30TH INF. DIV.
ARDENNES
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Extensive coverage of winter defensive against powerful attacks. Integrated narrative based on numerous interview, covering the action fully, from Division to companies. Much detail on platoon, squad and individual combat, and TD fighting against Panzers. Copies of official documents, serial photos and overlays.

Narratives by Historical Officer
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The defeat of the 1st SS Panzer Division, Adolf Hitler 53 pages
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THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE OF 16 DECEMBER:

THE DEFEAT OF THE 1ST SS PANZER DIVISION, ADOLF HITLER

BY: CAPTAIN FRANKLIN FERRISS
30TH INF. DIV. ---- GERMAN BREAKTHROUGH

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PREFACE

The authority for nearly all the statements in the following narrative consists of statements made to Captain Franklin Ferriss by men who participated in the defeat of the 1st SS Panzer Division. These statements are gathered in a series of interviews held by Captain Ferriss from 2 to 8 January 1945. In order to simplify the documentation of the narrative, these interviews are listed below, with a code letter for each interview. Each statement in the narrative which is based upon one or more of these interviews is indicated by the appropriate code letter following the statement. If no code letter or other footnote follows a statement, continue reading until a code letter does appear. This code letter gives the authority for all statements between it and the last preceding code letter or footnote. The code letter “Z” refers to the author, Captain Franklin Ferriss (better a poor authority than none.)

On 24 January 1945 this narrative, substantially in its present form, was shown to Brigadier General Harrison, Assistant Division Commander of 30th Division. With a few corrections which have been incorporated, he approved the text.

A. Interview with Capt. Richard J. Wood, S-3 of the 2d Battalion, 117th Infantry, held at the Battalion CP (671020) on 2 January 1945.

B. Interview with Lt. Col. Samuel McDowell, CO of the 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry, and Lt. Andrew Allen Executive Officer of Company K, 117th Infantry, held at the 3d Battalion CP in Roanne on 2 January.

C. Interview held at the CP in Stavelot of the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry, on 3 January. Present were Lt. Col. Robert Frankland, CO; Capt. Clifford Frieman, S-1; Lt. David W. Morgan, S-2; Capt. David K. Easlick, S-3; Capt. John Kent, CO of Company A; Capt. Morris Stoeffer, CO Company C; Capt. Stanley W. Cooper, CO of Company D.

D. Interview with Capt. Charles G. Smither, S-3 of the 119th Infantry, held at the Regimental CP in Francorchamps on 3 January.

E. Interview with Major Nathaniel J. Laney, Jr., Executive Officer of the 2d Battalion, 119th Infantry, and Lt. Kenneth H. Aamodt, Platoon leader of Company G, 119th Infantry, held at the 2d Battalion CP in Bernister (7806) on 4 January.

G. Interview with Lt. Edward C. Arn, CO of Company F, 119th Infantry, held at the Company CP in Burnenville, (767046) on 4 January.


I. Interview with Lt. Col. James W. Cantey, CO of 2d Battalion, 120th Infantry, held at the Battalion CP in Chodes (805053) on 6 January.

J. Interview held at the CP in Malmedy of the 3d Battalion, 120th Infantry, with the following members of Company K: Lt. Arnold L. Snyder, mortar observer with the 3d platoon; PFC. Raymond W. Gould, scout of the 3d platoon, PFC. Francis S. Currey, automatic rifleman with the 3d platoon; S/Sgt. Raymond F. Snow, asst. squad leader, 3d platoon; T/Sgt. Fred Taff, platoon sergeant of the 3d platoon.

K. Interview with Lt. Col. Hansen, CO of the 99th Infantry Battalion, and Capt. Howard Winholtz, CO of Company D, 99th Infantry Battalion, held at the Battalion CP in Masta (745025) on 7 January.

L. Interview held at the CP in Burnenville, of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion on 7 January with the following members of the staff: Major Paul J. Solis, Executive Officer; Major Roy E. Battson, S-3; Lt. John V. Pehovic, S-1.

M. Interview with Lt. Jack Doherty, leader of the 1st platoon, Company A 825 TD Bn, held at the CP in Burnenville, of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion on 7 January.

N. Interview with Capt. Dibert, CO of Company A, 825th TD Battalion, held on 7 January at the CP in Burnenville, of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion.

O. Interview with the following members of the staff of the 3d Battalion, 119th Infantry, held at the Battalion CP in Xhoffraix (818079) on 8 January: Lt. Col. Roy G. Fitzgerald, Jr., CO; Capt. Carlton E. Stewart, Executive Officer; Capt. Francis J. Delbene, S-3.
P. Interview held with the following members of Company B, 743d Tank Battalion, at the Company CP in Malmedy on 8 January: Lt. Jean M. Ubbes, CO; Lt. Jean Hansen, leader of the 3d platoon.

Q. Interview held with Lt. Col. William D. Duncan, CO of 743d Tank Battalion, at the Battalion CP in Francorchamps on 9 January.

R. Interview held on 9 January at the CP near Spa of the 823d TD Battalion. Present were the following members of the Battalion: Major Ashby Lohse, Executive Officer; Capt. Bruce A. Crissinger, CO of Company A; Lt. Thomas Springfield, leader of the 1st platoon of Company A; Lt. Ellis W. McInnis, leader of the 1st platoon of Company C.

S. Interview with Col. Walter Johnson, CO of 117th Infantry, held on 1 January at the Regimental CP in Francorchamps.

T. Interview with Brig. Gen. William E. Harrison, Jr., at 30th Division CP in Malmedy on 24 January 1945.


V. Interview with Lt. Col. Lowell S. Love, Armored Section, First U.S. Army, held at Spa on 23 January 1945.

W. Interview with Lt. Col. William F. Curran, CO of 110th A.A.A. Gun Battalion, held at the Battalion CP in Spa on 24 January 1945.

X. Interview with Lt. Walter R. Butts, Jr., Headquarters Company, 9th Armored Group, held by Sgt. Linnell Jones on 12 January 1945.

Y. –

Z. Refers to author, Capt. Franklin Ferriss.
I.  INTRODUCTION

In the early morning of 16 December 1944, Germany launched its biggest offensive of the Western European campaign. A total of nine divisions struck at various points along the VIII Corps, and the southern sector of the V Corps front. The enemy had chosen sectors where the front line was thinly held. There were no strategic objectives either west or east of this sector of the Allied line. General Bradley had taken the “calculated risk” of concentrating the bulk of the strength of the 12th U.S. Army Group to the north and south of this sector. Attack in the sector was dangerous because of the possibility that the enemy might succeed in breaking through at one or more of the several points initially attacked, then turn northwest to seize Liege and Maastricht and thus envelop most of the First and Ninth U.S. Armies

By 2400 16 December, the enemy had advanced as much as three miles in several places along the V and VIII Corps fronts. One of these penetrations was aimed at Malmedy. This town was situated astride the shortest route to Liege. West of Malmedy, all routes to Liege necessitated a crossing of the Ambleve River. In view of the road network, the most satisfactory crossings were at Stavelot, Trois Ponts and Aywaille. (See Map #1)

All of the terrain between Malmedy and Aywaille is mountainous and characterized by thick pine forests and steep ravines, at the bottom of which streams and all main roads are found. Military progress in this terrain is governed largely by the road network. The surrounding hills are valuable objectives only to the extent that they command a clear view of the important highways. (Z)
II. AMERICAN FORCES WIN THE RACE TO MALMEDY

At 1115 17 December, the 30th Infantry Division, which was then holding a sector of the Ninth U.S. Army front between Julich and Altdorf, Germany, was ordered to move as rapidly as possible to the vicinity of Eupen, Belgium, to be employed in the V Corps sector. (1) That afternoon, General Bradley ordered the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion, (Separate), and the 99th Infantry Battalion, (Separate), to proceed at once to Malmedy. (L) (2) Because of the congested roads caused by the great quantity of personnel and materiel being evacuated from the threatened areas, the progress of both of these battalions toward Malmedy was slow. Company B, 99th Infantry Battalion, took a separate route and arrived at the destination at approximately 2400 on the 17th. By that time, the town had been evacuated by all military personnel, with the exception of approximately 60 men of the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion, under the command of Lt. Col. David Pergrin. The engineers had established road blocks consisting of mines and were prepared to dynamite bridges and trees, to further block the approaches to the town. Company B, 99th Infantry Battalion, immediately took up positions to the southwest of Malmedy, to block the roads and occupy the high ground commanding the approach to the town from the south. (3)

The 526th Armored Infantry Battalion, with Company A of the 825th TD Battalion attached, reached the western outskirts of Malmedy at about 0200 18 December, when 12th U.S. Army Group ordered it to send one Company of armored infantry and one platoon of TD’s to Stavelot. Company A of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 1st Platoon of Company A, 825th TD Battalion, were given this mission and entered Stavelot between 0200 and 0300 of the 18th.

The rest of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion and the attached TD’s reached Malmedy about 0300. They were ordered to block the approaches to the town from the
southwest. Shortly afterwards, the 99th infantry battalion arrived and immediately deployed to reinforce the road blocks established by the 291st Engineers. (L)

Meanwhile, the 30th Infantry Division had been motorized and was moving from assembly areas north of Aachen, Germany, to the vicinity of Eupen in Belgium. (A) Its route was lighted by flares dropped by the German Luftwaffe all of the way. Some bombs were dropped and there were a number of close calls, but there were no casualties either to personnel or vehicles due to enemy action. Anti-Aircraft fire was almost constant. (A) (D). The 119th Infantry was the leading Regiment in the column and was moving into defensive positions northeast of Eupen before 2400 17 December. Then word was received from First U.S. Army, to send one Regiment to Malmedy. Brig. Gen. William K. Harrison, Assistant Division Commander, decided to send the 117th Regiment, which was following the 119th Regiment, as it was still mounted and on wheels. The 120th Regiment followed the 117th Regiment and was held temporarily north of Eupen. (T)

On the road from Eupen to Malmedy, the 117th column encountered a heavy flow of traffic moving in the opposite direction. All vehicles were using “Cat-eyes” only, and as a result, the column’s progress was slow. Just as it was beginning to get light, the convoy was ordered to halt in the vicinity of Beverce, a small town approximately one mile north of Malmedy. By this time, the Regimental Commander, Col. Walter M. Johnson, was in Malmedy conferring with officers of the 12th U.S. Army Group. He was also in communication with the V Corps commander and the 30th Division commander, Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs. The enemy situation was very fluid and there was considerable disagreement as to where the 117th Infantry should be committed. The final decision was that one Battalion would be left at Malmedy to further strengthen the road blocks protecting that town. Another Battalion would proceed to Stavelot to defend that town, or to evict the enemy if he had already captured it. and the third Battalion would protect the left flank of the Battalion going into Stavelot, blocking the roads running northeast out of Stavelot.
Col. Johnson gave the mission of reinforcing the defenses of Malmedy to his 3rd Battalion, sent his 1st Battalion to Stavelot and gave his 2nd Battalion the mission of protecting the 1st Battalion’s left flank.

To reach their assigned objectives, all three infantry battalions, and also the supporting artillery battalions, had to proceed through Malmedy. Movement was extremely slow, due to heavy outgoing traffic and the completely inadequate force of Military Police in the town. The 2nd Battalion took nearly two hours to pass through the town of Malmedy. (A)

Due to the order of march of the regimental column, the 118th FA Battalion, in direct support of the 117th Infantry, actually moved out ahead of any of the three infantry battalions. The high ground one kilometer north of Malmedy, in the vicinity of Sauveniere, was chosen for the battery sites of the 118th FA Battalion. The battalion proceeded to this vicinity without infantry protection and had to fight off numerous snipers and two hostile tanks, before it could emplace its guns.

