Panther 225, sic.) ... and Hofmann parked our SPW near the store, near which Sprenger had also parked his SPW. We then dismounted and stood around about 5 minutes and then started walking up the road leading to the woods ... Walking with me were Pioneer Toedter and Pioneer Storch. ... I saw Rottenführer Ernst Goldschmidt and Rottenführer Deibert across the street in a field shoot 4 American prisoners of war. Both of them had machine pistols. The 4 Americans were not making any attempt to escape nor did they do anything to provoke the shooting. When Goldschmidt and Deibert fired into them they were standing approximately 25 meters from the Americans. When I witnessed this I was approximately 25 meters from Goldschmidt and Deibert. We did not go over to examine the bodies but continued

on up to the intersection where we met Unterscharführer Beutner. There Beutner gave orders that the first group of our platoon would go in position down the road past (the, sic.) tank (Panther 225, sic.) and that the second group should go in position in the woods ... He further said, 'It is an order that no prisoners will be taken' We left Beutner and crossed the intersection to proceed up the road where we had been ordered to go and saw Obersturmführer Sievers and Oberscharführer Schaefer who were standing in the intersection ... Both of them spoke to us and used the same order - that no prisoners would be taken. The exact expression that Sievers used was: 'Jede Menge Barcelona', which meant that everything was to be moved down.

When we left Sievers and Schaefer, we continued up the road and when we reached the road approximately in front of the tank (Panther 225, sic.) ... Unterscharführer Witkowski stopped us and told us that we would search the houses. We searched a couple of houses and Witkowski himself discovered a group of American soldiers who were hiding in a chicken house ... He ordered them out of the building and then told us that they would be shot. Toedter, Storch and I took them behind this chicken house, ... and there they were shot by Storch, Toedter and Witkowski. I was armed with a pistol at this time but was loaded down with two boxes of machine gun ammunition and two machine gun belts of ammunition slung over my shoulder; and I did not shoot. Witkowski shot them with his machine pistol, Storch and Toedter with a machine gun. We continued up the road in the direction of the woods and while in the vicinity of the intersection, a civilian came up on a bicycle. He wanted to go up the road beyond the tank (Panther 225, sic.) ... Witkowski told him that he could not go up the road but the civilian did not leave and persisted in his desire to go up this road, so finally, Unterscharführer Witkowski took him ... into the edge of the woods and shot him with his machine pistol. I saw Witkowski when he shot this civilian as I was standing on the road opposite the spot where he led him into the woods. Witkowski marched the civilian off the road into the woods about 5 meters. He fired about 2 burst of 5 or 6 rounds each into the civilian.

Then we walked up the road ... and went into position. There Unterscharführer Witkowski told us that machine gunner 2 should go back for more ammunition, so Pioneer Ende and I walked back down the road and I found my SPW parked by (another, sic.) house ... Here Hofmann told us that he had seen Oettinger shoot 2 Americans who had been lying in the ditch by an American truck playing dead. He said that Oettinger had kicked them and pulled them to their feet. One of the Americans seemed to be wounded. Oettinger shot them with his machine pistol. Hofmann also told us that he had seen Altkrueger and Biloschetzky go by several times with groups of 3 to 4 American prisoners and always returned without them, so he assumed they were shooting them. When Hofmann spoke of these prisoners being marched away by Altkrueger and Biloschetzky, he indicated the path ... in front of the house where our SPW was marched. Hofmann also told us that he had seen American prisoners being marched away by men in Panzer uniforms and men of the 9th Panzer Pioneer Company and he also assumed that they were shooting these prisoners because they were returning without them. It was at this time that Hofmann also told me that he had shot some American prisoners of war in STOUMONT, but he did not tell me the circumstances except that he pointed down the road in the direction of the path which he had stated was taken by Altkrueger and Biloschetzky."

Jäkel went on to state that his comrades Strm. Juch and Strm. Novicin had told him in STOUMONT the same evening that Uscha. Stürzenbecker, Uscha. Dixtra and Rottf. Versick had shot some American prisoners at STOUMONT.³¹

Although Rottf. Ernst Goldschmidt was accused by Siegfried Jäkel and Joachim Hofmann of killing American prisoners of war in STOUMONT his affidavit given in March 1946 didn't correspond with Jäkel's story.

"Our company arrived in STOUMONT on 19 December 1944 and stayed there about two days. During our stay in STOUMONT I did not shoot or fire at any American prisoners nor did I see anyone else shoot at American prisoners of war."³²

Goldschmidt belonged to the SPW crew of Uscha. Max Beutner who was accused of having given the order to take no prisoners. Other members of Beutner's SPW who were accused of killing American prisoners of war at STOUMONT were Rottf. Max Hammerer, Rottf. Georg Deibbert and Strm. Schlingmann who later died in STOUMONT. While Hammerer was later accused during the Malmedy Trial as was Goldschmidt he only confirmed having killed an American prisoner of war on December 20th, 1944 in STOUMONT.³³

Four more members of the 3rd Company were later accused of war crimes committed at STOUMONT on 19th December 1944. Amongst them the company commander Ostuf. Franz Sievers, furthermore Oscha. Willi Schäfer the company troop leader, Strm. Gustav Sprenger who belonged to Uscha. Altkrüger's crew and Strm. Friedel Kies who belonged to the crew of Uscha. Bode. Strm. Gustav Sprenger also stated in his 2nd affidavit in April 1946 to have seen Ostuf. Sievers killing three American prisoners of war at STOUMONT in the presence of Ostuf. Peiper.³⁴

3. Alleged war crimes committed by 11./ SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 2

Another alleged killing of American PoW's was later committed by a crew of the 4th Platoon of 11./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2 under the leadership of Uscha. Gerhard Schuhmacher. His crew was riding a Sd.Kfz. 251/9 with a 7.5cm KwK and was made up of Grenadier Heinz Friedrichs - driver -, Grenadier Konior - loader -, Strm. Willi Braun - gunner - and Rottf. Edmund Tomczak according to Braun.

Sturmmann Willi Braun stated in April 1946:

"A paratrooper came along the road with seven American prisoners of war. Uscha. Schuhmacher stopped him and asked him what he would do with the prisoners. The paratrooper answered: 'I shall evacuate them to the rear.' Thereupon Schuhmacher said 'Oh I'm going to bring them myself to the rear.' The paratrooper turned the prisoners over to Schuhmacher and went his way. At that time our SPW stood at the right hand side of the street if one

*is driving towards to STOUMONT. A pasture was opposite where our SPW was parked. Schuhmacher ordered the prisoners to go to this pasture, where he lined them up in one row and gave us all, that is the whole group on the SPW, the order to dismount with hand weapons. Thereupon he ordered us to bump off the prisoners. At that time the prisoners stood about eight to ten meters away from the street in this pasture and we stood about five to six meters distance away from the street at the edge of the pasture. After Uscha. Schuhmacher had given the order to shoot the prisoners, our whole crew shot at these prisoners. The weapons used were, Uscha. Schuhmacher used a machine pistol, Tomczak and I used pistols and Konior a fast firing rifle. The pistol I used was a Belgian FN. I discharged my magazine which contained eight rounds, at the prisoners and had no time to shoot a second magazine at the prisoners. First I shot at one prisoner aiming at the head and saw him fall to the ground dead and he didn't move any more. When that had happened, I saw another hit and still moving prisoner lying on the ground. This man had only been wounded and out of pity for him I then gave him a mercy shot. Immediately after this incident we drove on to STOUMONT."*³⁵

*Rottf. Edmund Tomczak gave a different composition of the crew when he mentioned Sturmmann Weiss as the loader instead of Grenadier Konior, mentioned by Willi Braun. But Tomczak didn't mention the killing at STOUMONT at all.*³⁶

The driver in Schuhmacher's SPW, Grenadier Heinz Friedrichs, stated in March 1946:

"... and at 0900 hours left in the direction of STOUMONT. As we were leaving the woods, my SPW suffered some damage but was quickly repaired. At this time I wanted to catch up with the rest of the company but a paratrooper came up the road with 7 American prisoners of war in his custody. Unterscharführer Schuhmacher asked him where he wanted to go with the prisoners and he answered, 'Transport them to the rear.' Then Schuhmacher said, 'Oh, I'm going to transport them to rear myself.' The paratrooper naturally was very glad to get rid of

