

7 Sep 45

A n I N T E R V I E W W i t h  
O b s t J o a c h i m P E I P E R



1 S S P Z R E G T

(11 - 24 Dec 44)

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HISTORICAL DIVISION  
SPECIAL STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

12 July 1949

Note to: EPHINT 10

By: Kenneth W. Hechler  
Major, Infantry (Res)

No record of this oral interview was made in German, inasmuch as the oral interview was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter, notes were made at the time of the oral interview, and the text was rearranged in order to preserve continuity and compactness.

This is one example of where I believe I can attest to the authenticity and completeness of this version of the oral interview. Colonel Peiper, as noted in the preface to the oral interview, is a very arrogant individual, proud of his regiment and division. When I commenced the oral interview, neither the interpreter nor myself realized that Peiper understood English. Accordingly, the interpreter and I exchanged some remarks at various parts of the oral interview concerning Peiper's possible participation in the Malmedy massacres. The first indication that we had that Colonel Peiper spoke English is noted on page 8 of the oral interview, where, in perfect English, Colonel Peiper says "I am sorry" when informed that he had come within 300 yards of a 3-million gallon gasoline dump at Spa. This so astounded both the interpreter and myself that we sat with our jaws hanging open for full half-minute. Peiper did not blink an eye lash, but he pulled the same stunt on us several times after that. In addition, on several occasions he turned heatedly on the interpreter and corrected his interpretation with perfect English.

In view of the above, I think that we can testify as to the accuracy of this oral interview record. It should still be possible to clear this with Colonel Peiper and to have him initial it.

ETHINT 10 - ( )

Title : 1 SS Pz Regt (11 - 24 Dec 44)  
Source : Obst (W-3S) Peiper, Joachim  
Position : Cmdr, 1 SS Pz Regt, 1 SS Pz Div  
Date : 7 Sep 45  
Place : Freising, Germany  
Interviewer : Maj Kenneth W. Hechler  
Circumstances : Obst Peiper is a very arrogant, typical SS man, thoroughly imbued with the Nazi philosophy. He is very proud of his regiment and division and is inclined to make derogatory remarks about other units. He is possibly frightened about his future disposition. As soon as it became apparent that our conversation would be confined to military tactics and not his war crimes, he opened up. He speaks good English and took particular delight in correcting the interpreter. Physically, he is not as tall as published reports indicate.

Foreword

This interview is one of a series conducted by the Historical Section, ETOUSA, and its successors. Unfortunately, only a typed record in English is available for editing. It is not known whether a record in German was made at the time of the interview nor, if one was made, can the accuracy of the translation be determined. Therefore, no absolute guarantee can be given as to the authenticity and completeness of this version of the interview. Only obvious errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammatical construction have been corrected. All parenthetical statements, except those of the editor, which are identified as such, are as they appear in the available record.

*Robert W. Fye*

ROBERT W. FYE  
1st Lt      FA  
Historical Editor

JAN 16 1948

1 S S F Z R E G T

(11 - 24 Dec 44)

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I. Over-all Condition Of The Regiment Prior To The Offensive

1. Q: What was the condition of your Division immediately prior to the launching of the Ardennes Offensive?

A: It was badly mangled in the Normandy fighting and in the retreat across France. Before the Ardennes Offensive, we had about two months to reorganize our troops in the Minden area of Westphalia.

2. Q: What new troops did you receive during this re-organization period?

A: We got about 3,500 new combat troops, bringing the Division up to full T/O strength of 22,000 men.

3. Q: How good were the new troops which you received?

A: Pretty good considering the state of the German reinforcements assigned at that time.