Following the 118th FA Battalion, the 1st Battalion cleared Malmedy, and proceeded by way of Francorchamps, in the direction of Stavelot. (S) The 3rd battalion was given the responsibility for blocking the main highway running into Malmedy from the southeast. By 1015 that morning, it was in position on each side of this road, approximately one mile out of town. (B) A small amount of sniper fire had to be brought under control that day in Malmedy and vicinity, but no organized attack developed. (L)

III  STAVELOT

Stavelot was a key enemy objective for three reasons. First, there was an excellent bridge over the Ambleve River there. Secondly, two road networks to Liege converged in Stavelot. Finally, one of these roads passed through Spa, which was only 9 ½ miles away, and at that time was the headquarters of the First U.S. Army. (See Map #1)
When the company of armored infantry and the platoon of TD’s that were diverted to Stavelot, when on their way to Malmedy, arrived in Stavelot, their commander, Maj. Paul J. Solis, Executive Officer of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion, contacted the First Army engineers, which were the only combat troops then in the vicinity. He was advised that no hostile forces had been seen in the vicinity, but that several engineers covering hasty minefields placed on the roads leading into Stavelot, south of the Ambleve River had been killed. (See Map #2)

The immediate need apparently, was to place infantry in positions to cover these hasty roadblocks. Two platoons were given this mission and crossed the bridge over the Ambleve River with two towed TD guns accompanying them. At about 0500, as the two platoons were on their way to man the roadblocks, they were engaged by hostile infantry and armor. The accompanying TD’s had not had the opportunity to get into position, and hence were unable to get off a single round. The infantry was forced to withdraw. Their retreat across the bridge was interdicted by heavy enemy fire, causing about one-third of the force to become casualties. Company A’s anti-tank platoon, consisting of three 57mm anti-tank guns, took up positions covering the bridge. The enemy’s efforts to put infantry across the bridge were stopped by fire from this platoon and the three rifle platoons firing from the houses along the north bank of the river. (L) A hostile armored attack commenced at daybreak. A column of four tanks, which appeared to be Tiger Royals, approached the bridge from the southeast. The two TD’s remaining out of the four originally sent to Stavelot were M-10’s, under the command of Sgt. Martin Hauser and Louis Celentano. They had placed their guns on elevated ground, about 300 yards north of the Ambleve River. From these positions the two guns each knocked out one of the four tanks moving up to the bridge, employing only one round per gun at a range of approximately 800 yards. The enemy continued his efforts to advance. A third and fourth tank were knocked out by the two TD guns. (M) By now the enemy column had reached the bridge. As the lead tank started coming across, one of the 57mm anti-tank guns stopped it. Another took its place at the head of the column and the column resumed its advance, laying down a steady barrage of 88mm fire.
The anti-tank platoon leader was killed, one of the anti-tank guns was forced to cease firing and another was pulled back. The third gun, manned by Sgt. Elvan Smith and Pfc. Taylor, continued to fire until the lead tank came to within 40 yards of the gun’s position. By this time, all of the ammunition at the gun position was expended and the crew was forced to abandon the gun. The bridge was not mined. There were some mines dropped on the surface of the bridge, and those that were struck by the hostile armor, detonated without any apparent effect.

Once the enemy forced a crossing of the bridge, he was able to build up a force of infantry and tanks on the north bank of the Ambleve River, greatly superior to the defending forces. The fight continued for a half-hour to an hour in Stavelot, but then Maj. Solis gave the order to withdraw, which the infantry lost no time in doing. (L) The two M-10’s commanded by Sgt. Hauser and Sgt. Celentano had only one avenue of escape, which appeared to be covered by the muzzle of a Tiger Royal. It was agreed that Sgt. Hauser’s gun would cover the withdrawal of the rest of the TD platoon. As these other vehicles pulled out, the Tiger Royal came into view, and Sgt. Hauser’s gunner, Cpl. Paul Lenzo, fired three rounds in quick succession at it. One of these rounds jammed the recoil mechanism of the enemy tank, preventing it from firing. The crew later backed it into a house as they tried to turn it around. The tank became pinned down and the crew was forced to abandon it. All of the TD platoon, except the two guns captured south of the river, escaped. (M)

As the infantry retreated north along the road to Spa, Maj. Solis was approached by a Belgian officer, who was in charge of an enormous gas dump that extended for at least one-fourth of a mile along the road. (See Map #1) Maj. Solis had been given no authority regarding the gasoline, but realizing that unless immediate action were taken, it would fall into the hands of the enemy. He gave the order to set it on fire, and he even had some of his own men assist the Belgians in throwing the gas cans on to the road and setting them on fire. Maj. Solis then placed all available infantrymen and the remaining 57mm anti-tank gun in a defensive position, north of the burning gasoline. His orders were, to hold at this point at all costs.
A column of enemy armor, estimated by one observer, to consist of at least 15 vehicles, advanced up the road from Stavelot as far as the burning gasoline. To the enormous relief of Maj. Solis and his men, the enemy’s effort to get around the improvised roadblock by deploying off the road, were unsuccessful due to the steepness of the terrain at that point. The column withdrew in the direction of Stavelot, and very shortly, the 1st Battalion of the 117th Infantry arrived and relieved Maj. Solis’s force. (L)

The commander of the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry, was Lt. Col. Robert Frankland. His battalion was up to full strength, both in personnel and equipment. The officers at Battalion Headquarters and the four company commanders were veterans of the Battalion’s successful attack on the Siegfried Line on 2 October ’44. Though replacements since that operation averaged around one-third of the battalion’s strength, no heavy losses had been suffered since 7 October, and hence there had been sufficient time to train the new men and organize the battalion into an efficient military team. Col. Johnson, C.O. Of the 117th Infantry Regiment, had provided Lt. Col. Frankland with two reconnaissance platoons, a platoon of tank destroyers, three 75mm SP guns and the promise of at least one platoon of M-4 tanks. The infantry detrucked north of the burning gasoline dump, and with one company on each side of the road, moved past the improvised roadblock. All vehicles had to be left temporarily at this point. As mentioned above, the 118th FA Battalion, in direct support of the 117th Infantry, was delayed in setting up its batteries due to hostile tank and infantry attacks at the battery sites. Hence, as the 1st Battalion advanced on Stavelot, it had no artillery support. In the light of what Maj. Solis told Lt. Col. Frankland of the strength of the enemy force that had crossed the Stavelot bridge, the latter anticipated an extremely hard fight.

The advancing infantry guided on the Stavelot-Spa road as it moved down the hill towards its objective. (See Map #2) To the surprise of all, no resistance was encountered until the troops were just north of the town. There small arms fire opened on them, supported by direct fire from self propelled guns and tanks within the town. The enemy’s firepower, however, was not impressive. The infantry pushed aggressively ahead, reached the edge of town and had captured approximately half of it by nightfall. (C)
During the latter part of this engagement, Lt. Col. Frankland’s men had the support of three M-10 TD’s commanded by Lt. Ellis W. McInnis, Company C, of the 823rd TD Battalion. They were able to move past the burning gasoline, when infantrymen removed some of the cans of gasoline that were burning on the road itself. From positions on the high ground immediately north of the town, these guns gave very valuable direct-fire support that evening, knocking out two Mark V’s and three halftracks on the other side of the Ambleve River. (R)

After darkness, three M-4 tanks commanded by Lt. Jean Hansen of Co. B, 743rd Tank battalion, arrived in Stavelot. (P) Also, the 118th FA Battalion got set up and registered in. Contact was established with the 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry, which early in the day had established road blocks covering all roads leading northeast out of Stavelot. (C)& (A) Belgian civilians reported that 15 German tanks which had tried to get past the burning gasoline had returned to Stavelot and moved out of town in the direction of Trois Ponts and la Gleize. All of these factors were reassuring. However, from a well-placed OP on high ground immediately north of town, Lt. Col. Frankland had observed numerous tanks and other vehicles moving about on the south side of the Ambleve River. The bridge was still in enemy hands and Lt. Col. Frankland’s force was wide open to envelopment from the west and/or northwest. The enemy had used no artillery in his efforts to repel the American attack, but this was presumed to be only temporary. Knowledge of the enemy’s positions in Stavelot itself was very meager. There were plenty of reasons to be on the alert, and the 1st Battalion was.

Sometime before midnight a German tank rolled up to the square in the middle of the town that constituted a ‘no man’s land’. Bazookas and AT grenades persuaded the tank crew to put it in reverse. It backed into a building and the building collapsed on the tank. The crew was forced to abandon it. A second tank was knocked out by bazooka and AT grenade fire about a block the other side of the square. There were two more tanks behind it, but on account of the narrowness of the street, they could not move or even fire past the knocked out
tank. They might have approached the American line by another route, but they did not, presumably for lack of infantry protection. (C) Sometime later, an enemy halftrack drove up into the square. Combined fire from the supporting tanks and TD’s demolished the vehicle and probably accounted for most of its occupants. (P) & (R) The enemy made no further effort that night to breach Lt. Col. Frankland’s lines.

The next morning, 17 December, Companies A and B, operating in the west and east halves of Stavelot respectively, pushed forward rapidly during the morning, and by 1200, all of Stavelot north of the Ambleve River was cleared, (C) with the exception of a fringe of houses on the west edge of town, where a Mark VI tank fought off all efforts to knock it out or drive it out of town. (P) The enemy had not sent any sizeable reinforcements into Stavelot during the night – presumably, because the spearhead column had turned west on its primary mission, while the enemy’s build up had not yet reached Stavelot. (C)

The Germans had made the mistake of leaving too light a holding force to protect their crossing at Stavelot. Sometime in the morning of 18 December, the 1111th Engineer Combat Group blew the bridge at Trois Ponts and the next bridge over the Ambleve River at Stavelot. This made the recapture of Stavelot vital to the 1st SS Panzer Division, both in order to supply the forces that were north of the Ambleve River in the vicinity of Stoumont, as well as to insure an avenue of escape for these forces. Consequently, during the afternoon of 19 December, the enemy launched two counterattacks to recapture Stavelot and on 20 December, they made three further assaults. None of these efforts achieved success.

From his excellent O.P. on the high ground north of town, Lt. Col. Frankland spotted the first counterattack shortly after 1200 on 19 December. Two armored columns were moving towards Stavelot along the two roads that approach the town from the southeast and the southwest. These two roads converge south of the river into one road that crosses the bridge. The column
which approached from the southeast, was led by American jeeps and soldiers dressed in American uniforms. This gave Lt. Col. Frankland some pause, as he understood that the 526th Armored Infantry battalion had suffered both personnel and vehicular losses south of the river on the previous day. However, he decided to take no chances and immediately called for artillery support.

This had the effect of forcing the hostile infantry to deploy, and tanks to string out. Most of the infantry became pinned down by American artillery and mortar fire. Those that did advance were stopped by small arms fire well short of the river. But the hostile armor continued to roll forward. (C) In particular, the column approaching Stavelot from the southwest, managed to conceal itself behind the row of houses that lined this road, as it approached the bridge.

The last house on the road, short of the bridge, was about 40 yards from the intersection of the road, with the other road that comes in from the southeast. In order to cross the bridge, enemy armor coming from the southwest was forced to expose its flank for this distance of 40 yards before being able to turn and advance frontally onto the bridge. One of Lt. McInnis’ TD’s (Sgt. Clyde Gentry, gun commander and Cpl. Buell Sheridan, gunner), had fortunately moved into an excellent position, with turret defiladed, to cover the bridge and the immediate approaches to it from the south.