*them and he left to return to his unit. At this time my SPW was parked on the right hand side of the road headed in the direction of STOU MONT. Directly across from us on our left side of the road was a pasture. Schubmacher marched the prisoners from the road into the pasture and then he gave us the order to dismount with small arms. I remained in my driver's seat a moment and then Schubmacher said, 'That means the driver too.' I then took my machine pistol and also left the SPW. Then Schubmacher said, 'Now the prisoners are going to be bumped off.' The prisoners were lined up in one rank facing the road, some 8 to 10 meters in the pasture and those of us in the crew standing just on the edge of the pasture 5 to 6 meters from the prisoners shot them with our respective weapons. We had received an order from Schubmacher to shoot these prisoners and we had to execute it. I myself shot at two of these American soldiers, firing two bursts of 7 or 8 shots each with my machine pistol. The others who shot were: Schubmacher with his machine pistol; Braun with a rifle, Tomczak and Weis with pistols. The place where these prisoners were shot was about 700 meters from the castle I have mentioned above. The prisoners ... had their hands raised and had made no attempt to escape and did nothing to provoke the shooting. ... After the shooting took place, Schubmacher had us mount the SPW immediately and nobody examined the bodies of the Americans to see if they were dead.'*³⁷

4. Alleged war crimes committed by staff personnel of SS-Panzerregiment 1

4.1. Killing of an American prisoner of war at the entrance of Stoumont.

After the fighting at STOU MONT had ended elements of the staff of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 together with a liaison troop of the 1. SS-Pz.Div. gathered at the entrance of STOU MONT in the gardens of the houses which were located on the left side of the road. Ostubaf. Peiper and a member of the headquarters company were later accused of the killing of an American PoW. While Ostubaf. Peiper was alleged to have given the order to shoot the prisoner; Hans

Hillig was alleged to have carried out Peiper's order.

The affidavit of Hstuf. Hans Erich Gruhle, executive officer of SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, gave a very vague picture of what should have happened because he claimed to have not been at the location when the PoW was killed.

*"After the capture of the village, I was standing with Obersturmbannführer Peiper, Sturmbannführer Poetschke and some other officers and men in front of the second house on the eastern edge of STOU MONT, and was looking at the captured weapons and guns, when all of a sudden an American soldier, just captured, was brought to Obersturmbannführer Peiper. The interrogation, conducted by Peiper himself did not bring any results which could be used. I then turned away for a short time in order to converse with a German speaking civilian who asked for an interview. During the time of my absence this American soldier was shot. He was lying near a house in a field, between the ditches. The order for this shooting was given to a German soldier from the Regimental Headquarters Company by Obersturmbannführer Peiper; Peiper later told me this himself."*³⁸

Hans Hillig, who was accused of murder during the Malmedy Trial, went much more into detail when he stated:

"In the early part of the afternoon of the 19th December 1944, the following happened. If one travels from LA GLEIZE to STOU MONT there stands a house on the left side of the road just as one reaches the edge of STOU MONT. Around the house is a garden which is surrounded by a hedge about 1,20 meters high. I was told by Untersturmführer Krausse to park behind this house, that is, behind the hedge. We were standing there for about one-half hour at this place, when I received from Untersturmführer Krausse the order to gather up in one pile all enemy weapons and ammunition; the available crew of my vehicle was to help me. Suddenly I heard Sturmbannführer Peiper shout, 'Hillig, get that prisoner.' I knew where the prisoner was because once before I had executed an order from Peiper at which time I saw the prisoner. I took the prisoner from the lobby

of the house where he was sitting on the stairs and guarded by Rottenführer Water Lebn. I led him beside the house and turned him over to Sturmbannführer Peiper who was sitting on a stone. Immediately next to Peiper stood the following officers: Obersturmführer Rudi Mäule, and Untersturmführer Horst Krause, and I believe I also saw there Hauptsturmführer Hans Gruble. After I gave the prisoner over to Peiper I withdrew about 5 to 6 meters and remained there. The reason was I wanted to see what Peiper intended to do with the prisoner. I saw and heard as Peiper was talking to this man in a foreign tongue. This prisoner only answered to the first sentence which he was asked by Peiper. Peiper continued talking to the prisoner, but the prisoner remained mute. At the end of the interrogation between Peiper and the prisoner I know, however, that the prisoner gave a short answer. Peiper was then very angry and shouted, 'Hillig!' - I answered, 'Sturmbannführer'. Peiper said, 'Shoot the man and lay him next to the anti-aircraft gun.' By that he meant that I should shoot this man in the vicinity of the anti-aircraft gun. I led the prisoner away towards the location which was indicated to me by Peiper. When I was about 75 meters away from Peiper he shouted after me, 'That is far enough.' I would like to add that I had a pistol on me but no machine pistol; therefore, I let someone hand me a machine pistol from my vehicle. I cannot tell exactly who gave it to me but I believe it was Rottenführer Walter Landfried. After I had been addressed by Peiper as indicated above, I took the machine pistol and fired one shot into the region of this American prisoner's heart. He collapsed immediately. As he lay on the ground I shot him once more into the temple to be sure that he was dead. I know that the man did not suffer and was dead because his eyes were glassy. I then returned to Peiper who was still standing at the same spot, and reported to him that I had executed his order. He answered something which had to do with the prisoner, but, however, I cannot remember it anymore. I then returned to my previous work." ³⁹

Walter Landfried, a crew member of the second SPW of the regimental headquarters communications platoon which was under the leadership of Hscha. Hartmann was acting as a witness

for the prosecution. He stated during the Malmedy Trial:

"We parked next to the first house on the left side of the road. Then we received the order to search for American weapons. In the course of this search I looked at the house and near the left rear of the house I saw Obersturmbannführer Peiper, Hauptsturmführer Nüske, Obersturmführer Mäule, Untersturmführer Krause und Unterscharführer Hillig. Shortly thereafter, I heard Hillig say words similar to these: 'Give me a machine pistol.' I then went to my SPW and saw as a man gave Unterscharführer Hillig the machine pistol. An American soldier was standing next to Hillig. This man had his hands up, and Unterscharführer Hillig took him into the field. Then Unterscharführer Hillig stopped and the American soldier took perhaps one or two more paces to the front, Unterscharführer Hillig then shot the soldier with his machine pistol. Then the machine pistol had a stoppage, so he used one more shot from his pistol and fired on the American lying on the ground. Shortly thereafter, there was some artillery fire and we took cover." ⁴⁰

Another witness for the prosecution was Georg Ebeling, a crew member from Panther 002. He stated during the Malmedy Trial:

"In the morning of 19 December, our tanks drove into STOU MONT. Shortly thereafter, the two radio SPWs of our platoon joined us. Then the order was given that the tank was to be camouflaged. After it was camouflaged, I got into the tank and shortly thereafter I heard Sgt. Hillig call to the C.O. - Lt. Col. Peiper. A short time later, Sgt. Hillig returned with a prisoner of war and took him to a field which was located behind the houses where we were standing. After Sgt. Hillig had moved away from the house about 40 yards, he shot at the American. The American collapsed at once and the Sgt. Hillig shot him in the head again with his pistol." ⁴¹

4.2. Alleged killing of two American prisoners of war at La Gleize

Uscha. Anton Motzheim, the 2nd group leader of the KwK

platoon of 12./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 12, stated in February 1946 that he drove back from STOU MONT to LA GLEIZE on the morning of the 19th December with three damaged SPW's. There he met Ostubaf. Peiper, Stubaf. Knittel and Stubaf. Poetschke. The moment he met them Poetschke said to Peiper: "Obersturmbannführer, here are two more prisoners of war." Peiper answered in an indifferent and disdainful manner: "As usual". From Peiper's answer Motzheim concluded that both prisoners of war would be killed. The reason for his conclusion was that his company commander, Hscha. Thiele, had told him that they would not take any prisoners of war.⁴²

5. Pro and Cons

Looking at all the different affidavits and testimonies of the former members of Kampfgruppe Peiper it looks like STOU MONT had been another BAUGNEZ. By summing up all the different incidents between 72 and 123 American prisoners of war and one Belgian civilian were killed in cold blood by members of Kampfgruppe Peiper on the 19th December 1944. If one looks at the affidavits and how the battle at STOU MONT was fought it soon becomes clear that all the accused really had been at STOU MONT on the 19th December 1944 because their stories fit perfectly into the overall story. The tanks and guns which were mentioned in their affidavits had indeed been at the locations described and could also be proved by pictures taken during and shortly after the battle.

