



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

12 July 1949

Note to: ETHINT 12

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

This was one of the series of oral interviews conducted by Lt. Robert E Merriam in order to obtain additional material on the Ardennes Offensive. Inasmuch as Lt. Merriam used an interpreter during the oral interview, and took copious notes in English as he went along, there is no copy of the oral interview in German. As with his other oral interviews, Lt. Merriam wrote up his notes in a final report shortly after the completion of his oral interview.

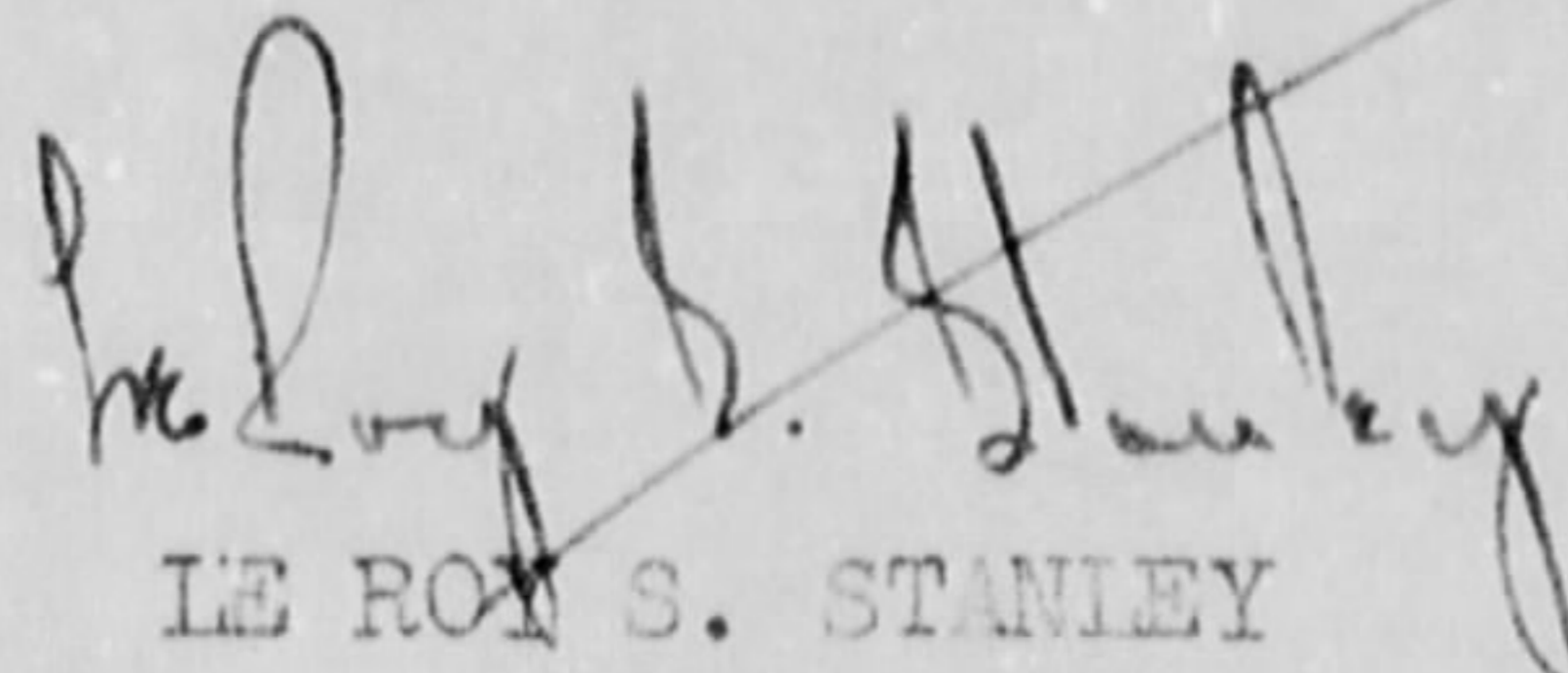
(The above information is derived from second-hand information received from Merriam, as well as general knowledge of the way in which Lt. Merriam operated.)