4. Q: What new materiel did you receive prior to the Ardennes Offensive?

A: We got many new tanks directly from the assembly line. However, the Regiment was supposed to have one battalion of Mark IV's and one battalion of Panther tanks, and, not having enough tanks, I organized one battalion with a mixture of two companies of Mark IV's and two companies of Panther tanks. To compensate for the shortage of tanks, my Regiment was further reinforced with a battalion of Tiger tanks which had formerly been corps troops. Therefore, the Regiment finally consisted of one battalion of mixed Panther and Mark IV tanks, one battalion of Tiger tanks, and one battalion of SS

personnel without tanks. My Regiment was the panzer regiment of 1 SS Pz Div; the other two were infantry regiments.

5. Q: How many additional tanks did you receive as reinforcements during the period when you reorganized in the Minden area?

A: Prior to coming to Westphalia we had about 50 tanks. We received about 200 additional tanks during the period of re-equipment.

## II. First Inkling Of The Offensive

6. Q: When did you first hear about the plans to launch an offensive in the Ardennes?

A: Unofficially, I deduced the fact five days before the start of the Offensive. Officially, I was informed two days before it began--on 14 Dec 44.

7. Q: How did you deduce it unofficially?

A: Kraemer, C of S of Sixth SS Pz Army, asked me on 11 Dec 44 what I thought about the possibilities of an attack in the Eifel region, and how much time it would take a tank regiment to proceed 80 km in one night. Feeling that it was not a good idea to decide the answer to such a question merely by looking at a map, I made a test run of 80 km with a Panther tank myself, driving down the route Euskirchen--Muenstereifel--Blankenheim.

8. Q: What conclusions did you reach as a result of this test run?



A: If I had a free road to myself, I could make 80 km in one night. Of course, with an entire division, that was a different question.

9. Q: Do you believe that Kraemer meant to give away the plan to you?

A: He certainly didn't, but it was rather obvious what he was up to.

10. Q: When did you move out of Westphalia?

A: About three weeks before the Ardennes Offensive, our unit was moved into Army reserve 12 km east of Dueren, north of Euskirchen.

11. Q: Were you able to accomplish anything in training your unit between the time that Kraemer tipped you off about the impending plans and 16 Dec 44?

A: I could give them a few tips about how to drive tanks through mountainous terrain and over icy roads, but no other training or instructions were possible, because the American forces were then attacking in the Aachen--Dueren area, and we had to remain on the alert as Sixth SS Pz Army reserve.

12. Q: Could you make any personal reconnaissance in the Eifel in advance of the offensive?

A: No, because movement in the Eifel territory was strictly forbidden.

III. Movement To The Assembly Area

13. Q: When did you move from the Aachen--Dueren area to the assembly area for the Offensive?

A: On 13 Dec 44, we were given a detailed march order issued by I SS Pz Corps. No mention of the impending offensive was contained in this order; nothing was mentioned except the route of march and the assembly area.

14. Q: Where was the assembly area for 1 SS Pz Div as a whole?

A: Marmegen--Blankenheimerdorf--Schmidtheim. Advance elements of the Division were in Dahlem.

15. Q: What special precautions were taken to conceal the movement?

A: The whole thing was to be announced to the troops only when they fell in immediately prior to departure. There was complete blackout during the night and radio silence. No signs marked the road other than simple yellow arrows without division designation.

16. Q: At what time did you move out, and what time did you close in your new assembly area?

A: We moved out at 1900 on 13 Dec 44 and had disappeared into the woods in our assembly area by 1000 on 14 Dec 44.

17. Q: Were there any unusual incidents en route? Were there any air attacks or American reconnaissance planes?

A: The weather was too foggy for any air activity, and it was still very foggy at 1000 when we closed in our assembly area.

18. Q: What forces were on your flanks?

A: The 12 SS Pz Div was on the north, and 2 Pz Div was on the south.

#### IV. Plans And Preparations For The Offensive

19. Q: What was the first conference held after your arrival in the new assembly area?

A: Before noon on 14 Dec 44, I was called to Tondorf, the command post of 1 SS Pz Div, where Oberst Mohnke, the Division Commander, announced the whole plan for the Offensive and read the detailed Corps order assigning various routes and fixing the morning of 16 Dec 44 as D-Day.