Lt. McInnis and Sgt. Gentry had observed the enemy column moving into positions behind the row of houses south of the river. The gun crew waited expectantly. Suddenly a Mark VI tank nosed out from the protection of the houses and attempted to reach the turn, where its heavy frontal armor would protect it from 3-inch TD fire. Cpl. Sheridan caught it however, in his sights, and at a range of 125 yards, knocked its turret completely off with his second round. A few minutes later, a second Mark VI tried its luck. It managed to get to the intersection and started to advance across the bridge in the face of a hail of 3-inch fire. Before it had reached the half-way mark, a round apparently knocked out
both its turret and its gun, for it was thereafter unable to traverse. Then two Mark VI tanks moved out. Ten rounds from Sgt. Gentry’s gun stopped both of them. One had its track hit and got into a ditch in an effort to maneuver into a less vulnerable position. The other retired behind the protection of the last house, where it parked with its muzzle sticking out. It took no further part in the action and was evacuated later under the cover of darkness. The enemy made no further efforts to cross the bridge that day. The only casualty suffered by Sgt. Gentry’s tank, was one 30 caliber machine gun which had been rigged on to the front of the tank. (R)

The enemy launched a second counterattack on the north side of the river, at about 1600. Three tanks and approximately 100 infantrymen advancing astride the road that leads into Stavelot from Trois Ponts, attacked Company A’s positions near the edge of town. The road had not been mined, as Company A was planning an attack to wipe out the last remaining resistance on the west side of Stavelot. The defenders were forced back about 300 yards, where from better positions, they were able to call for an artillery concentration that was largely responsible for breaking up the attack. The enemy infantry lost their aggressiveness, and the tanks apparently would not advance without the infantry. (C)

During the latter part of the afternoon, the defenses of Stavelot were greatly strengthened by the 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry, outposting the north side of the Ambleve River for a distance of about two kilometers east of Stavelot. These outposts were on high ground overlooking the river and road that winds into Stavelot from the southeast. Before dark, the 118th Field Artillery Battalion had adjusted concentrations all along this road. Some fires for effect were laid down that day on the road, and the next day the battalion had a field day interdicting the enemy traffic attempting to move up to Stavelot. No accurate account of the total number of tanks and other vehicles knocked out could ever be made, as the enemy managed to retrieve practically all of its vehicles under the
cover of darkness. However, in the opinion of the artillery forward observers, the enemy’s vehicular casualties along this road were well over 100. (A)

About 0400 on 20 December, two companies of German infantry made another effort to recapture Stavelot, this time by wading across the Ambleve River, (a distance of some 100 feet), and assaulting the town frontally. The swift current and the bitter coldness of the water made this a very difficult operation to coordinate. As a result, the fire-fight had started before most of the attackers had reached the north bank or even gotten into the water. To enable the 1st Platoon of Company A, which held the first row of buildings north of the river, to spot the German waders, flares were sent up and Lt. Hansen’s tanks set fire to the houses on the south side of the river. Silhouetted against this light, the wading Germans made easy targets. At least half of the attacking force is believed to have been killed in the water, or forced back to the south bank. However, the hostile infantry was supported by direct fire, and this finally forced the first Platoon leader, Lt. Robert O. Murray, and his men to retire to the houses immediately behind the first row of houses. As soon as the Germans occupied the first line of buildings, however, the hostile tank fire was masked. Lt. Murray’s men, with help from Company B on the left, launched a counterattack which drove the remnants of the attacking force back into the river. Only a small fraction of the original force succeeded in reaching the south bank. The American line was completely re-established along the north side of the river by 0730. The lack of any enemy artillery supporting this counterattack was an important factor in its successful repulse.

The fourth counterattack came later that morning. An estimated company of infantry supported by 3 to 5 tanks tried to break into Stavelot by attacking astride the road coming in from the west. This time, Company A had a minefield in, covered by tank, TD and infantry fires. Also in a position to give supporting fire was Company A’s CP, which was located in a chateau approximately 150 yards south of the roadblock. However, the German infantry managed to infiltrate
between the 3rd platoon, which was manning the roadblock, and the company CP. The company commander, John Kent, remained at his CP, reasoning that the German tanks would not go far without infantry support, and that his command group of 13 men, could with small arms fire and mortar support, “stop a slew of those krauts”. This they did, despite the fact that their chateau was a favorite target of the attacking tanks. Even with this strongpoint holding out, the attack got so close to the 3rd platoons’ positions, that Lt. Theodore V. Foote called for artillery fire only 50 yards away from his OP. Before firing the concentration called for, the artillery liaison checked back with Lt. Foote. “Yes, I know that it will fall where I am”, the platoon leader replied, “but that is what I want”. He got away with it, for none of his platoon was injured by the artillery fire. (C) The attack finally bogged down as a result of the lead tank, a Mark VI, having its track disabled, either by hitting a mine or from TD fire. (C & R)

Though the Mark VI tank remained in the vicinity the rest of the day, (no one could get into position to fire on its flanks), the offense was never resumed at this point. An important factor in Company A’s success was that despite the enemy’s infiltration, wire communications from the platoon to the company CP, and from the company CP to the battalion CP, were never out. Sgt. Thomas McCullough, A Company’s communications Sergeant, exposed himself repeatedly in order to keep the wire in.

The enemy made one last effort to reduce the American hold on Stavelot that afternoon. Unsupported by armor or artillery, and apparently relying chiefly on surprise, between 150 and 200 enemy infantry tried to outflank the force blocking the western exit of Stavelot, by attacking across country 500 yards north of the road. (C) If the attackers had made a wide envelopment and approached the town from the northwest, they might well have achieved their purpose. (F) The 1st Battalion did not have the manpower to build up a line that completely protected its western flank; much of the ground northwest of the town was covered only by patrols. But at the point which the enemy chose for his attack,
the 3rd Platoon of Company C was in position and had a good field of fire across open ground. Some distance west of this open ground, the attackers made the mistake of walking across an open ridge, which silhouetted their figures and enabled Lt. Col. Frankland in his OP to observe their movement and to alert the 3rd Platoon. As the enemy infantry rushed across the open ground, they were met by intense small arms, mortar and artillery fire. The artillery concentrations had to be called very close before the attack was over, but the platoon leader, Lt. Robert Stanley, had his men dig deep positions, and as a result, none of his men were injured by the shell fire. Most of the Germans are believed to have been killed or wounded. The remainder fled.

The enemy made no concerted effort to push his armor across the bridge on 20 December. However, one enemy tank did feel out the anti-tank defenses by advancing onto the bridge, as far as the Mark VI tank, which had been knocked out and abandoned there the previous day. Sgt. Gentry’s TD gun was able to move into the same position from which it had so successfully fired the day before, and apparently, fear of its fire persuaded the hostile tank to withdraw without firing a round. As the 30th Division’s mission was now definitely defensive, the 105th Engineer Combat Battalion demolished the bridge after darkness that evening. (C) At the same time, both 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 117th Infantry thickened their minefields and completed a virtual perimeter defense of their respective sectors. (C & A) The following day, 21 December, the 1st Battalion, supported by the attached tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion, cleaned out the west end of Stavelot. The Mark VI tank, which had been playing a game of cat and mouse there ever since the Battalion moved into town, had withdrawn for the night. (C & P)

The casualties for the 1st Battalion of the 117th Infantry for the 3 day period, 18-20 December, totaled 42, of which 13 were KIA’s, 19 WIA’s and 10 MIA’s. Of these casualties, 26 were in Company A, which bore the brunt of the fighting. (4)
The American Army’s possession of Stavelot was further secured on 20 December by Companies I and L, 117th Infantry, coming down from the northwest and capturing the little villages of Ster and Renardmont. (B) At the same time, Company E of the 120th Infantry, advanced from the west and seized Parfondruy. (I) These three villages are situated on the side of the hill west of Stavelot, overlooking the Ambleve River and the road out of Stavelot to Trois Ponts and La Gleize. Their possession meant that Stavelot was protected from a wide envelopment that aimed to hit the defenders of the town from the rear. (Z)

American soldiers who cleaned out the west edge of Stavelot and entered the villages of Ster, Renardmont and Parfondruy, found corroboration of reports previously received from Belgian civilians, that the German troops who had occupied these places, had wantonly murdered innocent civilians there. In the homes and outlying buildings of these localities, the Americans saw the incontrovertible proof of the atrocities. (B & C) The dead bodies of 117 men, women and children were found, all killed by small arms fire. (5)

Company A of the 117th Regiment captured nine prisoners from the 1st SS Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion on the outskirts of Stavelot. Incensed by the atrocious conduct of these soldiers, who later admitted that they had either witnessed or taken part in the murders, the men of Company A inquired of their commander, Capt. John Kent, if he wished to bother with them. In the hopes of securing valuable intelligence from them, Capt. Kent ordered the men to turn their prisoners over to the Division P.O.W. Cage.

IV  THE DEFENSE OF MALMEDY

The 3rd Battalion of the 117th Infantry was relieved of its defensive mission southeast of Malmedy on the morning of 19 December, by the 1st and 3rd battalions of the 120th Infantry. (B) The latter two battalions, together with the
526th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 99th Infantry Battalion, thereupon formed an iron ring protecting Malmedy from attack from the east, south and southwest. For two days the enemy made no serious effort in the direction of Malmedy. German patrols probed the routes of approach to Malmedy, and reported that all roads were blocked. (6) Undoubtedly, the enemy realized that while possession of Malmedy would give him access to the road to Spa, it would not, without another fight at Stavelot, enable him to re-supply the spearhead of his column, then in the Stoumont-LaGleize area. So, during 19 – 20 December, the enemy concentrated on trying to break through at Stavelot, possession of which would yield him an MSR for his forces in the vicinity of Stoumont, as well as access to a good straight road to Spa. But, five counterattacks at Stavelot on these two days failed to reduce the town. On the morning of 21 December, he hit at Malmedy as a possible, though less desirable, way of securing his objectives. (Z)

Between 0300 and 0400 that morning, (21 December), a company of hostile infantry launched a diversionary attack from the southeast, striking a roadblock of the 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry, near Montbijou, about a mile outside of Malmedy. The attack was repulsed by daybreak. What proved to be the main attack, was thereafter launched from the southwest. (Z) One column of armor and infantry advanced directly toward the town along the secondary road that roughly parallels the Stavelot-Malmedy highway. A second column attacked north on a small country road that joins the Stavelot-Malmedy highway near the large “S” curve in that highway. (See Map #3 for road network and defending forces.)