Surprisingly after the Malmedy Trial when more and more of the former witnesses for the prosecution as well as the accused themselves started to withdraw their testimonies nobody claimed that he had not been at STOU MONT and they didn't make changes to their testimonies except for the killings of American prisoners of war. This all makes it hard to believe that at least some of these killings didn't take place.

When most of the affidavits and testimonies were withdrawn after the Malmedy Trial nearly every member of Kampfgruppe Peiper involved claimed that his statements were made under physical

and psychological pressure by members of the prosecution team. The prosecution disagreed and claimed that all affidavits were given without force, threats or promises of reward.

A closer inspection of the Malmedy Trial reveals some very serious aspects which the German veterans, their lawyers and numerous historians tried to brush under the carpet after the trial. Immediately after the court announced on July 11th, 1946 that they found all 73 accused guilty (the French Alsatian Marcel Boltz of 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 had been handed over to the French authorities the same day), 43 of the men asked for mitigation of their sentences.

Amongst the soldiers pleading for mitigation was Uscha. Hans Hillig who told the court on 12th July 1946 that he was born in DÖBELN, Saxony in 1921 as son of a laborer. Volunteered for the Waffen-SS at the beginning of the Polish campaign when he was only 17 years old. During military training, *"we were told that we had to carry out every order of our superiors...refusing an order on the front would be punished by death."* In Sept. 1940, transferred to the pioneer battalion of the LSSAH he participated in the campaigns in Russia. In 1943, transferred as a tank radio operator to the Panzerregiment; he fought in Russia, on the invasion front and in the Eifel offensive. Then he said: *"I state that my testimony is correct as the prosecution witness testified before the court. I felt very sorry about the shooting of the American soldier; but I was in an unfortunate position. How could I have refused the order of my regimental commander? I request the court be considerate..."*⁴³

Although other accused also confirmed with their pleas that they had either killed American PoW's or Belgian civilians, no other statement caused so much damage to the attempts by Peiper and his lawyers to show that he had not ordered the killing of an American POW in STOU MONT who obviously wasn't willing to provide information.

The other accused who admitted their affidavits were:

a) Strm. Willi Braun (3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1, accused of shooting at

American POW's in STOUMONT on Dec. 19th, 1944) who was drafted into the SS on Feb. 20th, 1944; he told the court that he would have been shot if he did not act as ordered. At the same time he did not deny his statement.

b) Uscha. Willi von Chamier (Penal platoon of 9.(Pi.)/ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, accused of shooting at American POW's at BAUGNEZ on 17th Dec. 1944) who was drafted from the Luftwaffe flak into the LAH in April 1943. *"I only did my duty like every other soldier."* He also did not deny his actions.

c) Strm. Hans Trettin, (1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Panther 112, accused of shooting at civilians in WANNE on Dec. 20th, 1944) who was born 1926 to a farmer in BRESOW, POMMERN. In May 1943 he was inducted into the Waffen-SS. He told the court, *"In order to illustrate the obligation of absolute obedience, we were forced to attend the execution of five comrades who were shot according to martial law by the Headquarters company because of refusal of orders. Furthermore, we were told that any refusal of orders would draw the death penalty."* His next statement was even more unequivocal *"The court has declared me guilty for a crime which I was forced to commit as a soldier and which on my own accord would never have been committed."*

d) Strm. Georg Kotzur, (1./ SS-Pz.Rgt. 1, Panther 122, accused of killing civilians in WANNE on Dec. 20th, 1944) who was born in 1925 at RATIBOR, UPPER SILESIA. Inducted into Waffen-SS in September 1943. *"During my basic training I was informed about the sanctity of an order. We were educated to absolute obedience; all of us were not permitted to have his own opinion. There was only one 'Jawohl' for us."* *"In the Panzer Regiment 1st Battalion LSSAH there existed special methods to various types of punishment, even for smaller crimes....During the Eifel offensive, such a set-up was called 'S-group' by us men. These men were used in the most difficult situations... During the last combat at the Russian front the so-called 'Klammeraffe' was additionally invented. The duties of these men were during the attack to sit on top of the tanks at the point and when the fighting was going on to give messages from one tank to*

another. They were freely subjected to enemy weapons...Most of these men were killed already during the first hour or so...By those means, two comrades of my own company were killed in action. This type of punishment was to be an example for us men...It is to be understood that every order, no matter the difference with the wording, was to be carried out...We were not to think whether it was right or wrong- we only had to obey." And then Kotzur admitted his own shooting of civilians in WANNE. There was no denial. *"In regard to the shooting of the civilians, I was not conscious of any criminal act as they were accused of having participated in the killing of three German soldiers."*

e) Uscha. Paul Zwigart, (9./ SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 2, accused of killing a PoW on Dec. 18th, 1944 near CHENEUX) who was born in FREIBURG IN BREISGAU in 1922 as son of a railway worker. Volunteered for service at the outbreak of the war at 17 years of age. *"I participated as an SPW driver in all the heavy and extremely hard battles on all fronts of Europe. I got four direct hits and on the invasion front I was completely buried alive in debris...."* Zwigart said that he should have been relieved from service, but was kept in battle with the Leibstandarte. He told the court that just before the Eifel offensive, his home town was attacked by American bombers and he could no longer find anything out about the fate of his parents, *"which causes me great mental depression."* Moreover, Zwigart said he was exhausted on the 18th December, having been awake for three days with his nerves rattled again from the heavy American bomber attack on their column near CHENEUX. Zwigart admitted that he had shot the American soldier in the jeep that day. *"In the presence of my superiors, and on instigation of my comrades standing around me, I interpreted it as an order, which was my highest military duty...In the heat of battle, I lost my head....Soon thereafter I considered the wrong that I committed."*

These statements also get across an impression on the methods used by the LAH officers and NCO's to train and lead their soldiers in battle. Most of the enlisted men that plead for mitigation used expressions like, *"I was continuously taught that*

every order had to be carried out and that refusal to obey an order would be punished extremely, even with death..." or "We were told that we would be sentenced to death for not executing an order, especially during combat...I never got any instruction on the treatment of prisoners of war."⁴⁴

Although most of the admitted crimes took place at other locations during the Ardennesoffensive we felt obliged to show what happened on the 11th and 12th July 1946 because the pleas for mitigation were obviously concealed on purpose for almost 60 years.

During the trial when the defence attempted to make a case for the accused the prosecution brought up one more incident related to the fighting at STOUMONT on December 19th, 1944.

On June 27th, 1946 during the cross examination of Franz Sievers he was confronted with the killings of American PoW's at STOUMONT by members of his company. At first Sievers revoked his affidavits as they had been made under physical and psychological pressure. He also refused to admit any joint guilt but then he was asked when he had heard for the first time about the killings. To the great surprise of the defence, Sievers confirmed to the prosecution that Oscha. Willi Schäfer had reported to him the killing of American POW's by Strm. Gustav Sprenger during the night of Dec. 19th/20th, 1944 in STOUMONT. In a desperate effort to minimize the damage he had done to his defence and the defence of his co-defendants he told the prosecution that he didn't believe the report of Schäfer and therefore he didn't consider measures against Sprenger.⁴⁵

In favour of the accused one has to keep in mind that the prosecution failed to prove that between 72 and 123 American prisoners of war were allegedly killed at STOUMONT. Unlike BAUGNEZ the prosecution in the Malmedy Trial only presented a few American or Belgian eye-witnesses but failed to present the names of victims or pictures of dead bodies for the 16 or more war crimes that were alleged to have had taken place at STOUMONT. Until today it remains more than uncertain if all or

any of these war crimes were really committed. One of these witnesses was a Belgian tailor from STOUMONT, Monsieur Jourdain, who stated that he found five dead American on the path that ran by his house. This location was next to the place where members of 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 were alleged to have killed American PoW's.⁴⁶

One of the civilian victims in STOUMONT was 74 year old Emil Servais, who was killed by a crew member from a German tank. According to his niece they had taken refuge in her grandfather's house which was next door to her own home. During the arrival of the Germans in STOUMONT the elderly, women and children of STOUMONT and vicinity had taken shelter in the cellar of her grandfather's house. All the men of 50 years or younger had left STOUMONT in fear of the Germans, though her grandfather had stayed. When he heard someone entering his house he went to the front door to check who it was. Two crew members of a German tank in front of the house had entered and they shot her grandfather without any questions.⁴⁷

The STOUMONT battlefield came under American control much earlier than the crossroads at BAUGNEZ but the various reports of the 30th Inf Div did not mention any war crimes committed by Kampfgruppe Peiper in this area. Even the liberated American prisoners of war didn't mention any war crimes although some of them must have passed the places of the above mentioned incidents as can be seen on the cine film taken by a German war correspondent at STOUMONT.

