SPOTLIGHT ON THE 291ST ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

The story of the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion and their vital contribution in the construction of the Ludendorff Bridge will be featured in an exhibit in the upcoming Campaigns Pavilion.

ORAL HISTORY SPOTLIGHT

Sgt. Charles Hensel

291st Engineer Combat Battalion

Sgt. Charles Hensel of the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion was interviewed by Historian Tommy Lofton at his home in Lockport, NY, on November 10, 2010.

Sgt. Charles Hensel grew up in Lockport, NY and spent much of his youth playing softball and staying active in the Boy Scouts. He was drafted by the Army in 1943 and eventually left his home in New York for Camp Swift, Texas. Upon arriving at Camp Swift, he was assigned to the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion, under the command of then Lt. Col. David E. Pergrin. With the 291st Hensel underwent engineering training and the unit spent some time in Louisiana before eventually shipping out to England.

After months of hard fighting and successfully repairing roads and bridges in Normandy, the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion reached Belgium. It was there that the Germans launched Operation Wacht Am Rhein (better known as the Battle of the Bulge) against the Allied troops within the Ardennes Forest. As the Germans advanced in the direction of Col. Pergrin and his men, the 291st expanded along the American front line in order to defend or destroy the crucial bridges in the area and slow the German advance. Hensel, now a Sergeant in Company C and

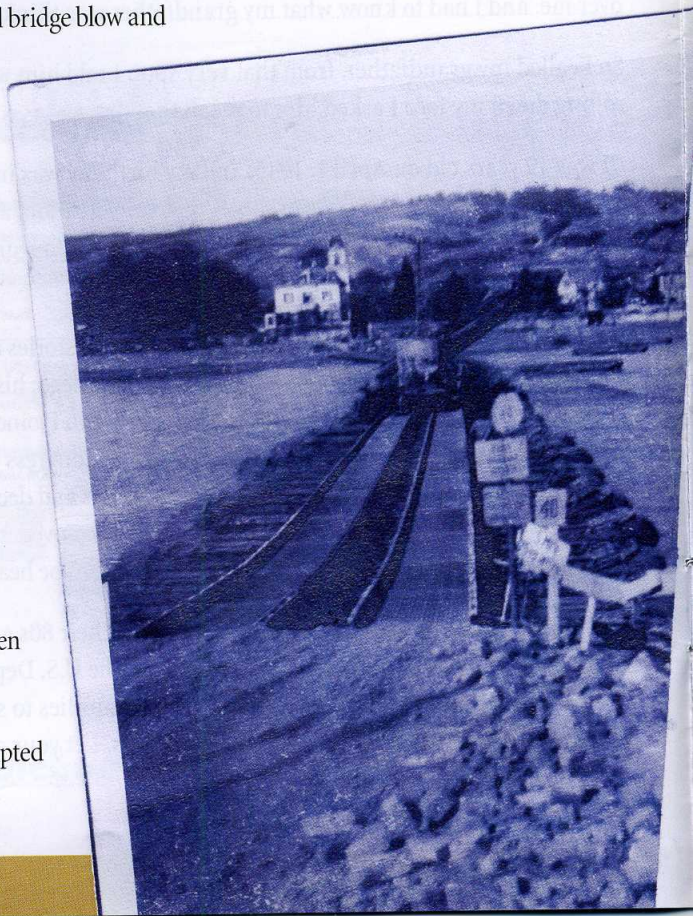
HENSEL *continued on page 5*

The 291st Engineer Combat Battalion was formed at Camp Swift, Texas in April of 1943. The unit began intensive training during the summer of 1943 and finally shipped overseas to England in October of that year. Arriving in Liverpool, England, the 291st and commanding officer, David E. Pergrin, were immediately put to work constructing tent camps and building roads in order to house and move troops for the upcoming D-Day invasion.

On June 23, 1944, the 291st landed in Normandy and moved inland, tasked with the job of maintaining the roads to and between Carentan. It was in Normandy that the 291st received its baptism by fire, sustaining light casualties during intermittent periods of German artillery fire. During the long summer of 1944, the 291st constructed and maintained roads through the Normandy area towards Paris.

By December 1944, the unit was occupying several small villages in the Ardennes Forest area of Belgium. The men of the 291st enjoyed Thanksgiving and prepared for a quiet Christmas. On December 16, the Germans unleashed a violent counterattack in the Ardennes Forest designed to re-capture Antwerp and cut the Allied armies in two. The American front lines were thrown into disarray as the Germans captured thousands of GIs and pressed their attack forward with relentless fury. For the first time in the war, the men of the 291st put down their building equipment and picked up their rifles and TNT.