20. Q: What divisions did you have in I SS Pz Corps?

A: The 1 and 12 SS Pz Divs; 2 Pz Div was in the Corps to our south.

21. Q: What additional troops did you have assigned to your Division especially for the Offensive?

A: We had one antiaircraft regiment with 88mm guns, one additional engineer battalion, and one battalion of Corps artillery with 150mm and 210mm guns (Ed: probably 150mm and 210mm howitzers. There was no German 210mm gun, and the 150mm gun was not normally in corps artillery).

22. Q: What was the purpose and mission of the additional engineer battalion?

A: It was attached primarily for repairing bridges.

23. Q: What particular bridge did they work on the most?

A: The railroad bridge northwest of Losheim.

24. Q: Any additional troops attached?

A: After 3 FS Div got stuck following the start of the offensive, one parachute regiment was attached to our unit. We also had at the start of the offensive special "Skorzeny" units of 150 Pz Brig. Each combat team had such a group. They consisted of 500 men, 20 General Sherman (Ed: M-4) tanks, a few German tanks, 30 2½-ton trucks, and 30 to 50 jeeps.

25. Q: Where had all this American equipment been obtained?

A: Much of it had been captured during the Invasion and had stayed with various units up until Oct 44, when a general order was issued to turn in all captured equipment.

26. Q: Did you have any tactical control over this "Skorzeny" group?

A: None whatsoever.

27. Q: What did you think of the value of the performance of the "Skorzeny" group during the Offensive?

A: They might just as well have stayed at home, because they were never near the head of the column where they had planned to be.

28. Q: What indication of the routes was given at the Division conference?

A: Each commanding officer--the commander of the reconnaissance battalion, the commanders of the two infantry regiments, and myself--got a marked map showing the routes of advance.

29. Q: What area of advance was planned for 1 SS Pz Div?

A: Hitler Jugend (Ed: 12 SS Pz) Div was on our north, and 2 Pz Div was on the south. We were ordered to follow this route: Schmidtheim--Dahlem--Kronenburg--Hallschlag--Scheid--Losheim--Losheimergraben--Huenningen--Honsfeld--Hepscheid--Moderscheid--Schoppen--Ondenval--Thirimont--Ligneuville--Pont--Trois-Ponts--Werbomont--Cuffet--Seny--Tinlot--Stree--Huy.

30. Q: How good was this route compared with the routes of the divisions to your north and south?

A: The roads assigned to the two divisions on my flanks followed main routes and were very good. The roads assigned to my Division were generally known to be bad, but there were few bridges along the way.

31. Q: Did you not object?

A: I immediately pointed out that these roads were not for tanks, but were for bicycles, but they wouldn't even discuss it. They said it was the Fuehrer's order that I should take that route.

32. Q: What routes of advance were assigned for 12 SS Pz Div and 2 Pz Div?

A: I did not know the route planned for 2 Pz Div. In general, 12 SS Pz Div planned to use the route Buellingen--

Butgenbach--K...as--Malmedy--Spa--Louveigne--Meuse River.

33. Q: What additional instructions or advice were you given at the Division conference?

A: They said that my combat team in the center was to have the decisive role in the Offensive. I was not to bother about my flanks but was to drive rapidly to the Meuse River, making full use of the element of surprise.

It was further announced that two train loads of gasoline urgently needed for the Offensive had not arrived, and, accordingly, orders were issued to all the units to supply themselves with captured gasoline.

34. Q: Did you know where to expect to find this captured gasoline?

A: Our Division Intelligence Officer had a situation map purporting to show your supply installations. We believed from that map that we could capture gasoline at Buellingen and Stavelot.

35. Q: Did you realize that you came within 300 yards of a three million gallon gasoline dump at Spa?

A: (Interviewer's Note: With a typical gesture Obst Feiper shrugged his shoulders, smiled rather arrogantly, and said in English, "I am sorry." He didn't know of the existence of the gasoline dump.)