Where the road traveled by the first enemy column goes under a railroad trestle, Company B of the 99th Infantry Battalion, supported by two towed TD guns of Company A, 825th TD Battalion, and one HMG platoon of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion, held a well prepared roadblock. The enemy column consisted of three American jeeps, one halftrack, one American M-8 armored car, one Mark VI and two Mark V tanks. (7) The two Panther tanks had been carefully disguised as American M-4A3 tanks, by the addition of a false front and
back of ordinary sheet metal. The markings of a fictitious armored unit had been painted on the tanks to further confuse the Americans. Actually, it was so dark at the time of the attack, that the enemy’s efforts to simulate a U.S. column were wasted. (Z) Three of the lead vehicles hit mines, and at the same time were fired upon by two TD guns. One of the TD guns was knocked out, but the Mark VI tank was damaged and forced to retire. (M) American rifle and machine gun fire, pinned down the attacking infantry, and then artillery and mortar fire was brought down on them and the stranded column of armor. (8) The brunt of the attack was broken at the end of an hour, though some firing continued for the rest of the morning. (K) An estimated 100 enemy infantry were killed and three prisoners were taken, two from the 3rd Parachute Division and one from the 1st Panzer Division. Two of the U.S. jeeps and the M-8 armored car were recovered in useable condition. (9)

The second enemy column advanced toward the Stavelot-Malmedy highway at approximately the same time that the first column was hitting the roadblock manned by Company B, 99th Infantry Battalion. (J) The attack of this column was handicapped by the fact that its route of approach to the Stavelot-Malmedy highway was subject to observation from the high bluff, one kilometer to the west. (Z) The enemy knew that the 30th Division had roadblocks on the highway that wound up the side of this bluff, as patrols had probed at these roadblocks in the last two days. (A) By striking two hours before daylight, the enemy undoubtedly hoped to break through onto the highway while it was still dark. (Z) He had the good luck to attack a roadblock which was manned by only one platoon, the 3rd platoon of Company K, 120th Infantry. Also, the crew of one of the two TD guns supporting this roadblock, happened to be away from their gun, reconnoitering for better positions at the time of the attack. (J) Finally, although there was a full platoon of TD’s on the high bluff to the west, they were towed guns, set up to cover attack along the road that winds up the bluff, and in view of their immobility, only one of them was moved into a position from which
it could fire on the road along which the enemy column was attacking. However, this gun caused the enemy plenty of trouble, as we shall see. (R)

The attack towards K Company’s roadblock began as an infantry attack. There was no artillery preparation, in fact, no artillery support at all. When the advancing enemy infantry got within three or four hundred yards of the roadblock’s outpost, they were discovered and fired upon. A spirited firefight immediately developed. Under the cover of machine gun and direct fire, the attackers advanced and took possession of a house in the vicinity of the crewless TD gun, about 200 yards from the positions of the defending platoon. (See map #3) The enemy made this house into a strong point and built up a line east thereof. Practically all of the hostile infantrymen carried automatic weapons. After about six hours, during which the men of Company K fought off all efforts of the German infantry to overrun their position, the supporting hostile tanks moved forward up the road in an effort to break the resistance, which the infantry had been unable to do.

In the face of this threat, all of the defending platoon, except for a few who were so badly pinned down so that they could not move, retreated to a paper factory on the north side of the Stavelot-Malmedy highway. In the confusion of making this shift in position, the leading tank reached the intersection without being fired on and turned west. It advanced up the highway about two hundred yards, apparently in an effort to get onto commanding ground. Fortunately, Lt. Arnold Snyder, a mortar observer with the 3rd platoon, who had left the roadblock on foot to confer with the Company K Commander at his CP, about getting artillery support, spotted the oncoming German tank in time to get a bazooka and get into a position from which he was able to knock it out from the rear. As a second enemy tank approached the main highway, a bazooka team consisting of Pfc. Francis Currey and Pfc. Adam Lucero, put a round into the turret of the tank, which prevented its firing.
The enemy tank driver backed it off and the crew abandoned it. (J) Meanwhile, Lt. Claire Farley, commanding the platoon of towed TD guns on the bluff west of the roadblock, ordered Sgt. Stinett to move his gun into a position from which he could fire across the river, on the road up which the enemy armor was advancing. From this position, Sgt. Stinett’s gun scored effective shots on five enemy tanks along the road. Two other TD’s of Company B, 823rd TD Battalion, were able to place flanking fire on the enemy column from the east. These latter guns were covering a supporting roadblock on the Stavelot-Malmedy highway, seven or eight hundred yards east of Company K’s roadblock. With the help of supporting infantrymen, the crews of these two guns, which were self-propelled M-10’s, took up the hastily laid mines and advanced to positions from which they could fire in the direction of the house that constituted the enemy’s strongpoint. The hostile tanks took cover behind this house, but a couple of rounds from the M-10’s knocked down the covering wall of the house, and exposed the target. Two of the tanks were hit and burned. The combined TD fire from the west and east, broke the back of the counterattack, (Z) although the enemy did not withdraw until after dark. (J) (10)

The Germans made no serious attempt after 21 December, to capture Malmedy. The defenders of the town had no easy time of it, however. The U.S. Air Corps erroneously and tragically bombed the town on 23, 24, 25 and 30 December. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 120th Infantry, suffered more casualties as a result of these bombings, than they did from enemy action the entire time they were defending the town of Malmedy. (11)

V. 1st SS PANZER DIVISION IS STOPPED NEAR WERBOMONT AND STOUMONT STATION

The 119th Infantry remained northeast of Eupen, in a state of alert until 1200 18 December, when the Regiment moved out in column with orders to proceed to Theux, where it would meet the division commander, and be given its
mission. (D) The Division Commander, Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs, in turn received his orders from First U.S. Army Hq. (T) The reason First U.S. Army ordered a regiment of the 30th Division to Theux was, at the time the order was issued, it was by no means certain that the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry, would be able to prevent the enemy column, already reported in Stavelot, from proceeding north and capturing First Army Hq. at Spa. By the time the 119th Infantry reached Theux, reports from the 117th Infantry indicated that the enemy was not likely to break through north of Stavelot, and other reports stated that German armor had been seen in the vicinity of Trois Ponts. West of Trois Ponts the road net gave the enemy two possible avenues of approach towards Liege: one along the north bank of the Ambleve River to Remouchamps, and the other south of the river through Basse-Bodeux, Werbomont and Aywaille. From either Remouchamps or Aywaille, it was less than 20 kilometers to Liege. (Z) So at Theux, Col. Edwin M. Sutherland, Commander of the 119th Infantry, was directed to proceed to Remouchamps, and there divide into two columns. The strongest of the two columns would proceed eastward along the road that parallels the Ambleve River on its north bank (D), as this route, being the shortest one, was considered the one on which the enemy would probably place his greatest striking power. (Z) The second column would cross the Ambleve River at Aywaille and move to Trois Ponts by way of Werbomont and Basse-Bodeux.

Col. Sutherland gave his 2nd Battalion the more southern route and attached to it, four M-10 TD guns from Company A of the 823rd TD Battalion. As the 2nd Battalion Commander, Major Hal D. McCown, started out on this mission, he was given a report that enemy tanks had been seen as far west as Chevron. Hence, he assumed that he would contact the enemy long before reaching his final objective, Trois Ponts.

Reconnaissance cleared his advance as far as Werbomont, so he moved his battalion as far as that town on trucks. From Werbomont, the men proceeded east on foot. (D) By the time that Company F, which was leading the battalion march,
reached the little settlement of Habiemont on the Lienne River, three kilometers east of Werbomont, it was dark. (See Map #1) (G) The bridge over the river at this point had been blown by First U.S. Army Engineers, but Maj. McCowan’s map showed another crossing one kilometer to the north, from which a road led to Company F’s position on the west side of the river. (F) When scouts in front of Company F were fired upon from a house on the west bank of the river, Major McCowan decided to dig in on the high ground above the river for the night. Company F’s Commander, Lt. Edward C. Arn, dispersed his men and the two M-10’s made available to him, as shown on the accompanying Map #4. He had just finished placing the forward TD gun into position, and the infantrymen along the side of the road were still digging their foxholes, when at about 2200 hours, five enemy halftracks passed the house occupied by Lt. Austin’s platoon. The leading halftrack mounted a 75mm assault gun which fired two rounds into this house, and so stunned Lt. Austin’s men, that they retired to the cellar. The column of halftracks proceeded on up the road. Not a shot was fired at it until the lead halftrack approached to within about 40 yards of the first TD gun. The driver of the lead halftrack at this point flicked on his headlights, apparently in order to make out a bend in the road. Instantly, the TD gun put three rounds into this halftrack, which went up in flames and lit up the whole area. The American soldiers on the sides of the road and in the first house, passed by the enemy column, and then opened up with all available weapons. One of the remaining halftracks was knocked out while it was attempting to make a U-turn. Another one was abandoned. The remaining two managed to turn around, but were stopped by bazooka fire as they passed the house occupied by Lt. Austin’s platoon. (G) One prisoner taken, identified the halftracks as belonging to the 2nd Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The enemy made no further effort to break through Company F’s roadblock that night or prior to the 2nd battalion’s relief by the 82nd Airborne Division at 1530 19 December.

Company F’s road block was the most western point reached by the 1st SS Panzer Division. (D) The Panzer Grenadiers that were repulsed there, retire to
Chevron and later joined the enemy column at Stoumont, crossing the Ambleve River on a bridge a little east of Stoumont. (See Map #1) (F) It is of interest to note how close they came to breaking through to Aywaille. If they had arrived at Company F’s roadblock an hour or two sooner, they might have broken through before Company F was in position to stop them. Thus, every delay caused the column enroute, was of critical importance. One such delay was caused by the heroic stand of 12 men of Company B, 526th Armored Infantry Battalion. (Z) Company B had not been with the rest of the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion when the battalion was ordered to proceed to Malmedy. On the morning of 18 December, it was passing through Trois Ponts on its way to rejoin its battalion in Malmedy. (L) An enemy armored column was reported approaching Stavelot. Twelve men of the company were requested to, and did establish a roadblock, consisting of a string of mines and one 57mm AT gun, in the vicinity of Trois Ponts. At approximately 1230, eight tanks approached and were stopped by PFC. Frazier and PFC. Bucker, pulling the string of mines in front of the lead tank. The men showed no panic and manned the 57mm anti-tank gun, knocking out the lead tank and possibly the second one. Then a direct hit on the gun manned by PFC’s McCollum, Hollenbeck, Buchanan and Higgins, resulted in the gun being disabled and the entire gun crew killed. The remainder of the 12 men escaped and joined the elements of the 1111 Engineer Combat Group, assisting in the operations against the enemy for the next few days. (13)

The mission of halting any hostile column on the road north of the Ambleve River was given to the 3rd Battalion of the 119th Infantry, with the 1st Battalion behind it in support. The 3rd Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Roy G. Fitzgerald, Jr., (12) sent out a reconnaissance screen which cleared the battalion’s movement as far as Stoumont. Lt. Col. Fitzgerald had his men detruck in Stoumont, and as it was dark by this time, he ordered his men into defensive positions for the night. A security patrol was sent out and brought back word that 30 to 35 enemy tanks were assembled some four or five hundred yards east of Stoumont. (See Map #5).
This was the first definite confirmation that the spearhead column, which was known to have moved west from Stavelot, had chosen the road north of the Ambleve River. (Z) About 1130 that morning, however, Lt. Col. William Fiske, commanding officer of the security detachment of the First U.S. Army Hq., had received a report that three hostile tanks were observed on a secondary road, not more than 3 miles south of Spa. The tanks were being heavily mauled by P-47’s. This report came from one of five weak roadblocks, which Lt. Col. Fiske had established that morning, to protect First Army’s CP in Spa, and its main gas dump which was located within a radius of 2-3 miles from Spa. The hostile tanks were stopped by the p-47’s before they reached the road block. (V)