Throughout the early stages of the Battle of the Bulge, the 291st distinguished itself in close and vicious fighting, stopping the German advance several times at key road networks with strong defense or blowing up numerous bridges across the many rivers in the Ardennes. After witnessing another vital bridge blow and disruption of his crucial time table, German spearhead commander, SS Obersturmbannfuhrer Jochen Peiper, is said to have pounded his fists on his tank and screamed, "The Damned Engineers!" in reference to the 291st.



By the end of January 1945, the US Army, along with the 291st, had resumed its advance into Germany. In early March, rumors began circulating that a railroad bridge in the town of Remagen was the last bridge standing across the Rhine River. On March 7, the Germans attempted

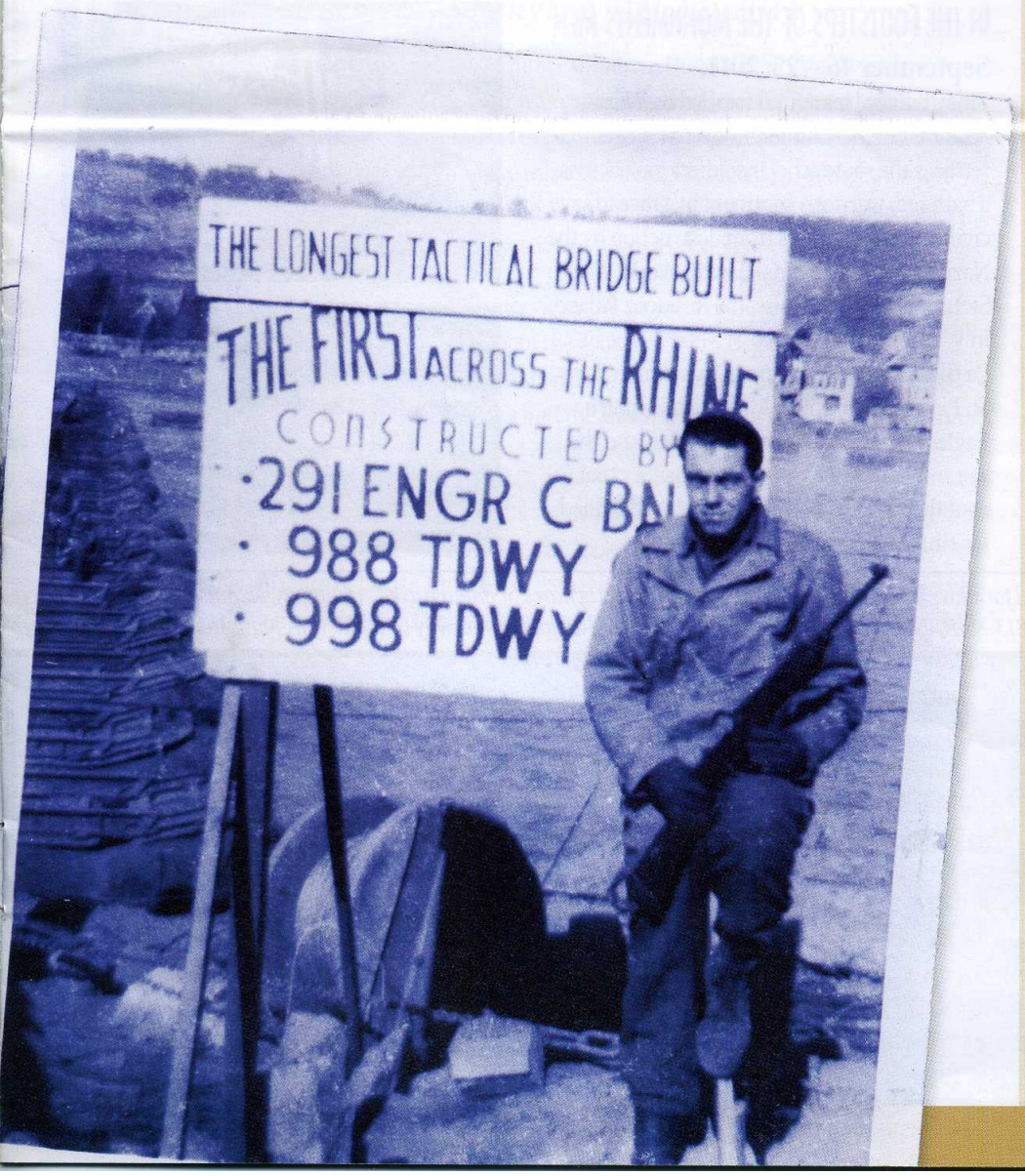
to destroy the Ludendorff Bridge ahead of the 9th Armored Division by detonation. The German emergency charge went off, but to their astonishment, the bridge remained intact.