The 3rd Bn, 119th Inf Rgt, later claimed they had lost 241 men out of 447. Of these 8 were killed, 30 wounded and 203 missing in action. Of these 203 men 10 returned to their outfit the next day and 143 were later recovered at Château FROIDECOUR and LA GLEIZE, reducing the number of the soldiers missing in action to exactly 50 men. The two platoons from Co A, 823rd TD Bn reported 9 men wounded and 16 missing in action for the 19th December 1944, totalling 66 soldiers missing in action. There is no information available regarding how many soldiers of Co A, 823rd TD Bn were liberated at LA GLEIZE but it is likely that there

had been some amongst the 170 liberated men. Furthermore there is no precise information available about the number of wounded American prisoners of war that were liberated when the Americans captured Château FROIDECOUR, which had been a first aid station for German and American wounded. There has also been no allowance made for any potential casualties amongst the American PoW's taken in STOUMONT and held by the Germans in LA GLEIZE, there was fierce combat and very heavy shelling during the battle to recapture the village which could easily have resulted in casualties.⁴⁸

Some other aspects are also very strange. For instance, why did at least three Panthers of the attacking German force try to kill a group of American prisoners already under guard while under fire from American tanks and anti-tank guns at the edges of STOUMONT and ROUÂ? The same thing is alleged to have happened at STOUMONT station when two tanks opened fire on American prisoners of war that were under guard of German infantry while the leading tank, Panther 215, had just been knocked out and it must have been clear that the enemy were nearby? Why had the crew of Panther 232 to load their machine guns while in direct contact with the enemy in order to kill prisoners of war? Strm. Rolf Ritzer's statement also raises questions regarding whether it would have been physically possible for the gunner and radio operator in his crew to fire both of their weapons in the manner described in their statements at a target that would have either been unsighted or would potentially have killed Ritzer himself standing in the drivers hatch. The behaviour of members of 3./ SS-Pz.Pi.Btl. 1 according to their statements is also very strange. It would appear that they were either checking American equipment, hunting prisoners to death or looking for something to eat while the initial order was to secure the village. One thing that appears to be consistent amongst all of the statements is referral to an order or orders that "no prisoners were to be taken", the question has to be asked that if this really was the case then why was it possible to release 170 American PoW's after the recapture of LA GLEIZE?

When examining the facts it can not be ruled out that members

of Kampfgruppe Peiper committed war crimes at STOUMONT, but if they did these crimes were committed on a small scale. One also has to bear in mind that those responsible for the war crimes at BÜLLINGEN, BAUGNEZ and LIGNEUVILLE also most likely made it to STOUMONT.

Footnotes

1. Hans Georg Hübler, Arnold Mikolaschek, Erwin Szyperski, Rolf Ritzer, Affidavits for the Malmedy Trial.
2. Testimony Hans-Georg Hübler, 05th June 1946, Affidavit Hans-Georg Hübler, 06th May 1948 and interview by Timm Haasler, 5th and 7th June 2004.
3. Testimony Hans-Georg Hübler, 5th June 1946.
4. Affidavit Arnold Mikolaschek, 3rd April 1946.
5. Affidavit Heinz Hofmann, 15th March 1946.
6. Affidavit Erich Werner, 4th April 1946.
7. Affidavit Erwin Szyperski, 8th March 1946.
8. Affidavit Rolf Ritzer, 13th March 1946.
9. Statement Walter Köbler, 4th October 1947.
10. Statement Walter Köbler, 28th August 1953.
11. Statement Georg Bunda, 22nd December 1947.
12. Affidavit Hans-Georg Hübler, 6th May 1946.
13. Deposition Hans Pletz, 28th August 1953.
14. Statement Otto Lessau, 8th April 1946.
15. Review of the war crime branch judge advocate division, Headquarters European Command, APO 403, U.S. Army, 2nd May 1951 including fragments of the affidavit of Erich Werner dated

4th April 1946.

16. Affidavit Rolf Ritzer, 13th March 1946.

17. Review of the war crime branch judge advocate division, Headquarters European Command, APO 403, U.S. Army, 2nd May 1951.

18. Witness hearing Horst Vollprecht, 28th August 1953.

19. Statement Georg Bunda, 22nd December 1947.

20. Statement Walter Köbler, 4th October 1947.

21. Affidavit Erwin Szyperski, 8th March 1946.

22. Deposition Hans Pletz, 28th August 1953.

23. Affidavit Erwin Szyperski, 8th March 1946.

24. Plea for Mitigation of Erwin Szyperski on 12th July 1946, information provided by Danny S. Parker.

25. Affidavit Rolf Ritzer, 13th March 1946.

26. Statement Georg Bunda, 22nd December 1947.

27. Affidavit Joachim Hofmann, 6th March 1946.

28. Affidavit Joachim Hofmann, 8th January 1946.

29. Cross examination of Franz Sievers during the Malmedy Trial, Danny S. Parker: "Verdict at Dachau", p.26.

30. Affidavit Gustav Neve, 6th March 1946.

31. Affidavit Siegfried Jäkel, 1st March 1946.

32. Affidavit Ernst Goldschmidt, 30th March 1946.

33. Affidavit Ernst Goldschmidt, 30th March 1946, Joachim Hofmann, 6th March 1946 and Max Hammerer, 11th April 1944.

34. Affidavit Gustav Sprenger, 22nd April 1946 and Cuppens: Was wirklich geschah - Malmedy - 17. Dezember 1944, p.128 ff.

35. Affidavit Willi Braun, 16th April 1946.

36. Affidavit Edmund Tomczak, 27th March 1946.

37. Affidavit Heinz Friedrichs, 21st March 1946.

38. Affidavit Hans Erich Gruhle, 18th March 1946.

39. Affidavit Hans Hillig, 15th March 1946.

40. Testimony Walter Landfried, 5th June 1946.

41. Testimony Georg Ebeling, 5th June 1946.

42. Testimony Anton Motzheim, 28th February 1946.

43. Information from an unpublished script by Danny S. Parker about Joachim Peiper, Chapter: "Verdict at Dachau", p.124 ff.

44. Information from an unpublished script by Danny S. Parker about Joachim Peiper, Chapter: "Verdict at Dachau", p.124 ff.

45. Cross examination of Franz Sievers during the Malmedy Trial, Danny S. Parker: "Verdict at Dachau", p.27 ff.

46. Information from an unpublished file of Danny S. Parker.

47. Information provided by the niece of Emil Servais, interviewed by Stefan De Meyer on 25.06.2006.

48. Figures taken from the Ferriss report.

Appendix 3: Order of Battle

2./ SS-Panzerregiment 1 during the Ardennes



Date and location of loss

1. Commander
2. Gunner
3. Loader
4. Driver
5. Radio-operator



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23.12.44 - LA GLEIZE

1. **Ostuf. Friedrich Christ**
2. Uscha. Hans Pletz
3. Heinz Hepp
4. Uscha. Otto Lessau
5. Uscha. Helmuth Dietz

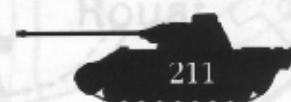


202

23.12.44 - LA GLEIZE

1. **Uscha. Hans Friedrich**
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

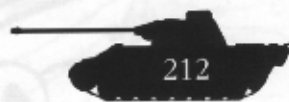
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211

19.12.44 - STOUMONT

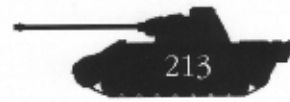
1. **Ustuf. Hubert Kaufmann**
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Strm. Odoy



212

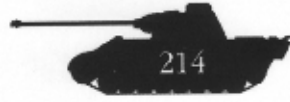
30.12.44 - LUTREBOIS

1. **Hscha. Heinz Weier**
2. Strm. Wilfried Holle
- 3.
4. Franz Heilig
- 5.