ETHINT 12 - ( )

Title : Ardennes Offensive  
Source : Obstlt Skorzeny, Otto  
Position : Commanding Officer, Operation "Greif"  
Date : 12 Aug 45  
Place : USFET Interrogation Center, Oberursel, Germany  
Interrogator : 1st Lt Robert E. Merriam  
Interpreter : Capt Samuel J. McClune

Foreword

This interview is one of a series conducted by the Historical Section, ETOUSA, and its successors. Unfortunately, the only record available for editing is a typed manuscript in English which is prefaced by the interrogator's statement that Obstlt Skorzeny's account is presented in a paraphrased narrative form. Therefore, as a copy of the interview in German is not available for checking, 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 interrogator and editor, which are identified as such, are as they appear in the available record.



LE ROY S. STANLEY  
Capt                      Inf  
Historical Editor

JAN 16 1948

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### I. Planning The Attack

1. About the end of Oct 44, Hitler called me to his headquarters in East Prussia and told me of plans for a winter offensive. Hitler said this would be the decisive offensive for us and that the first objective would be to reach the Meuse River between Liege and Namur. If this succeeded, we were to continue on to Antwerp to cut off the northern front. He told me about the tremendous quantity of material which had been accumulated, and I recall that he stated we would have 6,000 artillery pieces in the Ardennes, and, in addition, the Luftwaffe would have about 2,000 planes including many of the new jet planes (ME 262). He then told me that I would lead a panzer brigade which would be trained to reach the Meuse River bridges and capture them intact. I told him that if I were to do this in the short time I was allotted, I would have to give up all my other work. Hitler agreed to this and told me the Army would send some of its best officers for my unit. He then sent me to see Jodl, who gave me more details about the plan and the role of the Brigade. I then spoke to Genfldm Keitel and a colonel, and they completed the details of my role.

2. About the end of Nov 44 or first of Dec 44, I was called again to Hitler's headquarters, this time in Berlin, to discuss further plans for the attack. Hitler was not present at this conference. We were told that initially we would have three days' supply of rations and munitions and that there was a sufficient supply of trucks burning wood gasoline to bring up additional supplies. Although we were told

not to worry, it readily became apparent to me that too many promises were being made. I was told privately that there would be only about 140 planes in the West instead of the 2,000 Hitler had mentioned. The offensive was postponed several times and I knew only on 14 Dec 44 that it finally would begin two days later.

3. Immediately after my first meeting with Hitler, my troops began to arrive and training was started. At this time, I was the only one of our Brigade who knew of the plans for the attack. In the middle of Nov 44, I called my three group commanders together and told them that we were expecting an American offensive somewhere in the Aachen sector and that our plan was to let the Americans penetrate our lines and then cut them off. I told them that it was at this time that our Brigade was to create considerable disturbance in the rear lines, and to help in the annihilation of these forces. Around the first of Dec 44, all of the officers of the Brigade were given this outline of our plans. It was not until 10 Dec 44 that even the group commanders were aware of the actual plans for the attack.

## II. Organization Of Units

4. My organization was composed of two main groups, the Commando Unit and 150 Pz Brig. The Commando Unit was composed of English-speaking men who had been withdrawn from various units in the armed forces. I received about 600 men initially and from these I picked 150 of the best. All were equipped with American jeeps and

uniforms. The highest American rank we used was that of colonel. We did not disguise anyone as an American general officer. The Commando Unit was divided as follows:

(a) Demolition Groups. These were composed of from five to six men in each group whose job was to blow bridges and munition and gasoline dumps;

(b) Reconnaissance Groups. These units, with from three to four men, were to reconnoiter in depth east and west of the Meuse River to spot enemy tank, artillery, and other unit movements. Some of these groups were equipped with radios with which they were to send back information of these movements. They were also instructed to give false commands to units they met, to reverse road signs, to remove minefield signs, and to put white strips in streets with no mines so that the enemy force would believe the roads blocked;

(c) "Lead" Commandos. These groups, of from three to four men, primarily were to disrupt the enemy command by cutting telephone wires, wrecking radio stations, and giving false commands. They were to work closely with our attacking divisions.

5. The 150 Pz Brig was composed of two tank and one infantry combat groups, each with its own small combat staff. The total composition of 150 Pz Brig was as follows:

(a) My staff and a signal company;

(b) Three small combat staffs;

(c) Two signal companies from the army (200 men);

(d) Two battalions of Kampfgruppe 200, which was a



parachute unit from the German Air Force (800 men);

(e) One company of Jagd Verband Mitte Bn (Ed: a special unit organized initially to hunt and fight partisans in occupied countries), which was a special infantry battalion (175 men);

(f) Two companies of 600 FS Bn which was a special infantry battalion (380 men);

(g) Two tank companies from the Army (240 men);

(h) Two panzer grenadier companies (350 men);

(i) Two companies of heavy mortars from the Army (200 men);

(j) Two antitank companies from the Army (200 men);

(k) One pionier (engineer) company (100 men);

(l) Three vehicle repair companies (75 men).