By the evening of March 8, over 8,000 American troops crossed the Ludendorff Bridge. Although the bridge had been captured intact, it was severely damaged from the explosion and the massive volume of military traffic. The 291st was selected to build a new bridge across the Rhine River in anticipation of the Ludendorff's inevitable collapse.

On March 9, with cries of, "Rise and Shine, we're bridging the Rhine!" the 291st began construction of the longest treadway bridge ever built. They worked under constant German artillery fire and air attacks. Several times throughout the building process, work had to be stopped so that the engineers could dash for cover under the seemingly un-relenting German artillery. By the end of the first day, the 291st had suffered several casualties and had named the end of the lengthening bridge "Suicide Point."

Roughly 32 hours after construction began, the bridge was complete. At 1,032 feet, it was the longest tactical bridge built under fire, and the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion's finest hour.

By war's end, the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion had constructed 23 timber bridges, 44 Bailey bridges, 7 treadway bridges, constructed 11 bridges under fire, destroyed 6 bridges, made 7 river assault crossings, deactivated 15 bombs, cleared 7,000 mines, and taken 8,500 German prisoners. As a result of its stellar record, the unit was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.



HENSEL *continued from page 4*

squad leader of 3rd Squad, had orders to set up a road block in front of one such crucial bridge located just outside of Stavelot, a crucial town between Trois-Ponts and Malmedy.

Under the cover of a dark night, Hensel sent one of his men, Pvt. Bernard Goldstein, just ahead of the road block area to keep a lookout for German units moving into the area. The rest of the squad went into action setting up a "daisy chain" of landmines across the road to impede the advance of German armor.

Upon completion, Hensel decided to take another man down the road to assist Pvt. Goldstein with watching for German armor. These men had no idea that a German column of tanks was pulling up to Goldstein's position. All of a sudden "Halt!" echoed through the area as Goldstein yelled at the tank column, unsure of whether they were German or American tanks. Hensel and his man ducked down as shots rang out in all directions. They worked their way back to the squad and fell back to wait on Goldstein's return. After waiting as long as they could, Hensel decided to get his men back into friendly territory, uncertain of Goldstein's fate.

As the squad approached the bridge, Hensel remembered a group of GIs along the road stopping the truck and asking what all the commotion was about down the road. Hensel told them he didn't know, but that he was getting his men to safety. Upon pulling away, he realized that there was something odd about the GIs, that only one man talked and the rest seemed eerily quiet. Looking back, he feels quite certain that some of these men belonged to Otto Skorzeny's Panzer Brigade 150.

As the Battle of the Bulge wound to a close, Hensel and his men found themselves in Baugnez at the site of the "Malmedy Massacre." Their duty was to clean the snow off of the dead GIs and police them for booby traps that the

HENSEL *continued on page 14*

HENSEL *continued from page 5*

Germans may have left for unsuspecting soldiers. Fortunately, none were found, but Hensel did notice that, as the bodies were cleared, nearby men, waiting to pick up the dead, just tossed the frozen bodies in the back of the truck like sacks of flour. Hensel was enraged and immediately grabbed his rifle and ran to these men insisting that they treat their dead brethren with more respect. This seemed to get the point across and ensured that the dead men received more respect when being placed in the transport truck.

A few months later, Hensel and the rest of the 291st found themselves entering Germany, building bridges, repairing roads, and clearing minefields the whole way there. Upon reaching the Rhine River, the Ludendorff Bridge was in danger of collapse and it was deemed that another bridge was necessary to continue the troop flow across the Rhine. The 291st was assigned with building a pontoon bridge down river of the Ludendorff Bridge as quickly as possible. Hensel and his squad were tasked with fixing the approach to the bridge on both sides of the Rhine. After successfully completing this endeavor, Allied troops, tanks, and trucks started crossing the bridge the next morning.

To this day, Sergeant Charles Hensel is very proud of his work in the 291st and of their accomplishments across Europe during World War II. He plans to attend the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion reunion at the Museum in spring 2011.

BEGINNING OF THE END:
THE LEADERSHIP OF
SS OBERSTURMBANNFÜHRER
JOCHEN PEIPER

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

HAN BOUWMEESTER, MAJ, ROYAL NETHERLANDS ARMY
M.A., Free University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2000

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14. ABSTRACT

SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was one of GermanyŸs most colorful military leaders of World War II with an audacious reputation. The name Peiper will always be linked to the Malmédy Massacre, the death of Belgian civilians and more than seventy American soldiers, but there is still a myth around Peiper. Why was a twenty-nine year old Waffen-SS officer chosen to lead the German spearhead unit during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944? Peiper was a special leader within the one of the most elite Waffen-SS divisions, the Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler. Peiper was charismatic and extreme loyal to his unit. His men trusted him as a leader, even under the most extreme conditions. In Germany he was a well-known war hero. It was a logical decision that Peiper became the commander of the spearhead unit, but there were other factors leading to this decision: tactical considerations, a we-know-what-to-expect-principle, and Peiper was lucky that he was still alive and serving in the Waffen-SS.