213

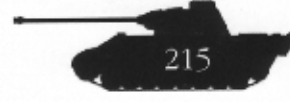
1. **Uscha. Walger**
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



214

23.12.44 - LA GLEIZE

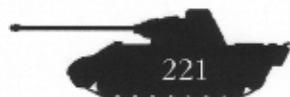
1. **Uscha. Rech**
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



215

19.12.44 - STOUMONT

1. **Uscha. Krüger**
2. Rottf. Hans Fritsche
3. Strm. Hermann Schäfer
4. Oskar Gutmann
5. Strm. Karl Daub



23.12.44 - LA GLEIZE

1. Hscha. Heinz Knappich

2. Rottf. Heinz Hofmann
3. Rottf. Walter Köbler
4. Rottf. Erich Werner
5. Strm. Arnold Mikolaschek



19.12.44 - STOUMONT

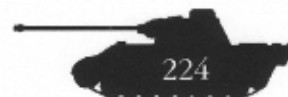
1. Oscha. Walter Ropeter

2. Uscha. Alfred Schwaten
3. Rottf. Hans Strasdin
4. Schaudin
5. Strm. Manfred Mathebowski



1. Uscha. Kurt Baier

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



1. Uscha. Werner Schräber

- 2.
- 3.
4. Möller
- 5.



19.12.44 - STOUMONT

1. Rottf. Franz Prahm

2. Strm. Hans-Georg Hübler
3. Strm. Herbert Zander
- 4.
5. Strm. Heinz Bieler



23.12.44 - LA GLEIZE

1. Ustuf. Helmuth Koch

2. Rottf. Georg Bunda
3. Strm. Oskar Maurer
4. Uscha. Horst Vollprecht
5. Uscha. Erwin Aumer



19.12.44 - STOUMONT

1. Uscha. Herbert Brauschke

2. Schtz. Herbert Angerer
3. Strm. Nestler
4. Rottf. Erwin Szyperski
5. Strm. Rolf Ritzer



17.12.44 - HONSFELD

1. Uscha. Willi Kritzler

2. Willi Kühn
3. Strm. Michael Emonds
4. Rottf. Erich Kuhn
5. Lemke



21.12.44 - STOUMONT

1. Uscha. Herzog

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



17.12.44 - HONSFELD

1. Uscha. Walter Publik

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Appendix 4:

Camouflage patterns and markings

Over the course of this project, we have had an opportunity to examine numerous high quality photographs of Panther Ausf G's that were used by various units during the Ardennes offensive. This led to the conclusion that there was a sense of order within what appeared to be at first glance a haphazard application of camouflage and markings to these vehicles. No serious study of these vehicles can be undertaken without reference to the excellent series of "Panzer Tracts" books published by Tom Jentz and Hilary Doyle of which more information can be found at www.panzertracts.com. The volume that deals with the Ausf G is number 5-3 which is the third volume in a set of four that covers the development of the Panther admirably.

We have tried to identify which assembly plants used specific camouflage patterns and marking combinations, which had appeared very consistently during our research and examine whether these features can be used to identify where a particular Panther was assembled and when. This was then compared carefully against the existing Panther hulls and the photographs taken of them in 1944/45 to see if by using the marking and camouflage pattern combinations the assembly plants for the various hulls could be ascertained correctly. The results were checked against the Fahrgestell numbers by Tom Jentz and Hilary Doyle giving us a positive identification of the assembly firm for each vehicle and the knowledge that our theory held water.

1. Development of a standardised camouflage pattern: August - early September 1944.

In an attempt to economise on valuable resources, streamline production and provide vehicles to the German Panzerwaffe that were available for immediate combat, German armoured vehicles were to have an effective, standardised camouflage paint scheme applied at the assembly plants.

The General order dated August 19th, 1944 sent to all of the assembly plants involved in the Panther programme stated that "all Panthers were to be painted with a standardised camouflage pattern prior to being shipped from the assembly plants".¹ There is some evidence to suggest that this may have been trialled by M.A.N. prior to this order being issued as there are of photos of SS Panthers in Paris (LAH/Hitlerjugend) and Panthers issued to Panzer Brigade 105 that show Panthers from both units painted in the same camouflage pattern. We have identified them as being from the M.A.N. assembly plant from the Zimmerit pattern applied with a roller that was unique to this assembly plant.

Using the same I.D. method (Zimmerit pattern) we can go on to see how this order was implemented by M.A.N. after August 19th from the sequence of Panthers in the Alsace photographed in September 1944. There is no doubt that there is sound scientific research behind the changes to the factory applied camo but we will try not to stray on to the question of "why". We can now see that larger areas of the Panther are covered in green and red brown in comparison to the trial (for want of a better description) run batch. Another prominent feature of these M.A.N. Panthers is the application of a "Disc" camo overlay in dark yellow that

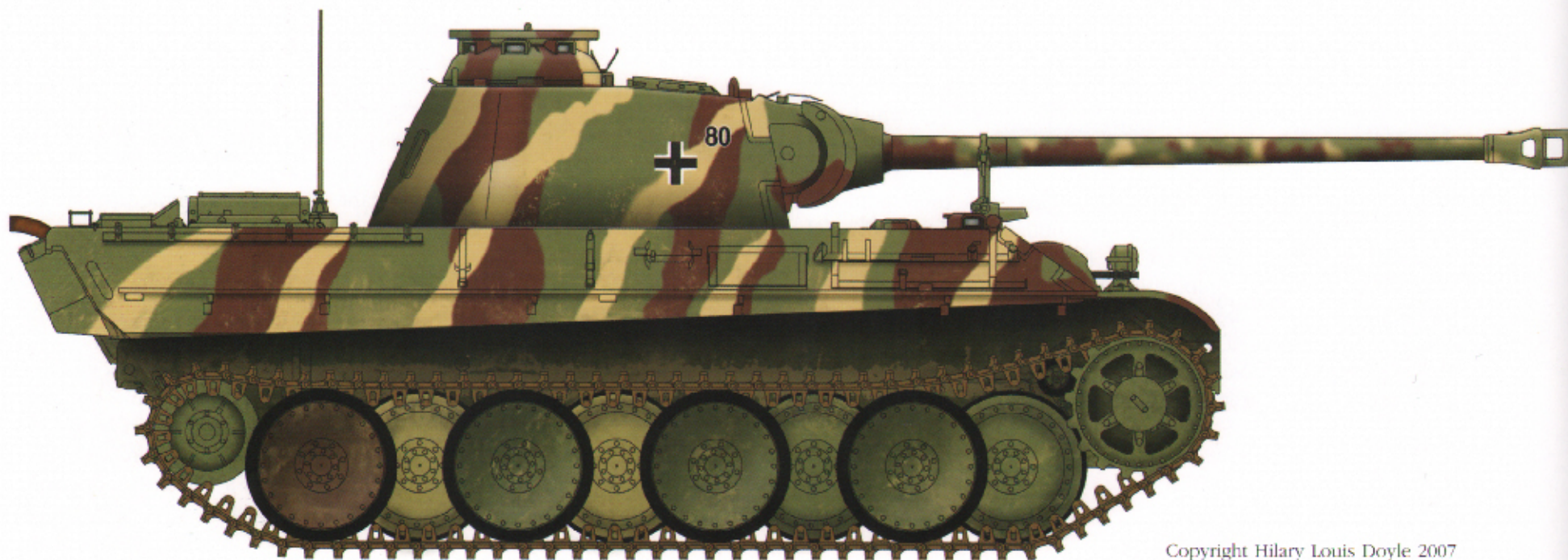
1. Camouflage Patterns

seems to have been discontinued around the middle of September 1944. The difficult part in this period is what did M.N.H. and Daimler-Benz do; we can identify Panthers from both of these assembly plants from the Zimmerit application. We do know from photographs taken at assembly plants what pattern was used when the assembly plants applied Zimmerit. M.N.H. had a relatively plain troweled finish while Daimler-Benz had a very rough diagonally ridged pattern while as mentioned earlier M.A.N. used a roller applied ridge pattern, these were then broken up with a grid to limit the amount of material that might spall off after taking a hit. There are quite a few photos of Panther G's manufactured by both Daimler-Benz and M.N.H. which don't appear to show any discernable camouflage pattern, with the Zimmerit seeming to break up the edges of the colour fields.

2. Developments after September 7th, 1944.

After the order to drop Zimmerit on the September 7th, 1944 things become a little easier to follow.² It would however appear (based on factory photo's of Zimmerited turrets being fitted to hulls) that the assembly plants didn't wait until the vehicle was completed before applying Zimmerit to its components so we have a number of vehicles from both M.A.N. and Daimler-Benz with clean hulls but turrets coated in Zimmerit which we can use to identify the assembly plants that these vehicles came from.

We also have a far more standardised camo patterns appearing, with two very distinct patterns starting to appear.



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M.N.H.