All of these companies were somewhat weaker than an ordinary, equivalent army unit. The two tank companies each had 12 tanks, half of which were either Sherman or Mark Twain (Ed: II?) tanks and the other half Panther (Mk V) tanks. In the panzer grenadier companies, two or three of the half-tracks were American and the other ten to twelve were German.

6. The following is a sample organization of one of the tank combat groups:

(a) A small staff;

(b) A platoon of signalmen;

(c) One company of tanks;

(d) Three companies of infantry (120-150 men each)

made up of two companies of Kfgr 200 and one company of Jagd Verband Mitte or 600 FS Bn;

- (e) Two platoons of heavy (120mm) mortars;
- (f) Two antitank platoons;
- (g) Two platoons of panzer grenadiers;
- (h) One platoon of engineers;
- (i) One vehicle repair group.

Both tank groups were based on this organization, as was the infantry group except that the latter had no tanks.

7. The mission of the Brigade was to seize undamaged at least two Meuse River bridges from among the following possibilities: Amay, Huy, or Andenne. This action was to be initiated when the attack of the panzer units of the panzer divisions reached the Hohe Venn, roughly on a line running northeast and southwest from Spa. At that time, my troops were to move forward at night and reach our objective six hours later. It was planned originally that the attack would reach the Hohe Venn on the first day and that we would move out that night. The plan could be carried out only when the area of the Hohe Venn had been reached, because it was necessary to move forward with complete surprise and without having to fight. The three groups were then to move on parallel routes towards these three bridges. Radio communication was to be used between groups in order that they might shift if resistance were encountered.

III. Employment Of The Commandos

8. We actually sent out four groups of Reconnaissance Commandos and two groups of Demolition Commandos during the first several days of the attack. In addition, one group of "Lead" Commandos went with each of the following divisions: 1 SS Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div, and a Volks Gren Div (I believe it was 12 Volks Gren Div). Also, one unit went with each of the groups of 150 Pz Brig. Of the 44 men sent through your lines, all but eight returned.

9. In the first two or three days, when your positions were extremely disorganized, we were able to get some information from these Commando Groups. The following are some of the facts which these units brought back to me:

(a) A jeep drove through Malmedy and discovered that the town was very lightly held.

(b) Enemy movements were spotted south of Liege, but not on a large scale.

(c) We discovered that all airports east of the Meuse River had been evacuated. This was very important to us because we then knew that the enemy air force would not be employed immediately. (Interrogator's Note: Skorzeny did not enlarge upon this point, but it is believed that he was thinking of the time which would be required to establish fighter-bombers on new fields west of the Meuse. Actually, there were very few, if any, airports in the Ardennes area east of the Meuse River.)

(d) We located munition depots at Liege and Huy. One

group reported that they had destroyed a small munitions dump.

(e) We located one gasoline dump, which I think was in the neighborhood of Vaux Chauvenne. This location was reported to I SS Pz Corps.

(f) One group claimed to have misdirected an entire American regiment, but of course we cannot be sure that this is so. However, we did monitor some American broadcasts which mentioned the fact that a regiment had been sought for two or three days. (Interviewer's Note: A regiment of 84 Inf Div (US) was directed down the wrong road by an MP as the unit moved into the Ardennes sector. It is very possible that this was the unit referred to because no trace could be found of an American MP who had been at this particular intersection.)

10. We were not able to receive radio reports from the Reconnaissance Commandos because of bad weather, fog, and wind, and the high hills between these units and my headquarters in Schmidtheim. However, these jeep units did succeed in getting through the enemy lines by the following means:

(a) The jeeps would follow at the rear of an attacking panzer column and, when the column got into a fire fight, the jeeps would move off the main road and travel around the battle area on side roads until they were behind the withdrawing American troops. This was very easy in the first several days of the confused fighting.

(b) Some of the jeeps moved through small trails in wooded areas until they were behind the enemy lines.

(c) Some of the units moved through at night.