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ABSTRACT

BEGINNING OF THE END: THE LEADERSHIP OF SS OBERSTURMBANNFÜHRER JOCHEN PEIPER, by Han Bouwmeester, 149 pages.

SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper was one of Germany's most colorful military commanders of World War II with a reputation for conducting extremely daring operations. The name Peiper will always be linked to the Malmédy Massacre, the death of Belgian civilians and more than seventy American soldiers. Peiper at the very young age of twenty-nine had been chosen to lead the spearhead unit (Kampfgruppe Peiper) during the Battle of the Bulge, the German offensive through the Ardennes in December 1944. Peiper commanded a platoon up to a regiment within the Leibstandarte, one of the most elite divisions within the Waffen-SS. He was an exponent of the tough SS leadership. Peiper was charismatic and extreme loyal to his unit. He was also a smart independent thinker. His men trusted him as a leader, even under the most extreme conditions. It was a logical decision that Peiper became the commander of the spearhead unit, but there were factors other than leadership leading to this decision, such as tactical considerations and a "we-know-what to-expect"-principle. Last but not least, Peiper was lucky that he was still serving in the Leibstandarte in December 1944.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Beginning of the End" is the title of this Master in Military Art and Science (MMAS) thesis on the leadership of SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper. The Battle of the Bulge was indeed the turning point in Peiper's life. In the years prior to this operation Peiper was heroic and a very popular German tactical commander. He became Germany's poster boy, but that changed dramatically after the Battle of the Bulge: Peiper was accused of committing war crimes at Malmédy without real hard evidence. He was sentenced to death; later changed into life imprisonment. Finally, he spent almost ten years in prison in solitary confinement. After release he was not able to make a living in Germany. He was disappointed and went to France, where he has been murdered by what is believed French communists.

It is still very sensitive to study the leadership of a Waffen-SS officer, who was sentenced to death. Many people see Peiper only as a representative of a very evil organization. I can imagine that. There is a very dark side to Peiper's leadership. Nevertheless, World War II took place more than sixty years ago. The time has come to reflect on all aspects of this war; not only glorifying the actions of the Allies and stigmatizing the proceedings of the Germans as evil. Units as the Leibstandarte achieved a lot of success. There are many positive things to learn from these German units; even for today's modern armies. In the case of Jochen Peiper: Why was a twenty-nine year old Waffen-SS officer the first choice for commanding the spearhead unit during Germany's most important offensive? He must have impressed his seniors with his leadership in the

period prior to the Battle of the Bulge. But, what made him such a successful leader? These interesting questions became the nucleus of my research.

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Richard Olsen (Chair), LTC John Suprin (2nd Reader) and Dr. Mike Ray (3d Reader), for their tremendous support, advice and sometimes challenging academic discussions. I would also like to thank LTC Joseph Ryan of the Combat Studies Institute for the excellent help he gave to win my "War on the American English Language." Another person to thank is Mrs. Helen Davis, the secretary of the MMAS Program and a real specialist on Kate Turbanian's *A Manual for Writers*, for all the advices she provided to make this thesis a real MMAS thesis.

Last but not least I would like to thank my family for all their support. Unbelievable how much patience my wife Joke had with me. I spent many hours behind my computer doing MMAS. Many other international officers with their families discovered the New World during the weekend holidays; we stayed at home for the MAS thesis. Joke always supported me very much: cooking, cleaning, being charming at the many international parties, running the family and entertaining the children in the weekends, because Daddy has to concentrate on the MMAS thesis in his study. And during Sunday evenings, when I had finished another chapter, Joke advised me to take some rest while she could read my crappy draft versions; making corrections and asking me nasty academic questions on black holes in the text. In return of all this, I promised my family to show all the nice places, discussed in this thesis, in the Belgian Ardennes as soon as we are back in Europe. Not doing a battlefield tour, but spending quality time with my family in a very nice surrounding.