36. Q: Did you have enough ammunition for the Offensive?

A: I obtained some ammunition myself in Buskirchen, and we had enough to last up until the fourth or fifth day.

37. Q: Did you have any other shortages?

A: No.

38. Q: What else occurred at the Division meeting?

A: The Division Commander repeated most of Hitler's speech of 12 Dec 44 to division commanders.

39. Q: What did you do following the meeting?

A: I sat down and decided how to organize my own combat team. I decided that my column would be about 25 km long, and the vehicles would proceed at medium speed. It was impossible for the vehicles in the rear to overtake those in the front because of the bad roads. Therefore, all combat elements had to be placed in the front of the column. In order to provide maximum speed and power, I decided that my armored half-tracks would proceed as fast as possible until they met resistance, and then the tanks would come up to destroy the resistance, following which the half-tracks would again advance. I expected that if all went well I would need only Mark IV's and Panthers to proceed through the mountains and to reach the Meuse River, with one panzer company. Then I could move up the heavy Tiger tanks later (Ed: the exact meaning of the last two sentences is unknown).

40. Q: Did you honestly expect to reach the Meuse River in one day?

A: (Interviewer's Note: Obst Peiper paused for a brief period before answering and wrinkled his brow.) If our own infantry had broken through by 0700 as originally planned, my answer is "yes," I think we might have reached the Meuse in one day.

41. Q: What happened following your completion of initial plans on 14 Dec 44?

A: On the afternoon of 14 Dec 44, I drove over to confer with the Commander of 12 Volks Gren Div, whose infantry was supposed to crack the initial line. We developed a joint plan. Genmaj Engel, Commander of 12 Volks Gren Div, explained that he hoped to achieve the initial penetration by 0700 hours. I then asked Genmaj Engel to clear the main road of mines in the area of Losheim.

42. Q: What else did Genmaj Engel tell you of his plans for the attack of 12 Volks Gren Div?

A: He said that he had a heavy artillery concentration ready to destroy the American front line positions. He then said that he would attack with two regiments and actually reach Losheim by 0700 hours.

43. Q: What else did you do on 14 Dec 44?

A: Merely general preparations, such as looking up supply routes.

44. Q: When was the next conference?

A: At 1100 on 15 Dec 44 there was a conference at I SS Pz Corps, consisting of the division commanders, the commanders of all the combat teams, and Skorzeny. Genlt (W-SS) Friess, the Corps Commander, gave a short "pep" talk explaining the importance of the offensive; the Chief of Staff, Gen (Ed: actually Ostbf) Lehmann repeated the attack order, announced that the expected gasoline had not yet arrived, but that the Fuehrer had insisted that the offensive



start on 16 Dec 44, notwithstanding.

45. Q: What did you think happened to that gasoline?

A: Oh, I guess it was delayed, re-routed, and may have arrived later on in some other area, but we never saw it.

Following this, I had a conference of my own commanders, plus Skorzeny's deputy and eight or nine of his representatives. I explained the plan and its importance, that there were three main spearheads in our area, and that, of course, my combat team would be the first to reach the Meuse River. Then I explained the route to be taken, the march order, and the time each unit was to pass the IP (one km southwest of Schmidheim). Then I announced the signal SOP, and assigned wave lengths.

46. Q: Was there anything unusual about your signal SOP?

A: The only unusual thing was that the distances involved were cut in half because of the necessity for the radio waves to travel through mountainous territory (Ed: the preceding sentence is reproduced verbatim from the available record).

47. Q: What other orders or instructions did you issue?

A: I issued orders against firing into small groups of the enemy and forbidding looting. I ordered this because we could not afford to lose time. I then questioned Hardecka, Skorzeny's deputy, on the mission of his group. Hardecka explained that this group would try to overtake the leading tanks as soon as possible, would then infiltrate to cause confusion among the American troops, would drop off fake MP's to direct American traffic, seize command

posts, centers of communication, and a bridge over the Meuse River at either Huy or Ombret Rausa with a single coup.

