

An INTERVIEW With  
Obst Joachim PEIPER



1 S S P Z REGT

(16 - 19 Dec 44)

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

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Note to: ETHINT 11

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

After my interview of 7 September 1945 with Peiper (see ETHINT 10), members of the Ardennes Section of the ETO Historical Section suggested some additional clarifying questions for Colonel Peiper. I took these questions, rephrased them and added a few of my own, and then briefed Lt. Tobin regarding Colonel Peiper's location and the previous interview I had had with him. By this time, Colonel Peiper had been moved from the 3rd Army Interrogation Center at Freising, Germany to Oberursel, Germany. Because the oral interrogation was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter, and notes were made in English on the replies of Colonel Peiper, there is not record in German which was made at the time of the oral interview.

See the annotation of ETHINT 10 for comments on Colonel Peiper, which applies also to ETHINT 11.

(Most of the above information, aside from the actual oral interview itself, was derived from first-hand knowledge.)

ETHINT 11 - (ML - 752)

Title : 1 SS Pz Regt (16 - 19 Dec 44)  
Source : Obst (W-SS) Peiper, Joachim  
Position : Cndr, 1 SS Pz Regt, 1 SS Pz Div  
Date : 18 Sep 45  
Place : USFET Military Intelligence Service Center,  
Oberursel, Germany  
Interviewer : 1st Lt Samuel J. Tobin  
Circumstances : This interview was conducted with the objective of  
obtaining answers to specific questions by Maj  
Kenneth W. Hechler and other members of the Ardennes  
Section; therefore, the following information is  
not continuous but is a series of answers to  
indicated questions.

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.

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1. Q: According to captured maps depicting the axis of advance for 1 and 12 SS Pz Divs, the latter is given three routes and the former two. The most southern 12 SS Pz Div route lies from Losheim to Losheimergraben to Buellingen to Butgenbach, etc. Obst Peiper has stated that his regiment's route lay from Scheid to Losheim to Losheimergraben to Huenningen to Honsfeld. This would appear to leave 12 SS Pz Div two poor "penetration" routes into the Rochedath area through heavily forested terrain from the direction of Mollerath and Neuhof. The map also shows the northern route of 1 SS Pz Div as springing from Lanzerath, but Obst Peiper states that this route was taken only after the Losheim--Losheimergraben route proved to be unusable because of resistance and the blown bridge. Can Obst Peiper explain this further? Was the Losheim--Losheimergraben route taken away from 12 SS Pz Div and given to 1 SS Pz Div, thus changing the original plan?

A: The route from Losheim to Honsfeld was that designated for 1 SS Pz Div; however, Buellingen was on the route of 12 SS Pz Div. Due to the conditions of the road west from Honsfeld through Hepscheid to Moderscheid, Obst Peiper chose the better route and proceeded through Buellingen to Richelsbusch to Moderscheid. At the time, 1 SS Pz Regt was considerably in advance of the elements of 12 SS Pz Div. Therefore the road would not be congested by two columns, one from each division. In addition, Peiper knew that large stores of gasoline were in the town of Buellingen. In the town they captured

some thirty thousand gallons (liters?) (Ed: In ETHINT 10, Obst Peiper speaks of capturing 200,000 liters of gasoline in Buellingen, or about 52,500 gal) of gasoline in cans. Some artillery fire and direct fire was received from the high ground and woods about two km northwest of the town. After refueling, the column continued to the southwest and closed upon its originally designated axis of advance. At the time of the initial assault, the tanks had only enough gas for approximately 50 miles of operation--approximately one-half of the basic load, without any reserve.

2. Q: Did elements of 12 SS Pz Div use the Lanzerath route to reach Buellingen after 1 SS Pz Div had moved on to the west?

A: The elements of 12 SS Pz Div were stopped by an American counterattack north of Buellingen, where they were halted and unable to advance. The 12 SS Pz Div was later withdrawn from the vicinity and sent to follow the axis of the penetration of 1 SS Pz Regt. To Peiper's knowledge, 12 SS Pz Div did not pass through Buellingen. It circled, instead, and came into the axis of advance of 1 SS Pz Regt at Honsfeld (Note by 1st Lt George M. Tuttle: 12 SS Pz Div did not enter Buellingen from the direction of Lanzerath but moved up from Lanzerath to Honsfeld to Buellingen.).

3. Q: Did 1 SS Pz Regt make any attempt to move up into Putzenbach from Buellingen? If no attempt was made in force, were reconnaissance elements sent from Buellingen in the direction of Putzenbach? In the direction of Wirtzfeld?