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ACRONYMS

AAA	Anti Aircraft Artillery
C of S	Chief of Staff
Hrs	Hours
MMAS	Master in Military Art and Science
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Nazi	National Socialisms
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (High Command of the Army)
OKW	Oberkommando des Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces)
SA	Sturm Abteilung
SS	Schutz Staffel
SS TV	Schutz Staffel Totenkopf Verbande
SS VT	Schutz Staffel Verfügungstruppen
WSSOB	Waffen-SS Order of Battle
U.S.	United States
III / LAH	3d Battalion / Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

The study of leadership has preoccupied many professions--business managers, trainers and coaches in sports and politicians--but by far it is the primary preoccupation of soldiers. Leadership is really important to the military profession, because armed forces are always focused on reaching a target with a group of people, sometimes under extreme conditions, and that requires leadership. Military leaders, such as Julius Caesar, Frederick the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, the Duke of Wellington and Dwight D. Eisenhower, all had an enormous impact on history. These well-known commanders are still a source of inspiration for new generations of leaders. But what actually is leadership? The Netherlands Army doctrine gives the following explanation for leadership:

> Leadership refers to those activities aimed at influencing the behavior of others to properly carry out the set tasks. Leadership is the projection of personality and character of an individual, usually the commander, to motivate soldiers to do what is expected. (1996, 107)

The Royal Netherlands Army considers leadership as one of the most decisive factors for a unit in battle. It is the commander who ensures the execution of a mission, by action, motivation and energy, by conveying the will to "go for it" to his personnel (1996, 108). This is the reason why this research puts its focus on leadership.

The Dutch political scientist Toonen explains in his article "Besluitvorming in de publieke sector: bestuurskunde tussen 'politiek', 'beleid' en 'management'" ("Decision making in the public sector: public administration between 'politics', 'policy' and

'management'") that in social research there is a difference between the "focus" and the "locus." The focus is the way of looking at a subject. The locus, however, is the subject itself, the phenomenon the researcher emphasizes (1995, 382). *Webster's Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines locus simply as "a place" or "a location," or in a mathematical way "the set of points, lines or surfaces, which satisfies a given requirement" (1996, 841). In this thesis the focus is the study of leadership, but the locus is SS Obersturmbannführer (lieutenant-colonel) Jochen Peiper, a controversial figure in World War II military history. Why is Peiper the locus of this research? Ian Sayer and Douglas Botting explain in their book *Hitler's Last General, The Case against Wilhelm Mohnke,* that the German Army launched in December 1944 an armored offensive in the Ardennes (Belgium) as a last attempt to jump over the River Meuse and recapture the harbor of Antwerp, some eighty miles away. This offensive was Germany's last chance to stop, divide or delay the Allied advance into Germany and to possibly gain a favorable outcome. The newly formed Sixth Panzer Army under command of SS Oberstgruppenführer und Panzer Generaloberst der Waffen-SS (four star general) Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich was to play a key role in the operation. Leading division in this army was the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler (989, 240-243). Rupert Butler notes in his book *SS Leibstandarte: The History of the First SS Division, 1933–1945,* that this division was considered one of the most elite fighting units in the Waffen-SS. They saw action in Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the Balkans, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Austria and the Soviet Union (2001, 40-129). Sayer and Botting explain that the spearhead of this division was to be a strong armored battle group with almost 5,000 soldiers, better known as Kampfgruppe Peiper after its commander SS

Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper. Peiper was a handsome and quiet twenty-nine-year-old war veteran who commanded the Leibstandarte's 1st SS Panzerregiment (1989, 245). He had won the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, and in January 1945 Peiper received the Swords to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves for his "outstanding leadership" and performances during the Battle of the Bulge. He was seen as one of Germany's war heroes (Reynolds 1995, 28-29). Many considered him a brilliant and inspiring battlefield leader. On the Eastern Front Peiper had conducted some extremely daring operations (Lucas 1994, 126-130). But there was a negative side to Peiper's impressive exploits. He served as first military adjutant to SS leader Heinrich Himmler, and Peiper even married one of Himmler's personal secretaries, Sigurd Hinrichsen (Reynolds 1995, 25-27). In addition, Peiper will always be linked to the Malmédy Massacre, the killing of many innocent Belgium civilians and more than seventy American soldiers (Bauserman 1995, 61-68). His Janus face makes a myth of SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper, and he is, therefore, a favorable subject for a leadership study.

Research Questions

This thesis examines the leadership of Jochen Peiper and explains why he commanded at the very young age of twenty-nine the most important German unit during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* (Operation "Watch at the Rhine," the German code name for the Battle of the Bulge). This approach leads to the main research question for this thesis: Why had SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper been chosen to be the leader of the spearhead unit of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944?