48. Q: What special precautions did Skorzeny's men take to protect themselves against being fired on by German troops?

A: Tanks were to point their guns at nine o'clock and to leave them in that position throughout the journey, without any shooting at first. All soldiers were to take off their steel helmets. All vehicles had small yellow triangles in the rear.

#### V. Beginning Of The Attack

49. Q: How did the attack proceed on 16 Dec 44?

A: The route which we actually took was as follows: Schmidtheim--through to the railroad bridge northwest of Losheim, the same as the original plan; then we backtracked and took a secondary road to Lanzerath--then through the woods in a northwesterly direction to Honsfeld--Buellingen--Richelsbusch; then along the planned route through Ligneuville; then through Pont--Stavelot--Trois Ponts--La Gleize and Stoumont.

The infantry was to open a gap through the MLR, and we were then to break through. At 0500 the infantry jumped off. The drive was poor, and the infantry had to by-pass numerous nests of resistance which caused considerable trouble after they had been by-passed. When we started, we found that these nests of resistance also caused us quite a bit of trouble. There were many mines in the roads also.

50. Q: How strong was the resistance of the American infantry?

A: Your 99 Inf Div put up very light resistance. In fact, the resistance was so light that it was a pity to have wasted so much artillery on them.

51. Q: Where did you go when the attack started?

A: At 0500 I moved to the command post of Genmaj Engel to observe his attack, in order to estimate the proper moment for launching my own push.

52. Q: What did you see?

A: Oh, I didn't see very much except the messages coming in to Genmaj Engel's headquarters, explaining where the infantry was fighting, and from them I could estimate when to commit my unit. It turned out I was actually at Genmaj Engel's command post until 1400 on 16 Dec 44.

53. Q: What held you up?

A: There was a blown bridge out in "no man's land," northwest of Losheim. This bridge had been blown by the Germans in their previous retreat from this area. Another delay occurred when either Corps or Army ordered the Division Artillery to move up farther after the infantry had broken through. Since the Division Artillery was a horse-drawn artillery regiment, it clogged up the roads. This was a completely idiotic idea, inasmuch as the regiment did no firing. From 1400 to 1900, I went down to the bridge to regulate traffic and tried to restore order. The bridge was not ready for use until 1930,

and my combat team started at 1600 hours.

54. Q: How could you get through if the roads were clogged?

A: I ordered my vehicles to push through rapidly and to run down anything in the road ruthlessly. I finally found a detour around the bridge--a deep cut in the terrain--and reached Losheim at 1930 hours. There I received a radio message from Division that the next railroad bridge could not be used, and that the engineers could not get up to it. I was told then to drive to Lanzerath, where I should meet elements of the parachute regiment of 3 FS Div. This regiment had attempted to attack through the woods west of Lanzerath towards Honsfeld and had been repelled three times. I received orders to take over this regiment and to attack.

55. Q: What was your objective?

A: Obviously Honsfeld.

56. Q: Did you have any difficulty?

A: It was difficult to find my way out of Losheim because of the German and American mines. I lost five tanks and the same number of other armored vehicles before reaching Lanzerath at midnight.

57. Q: What happened at Lanzerath?

A: There I had a conference with the commanding officer of the parachute regiment--an Obst (I was at that time an Obstlt). I asked him for all the information that he had on the enemy situation. His answer was that the woods were heavily fortified,

and that scattered fire from prepared "pill boxes" plus mines in the road were holding up his advance. He told me that it was impossible to attack under these circumstances. I asked him if he had personally reconnoitred the American positions in the woods, and he replied that he had received the information from one of his battalion commanders. I asked the battalion commander, and he said that he had got the information from a Hptm in his battalion. I called the Hptm, and he averred that he had not personally seen the American advances (Ed: forces?) but it had been "reported to him." At this point I became very angry and ordered the parachute regiment to give me one battalion, and I would lead the breakthrough.