"M.N.H. Pattern"

The first of these we will call the "M.N.H. pattern", this consists of relatively consistent bands of colour crossing the vehicle diagonally from one side to the other with the same number of colour bands being seen on different vehicles (i.e. not an accident or random application) either with a Balkenkreuz painted on the turret side or completely devoid of national markings (we will come back to the position of the BK).

122 Panther 80 of the 9.Pz.Div. sports a classical example of the "M.N.H. Pattern". This vehicle was abandoned closely to the local school in HUMAIN after having received hits to the bow MG, right front corner of the turret and middle of the mantlet. It was later moved fifty meters down the road, where it was finally photographed.

(Stefan De Meyer)



M.A.N./Daimler-Benz

"Classic Factory Pattern"

The second pattern we will call the "Classic Factory Pattern", this appears on probably 70% of the post September 1944 Panthers we have seen photos of, the glacis will have a small patch of dark yellow to the top starboard side of the MG ball mount and there will also be a stripe of dark yellow starting from around the drivers periscope meandering its way diagonally down towards the bottom starboard corner of the glacis before continuing down to the lower glacis plate and then making for the lower port corner. On the turret starboard side there is a wavy line of dark yellow starting around the poison gas indicator panel coming down diagonally towards a point just below the lower weld seam

on the front interlock. Above this band will be a series of red brown troughs that start at the front of the turret and finish around the bend in the roof plate. On the gun mantlet there is a dark yellow band coming down from the turret roof to the starboard side of the gun tube aperture.



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123 Panther 327 of the SS-Pz.Rgt.12 was built by M.A.N. and knocked out during the heavy fighting for Krinkelt-Rocherath in December 1944.

(Book team)

124 - 125 Although very hard to make out, Panther 154 actually is a Pantherbefehlswagen. It was the official mount of the adjutant of the I./SS-Pz.Rgt.12. In the background we can make out Panther 327.

In this photograph we can clearly see the remarkably consistent placement of the colour fields between these two different Panthers assembled by M.A.N. The instructions for the application of this camouflage stated quite clearly that the vehicles should all be painted in a similar pattern but that it should not be identical. This can also be seen from photos taken of Panthers assembled by both Daimler-Benz and M.N.H

(Stefan De Meycr, Book team)







Daimler-Benz

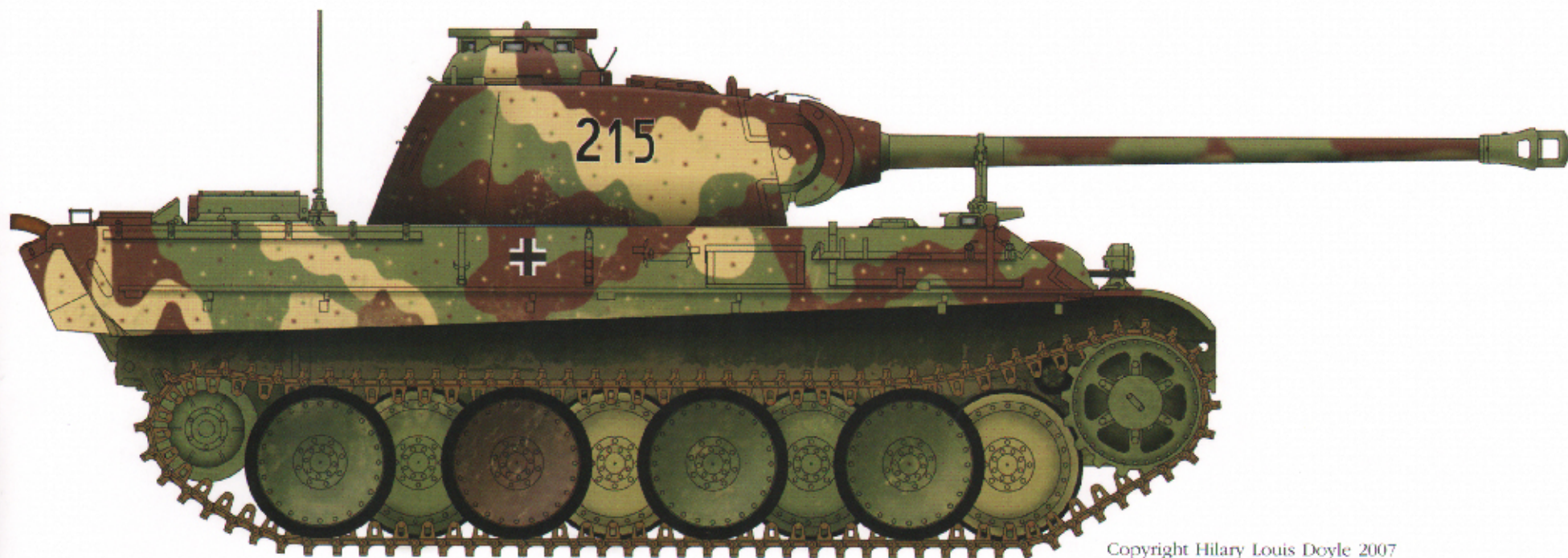
"Dot camouflage"

Daimler-Benz also used a variation of the "Classic Factory Pattern" that had small dots of contrasting camouflage paint applied to the larger colour fields of the "Classic Factory Pattern" as per the I.R. test vehicle on the front cover of Panzertracts 5-3 that has this contrasting dot overlay. This Panther is completely devoid of painted markings but there is a chalked number "726" on the corner of the glacis that could be the last three digits of the Fahrgestell number. If this is the case it suggests it was manufactured by Daimler-Benz during September 1944. The use of this contrasting dot overlay was very short lived and for some reason it was discontinued in late September 1944.

This vehicle has been painted in the "Classic Factory Pattern" by Daimler-Benz. While both M.A.N. and Daimler-Benz used this pattern they both had quite distinctive styles within this, compare the size, colour and shape of the main colour fields which although they differ slightly are in the same relative position.

Panther 215, 2./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (Uscha. Krüger)