To defend Stoumont, Lt. Col. Fitzgerald’s 3rd Battalion had the support of eight towed TD guns of Company A, 823rd TD Battalion, and two 90mm AA guns (O), from the 143rd AAA Gun Battalion, (W), in addition to the three 57mm anti-tank guns of Battalion Hq. He set up a perimeter defense of Stoumont, with Company I and four of the TD guns manning the main roadblock, covering the road into Stoumont from the east. Company K and the other four TD’s protected the southern side of the town. Company L and the three 57mm anti-tank guns covered the little suburb of Rouat, just north of Stoumont. Lt. McGuire’s two 90mm anti-aircraft guns were ordered to set up just inside of the town. One of these guns developed a mechanical problem, and could never be emplaced. A hasty minefield was set out in front of Company I’s positions. (O) There were no tanks with the 3rd battalion when it arrived in Stoumont, but as soon as the presence of a large armored force east of town was discovered, Col. Sutherland pressed higher authority for tank support. One company of M-4 tanks was promised to him. (D) Company M’s heavy mortars got set up late that night, but supporting artillery was not available until late the following morning. Neither friendly nor enemy artillery fire played any part in the first battle of Stoumont.
The 3rd Battalion was in a tight spot. It had moved into Stoumont after dark, and no one had a very clear idea of the lay of the land. (O) Actually, Stoumont was not easy to defend against attack from the east. Tanks coming from that direction were not canalized, and could deploy across open ground, both north and south of the road. (Z) The 3rd Battalion, furthermore was substantially understrength. Officers and men present for duty on 17 December in its three rifle companies were: Company I – 145; Company K – 137; & Company L – 165. (14)

At about 0300, a German reconnaissance vehicle hit and blew one of Company I’s mines. Then at about 0645, Jerry pounded a few rounds of mortar in. (O) At 0700, as it was just beginning to get light, an estimated battalion of enemy infantry attacked Company I’s roadblock. (O) & (D) The attack was supported by MG and 88m fire from at least 15 observed tanks. (o) It seemed doubtful if Company K could hold out for any length of time at all. (Z) But, ten minutes after the attack was launched, the tanks promised to Col. Sutherland arrived. There were 10 of them under the command of Lt. Walter D. Macht, of Company C, 743rd Tank Battalion. Four of the tanks were committed in support of Company I; four more were attached to Company L at Rouat, while the remaining two were held in reserve inside of the town, and later were sent up to help Company I.

Two initial enemy assaults by infantry, supported by tank fire were repulsed. Then five tanks moved against Company I’s positions, while the same number simultaneously hit Company L on the north. (O) At this time, it was still not very light, and on this account and because of an early morning fog, the gunners on the first two TD guns lost the lead tank in their sights. Without running into any of the mines that had been set out, the column of tanks advanced beyond the positions of the first two TD’s and the foxholes of the supporting infantry without being fired upon. The 3rd TD gun fired four rounds at the lead tank, all of which ricocheted. This gun was quickly knocked out by enemy 88mm
One of the crew was killed and all the rest were wounded. The crew of the fourth TD gun supporting Company I, was picked off by German infantry. Company I retreated to the middle of the town, and there the enemy’s advance was delayed for approximately two hours, chiefly because of fire from Lt. Macht’s tanks and Lt. McGuire’s AA gun. The latter knocked out a Mark VI tank before being itself destroyed. Lt. Macht’s tankers fought an extremely able delaying action, disabling five German tanks, destroying three halftracks, and causing many enemy casualties, without suffering a single casualty themselves. The TD’s that had been assigned to Company K on the southwest side of the town, were outflanked when the enemy column got into the main street of Stoumont, and did not figure in the engagement. In the opinion of Capt. Bruce Crissinger, commanding these guns, the failure was due to the fact that they were all towed guns, which exposed their crews to small arms fire and prevented them from maneuvering so as to avoid being outflanked.

By 1000, Companies I & K had retired from Stoumont, and the enemy held most of Stoumont. Lt. Macht was ordered by Maj. Vodra Phillips, S-3 of the 743rd Tank Battalion, to withdraw his 1st platoon under cover of fire from the 2nd platoon. Capt. Francis J. Delbene, S-3 of the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry, told Company L to retire, using the road to the north as an axis of retreat. Both the withdrawal of the tanks and of Company I, was ably done. To avoid observation as the men retreated over the first four or five hundred yards of open ground north of Stoumont, Lt. David F. Knox, then in command of Company L, ordered the side of the hill to be smoked with WP grenades. This enabled the company to effect an orderly withdrawal. The road leading west from Stoumont, over which the tanks were ordered to withdraw, was likewise exposed to observation from Stoumont for approximately 500 yards. As the first five tanks retreated down this road, the remaining five, under the command of Lt. Clyde S. Thornell, provided excellent covering fire. Once they had reached the concealment of the woods, the 1st platoon took positions from which they covered the withdrawal of Lt. Thornell’s tanks. The latter were the last American
forces to leave Stoumont. They backed out in an orderly withdrawal, firing as they went. (D), (Q), (O), & (H)

Meanwhile, the CP of the 119th Infantry located at Halte de Lorce et Chevron, (hereafter referred to as Halte – See map # 1), was a beehive of activity. When it became evident that the friendly forces in Stoumont would not be able to hold the town, Col. Sutherland alerted his 1st Battalion to be ready to reinforce the 3rd Battalion. (D) Thereafter, Company C was sent up to Stoumont to reinforce the 3rd Battalion. The company left Halte at about 1000 hours in trucks. Starting at Targnon, the column began to pass members of Companies I & K, beating it to the rear. Company C, commander, Capt. Donald R. fell, had the trucks continue another 500 yards, and then the men dismounted and continued on foot, passing most of companies I & K going in the opposite direction. Capt. Fell’s orders were to report to Lt. Col. Fitzgerald, CO of the 3rd Battalion. He reached the edge of Stoumont, but Lt. Col. Fitzgerald was not to be found there. So, he and Lt. Macht agreed to commit their respective commands to a slow, mutually supporting retreat until additional reinforcements arrived. (H) This plan was approved by the respective battalion commanders, and put into effect. (D) & (H)

While the defending forces gradually retreated, Col. Sutherland and Maj. Phillips of the 743rd Tank Battalion, worked feverishly to prepare a defensive line, short of the Regimental CP at Halte. The enemy’s only obstacle between Halte and Liege consisted of approximately ten M-4 tanks in defensive positions along the road between Halte and Nonceveux. The tanks were manned by personnel of the 90th Ordnance Battalion, under orders from First U.S. Army. These ordnance men turned tankers, had no communications, nothing but ammunition and ‘guts’. The biggest problem was that Lt. Macht’s tanks were running very low on ammunition. (D)

First U.S. Army had one uncommitted Tank Battalion, the 740th Tank Battalion. Its tanks however, had been taken away from it on 17 December, and
on the morning of 19 December, it was in the process of having new tanks issued to it at the ordnance depot, four miles north of Aywaille. The depot’s supply of tanks was meager. There were not even enough M-4 tanks to fully equip Company C, the first company of the 70th Tank Battalion to arrive at the depot. What Company C was actually able to get was 14 M-4 tanks, 5 DD tanks, and one M-36 TD. The radios in all of these vehicles were British. As the American tankers did not know how to operate them, they had to depend on hand signals, until U.S. radios were provided the next day.

While Maj. Gen. Hobbs was arranging for the 740th Tank battalion to be attached to his division, Capt. Berry of Company C was whipping the conglomerate armor of his company into fighting shape. About noon, Capt. Smithers, S-3 of the 119th Infantry, met Capt. Berry on the road near Remouchamps and asked him how soon he could get his tanks rolling to help the 119th Infantry. Capt. Berry replied that it would not be long. He added, “They’re bastard tanks, but we’re shooting fools.” True to his promise, Capt. Berry moved his company, consisting of 14 tanks, to Halte around 1400 hours. It was their first combat mission.

The tanks arrived just in time. Lt. Macht’s tanks had not had sufficient ammunition to hold a defensive line, even temporarily, on the road from Stoumont to Stoumont Station. The few infantrymen who really remained with the last of the retreating tanks, were unable to do more than prevent the advance enemy scouts from coming within bazooka range of the tanks. As the withdrawing column passed Stoumont Station, a 90mm AA gun was observed in position there. Its crew stuck by their gun and demolished at least one Mark VI tank and one halftrack before their gun itself was destroyed. This slowed the enemy for a short time, and then as he resumed the pursuit, one of Lt. Thornell’s tanks knocked out the leading enemy tank east of Stoumont Station. The enemy withdrew temporarily. By this time, word had come to Lt. Macht, that another tank company was on its way up to relieve him. This meant that
there was no longer any necessity of conserving ammunition, and he promptly suggested that a defensive line be formed between Stoumont Station and Halte. Companies B & C of the 119th Infantry had been deployed on either side of the road in this vicinity, and the 1st Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Robert Herlong, now ordered Company C to make a sand along with Companies A & B, at the site chosen by Lt. Macht. (H)

The spot chosen by Lt. Macht for a stand was about half way between Stoumont Station and Halte. Here the road parallels the Ambleve River, 30 to 50 yards north thereof. Between the river and the road, there is a railroad track, the bed of which is either on a cut or a fill, most of the way from Stoumont Station to Halte. North of the road the terrain is thickly wooded and starts sloping abruptly upward some little distance from the road. South of the road, infantry could deploy for 30 to 50 yards, while north of the road there was no limit, but progress must necessarily be very slow because of the thick woods and abrupt slope. (Z)

The three rifle companies of the 1st Battalion went into hasty defensive positions on either side of the road. Everybody expected a tank-infantry attack at any moment. All that developed, however, was a few wild rounds from a hidden enemy tank, plus a very limited effort by infantry to infiltrate. Lt. Macht’s tanks made a strong demonstration by fire in the direction of the unobserved tank, while Company B placed 60mm mortar fire on the few infantrymen that approached its position. The probable explanation is that given by Capt. Fell of Company C, viz., the enemy at the time had only one tank and perhaps an infantry platoon, as far west as the point where the Americans chose to defend. These were presumably stalling until additional armor and infantry caught up.

At any rate, the enemy’s attack paused for about an hour, enabling Capt. Berry’s tanks to replace those of Lt. Macht, who went back for ammunition. Lt. Col. Robert Herlong, the 1st Battalion commander of the 119th Infantry, now
organized a tank-infantry attack. Six infantrymen were assigned to each of Capt. Berry’s 14 tanks. (H)

At about 1600 hours, the attack got under way. The tanks advanced in single file with their protecting infantry deployed abreast of them on each side of the road. Lt. Charles D. Powers’ platoon was leading, with Lt. Powers own tank at the head of the column. There was considerable ground haze in the valley, and Lt. Powers moved cautiously, realizing that all might depend on his spotting the enemy first. He hugged the inside of the road as he rounded a curve just west of Stoumont Station. As he did so, the first enemy tank loomed into view, a Mark V, approximately 200 yards away, though barely discernable in the haze. Lt. Powers got off the first shot. It ricocheted off the mantle of the Panther tank, and penetrated into the thinner armor just below, setting the tank ablaze. Lt. Powers advanced 50 yards, spotted another Mark V tank, and again got off the first round, which this time penetrated the lower front slope plate. The Mark V was disabled, though it did not burn. Lt. Powers moved on again and in another 50 yards, took another Mark V into his sights. This time his gun jammed. The Panther got off several rounds, which missed their mark and gave S/Sgt. Charlie W. Loopey, commanding an M-36 TD behind Lt. Powers, the necessary few seconds in which to get off a round that pierced the Mark V’s cupola, followed by several others which caused the tank to burn. (U)

The three German tanks formed a roadblock of considerable defensive value, and furthermore, had to be cleared before Capt. Berry’s tankers could continue the advance. So, Lt. Col. Herlong ordered the infantry to advance beyond the knocked out tanks and establish a defensive line for the night, just west of Stoumont Station. The enemy made no attempt to break this line. (H)

The turn in the tide of the battle just west of Stoumont Station was the most critical juncture in the repulse of the 1st SS Panzer Division’s drive for Liege. If this enemy division had broken through here, it might well have
continued its blitzkrieg to Liege. Though credit must be given to several other units for delaying the German spearhead, the 740th Tank Battalion was primarily responsible for turning the tide of battle. (F)

The reaction of Lt. Col. Rubel, the Commanding Officer of the 740th Tank Battalion, and Capt. Berry, commanding officer of Company C, as they went into battle, are well worth noting. Lt. Col. Rubel later stated, “I never had such misgivings in my whole life. I hated to commit the battalion, and my fears were doubled when I saw the 743rd Tank Battalion pulling out more tanks than we were putting in. They could have gotten more ammunition from where we got it. They just did not have the heart.”