I ordered my troops to deploy and be ready to attack at 0400 hours. After a conference at 0100 on 17 Dec 44, I organized the attack as follows: Two Panther tanks lead the column as the point, followed by a series of armored half-tracks and then a mixture of Panther and M4 tanks. Strangely enough, we broke through the area without firing a shot and found it completely unoccupied.

At dawn we arrived at Honsfeld and captured a large American group still asleep. In all, our booty consisted of 50 reconnaissance vehicles, including half-tracks, about 30 2½-ton trucks, and 15 or 16 antitank guns. One km northwest of Honsfeld we received some small arms fire, but this didn't make us unhappy because although there was a slight delay, it allowed rear vehicles to close up.

58. Q: How long were you delayed at this point?

A: About half to three quarters of an hour, allowing

the parachute elements to close up. Most of them rode up on the rear tanks of my column.

Judging by the noise to our right rear I concluded that 12 SS Pz Div was advancing slower than their original schedule, so I decided to take their road.

59. Q: Did you communicate this fact to Division?

A: Throughout, we had no communication with Division which meant anything. The first message that I received was at 0800 on 17 Dec 44, asking me why the Leibstandarte (Ed: "Leibstandarte--SS Adolf Hitler," honorary title given to 1 SS Pz Div) had not gotten started.

60. Q: Where did you decide to change your route?

A: At a small farm just on the outskirts of Honsfeld. One other thing which influenced my decision was the knowledge that an American gasoline dump probably existed at Buellingen, and we were already running low on gasoline. We drove on to Buellingen without any resistance, and there overran an American liaison plane group, destroying 12 L-5's. There was a slight delay when ground personnel at the liaison strip tried to stop us with a few machine guns.

61. Q: Did you find the gasoline you were looking for?

A: Of course. We captured 200,000 liters in Buellingen and used 50 American prisoners to fill all of our tanks. This was a lucky break, because by the time we had reached Losheim, we had used up as much gasoline in 25 km, as we would normally have used in covering 50 km, on account of the mountainous terrain in the Eifel.

Shortly after we captured Buellingen, the American artillery laid a barrage on the town at about 0930 on 17 Dec 44, causing some casualties.

From Buellingen, we drove southwest toward Moderscheid. The only difficulty here was the road through the woods, where many of our vehicles got stuck in the mud. We surprised a very small American garrison in Moderscheid.

62. Q: By now did you feel that you had achieved a clean breakthrough?

A: Yes, this was a clean breakthrough, and we continued with very little opposition. Every now and then a few stray jeeps would enter our main route of advance from side roads, apparently not realizing that we had penetrated that far. A short distance north of Thirimont, our tank point fired at an American convoy proceeding along the road from Malmedy to Ligneuville.

63. Q: Was this still part of 99 Inf Div (US)?

A: No, this was a field artillery observation battalion.

64. Q: What happened?

A: Eleven to fifteen of their trucks were destroyed, and we moved through their convoy with little difficulty and pushed into Ligneuville. We had information there was an American command post in Ligneuville, but we got there too late and only captured their lunch. This was between twelve and one o'clock on 17 Dec 44. However, we met heavy resistance just outside of Ligneuville. There

we encountered American tanks for the first time and lost one Panther and two other armored vehicles.

65. Q: What did you estimate were the American losses at this point?

A: Two Shermans, one M-10 tank destroyer, a few machine guns, and a few PW's.

Pushing through Ligneuville was quite difficult for tanks, inasmuch as there were many curves in the road.

#### VI. The Battle For Stavelot

66. Q: Sepp Dietrich says that Sixth SS Pz Army lost many tanks due to mechanical difficulties. Did you have any trouble along this line?