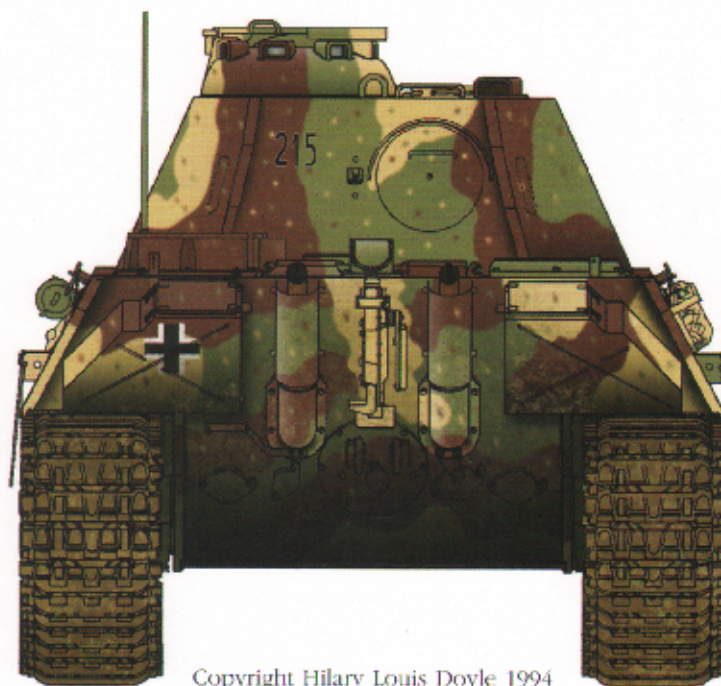




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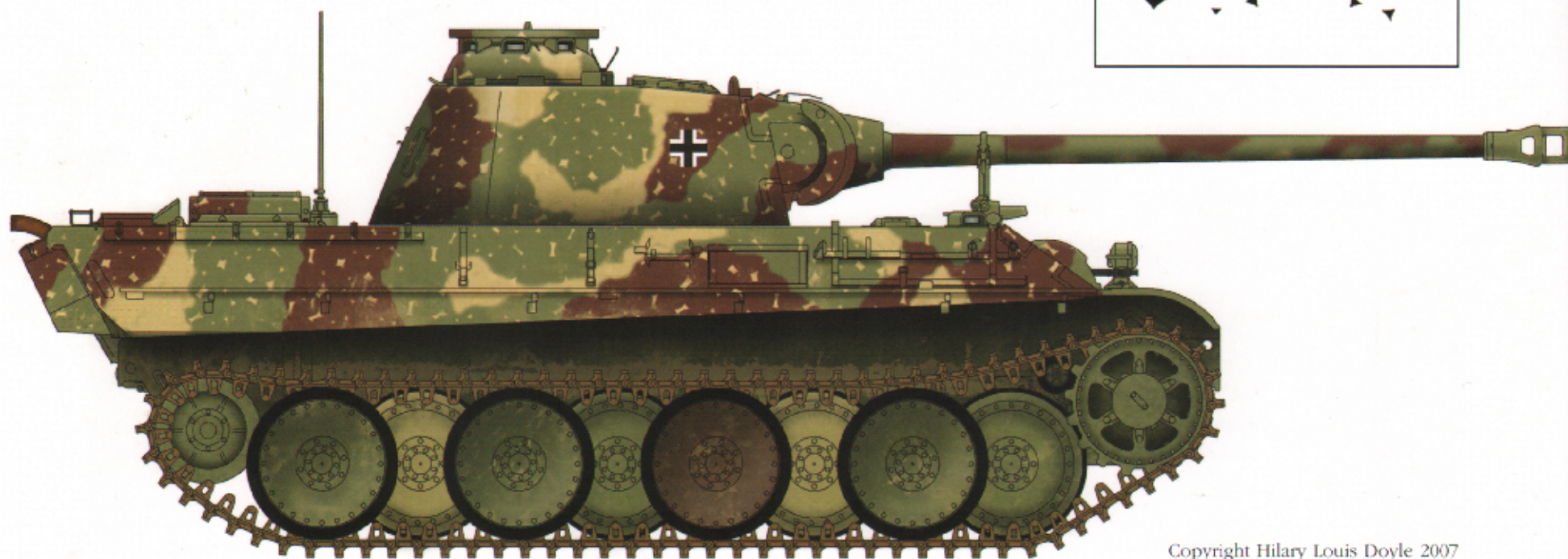
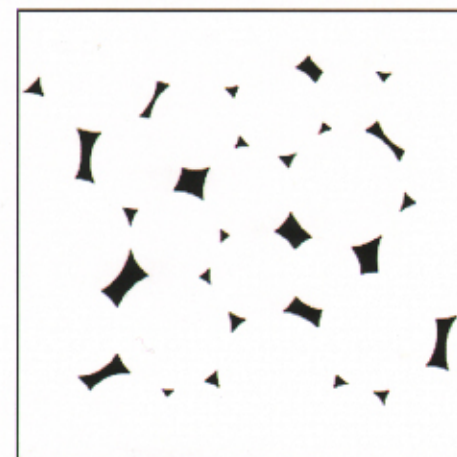
M.A.N.

"Disc camouflage"

The application of a "Disc-Camo" pattern by M.A.N. can be compared to the use of contrasting dots by Daimler-Benz and was used during the same time frame. The "Disc-Camo" pattern was applied by using a stencil made up with different sizes of disc connected together at the edges. These were arranged so that the left and right hand sides of the pattern would interlock which resulted in a repeating pattern that looked as though it had been applied with a roller.

126 This excellent rear view shows Panther 252 of the 11.Pz.Div. being towed away for examination. We can clearly make out the "Disc Camouflage" between the exhaust pipes and on the turret.

(US Army via Panzerwrecks)



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M.A.N.

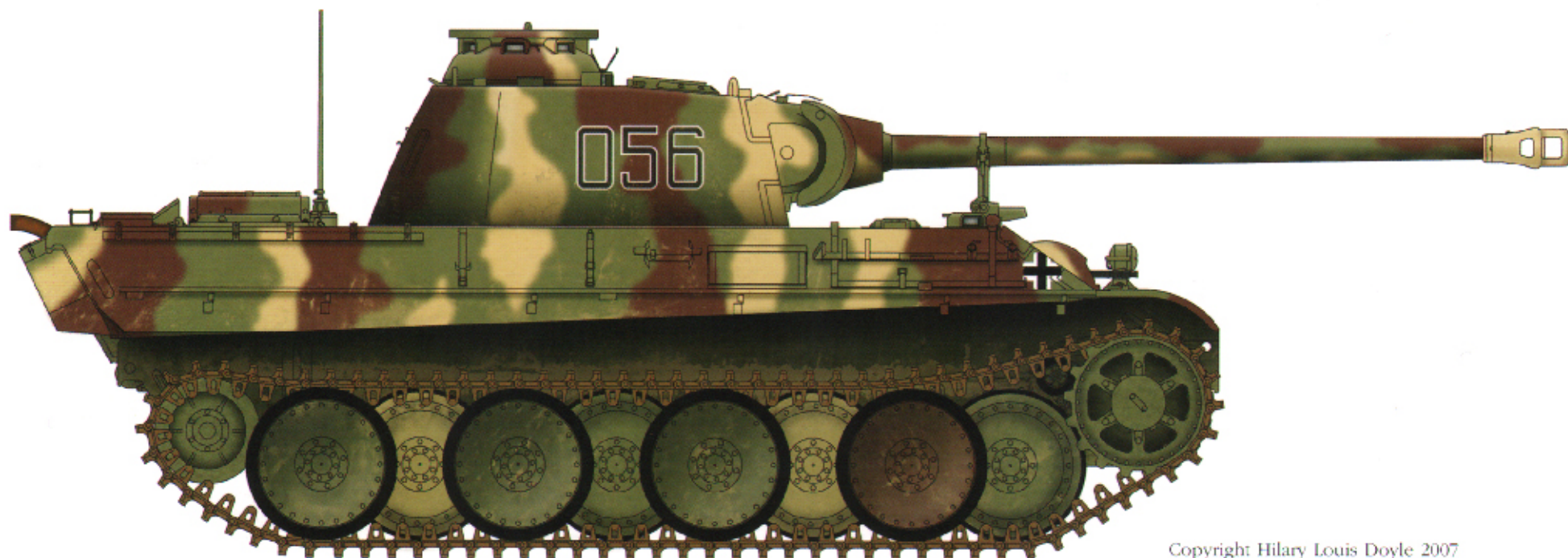
“Late Pattern”

(October 1944 onwards)

80% of the post September 1944 Panthers we have seen photos of sport one of these schemes or a variation of it, the other 20% have either the very late war two colour scheme or a three colour scheme used on some M.A.N. assembled Panthers from late October onwards. The variations are very interesting and are probably the result of the schemes evolving either through combat experience or the experience of the assembly firms.

127 Panther 056 formerly belonged to the Aufklärungszug of the Stabskompanie/ SS-Pz.Rgt.12. It clearly shows the late M.A.N. Pattern that started to appear from late October 1944 onwards.

(Stefan De Meyer)



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2. Markings

The consistency of Balkenkreuz application was quite striking; at first glance they appeared to be everywhere, on the turret sides, on the front corners of the hull, halfway along the hull side! The more photos we were able to examine the more it became obvious that there were certain combinations of placement and remarkable consistency within these. It also helped to have more than one view of the same Panther to check the consistency of these combinations. Four distinct combinations were identified.

1) Panthers that had a Balkenkreuz over the wire cutter stowage bracket on the port side also having a Balkenkreuz in the middle of the hull on the starboard side directly underneath the hammer stowage and a Balkenkreuz on the port rear stowage box were identified as having been assembled by Daimler-Benz. There was

only one variation to this when very late war Panthers assembled in 1945 had the port Balkenkreuz moved back from the wire cutter bracket to the area behind the gun cleaning tools stowage tube.