Some of the units which came back through the lines were able to come back with their jeeps, while others came back on foot. During the first several days, the jeep units had no difficulty getting back with their vehicles.

11. The last men of the Commando Units were sent through the lines on 19 Dec 44. After this, the element of surprise had been lost and already it was apparent that the attack of Sixth Pz Army was not going to reach its objective. After 19 Dec 44, these Commando Units made only normal trips through the lines to locate artillery and tank positions. These trips were made as ordinary reconnaissance, and the men once again wore German uniforms.

#### IV. Employment Of 150 Pz Brig

12. The 150 Pz Brig moved into the Ardennes area on 14 Dec 44 in the neighborhood of Muenstereifel. We had moved into the area mostly at night and the tanks were always kept deep in the woods during the day. Our soldiers were not allowed to go into towns in the area, nor did we send any men to the front lines prior to the attack. I considered it much more important to conceal our movements than to risk betraying the offensive by conducting reconnaissance. On the afternoon of 16 Dec 44, the Brigade moved out, and from there the combat groups moved in behind the attacking divisions. The units were placed at the rear of the leading elements of the divisions to which they were as-

signed, and the plan was that they were to move around the divisions on side roads once the objective, Hohe Venn, was reached.

13. The three combat groups of 150 Pz Brig were split between 1 and 12 SS Pz Divs and a Volks Gren Div with I SS Pz Corps. The only chance that these units had to complete their mission successfully was during the first two days, as it was necessary that they go through to the Meuse River without fighting. They were not strong combat forces and were to be used mainly to hold the bridges for a short time once they had been seized.

14. When Sixth Army did not reach the projected starting point for their maneuver in the first two days, I realized that the whole plan would not succeed and that we would never be able to get our small combat groups through to the Meuse bridges. Therefore, I went to the Commander, Sixth Pz Army, and recommended to him that we pull my three combat groups together and use them as a normal army unit. He accepted my recommendation, and the three combat groups were brought together and assembled south of Malmedy. At that time, I took personal command of the Brigade because the Brigade Commander, Hardick, had been killed on the first day. At that time we were working directly under I SS Pz Corps, and, although this was the 1 SS Pz Div sector, the division commander could not give me any commands. I was given the mission by Corps to attack Malmedy on 21 Dec 44. Early on that day, I attacked with two combat groups, one moving on the town from the east and the other from the south. The third group was held in reserve. The attack from the east was stopped immediately and the attack from the south was

halted about 1500 hours.

15. During the time between our initial reconnaissance in Malmedy and this attack, strong enemy forces had moved into the town and had taken up defensive positions. I had no artillery with my Brigade, and when I realized the strength of the enemy, I ordered a withdrawal to defensive positions south of Malmedy. We remained in these positions until 29 Dec 44 when we withdrew because of continuous losses to enemy artillery fire. Our lack of artillery was a great handicap.

16. Losses to the Brigade amounted to 15% of the strength. Of a strength of 3,000, about 450 men were either killed, wounded, or missing. Most of these losses were caused by artillery fire and some airplane attacks. We lost a number of the men around Holzheim on the first and second days. These losses also were due to enemy artillery fire. After we withdrew from the line south of Malmedy, we went to Schlierbach and on 2 Jan 44 we withdrew completely to the area south of Kohnwahu (Ed: Kohlwald?), and went by train from there to Grafenwohr. There we disbanded and the men returned to their original units.

#### V. Capture Of Gen Eisenhower Not Planned

17. We did not plan to capture high American officials. This was never part of the scheme. Around the beginning of Nov 44, when the unit was organized, the soldiers began to spread rumors about the employment of this special unit. Naturally we censored all the mail,

and at first tried to suppress these rumors. By the middle of Nov 44, however, I began to realize that it would be impossible to stop the rumors, many of which were spread by officers in the units. I had a meeting with Folkersam, who was my Chief of Staff, and Hardick and we decided to let the rumors go, but direct them so that they didn't come too close to the truth. Since the three of us were the only ones who knew of the plans for our employment, this was not a difficult task. I recall specifically that some of the men were claiming that our unit, single-handedly, was to capture Antwerp, while others said we were to drive to Dunkirk and free the German troops encircled in that town. I am quite certain that the rumor about capturing Gen Eisenhower was started in this way. Naturally we finally began to encourage these rumors on the theory that it would conceal the true purpose of the Brigade.