A: We lost only five or six tanks due to motor difficulties. In many cases the air conditioning broke down, or sometimes the brakes would not work. I hear that 12 SS Pz Div had a lot of trouble with its tanks.

At 1600 on 17 Dec 44 we reached the area of Stavelot, which was heavily defended. We could observe heavy traffic moving from Namedy towards Stavelot, and Stavelot itself seemed clogged up completely with several hundred trucks. That night we attempted to capture Stavelot, but the terrain presented great difficulties. The only approach was the main road, and the ground to the left of the road fell very sharply, and to the right of the road rose very sharply.



There was a short curve just at the entrance to Stavelot where several Sherman tanks and antitank guns were zeroed in.

Thereupon, we shelled Stavelot with heavy infantry howitzers and mortars, resulting in great confusion within the town and the destruction of several dumps.

At the same time, I ordered one of my Mark IV tank companies to try to find a way around Stavelot through Aisomont, Wanne, and Trois Ponts. It proceeded along a small trail which was nearly impossible to negotiate with tanks. At 1800 a counterattack circled around a high hill 800 meters east of Stavelot and hit my column from the south.

67. Q: Were any tanks included in this counterattack?

A: No, the terrain was much too difficult, and the counterattack consisted entirely of infantry. After the counterattack was repulsed, I committed more armored infantry to attack Stavelot again. We approached the outskirts of the village but bogged down because of stubborn American resistance at the edge of Stavelot. We suffered fairly heavy losses, 25 to 30 casualties, from tank, antitank, mortar, and rifle fire. Since I did not have sufficient infantry, I decided to wait for the arrival of more infantry.

68. Q: Where did you expect to get this infantry?

A: I had one battalion of armored infantry in my column.

As darkness fell, we observed heavy American traffic all moving westward, without blackout restrictions. We fired

at them up to a range of 4,800 yards with our tanks but launched no additional organized counterattacks until dawn of 18 Dec 44. At dawn, I committed another armored infantry company against Stavelot. I withdrew two Panther tanks 200 meters from the edge of the town and instructed them to charge Stavelot at maximum speed. They drove around the curve firing rapidly. The first Panther tank was hit, and it burned, but it had so much initial speed that it penetrated the anti-tank obstacle at the curve and damaged two Sherman tanks. The second Panther used this opportunity to drive through and seize a bridge in Stavelot. We followed up with other vehicles, and the Americans evacuated the town, leaving some materiel.

69. Q: How much?

A: Oh, I didn't see it.

#### VII. Efforts To Continue The Advance

70. Q: Where did you go?

A: We proceeded at top speed towards Trois Ponts in an effort to seize the bridge there. We were delayed briefly by an antitank gun east of the bridge. We destroyed the antitank gun, but then the enemy blew up the bridge in our faces.

71. Q: What was the importance of the bridge in Trois Ponts; in other words, what do you think you might have been able to do if you had captured the bridge intact?

A: If we had captured the bridge at Trois Ponts intact

and had had enough fuel, it would have been a simple matter to drive through to the Meuse River early that day.

Blocked at Trois Fonts, we continued on to La Gleize where we encountered little resistance. There was another important bridge near Cheneux, which we prevented from being blown. However, in the afternoon of 18 Dec 44 we had a bad break when the weather cleared and American fighter bombers came over. We lost two to three tanks and five armored half-tracks. The tanks blew up in the road, and the road was too narrow to by-pass them, thus causing additional delay. About 1800 on 18 Dec 44 we moved up towards our old route of advance near Habiemont and started to cross the Lienne River. Just when we were starting to cross, this bridge also was blown up. I sent one of my tank companies on a reconnaissance mission to find another bridge north of this point. Elements advanced over a newly discovered bridge and then were ambushed and suffered heavy casualties. It was then reported that the bridge was not heavy enough for our tanks. Not being able to find another bridge, it was decided to turn north to Stoumont and La Gleize. After reaching La Gleize, another group reconnoitred towards Stoumont. It was reported that Stoumont was strongly held and that powerful American forces were moving from Spa towards Stoumont.