Capt. Berry commented, “We probably would not have had the heart if we had known what was there in front of us. We had almost no information as to what was there. Of course, we were nervous as hell.”

Lt. Col. Rubel then remarked, “Neither Capt. Berry nor any of his men showed it if they were nervous. Incidentally, the cooperation between the battalion and the 119th Infantry was perfect.” (U)

Col. Sutherland had relieved Lt. Col. Fitzgerald at about 1200 hours, (19 December), and placed Capt. Carlton E. Stewart, assistant executive officer, in charge of the 3rd battalion. Capt. Stewart was ordered to pull his battalion together, proceed across country to the first intersection in the road that leads north up the hill from Stoumont. (See Map #5) There he was to set up a roadblock and sit tight while the battalion was resupplied. (D) At that time the effective strength of the 3rd battalion was as follows: Company I, 24; Company K, 50-55; Company L, 80; and company M, 100. (O) Casualties had been: 8 killed; 30 wounded; and 203 missing. (Of these latter, ten were returned to duty the next day and 143 were recovered in Stoumont and La Gleize. (15)
Capt. Stewart did a magnificent job of reorganizing Companies I & K in
the vicinity of Halte, and then marched them during the afternoon over a steep
grade to the cross roads north of Stoumont, which was their objective.

The battalion remained here for 36 hours, ready to repulse any attempt by
the enemy to move north up the secondary road that runs north out of Stoumont.
No such attack developed, and the men had a much needed opportunity to catch
their breath and get refitted. (D) Capt. Stewart felt that by nightfall, the battalion,
though still shaky, had gotten over the panic incident to the retreat from
Stoumont. The older men had resumed control of the less experienced soldiers.
The Battalion S-4, Lt. N. N. Mason, went to work at once to secure all possible
equipment. The battalion had practically no machine guns, mortars, bazookas,
blankets or extra clothing. That day, Lt. Mason brought up four BAR’s, 1 HMG,
2 LMG’s, and 4 bazookas. Additional supplies were coming in all day on the 20th
of December. Lt. Col. Fitzgerald rejoined the battalion while it was refitting,
although Capt. Stewart continued as the battalion commander. About 10 days
later, Lt. Col. Fitzgerald was exonerated by an I. G. Report, and was given back
his command. (O)

While the 119th Infantry was battling to prevent the hostile force in the
vicinity of Stoumont from moving either west or north, the enemy in La Gleize
was probing the secondary road that runs north from La Gleize over the ridge to
Spa. (See Map #1) A German column consisting of two armored cars, two trucks
and two 88mm SP’s, (with prime movers), reached a point about one mile north
of Cour. There they ran into one of Lt. Col. Fiske’s roadblocks, commanded by
Lt. Walter R. Butts Jr. The roadblock consisted of a hasty minefield covered by
two 90mm towed guns and four M-51 quadruple mount .50 caliber trailers,
(provided by the 110 AAA Gun Battalion), two M-8 armored cars from Troop B,
125th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, and one half-track from Hq. Company,
9th Armored Group. When the leading armored car stopped short of the
minefield, and two men started toward it on foot, the troops manning the
roadblock opened up with every weapon that they had.
“Jerry must have thought that he had hit a regiment” according to Lt. Butts. “I don’t know how much damage we did, but we made a hell of a lot of noise. After about 10 minutes, the enemy column pulled out. We just let it go. We didn’t have anything to follow it up with.” (X)

Lt. Col. Lowell S. Love of the Armored Section, First U.S. Army Hq., who had been given command responsibility over the disposition of the army gas dump, described the five roadblocks just south of Spa and their intervening outposts “as a typical counter-reconnaissance screen, which successfully bluffed the enemy into thinking the routes to Spa were heavily defended.”

None of Lt. Col. Fiske’s roadblocks were strong enough to withstand a serious effort by the enemy to break through. (V) To prevent such a breakthrough, the 3rd Battalion of the 117th Infantry was relieved of its defensive mission at Malmedy during the morning of 19 December, by the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 120th Infantry, and was ordered to block the exits from La Gleize to the north and northeast. The 3rd Battalion, (117th), Commander, Lt. Col. Samuel McDowell, gave to Company K the mission of blocking the secondary road running north over the ridge to Spa. Company K went into defensive positions at Cour that afternoon without incident. Company L was ordered to take the high ground south of Roanne and organize defensive positions there, from which it could interdict any traffic moving east out of La Gleize. It was held up north of Roanne by tank fire from La Gleize, but after Lt. Robert A Peters, the 3rd Battalion’s AT Officer disabled the tread of the tank with 57mm AT fire, the company was able to get to its objective. It held this position all of the next day. (B)

Engagements with the enemy on 19 December, clearly established that a powerful force of armor and infantry had secured control of the high ground from
La Gleize to Stoumont. If the enemy could keep his lines of communication open, it was reasonable to presume that he would attempt to break out either to the west or to the northwest. If his lines of communication were cut, it seemed highly probable that he would attempt to force his way back to Trois Ponts in an effort to re-establish contact with the rest of his division. Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, XVIII Corps Commander’s plan was to block any move of the hostile force in any of these directions, while gradually closing in on it from both west and east. (Z) On 20 December, operations pursuant to this plan were carried on by the 119th RCT, and CCB, 3rd Armored Division. Coordination was attempted at Corps level. This was not entirely successful, chiefly because the only communication was by personal liaison over a distance of 25 miles. At the end of the day, CCB was attached to the 30th Division, and the 119th RCT returned to 30th Division control. By that time, one of the three task forces comprising CCB, had fought its way from Roanne south to the vital bridge over the Ambleve River at Trois Ponts. (D) This was Task Force “L”, made up of three tank companies, one armored infantry company and one reconnaissance platoon, under the command of Lt. Col. Lovelady. This force blew the bridge and organized several strong roadblocks at the bridge site and on the road north to La Gleize. (See Map #1) So long as this vital roadblock held, the enemy force in the Stoumont-La Gleize area “was in a picklement” as the Ass’t Division Commander, Brig. Gen. William K. Harrison put it. (F)

That same day, 20 December, Company K of the 117th Infantry, was given the mission of capturing La Gleize from the north. It had reached the town of Cour the previous day, following its mission of blocking the enemy’s exit northward from La Gleize. From Cour, it moved south to Borgoumont, but below Borgoumont it ran into very stiff tank and infantry opposition. (B) The enemy’s firepower was so great that it left no doubt that he was able to hold a very substantial garrison in La Gleize, (Z), even though his main striking force had gone on to Stoumont. (D)
While TF “L” was securing the crossing at Trois Ponts, and Company K of the 117th Infantry was attacking toward La Gleize, two offensive prongs were directed at Stoumont from the northwest and west. (Z) (See map #5) A second task force, consisting of two tank companies and one armored infantry company, under the command of Lt. Col. Jordan, attacked through the 3rd battalion’s roadblock north of Stoumont, and got to within 500 yards of the town. There at a sharp bend in the road, the task force had two of its tanks knocked out by direct fire. The bend in the road enabled the enemy to fire the first shot, and the terrain was so steep and heavily wooded, that the tanks could not deploy off the road. (O)

Attacking from the west, was the 1st Battalion of the 119th Infantry, supported by Company C of the 740th Tank Battalion. It ran into a Mark V just as it started out, but the leading American tank, commanded by Lt. John Galloway, knocked it out with a round that “opened its muzzle up like a rose”. A little further on Lt. Galloway’s platoon knocked out two enemy half-tracks. (U) Resistance consisted mostly of minefields. There were five of these minefields and in each case the mines were booby trapped and covered by infantry. (D) At the big “S” curve east of Targnon, the 740th Tank Battalion lost its first tank by hitting a mine. (U) The attacking force, nevertheless, made an advance of approximately two miles by nightfall, by which time it was 300-400 yards west of Stoumont. (D)

There the leading tank, commanded by Lt. David Oglensky, was hit by a well camouflaged direct fire weapon, emplaced at the crossroads on the north side of town. The tank’s gun was disabled, but the motor was alright. As it was almost dark, and too late to attack the town, Capt. Berry ordered Lt. Oglensky to
turn his tank sideways across the road to form a roadblock. Lt. Oglensky did so. (U)

Just north of the road over which the attackers had advanced, was a large building which housed a sanitarium for sick children and aged people. (See Map #5) (Z) Several platoons of Companies B & C decided that this building, which was situated on high ground overlooking Stoumont, would make an excellent place for their CP’s. The building was then occupied by the Jerries, but in a spirited firefight they were thrown out, and three or four platoon CP’s were set up in the building. Companies B & C deployed north of the road, while Company A set up south of the road. (H) Some 200 of the sanitarium’s inmates had sought shelter in the basement of the building. Plans for evacuating them were postponed until daylight. (D)

About 2300 hours, the Germans launched a very aggressive counterattack against the sanitarium. Between 50 and 100 infantrymen supported by several tanks firing from the road north of the sanitarium, fought like crazy men, (they kept shouting, “Heil Hitler”) to recover the building from which they had been evicted. A bloody fight, lasting several hours ensued. The Americans were forced to withdraw completely from the main building of the sanitarium. One group of 11 men, led by Sgt. William J. Widener, held out in an adjoining building, while the rest of Companies B & C built up a line along a hedge, not more than 30 yards from the sanitarium.

This withdrawal was due chiefly to the enemy’s superior firepower, gained by bringing one and perhaps several Panther tanks up close to the sanitarium. (M) Three of Capt. Berry’s tanks attempted without success to counter the hostile tank fire from positions along the road, just south of the sanitarium. (U) They were greatly handicapped by the terrain, which sloped
steeply up from the road to the sanitarium, while the enemy tanks were on even higher ground north of the sanitarium. (Z) Ascent up this slope was impossible due to the very muddy conditions of the ground, and the tanks were left on the road. Then Jerry had the bright idea of sending up flares to spot our tank’s location. They were well placed flares, which lit up the American tanks, but did not disclose the location of the enemy’s armor. Two of Capt. Berry’s tanks were knocked out in rapid succession. Thereafter, all of the tanks were kept west of a house, approximately 150 yards short of the sanitarium, in order that they might be defiladed. (U)

About this time, a shift in command that had been effected the previous evening, began to make itself felt on the front lines. The necessity for coordinating the efforts of the 30th Division and CCB of the 3rd Armored Division, had resulted in the attaching of CCB to the 30th Division at 17 00 hours on 20 December. The next step was to place all of the forces involved in the reduction of the enemy column caught in the Stoumont-La Gleize pocket under one command, which was given to Brig. Gen. Harrison, the Ass’t. Division Commander. Task Force “Harrison” was a part of Gen. Hobbs’ command, but due to the hilly terrain, communications between the Task Force Hq. and the 30th Division Hq. were very poor. B. Gen. Harrison made practically all of the important decisions in this operation.