The main question is divided into three secondary research questions. These three questions are comparable with a three-stage rocket. Every stage filled with fuel takes the rocket sequentially closer to the moon. In this thesis every answer on a secondary research question leads sequentially to the final answer on the main research question. It is a deductive approach. The first step starts with a general view on the German armed land forces in the period prior and during the World War II and determines why the Waffen-SS was so special among the other armed services. The next step is already more specific and focuses on the division Peiper served in: the Leibstandarte. It explains why the Leibstandarte was so special within the Waffen-SS. The last step is the most specific one and concentrates on why Peiper, as leader, was so special within the Leibstandarte. These three steps are translated into three secondary research questions. These questions in the correct sequence are:

1. What separates the Waffen-SS from the regular German Army?
2. What separates the Leibstandarte from other units within the Waffen-SS?
3. What separates Peiper from other commanders within the Leibstandarte?

The three secondary research questions are further divided into eight tertiary research questions:

1. What are the histories of the Waffen-SS and the Leibstandarte?
2. What is the difference between the Waffen-SS and the regular German Army?
3. What made the Leibstandarte so special?
4. What were the career and previous battle experience of Jochen Peiper?
5. What drove Peiper?
6. What made Peiper so special in comparison with other Leibstandarte officers?

7. How did Peiper and his Kampfgruppe prepare themselves for *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein?"*

8. Were there any circumstances other than leadership which led to the decision to make Peiper the commander of the spearhead unit?

Two additional tertiary research questions, which will not lead directly to an answer on one of the three secondary research questions, contemplate on two other things. The first additional tertiary question functions as an after action review of Peiper's action during the *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* Was it a right decision to make Peiper the commander of the spearhead unit? The second additional tertiary research question concentrates on the relevance. What can today's Royal Netherlands Army learn of Peiper's leadership? The two additional research questions are:

1. How well did Peiper and his Kampfgruppe perform during the Battle of the Bulge?

2. Is his leadership style or elements there of useful for today's Dutch military vision on leadership?

Research Methodology

The methodology for this thesis is based on the study of literature. This means, according to the Dutch social scientist Swanborn, that mainly indirect or secondary sources are used for this research. Information on a certain subject is used to answer a new research question. Swanborn calls this second generation research or secondary analysis. Swanborn makes clear in his requirements for social scientific studies that a researcher who uses secondary analysis can be influenced by the thoughts of the primary researcher (1993, 214-217).

This research approach raises some questions. How valid are the sources? Is all information coming from these secondary sources useful? To answer these questions appropriately, one must keep two ideas in mind. First, among the writers of secondary sources are many well-respected researchers, such as British historian John Keegan, German social scientist Bernd Wegner, American historian and former US-ambassador to Belgium Brigadier (retired) John Eisenhower (son of President Eisenhower), and British Major-General (retired) Michael Reynolds. Moreover, the books of Rudolf Lehmann and Ralf Tiemann on the Leibstandarte are based on the Bundesarchiven (National Archives) in Koblenz and Freiburg in Germany. Second, this research uses a variety of secondary sources, not only Anglo-American but also German, sometimes written by former SS soldiers, such as Hans Schmidt, Paul Hausser, Richard Schulze-Kossens, Rudolf Lehmann, and Ralf Tiemann. Some German sources are at odds with American sources, but that may help contribute to the dialectic approach of "thesis, antithesis, synthesis."

Not only secondary sources are used for this thesis. Some useful primary sources are also used, such as reports from the Dachau trials (interviews of all German key figures, who participated in the Battle of the Bulge), reports from Peiper, reports form his superiors and the so-called ETHINTS (European Theater Historical Interrogation Series, special reports on World War II made by German officers).

No interviews are conducted for this thesis, as most of the main characters are already deceased. Peiper died in 1976 in Traves, France, after his house was set afire, and most of his Waffen-SS comrades have also passed away. Additionally, those few survivors live in Europe or South America; some still in hidden places. It is unfeasible to conduct any overseas interviews in the short period of time available for this research.

Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises in total six chapters. Chapter 1, "Introduction" pays attention to the organization of the research. It is the introduction with the main research question, the secondary and tertiary research questions, the methodology, the structure, and the limitations, explanations, and basic assumptions that are made during the research.

Chapter 2, "Loyalty is My Honor" focuses on the first two secondary research questions: What separates the Waffen-SS from the regular German Army? And what separates the Leibstandarte from other units within the Waffen-SS? The chapter describes the history of the Waffen-SS and the Leibstandarte, the differences between the regular German Army and the Waffen-SS, and the question of what made the Leibstandarte so special?

Chapter 3, "The Poster Boy" answers partly the third secondary research question: What separates Peiper from other commanders within the Leibstandarte? The chapter describes the career and previous battle experience of Peiper prior to the Battle of the Bulge and tackles the motivation of Peiper. The chapter explains what these two areas, experience and motivation, mean in terms of leadership.