#### VIII. Failure Of The Offensive

72. Q: Did you observe any difference in quality of

American troops in this sector?

A: Decidedly. We were now confronting elements of your 30 Inf Div and 82 Abn Div, who fought far more savagely than 99 Inf Div (US). We decided to hold the bridge southwest of La Gleize, since it might prove important later on, and to attack Stoumont. At daylight on 19 Dec 44, we attacked Stoumont with one battalion of armored infantry and one company of parachutists attacking on both sides of the road, supported by tank fire. Again because of the terrain, tanks were unable to leave the road. Strong fire from Stoumont and heavy flanking fire from the north from your 30 Inf Div checked our attempts to enter Stoumont. However, we used the same technique of sending in two to three tanks at maximum speed, and eventually broke into and cleaned out the village, and then pushed westward to seize a bridge west of Stoumont. This was about as much as we could do with the gasoline that we had.

From then on, events turned rapidly against us. The same day, the commanding officer of the reconnaissance battalion reported that Stavelot had been retaken. As our infantry had been pushed to the eastern edge of the town, I immediately ordered him to attack from the west and clear Stavelot.

On 19 Dec 44 three counterattacks launched at Stoumont were repelled. However, we began to realize that we had insufficient gasoline to cross the bridge west of Stoumont. Therefore, we ordered the forces west of Stoumont to withdraw to the town.

On 20 Dec 44 we tried to attack again, with little

success. American troops attacked us from northeast of La Gleize and at the same time attacked Cheneux, where we had left a group to protect the bridge. Realizing that we were weak at La Gleize, Stoumont, and Cheneux, and endangered at all three points, we decided to abandon Stoumont that night. A small counterattack covered our withdrawal from Stoumont. After Cheneux had been captured and recaptured twice, we abandoned it and retreated to La Gleize on the night of 20 Dec 44.

73. Q: What were the orders that you received from Division Headquarters during this period?

A: (Interviewer's note: Obst Peiper sniffed cynically.) I got one message that I should report immediately the location of my dressing stations for the wounded, and that unless I reported the amount of gas I still had on hand, I could not hope for any additional gasoline.

74. Q: Were you able to maintain radio contact and inform Division of your whereabouts?

A: We had no regular radio contact with Division, but Division knew of our whereabouts by listening in to the American radios.

75. Q: What indication did you get that the entire Ardennes Offensive had failed in a larger sense?

A: The first indication we had was a message on 23 Dec 44 at 1700 ordering us to break out toward the east with our vehicles and men. When I received that message I realized that the only chance was to break out without any vehicles and wounded. Ac-

cordingly on 24 Dec 44, at 0100, we abandoned all our vehicles and started walking back.

76. Q: What were your losses?

A: We had to leave over 300 in La Gleize, and they were probably captured. Only 800 men got out.

77. Q: If you had to launch this offensive again, what measures would you execute differently, both in the higher planning and within your own regiment?

A: It soon became apparent that the real aim of the Ardennes Counteroffensive was not to reach Antwerp, but simply to disturb American preparations and delay the American winter offensive for two months. This should have been made clear by the higher command at the start of the counteroffensive. There are certain definite things that I would do differently:

- a. Institute a speedier system of supplying gasoline.
- b. Have no artillery preparation and keep the horse-drawn artillery from clogging the roads.
- c. Attack with combat teams and tanks at the same time as the infantry. An unsupported infantry attack wastes too much time.
- d. Reduce the length of each column, and instead of three columns use twenty; then upon finding the softest spot, all columns should concentrate on this point.
- e. Use more infantry on tanks.

f. Take along a bridging unit with each armored point.

g. Make each combat team completely self sufficient.

h. Put a general at each street corner to regulate traffic. (Interviewer's note: Obst Peiper indicated that there were two good reasons for such a move, and one of them was not traffic control.)