In addition to the forces that had been attacking Stoumont from the west, under the command of Col. Sutherland, B. Gen. Harrison also controlled TF “J”, (CO Lt. Col. Jordan), on the north side of Stoumont, and TF “M” (CO Maj. McGeorge), on the east side of La Gleize. TF “L”, the third of the three task forces of CCB, was attached to the 117th Infantry. Company K, 117th Infantry, was placed under TF “M”. (D) In the case of the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry, which was working with TF “J”, neither the infantry was attached to the tanks, nor the tanks to the infantry. Both were supposed to take orders from Lt. Col. Courtney Brown, Executive Officer of the 119th Infantry; but Lt. Col. Brown
remained at Halte, and the lack of a clear cut chain of command resulted in poor coordination. (O)

Brig. Gen. Harrison’s plan of attack for 21 December included a squeeze play on Stoumont, and an attack from the east on La Gleize. The squeeze play was this: The 2nd battalion of the 119th Infantry, was to make a wide envelopment to the north, then turn south and attack Stoumont from the east, setting up a roadblock in Auny, between Stoumont and La Gleize to protect its rear. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, (119th), supported by Capt. Berry’s tanks, and a company of TD’s, would capture the sanitarium and move into the town from the northwest. TF “J” and the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry, would advance on the town directly from the north. (D)

During the early morning hours of 21 December, Company F had to be attached to the 1st Battalion, to bolster its line at the sanitarium. (G) Hence, only Companies E & G made the wide envelopment through the woods, north of Stoumont. During the long foot march, which was led by the 2nd Battalion Commander, Maj. H.D. McCowan, only sporadic mortar fire was received. The two rifle companies reached the Stoumont-La Gleize road, approximately half way between the two towns, in the early afternoon. Company G quickly put in a hasty minefield before the enemy built up a minimal counterattacking force. Then, enemy infantry and halftracks moved towards Companies E & G from both La Gleize & Stoumont. A sharp fire fight ensued. At this critical stage, they had the misfortune to have their Battalion Commander, Maj. H.D. McCowan, captured. (E) It so happened that the other two prongs of Brig. Gen. Harrison’s coordinated attack on Stoumont, were also running into heavier opposition than anticipated. (D) Hence, about the middle of the afternoon, Brig. Gen. Harrison ordered Maj. Nathaniel J. Laney, Executive Officer of the 2nd Battalion, to withdraw his men to the west of Stoumont, by the same route used in the advance that morning.
The attack on Stoumont had commenced that morning with a four or five hour neutralization by TD fire on the sanitarium, which commanded the town. From a well concealed position behind a house, 150 yards west of the sanitarium, an M-36 TD poured 240 rounds into the sanitarium. Sgt. Widener, who was still holding out in the annex to the main “chateau”, adjusted this fire… Later, several M-10 TD’s were brought up and they fired a couple hundred into the building. By early afternoon, the front of the “chateau” presented nothing but a series of gaping holes. The infantry were now able to work into two rooms of the building. But, the enemy met this threat by moving a Mark V right up to the rear of the building. It fired round after round of 88mm fire right through the ground floor. No further advance was possible, and 22 infantrymen became pinned down in the building. (U) A bazooka team climbed up on top of the sanitarium in an effort to knock out the German tank maneuvering behind the building. Machine pistol fire from the enemy broke up this attempt. (H)

Capt. Berry’s tanks came to the rescue. As previously stated, the tanks were unable to climb the slope from the road to the sanitarium, because of its steepness and the boggy ground. But with the help of Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion, Capt. Berry put in a 75 yard corduroy road, somewhat west of the sanitarium, which enabled the tanks to climb the hill to an elevation equivalent to that of the sanitarium. The three M-4 tanks and a TD gun then moved right up to the sanitarium. Lt. Powers in the lead, managed to sneak around the right side of the “chateau”, and knock out the Panther tank, whose fire had been interdicting all movement in, to, or from the “chateau”. The TD and the tanks then covered the withdrawal of the 22 infantrymen, who had been pinned down. After they had all gotten back safely, the American armor retired in the face of hostile AT fire from the high ground northwest of the sanitarium. (U) It was the enemy’s command of this high ground to the rear of the sanitarium, which effectively prevented the 1st Battalion from advancing throughout the day. (Z)

Tanks were also responsible for checking the attack from the north of TF “J” and the 3rd Battalion. (D) & (O) Though the infantry managed to build up a
line on the east side of the road, reaching almost to the edge of Rouat, and even got some of TF “J’s” light tanks to deploy in support of this line, the attack of the medium tanks down the road, ran into the same murderous tank fire encountered the previous day. For lack of M-4 support, the infantry pulled back into the cover of the woods for the night. (O)

An attack on La Gleize by TF “M” that day, 21 December, made no better progress. (D) & (B) Here again, U.S. armor was canalized to a road that ascended at an even steeper angle than the road north from Stoumont. (Z) As Major McGeorge’s M-4 tanks made the sharp “S” turn in the road east of La Gleize, they came into the sights of Mark V and Mark VI tanks, carefully situated to interdict approach by this route. After two of McGeorge’s tanks were destroyed in this manner, the column was ordered to withdraw. (D) The accompanying infantry, attacking on the south side of the road into La Gleize, made good progress, but were forced to withdraw to their original positions, one mile east of La Gleize, when the tank attack bogged down. (B)

At about 1000 hours the following morning, (22 December), Brig. Gen. Harrison came up to the front lines just west of the sanitarium, “to figure out how to attack the place.” He noticed that nothing was drawing fire from the building, and then two civilians reported that the Germans had vacated it during the night. The General ordered a reconnaissance patrol to investigate. It found the place deserted, and the 1st Battalion had occupied it without firing a shot. Two or three seriously wounded Americans, whom the Germans had left behind in the sanatorium, reported that the enemy had vacated the building at 0400 hours that morning. (U)

Stoumont itself still showed signs of enemy movement, but when the 1st and 2nd Battalions attacked from the west, only rear guards were encountered. Their resistance was light, and Stoumont was in American hands by mid-morning. (T)
The 2nd Battalion Commander, Maj. H.D. McCowan, who had been captured the previous day, (21\textsuperscript{st}), was told by the German commander, Lt. Col. Foeder Pieper, that it was the appearance of Company E & G in the rear of Stoumont, that caused him to evacuate the town that night. Further details gleaned by Maj. McCowan during his captivity, are given below. He escaped on 25 December, and returned to the American lines. (16)

The 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion of the 119\textsuperscript{th} Infantry bore the brunt of the second battle of Stoumont. Total casualties during the fight were 106, consisting of 18 killed, 60 wounded and 28 missing. Of these missing, 24 of them were later re-captured at La Gleize. (17) By some miracle, none of the 200 civilians who had remained in the cellar of the sanitarium throughout the battle for Stoumont, were wounded. They were evacuated the same morning that Stoumont fell, 22 December. Also evacuated that same morning, following the fall of Stoumont, were about 60 wounded German soldiers, who had been left behind in a chateau just east of Stoumont. (D) Lt. Col. Peiper told Maj. McCowan that he had to leave them behind because he lacked the facilities to give the wounded men the proper attention. (F)

That same day, (22 December), a significant thing happened. (Z) Company E of the 120\textsuperscript{th} Infantry, which had taken Parfondruy the previous morning, had been ordered by Lt. Col. Lovelady to march south to rejoin TF “L” in the vicinity of Arret de Coo. (See Map #2) and return to Arret de Coo, but by mistake, had marched to Roanne. Company E had originally joined TF “L” on 20 December by using this route. Now, however, the company ran into heavy resistance north of Arret de Coo, and was unable to make contact with any element of TF “Lovelady”. Not only had the enemy cut the road to La Gleize north of the main roadblock, at the bend in the river, the area east of this roadblock, over which Company E had marched to take Parfondruy, had filled up with Germans. (I) Aerial reconnaissance picked up an estimated 12 enemy tanks on the road between Stavelot and Trois Ponts. Later when the Americans captured this road, it was found that the enemy had improved a footbridge across
the Ambleve River, one kilometer east of Trois Ponts, so that it would carry tanks. This is presumed to be how the hostile armor got onto the Stavelot-Trois Ponts road. (F) The purpose of this move was obvious. The enemy was intent upon reducing the roadblocks established by TF “L”. Since these roadblocks were effectively cutting off the spearhead column of the 1st SS Panzer Division in La Gleize. (Z)

Company E, in spite of hard fighting, found itself unable to make contact with elements of TF “L”, or with Company L, 117th Infantry, which was holding the hilltop approximately one kilometer to the east. (I) The company, which had started the battle with the 1st SS Panzer Division, was at about 75% of T/O strength (150), (18), was down to almost 100 effectives, and feeling very much out on a limb. Under these circumstances, the company got in touch with the 2nd Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. James W. Cantey, who visited the company, who then reported the situation to Col. Johnson, the 117th Regimental Commander. (TF “L”, it will be recalled, was attached to the 117th Infantry). Permission was secured from Division Hq. to push Company F into the gap between Company E and Company L on the hilltop. Then Col. Johnson ruled that Lt. Col. Cantey should take charge of the infantry in the Arret de Coo area. In practice, Lt. Col. Cantey from then on, directed all offensive operations in the area. Lt. Col. Lovelady concentrated on repulsing assaults on the vital roadblocks he held, though some of his tanks assisted the infantry.

Lt. Col. Cantey secured permission to use the other rifle company of his battalion, Company G, which heretofore had been in division reserve. On 23 December, it was brought up through Parfondruy and placed in defensive positions approximately one half mile west of the town. The rest of that day was spent in tying in the three companies of the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry, with Companies L & I of the 117th Infantry, and preparing plans for an attack to eliminate the hostile infantry that had infiltrated west of the Ambleve River. (I) The most important accomplishment of the day was this negative one: By placing an able Battalion Commander in charge of the various rifle companies in the area,
Col. Johnson had made it possible for these companies positions and efforts to be organized, and thus prevent the numerically inferior enemy from liquidating the companies piecemeal. (Z)

Meanwhile, the German commander in La Gleize, Lt. Col. Peiper, fought a delaying action both west and east of La Gleize. The 119th Infantry’s attack from the west advanced in two columns, one guiding on the main Stoumont-La Gleize road, (TF “J” plus 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry), and the other column, (1st Battalion, 119th Infantry), guiding on the secondary road that winds up to La Gleize from the La Gleize station. (See Map #5) The 2nd Battalion was left in Stoumont in defensive positions. The column moving astride the main highway into La Gleize, was held up most of the day by the roadblock in the woods between the two towns, which Company G had originally put in, on 21 December, and which the Germans had strengthened, and now had covered with both tanks and infantry. (D) The 3rd Battalion was committed on the hillside north of the highway, and made somewhat better progress than TF “J” (O), though against lighter resistance. (Z) The attack of the 1st Battalion up the secondary road from La Gleize station bogged down, chiefly because of tank fire from the high ground on the outskirts of La Gleize. This avenue of approach was so subject to the enemy’s observation, that tanks could not be effectively used, and infantry advance was very difficult. (H) Probably the most effective pressure on the enemy was the constant artillery fire that was emplaced on La Gleize and anything that moved in or out of the town. Enemy casualties from this fire were heavy. (19) By the end of 23 December, the American line was roughly one kilometer west of La Gleize. (D, H & O)