Chapter 4, "Autumn 1944" also replies partly the third secondary research question. What separates Peiper from other commanders within the Waffen-SS? The chapter clarifies why Peiper was so special in comparison with other Leibstandarte officers. It also concentrates on the preparations of Peiper's Kampfgruppe and on circumstances other than leadership which led to the decision to make Peiper the commander of the spearhead unit.

Chapter 5, “Peiper’s Advance” is an evaluation of Kampfgruppe Peiper in relation to the main research question of why Peiper was chosen to be the leader of the German spearhead unit. It focuses on the tertiary research question: How well did Peiper and his Kampfgruppe perform in the Battle of the Bulge?

Chapter 6, “Final Remarks” provides a conclusion as a final answer to the main research question. Moreover, this chapter makes a huge step forward in time to learn whether the findings are useful for today’s vision in the Royal Netherlands Army on military leadership. The chapter refers to the question: Is Peiper’s leadership style or elements there of useful for today’s Dutch military vision on leadership?

Limitations, Explanations, and Basic Assumptions

The first limitation is linked to the main research question. The main research question (why Jochen Peiper had been chosen to lead the spearhead unit?) may suppose that the researcher has full insight in the decision-making process of Peiper’s superiors to designate him as leader of this spear unit. That is, however, not the case. It is always very difficult to find out what people really consider when making decisions. During social research a researcher must always be aware that people will not always say what they have done and that they will not always have done what they say. This is a fact of life, a human idiosyncrasy. It is up to the researcher to judge these things. He must try to find out what happened and why it happened. He has to be as objective as possible. This thesis is mainly based on secondary analysis, but due to the quality of sources, it is possible to draw useful conclusions, which will answer the main question.

The second limitation is the description of the Battle of Bulge and the Malmédy incident. These descriptions only focus on the role of SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen

Peiper and do not give an unlimited comprehensive view of both the Battle of the Bulge and the Malmédy incident; both are well documented by previous research. Nor is the purpose of this thesis to add another biography to the list of biographies on Jochen Peiper.

The first explanation is the use of time. Every date and time used in the thesis is related to local time and date during and just prior to the World War II, whether it is at the Western Front in Belgium or at the Eastern Front in the former Soviet Union. This thesis does not use any standard time for the whole research, like the Z-time (the Greenwich Mean Time) in NATO.

The second explanation is the use of the German terminology for ranks and unit names and other military expressions. The once-only English translation for the ranks, and sometimes units, is shown between parentheses after the German term is introduced for the first time. Some researchers try to translate all German unit names, for example Waffen-SS becomes Armed SS and Leibstandarte becomes bodyguard or life guard, but these translations are not fully representative. Armed-SS is not a 100% true translation of Waffen-SS; it loses some of its meaning. Sometimes a translated name might cause only confusion, for example using bodyguard in stead of Leibstandarte. The Leibstandarte was initially a small bodyguard unit to protect Adolf Hitler, but it evolved into a military combat unit with the strength of a large armor division. Leibstandarte became a real brand name.

The first basic assumption is that the amount of sources used for this thesis is sufficient to draw conclusions. As researcher, one is always looking for more information, but there are limitations, such as time available for the research and

information that is only accessible at far away places or for a lot of money. It is up to the researcher to make a decision. The reference list for this thesis grew steadily and is now at a point that most books and articles are referring to each other. That completes the circle.

CHAPTER 2

LOYALTY IS MY HONOR

> I swear to you Adolf Hitler as Leader and Chancellor of the German *Reich*, loyalty and courage. I vow you and to the superiors appointed by you, obedience unto death, so help me God.
>
> The Oath of the Waffen-SS

Preamble

"Loyal is My Honor" is the name of this second chapter. It was the device of the Waffen-SS. The chapter focuses on both the Waffen-SS and the Leibstandarte. It therefore concentrates on the first two secondary research questions: What separates the Waffen-SS from the regular German Army? And what separates the Leibstandarte from other units within the Waffen-SS? The chapter describes the histories of the Waffen-SS and the Leibstandarte and the differences between the regular German Army and the Waffen-SS. The German Army and the Waffen-SS were separate armed services. The Waffen-SS was known as a fierce fighting force, but it was not a monolithic organization. It was made up of several combat divisions. Their numbers grew over the time. Among all these divisions, there was one very special: "The Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler." The chapter, therefore, addresses the tertiary research question: What made the Leibstandarte so special?