A: No reconnaissance was sent toward Putzenbach from

Buellingen, as they (Ed: 1 SS Pz Regt?) were receiving heavy resistance from that direction. Peiper's orders were to penetrate as far as possible and exploit his breakthrough. Therefore, he did not attempt to smash resistance on his flanks, as he expected 12 SS Pz Div to move up and cover his northern flank. Peiper lost one Royal Tiger (Ed: King Tiger) tank west of Buellingen.

4. Q: Was the bulk of 3 FS Div left to hold the front between Waines and Putgenbach? Did it follow immediately in the path of 1 SS Pz Div? (It is understood that small elements of 3 FS Div were with 1 SS Pz Regt.) Where was the rest of 3 FS Div?

A: The 3 FS Div was responsible for holding the north flank behind the advancing armored columns. The 10 FS Regt (Ed: 5, 8, and 9 FS Regts were organic to 3 FS Div. However, this division was engaged in the Ardennes Offensive, and 4 FS Div, to which 10 FS Regt was assigned, was not; therefore the regiment in question must have been one from 3 FS Div.), 3 FS Div, was attached to follow 1 SS Pz Regt. The remainder of the division moved northward after the armor had passed to the west and held a line generally between Putgenbach and Waines. The 3 FS Div had been annihilated in previous campaigns in Normandy and at the time of the Ardennes attack was composed of a large number of airforce personnel who were former ground and flight crews. (Ed: Paratroopers in the Wehrmacht were a part of the Luftwaffe; thus much of the personnel did not have suitable infantry training.) The commanding officer of 10 FS Regt was a Luftwaffe staff obst with little if any ground force experience.

Obst Peiper was an obstlt at the time and was more or less outranked. The net result was that the armored column did not obtain efficient cooperation with the infantry. One battalion of infantry, however, worked in close cooperation with the tanks in the capture of Honsfeld, and elements amounting to about a reinforced company were still riding the tanks when Peiper's forces reached Stavelot. The remainder of 3 FS Div moved up to hold the line on the north flank, as previously stated.

5. Q: Was any attempt made to return to the Losheim--Losheimergraben road after moving north out of Lanzerath on the night of 16/17 Dec 44? If it had been possible to cross the railroad and move up into Losheimergraben, the possibility of withdrawal for 99 Inf Div (US) elements would have been seriously interfered with, if not completely eliminated. (It is understood that this was not the mission of 1 SS Pz Div.) Was this known at the time? Did the possibility, if known, enter into Obst Peiper's plans?

A: Peiper was aware of the fact that he could have cut off a battalion, approximately 1,000 men, of 99 Inf Div (US), in the woods east of Lanzerath. However, he did not do so because it was of prime importance to exploit his breakthrough and drive on for gasoline. Therefore, Peiper did not deviate from his axis of advance.

6. Q: In the move to the west, did any elements of 1 SS Pz Div, reconnaissance or otherwise, enter Fayonville or Simas? What information on his northern flank did Obst Peiper have at the time?



A: Reconnaissance was not sent into Faymonville or Waines because no resistance was received from the northern flank, and Peiper, who was out of contact with 12 SS Pz Div, believed that his right flank would be covered by 12 SS Pz Div. In addition, insufficient gasoline prohibited any needless reconnaissance.

7. Q: Can Obst Peiper remember what elements were supposed to have stopped the regiment of 3 FS Div three times in its attempt to attack from Lanzerath toward Honsfeld on 16 Dec 44? (Note: Only elements of 3d Bn, 394 Inf Regt (US), were north of Lanzerath, and being in a supposedly safe reserve position, they could not have been occupying well organized positions; Honsfeld was being used as a rest center by 99 Inf Div (US).) Who was there to stop them (3 FS Regt)?

A: Obst Peiper said the FS Regiment supporting his unit was repulsed three times by elements of 99 Inf Div (US), consisting of what he thought was a battalion. The unsuccessful attack was due in his opinion to the lack of experience and infantry training of the commanding officer of the Regiment and a great many of his men, as mentioned in answer to one of the previous questions. Obst Peiper's tanks met no resistance when they pushed through 10 FS Regt in the attack.

8. Q: Just what method was used to move the German armored columns forward from Lanzerath on the night of 16/17 Dec 44? Were vehicles led into Honsfeld by an enlisted man carrying a flashlight? (Note: the night was exceptionally dark, according to an interview with one of the Honsfeld defenders who also claims that

German tanks entered the town in this manner before any firing took place by other defenders positioned outside of the town on the Lanzerath road.) Under what conditions was the night march from Lanzerath to Monsfeld conducted?