The advance on La Gleize from the east that day, was a failure as far as the tank attack was concerned. The two M-4 tanks that had been destroyed on 22 December, completely blocked the only avenue of approach which the tankers found feasible. Company K of the 117th Infantry, however, was successful in reaching the farm buildings approximately 500 yards southeast of La Gleize. This
put the company in a favorable position for enveloping the town from the south. (B)

Brig. Gen. Harrison anticipated a very hard battle on 24 December to reduce La Gleize. He estimated that the enemy force in La Gleize consisted of at least one panzer battalion and two panzer grenadier battalions. In addition to its great firepower, this force held the ground commanding the approach from east, south and west. Only on the north could an attacking force get within a few hundred yards of La Gleize without being observed. The hill north of La Gleize was heavily wooded, and furthermore, patrols had investigated the area and found it clear of the enemy. Attack from the concealment of these woods did not have to run the risk of being stopped by tree bursts, as the enemy had no artillery support. To secure surprise, Brig. Gen. Harrison planned to make the main effort from the north, a direction not previously used, employing his rested battalion, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} battalion of the 119\textsuperscript{th} Infantry. This battalion was to outflank the enemy line north of the Stoumont-La Gleize road, advance as far as La Gleize, and then make a 90 degree turn, to hit the town directly from the north. The 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion’s mission was to seize the high ground southwest and south of La Gleize, from which the battalion would support by fire, the other attacks on the town. Meanwhile, TF “J” and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, supported by 155mm SP guns, would demonstrate from positions west of town, and later advance, if possible. TF “M” would do the same east of town. (D)

It was a well conceived plan, but fortunately never had to pass the test of a real battle. (F & H) For at the very moment that Brig. Gen. Harrison was working out his plan of attack, Lt. Col. Peiper was arranging to evacuate La Gleize. Late on 23 December, Lt. Col. Peiper called Maj. McCowan to his headquarters and told him that he had received orders to withdraw to the nearest German troops. He said that he knew it was impossible to save any of his vehicles and that it would have to be a foot withdrawal. Later he told Maj. McCowan that it was the U.S. forces east of La Gleize which he regarded as his greatest danger.
At 0300 hours on 24 December, the enemy foot column moved out, led by Lt. Col. Peiper. Maj. McCowan was the only one of the 171 American prisoners in La Gleize to go with the column. The rest were simply left in La Gleize. The escaping Germans numbered about 800, according to Lt. Col. Peiper’s statement to Maj. McCowan, and Maj. McCowan corroborated this statement by actually counting the entire column. The Germans crossed the Ambleve River on a small highway bridge south of La Gleize. Maj. McCowan described the march in these words: “The noise made by the entire 800 man group was so little, that I believe that we could have passed within 200 yards of an outpost without detection. At 0500 hours, we heard the first tank blow up and inside of 30 minutes, the entire area formerly occupied by Lt. Col. Peiper’s command, was a sea of fiercely burning vehicles, the work of a small detachment he had left behind to complete the destruction of all of his equipment. He told me later that there were a few vehicles that he had not destroyed. I could not ascertain the exact reason why.”

When Brig. Gen. Harrison’s troops attacked at first light that morning, the only resistance of any consequence was met by Companies E & G in the woods just north of La Gleize. (D & F) Here some 50 Germans fought fiercely, either because they had not been told that Lt. Col. Peiper had given up the town, or because they wished to do that rare thing, even in an SS soldier – die rather than surrender. (E & F) They died alright, (E), and Companies E & G that killed them, had only 10 WIA’s and no KIA’s. (21) When the Americans got into the town, they found that the “small detachment” which Lt. Col. Peiper had left behind, had done a very poor job of destroying all of the German materiel which had been left behind. Many vehicles were found to be in perfect working condition. Most of those that had been damaged, had only minor things wrong with them. (D & O) Following are the official figures of the more important German armor captured at La Gleize: 7 Mark VI tanks, 15 Mark V tanks, 6 Mark IV tanks, 8 armored cars, 70 halftracks, 6 SP 150mm howitzers, 6-75mm or 88mm anti-tank guns, 2-75mm assault guns, 6-120mm mortars, and 5-20mm AA guns. (22) The capturing troops found large quantities of ammunition for all of this armor. Gasoline, however,
was very low. (O) The gas tanks of most of the vehicles were empty, corroborating the belief of Brig. Gen. Harrison and Maj. McCowan, that Lt. Col. Peiper did not have sufficient gasoline to move his armor back through Trois Ponts, even if he had not been forced to fight. (F)

The 170 U.S. POW’s, most of them from the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry, were left behind by Lt. Col. Peiper. They were in good condition, except for being shaken up by the terrific pounding, which the U.S. artillery had given La Gleize while they were captives in the town. (D) German prisoners captured in Stoumont and La Gleize, totaled around 200. Of these, 127 were taken in La Gleize. An additional 100 were estimated to have been killed in taking these two towns. (D)

Brig. Gen. Harrison gave orders that all enemy vehicles knocked out or captured between Halte and La Gleize, should be counted. (F) By actual count, these totaled: (23):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Tanks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Shermans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark VI’s</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark V’s</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark IV’s</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Halftracks</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Guns</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Misc. Vehicles</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>172</td>
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</table>
On the basis of these figures and other evidence, Brig. Gen. Harrison’s estimate of one panzer battalion and two panzer grenadier battalions, was not far from wrong. (Z) They were part of the 1st Panzer Regiment of the 1st SS Panzer Division, under the command of Lt. Col. Foeder Peiper. (24)

The same night that Lt. Col. Peiper was ordered to withdraw from La Gleize, the enemy reinforced his troops in the Arret de Coo area, presumably in the hope of reducing the American roadblocks between La Gleize and the makeshift bridge over the Ambleve River, a little east of Trois Ponts. Brig. Gen. Harrison estimated the enemy’s total strength as of 24 December, at two battalions. (T)

Lt. Cantey’s plan of attack for 24 December, was for Companies E & F of the 120th Infantry, and Company L of the 117th Infantry, to push south of the Ambleve River, while Company G advanced southwest towards the river, where all four companies at the day’s end, would set up a defensive line along the north bank of the river. The attack was supposed to be preceded by a strong artillery preparation at 0845 hours, with H-hour at 0900. The supporting artillery battalion got mixed up on the time, however, and the infantry had jumped off before Lt. Col. Cantey could stop them and postpone H-hour, until the artillery preparation had been fired. This proved to be a very costly error, as the woods were full of SS troops, who put up fierce resistance. Company E took its objective just south of Arret de Coo, but Companies F & L, which were fighting on the high wooded ground to the east, could hardly advance at all. An effort to help the infantry by placing TOT’s on the enemy’s positions boomeranged, when almost as much of the fire came in on Company F, as landed on the enemy. Net advances for the day for these two companies were around 300 yards. Company G had an even tougher time. It had no artillery support, its company commander had to be evacuated, and fire from hostile tanks operating on the Trois Ponts- Stavelot road, interdicted its advance and caused heavy casualties. (I) It suffered 5 KIA’s, 24 WIA’s and 7 MIA”S (25), and was so depleted at the end of the day’s action, that it had to be withdrawn from the fight entirely.
During the afternoon of 24 December, the 2nd Battalion of the 119th Infantry was brought down from La Gleize to reinforce Lt. Col. Cantey’s forces. At this time, Company G of the 119th Infantry, relieved TF “L” on the main road block above Trois Ponts. TF “L” and the rest of the CCB were detached from the 30th Division that afternoon and returned to the 3rd Armored Division. Brig. Gen. Harrison assumed command of the disposition of the forces that evening and the attack on the following day. For his attack, Brig. Gen. Harrison had available two Companies, E & F, of the 119th Infantry, two Companies, E & F of the 120th Infantry, and two Companies, L & K of the 117th Infantry.

A very careful plan of attack was worked out and put into execution. But, when the troops moved in for the kill, they found, as they had at La Gleize, that the enemy had pulled out the previous night. Practically no prisoners were taken on either side during the three days of this battle in the woods. (I) By nightfall, 25 December, the 30th Division held an unbroken line north of the Ambleve River from Stoumont Station to Stavelot. From Stavelot, east to Malmedy, the division occupied the same positions that it had taken on 18 December. (26)

Lt. Col. Peiper’s 1st SS Panzer Division had been stopped and driven back to the line where the attack had started!!
Footnotes

1. Report entitled, “The Defeat of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler”, prepared by G-2 of the 30th Infantry Division
3. Id. (last three sentences)
4. Figures compiled from the Morning reports of the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry.
5. Memo of 30th Division CIC Detachment, dated 6 January 1945.
7. Id.
8. Id.
9. Id.
10. Until darkness fell, anything that moved in the vicinity of Company K’s roadblock was blanketed by automatic fire. The 3rd platoon at this time was down to eight effectives. A number of the original defenders had been pinned down all day long by hostile fire. Casualties of 7 KIA’s, 8WIA’s, 1MIA and 1 battle fatigue case had been suffered. The platoon sergeant set about evacuating all of the WIA’s. One of these was pinned down near the enemy’s strong point along with several who were not wounded. Pfc. Currey volunteered to go to their rescue. Leaving Pfc. Lucero and Pfc. Raymond W. Gould at the house across from the factory where the platoon had originally made its CP, he crept forward to within 50 yards of the house held by the enemy, which put him within 20 yards of three stationary tanks. He called back for fire support from Pfc. Lucero and Pfc. Gould. Under the cover of their supporting fire, he stood up and fired a bazooka at the enemy’s house, knocking down half of the wall. This temporarily slackened the fire from the house, but MG fire from the tanks still had the men, whom Pfc. Currey sought to rescue, pinned down. So, Pfc. Currey ran across the street to a halftrack, where he procured an armful of anti-tank grenades. Then, while still subjected to intense enemy fire, he moved around to various positions, until he found a satisfactory one from which to fire on the tanks. He then fired on the enemy tanks, forcing their occupants to leave them and run for the house. He made his way, about 15 yards, under heavy small arms fire coming from the house towards the halftrack. He climbed up on the vehicle and fired
a 50 caliber machine gun at the house. While doing this, he was in full view of the enemy, only about 150 yards away. He soon realized, however, that his fire was not having the desired effect. He therefore ran 30 yards to a heavy 30 caliber machine gun, about 10 yards from the Company M CP. The crew of this gun had been killed and the gun itself was jammed. Pfc. Currey swung it around and put it into action, firing on the house occupied by the Germans. Under cover of this fire, the men in the hole were able to withdraw. For the above heroic actions, Pfc. Currey’s company commander recommended him for the Congressional Medal of Honor. (J)

11. Based on casualty figures of 120th Infantry.
12. Lt. Col. Fitzgerald had assumed command of the 3rd Battalion, since the 30th Division’s advance to the Roer River. It was his first combat assignment.
14. Figures taken from the Morning Reports of the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry.
15. Id.
17. Figures compiled from the Morning Reports of the 1st Battalion, 119th Infantry.
18. Company E’s Morning Report for 17 December 1944
19. Maj. McCowan’s account, ibid. 16
20. Id.
21. Morning Reports of Companies E & G, 119th Infantry
23. ID.
24. Maj. McCowan’s account, ibid. 16
26. Based on figures given in the Company Morning Reports, the 30th Division suffered 133 casualties in the Arret de Coo area, broken down as follows:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>E-119</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F-119</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F-120</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>G-119</td>
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<tr>
<td>G-120</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>83</td>
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