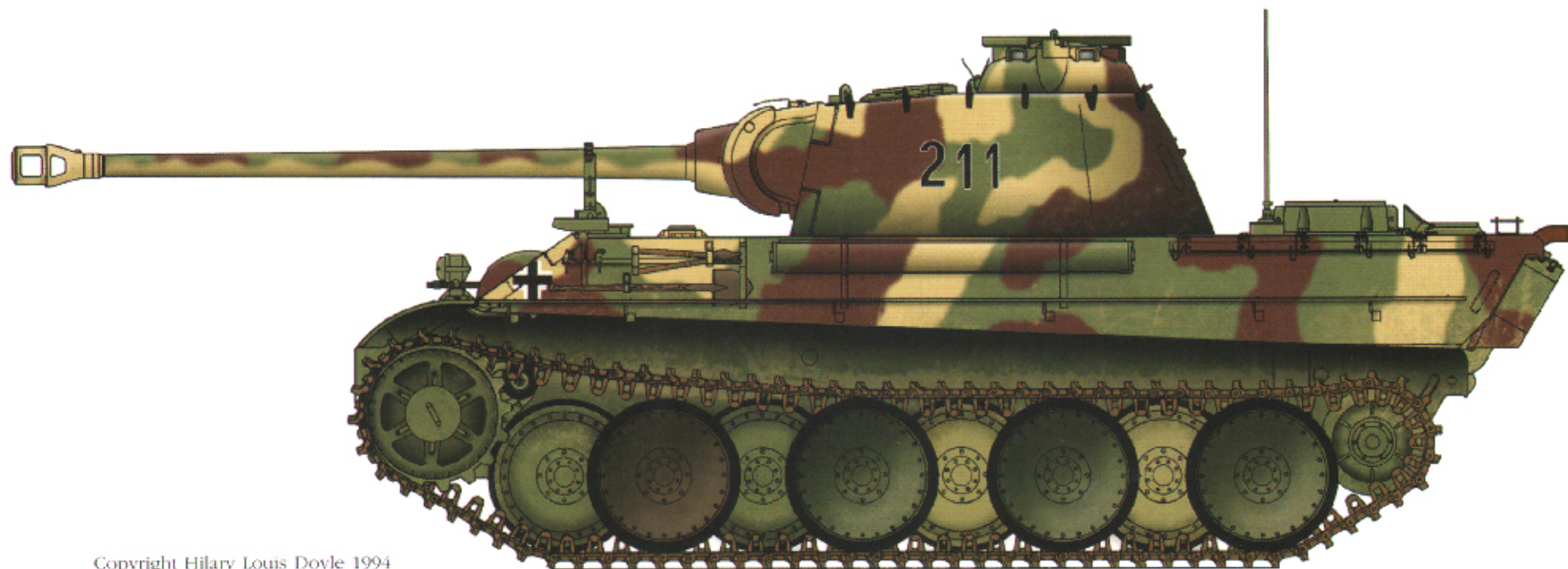
2) The second combination was applied to Panthers assembled by M.A.N. The Balkenkreuz were located in front corners of the hull sides ahead of the tool stowage brackets on both port and starboard sides, with the rear Balkenkreuz applied to the starboard rear stowage box.

Both of these Balkenkreuz combinations (Daimler-Benz and M.A.N.) can only be seen on Panther G's with the "Classic Factory Pattern" or the variation of this used by M.A.N. on some of the Panthers they assembled from late October 1944 onwards. One of the more helpful foibles of the M.A.N. assembly plant was the stencilling of the Fgst. number either on the glacis plate or the gun travel lock giving us a positive I.D. on the assembly plant. We have seen one period photo that shows a Daimler-Benz Panther G with an identifiable Fgst. number stencilled on the gun



Panther 211, 2./SS-Pz.Rgt. 1 (Ustuf. Hubert Kaufmann)

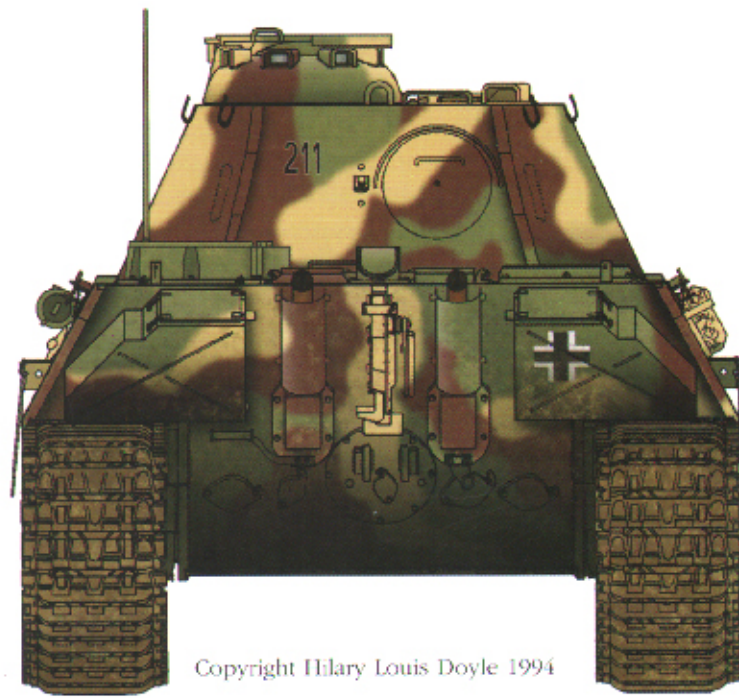
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travel lock and this had a full coat of Zimmerit, unfortunately we have not been able to find an identifiable Panther G from M.N.H. with its Fgst. number stencilled on it. Another feature that would appear to be unique to M.A.N. assembled Panther G's was the application of a white square topped capital "A" on the gun travel lock. When we have been fortunate enough to have nice clear photos of the front of a Panther G assembled by M.A.N. the Fgst. number and this white A invariably appear together.³

Panthers that have the Daimler-Benz Balkenkreuz combination had no white A on the travel lock or Fgst number visible (with the exception of the very early Ausf G). There were also a lot of these Panthers with the later style cast exhaust armour suggesting that it was trialled by Daimler-Benz prior to its introduction by both M.A.N. and M.N.H. A few of these Panthers still had Zimmerit on the turrets which from the method of Zimmerit application and the consistency of the factory applied camouflage pattern helped confirm that this Balkenkreuz combination was used by Daimler-Benz only. The Panther G lost at the bridge in HOUFFALIZE and still on display in the town square had this particular Balkenkreuz combination and we were able to identify this Panther as having been assembled by Daimler-Benz in May 1944 (Fgst.Nr. 124317).

3) The third Balkenkreuz combination was the application of these markings to the port and starboard turret sides. With this combination there are no markings on the rear hull stowage bins. This combination can be seen on vehicles assembled by M.A.N. as well as M.N.H. There are a high proportion of Befehlspanthers photographed with this combination from the vehicles involved in the Ardennes offensive as well as Panthers that have a "Disc-Camo" overlay to the factory applied camo. Closer examination of photographs and the delivery records for the units equipped with M.A.N. assembled Panthers with this Balkenkreuz combination suggest that its use by them was time frame related. The third Balkenkreuz combination was also used by M.N.H. and can be seen in the photographs taken of the M.N.H. assembled Panther that belonged to Kampfgruppe von Cochenhausen knocked out at CELLES and still on display there. M.N.H.

assembled Panthers were finished in three colour camouflage painted in diagonal bands from port to starboard. This pattern evolved as the war progressed with the edges of the colour bands on the later machines becoming very straight to the point that they looked as if they had been applied with a ruler.

The fourth combination is a complete lack of markings other than tactical markings applied at unit level. A significant number of M.N.H. assembled Panthers were issued to troops devoid of national markings. These vehicles have come from different timeframes in the production run at M.N.H.. There were also a very small number of M.A.N. vehicles that were devoid of all markings other those applied at unit level (Tactical numbers on the turrets). These Panthers were all finished in the Disc pattern overlay. The fact that these vehicles were all finished in the Disc overlay and that there are other M.A.N. assembled machines also finished in this camouflage pattern that had all of the markings that are normally associated with this assembly plant indicates the hiatus from applying these markings by M.A.N. was timeframe related and extremely short lived.

This chapter has been greatly condensed to provide as broad an overview as possible focussing on the vehicles issued to Kampfgruppe Peiper. Space precludes us from including all of the information available and covering all of the assembly plants production timeframes thoroughly as it could quite easily fill a volume on its own.

Footnotes

1. Jentz, Doyle, "Germanys Panther Tank, The Quest For Combat Supremacy", p.91

2. Jentz, Doyle, "Germanys Panther Tank, The Quest For Combat Supremacy", p.93.

3. The only instances that we can think of where this has not been the case is when the travel lock is missing or if the Panther has been used as a test/development vehicle, but in general if the Panther is intact then when the Fgst number is present so too is the "A"(with the one exception of the very early D-B Panther G).

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128 An interesting photograph showing the aftermath of the battle. Here we can see US prisoners of war walking up the "Rue du Village" having been disarmed and searched. In the background an Sd.Kfz.251/7 of the 3./ SS-Pz.Pio.Btl. 1 and behind that a Panzer IV of the 6./SS-Pz.Rgt.1 are blocking the road, where later on Uscha. Rech will try to negotiate these obstacles.

This photograph has appeared at the very last moment - courtesy of Andy Found - but its importance to the story meant we had to include it. This is an indication of how small details that the reader may think we are already aware of or are not significant can be important to our story in this and further volumes.

(MNZS)