A: Obst Peiper moved out of Lanzerath at approximately 2400 on the night of 16 Dec 44 and went through the woods toward Monsfeld, without encountering any opposition. Approximately one battalion of paratroopers provided flank protection on either side of the road, as the tanks moved through the woods. During the night some interdiction fire fell in the woods; however, none was effective. Some artillery fire came close as the tanks emerged from the woods toward Monsfeld. It was daylight, about 0500 or 0600, when the column reached Monsfeld. The occupants of the town were taken by complete surprise. The march was conducted under normal blackout conditions, with guides leading each tank holding a white handkerchief for identification, and flanking infantry on either side to protect the tanks from ambush. The march was made without incident except for sporadic artillery fire, which was not effective.

9. Q: Obst Peiper speaks of only one route having been used by 1 SS Pz Div, i.e., the one which he took starting from Lanzerath to Stavelot. Do you believe that there is evidence to conclude that this division had planned and did use another route also, i.e., one which had its origin in the vicinity of Kruinikel and whose axis of advance led through Wereth, Heppenbach, Birfeld, Ableve, Diedenbergh, Pomm, Recht, and Trois Fontes. Does Obst Peiper agree that a part of

1 SS Pz Div took this route? If not, can he offer any explanation for the appearance of armor generally along this axis of advance?

A: The route mentioned: Wereth--Heppenbach--Kirfeld--Arbleve--Diedenberg--Born--Recht and Trois Ponts was taken by other elements, which comprised the infantry regiment of 1 SS Pz Div and the assault gun battalion. Other foot elements of the division followed this route to avoid congestion on the main axis of advance. The southern group met considerable resistance, losing eight or nine of their assault guns; however, it knocked out 30 American tanks. This group eventually was to reinforce Obst Peiper but was held up and never made contact with him.

10. Q: Obst Peiper also mentioned that 2 Pz Div was on his southern flank. It is known that this division was in the southern part of First (Ed: US) Army zone, and that it crossed the Our River at Dasburg, due east of Clerf and 40 km south of Malmedy. Who was on Obst Peiper's flank?

A: At Trois Ponts Obst Peiper was out in front with no one on either flank. He was out of communication with his own division and due to technical difficulties with his radios and terrain could not communicate with all elements of his own column, which was some 25 km long.

11. Q: Just what was known of the gas installations immediately south of Spa, and was there any intention to move north from Stoumont to capture these dumps? (Obst Peiper denied that any of his men moved toward these dumps, but small columns went up both the valley

and the ridge road from La Gleize toward these dumps, and one group actually hit the south edge of the dump.)

A: Before the start of the offensive Obst Peiper was given a map marked with known American headquarters and supply installations. He knew of the gas in the one dump near Spa and also of the gasoline at Buellingen. He did not know of the presence of the other dump south of Francorchamps.

12. Q: Why was no reconnaissance sent by Obst Peiper's group into Malmedy? Ordinarily wouldn't flank reconnaissance be sent, even though the town was not in 1 SS Pz Div zone of action?

A: Gas was getting low as Obst Peiper's column approached Stavelot. This reason and the fact that 12 SS Pz Div was expected to move along the right flank, plus the fact that no resistance was being received from the north, made reconnaissance unnecessary. Heavy resistance from the towns of Ligneuville and Stavelot was the focus of Peiper's attention. Later, the tanks were practically out of gas at Stoumont.

13. Q: Give more detail on the column which crossed south of L'Ambleve River and headed for Werbomont, especially about the blowing of the bridge at Habiermont, the size of the force south of the river, and what alternate route was taken to cross the Lienne River.

A: The bridge over the Ambleve River was blown just in front of the leading tank. Reconnaissance was sent both north and south of the position. Small bridges were found; however, it was reported that they were too small for the 72-ton Royal Tiger tanks.

The size of the force used was one reconnaissance company supported by several assault guns. The same force was sent to cross the Lienne River. It found a bridge which was too narrow to accommodate the heavy tanks; however, it crossed with its halftracks and ran into a minefield in the area west of Chevron. This force also met heavy resistance from infantry and was annihilated. Only a few men from the force returned. The exact route taken by the reconnaissance was not known to Peiper, since he received negative information from the leaders of the unit.

14. Q: Why did your columns even try to continue northwest from Stoumont up the valley road toward Aywaille, when it was obviously such a narrow road with steep gorges, which meant that even several tanks could stop you if placed at the right points?

A: The northwest route from Stoumont to Aywaille was chosen simply because it was the shortest route. The shortage of gasoline did not permit the selection of any alternative. Though the terrain was unfavorable for armor in view of all considerations, the shortage of gasoline prohibited any other choice. In addition, Peiper wanted to capture the bridge at Aywaille, which was one of the prime objectives in his original mission.