The chapter is to this end divided into seven sections: "The History of the Waffen-SS," "The Waffen-SS and the German Army," "The Climate of the Waffen-SS," "Training of the Waffen-SS" and "The Special Place of The Leibstandarte-SS within the Waffen-SS." Special emphasis is placed on leadership in both the German Army and the

Waffen-SS in a section called "Leadership in the German Army and the Waffen-SS." This chapter concludes with an analysis.

History of the Waffen-SS

The history of the Waffen-SS goes back to the early 1920s. Williamson describes in his books *The SS: Hitler's Instrument of Terror* (1994) and *Loyalty is my Honor* (1995) its purpose was political violence. Political violence during elections was both commonplace and bloody in Germany between the wars. When Hitler started his National Social German Workers Party, better known as Nazi Party, it was not unusual for party meetings to deteriorate into riots and fights with opponents from the political left. Many of these fights became extremely violent. The Nazi Party had expanded rapidly, and to provide security for its spokesmen, the party formed the so-called "Sport and Gymnastic Section" from which the toughest members were selected as bodyguards. This section soon developed under Ernst Röhm as an independent body with a new name: "Sturmabteilung" (SA or Storm Troops). This title referred back to World War I (1995, 10; 1994, 16-17). During this war the German Army created special trained storm troops to break through the Allied lines (Lupfer 1981, 41-46).

While Hitler spent nine months of 1923 in jail because of his failed attempt to overthrow the Bavarian government, the SA grew from 2,000 to over 30,000 members during this time. After release from prison Hitler decided that he needed a paramilitary group to protect him personally. That group should be steadfastly faithful and loyal to him alone; not least to protect him from possible SA intrigues. Therefore Hitler established a personal bodyguard in his hometown München (Munich). Initially this group numbered only ten men with one officer. It was first called "Stoßtruppe Hitler"

(Shock Troops Hitler). Again the title derived from divisional assaults groups from World War I. Later it was renamed "Schutz Staffel" (SS or Protection Squad). Hitler placed the SS under SA command and arranged for similar SS groups in a number of other cities in which he was to appear. Each recruit was chosen for fitness, abstemiousness and lack of criminal record and swore allegiance to Hitler himself rather than to the Nazi Party. In early 1929, the unknown Heinrich Himmler took over the leadership of the SS (Williamson 1994, 17; Keegan 1970, 28-31).

In the early 1930s, the SA questioned Hitler's leadership, while the SS remained loyal. As a reward the SS became the Nazi Party's primarily security force. By 1932 the SS had some 30,000 men, and the SA now had some 400,000 members, while the German Army only had 100,000 soldiers due to the Treaty of Versailles. Most Army generals flirted with the Nazi's, but distrusted the SA as an armed force for defense of the nation (Williamson 1995, 11). Nevertheless, SA membership in 1933 topped 3,000,000. Keegan notes in his book *Waffen SS: The Asphalt Soldier* that the reason for this expansion was threefold. First, the German economy was in a depression at the time. Second, Röhm successfully incorporated national servicemen leagues, such as the "Stahlhelm," into the SA. Third, many Germans decided to jump on the Nazi train before it was too late. Many Germans were frustrated and the SA gave them a voice against the comfortable established and ruling middle class (1970, 39). Williamson renders that, shortly after Hitler became chancellor and commander-in-chief of the German Army in 1934, Röhm declared the SA solely the true army of National Socialism. The German Army was to be transformed into a training organization. Röhm feared that Hitler became favorably disposed towards the traditional power groups in Germany at the time: the

Army, aristocracy, and industrial and financial magnates (1994, 32). Professor Weingarten states in his book *Hitler's Guard: The Story of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1933-1945*, that there is no evidence that Röhm ever seriously intended to lead a coup against Hitler (1991, 11). Nevertheless, in reaction Hitler tried to settle this problem and sent the entire SA organization home for leave. The SA leadership was killed within three days by Himmler's SS troops. This "Nacht der langen Messer" ("night of the long knives") destroyed the SA organization and afterwards the SS became an independent organization within the Nazi Party. Six days later all the officers and men in the German Army were forced to swear a new personal oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler (Williamson 1995, 11; Keegan 1970, 40-51).

In March 1935 Hitler broke the Treaty of Versailles and announced the expansion of the German Army and the formation of the SS Verfügungstruppen (SS VT or SS special purpose troops) as the core of a full military division. This unit was financed by the police budget to counter any Army fears. The formation of the SS Verfügungstruppen was the birth of the Waffen-SS and this threatened the German Army. They saw in the Waffen-SS a competitor. Hitler's reason for expanding the armed SS units was to help militarize German society and to create unswervingly loyal and obedient troops for himself. Hitler never trusted high-ranking officers in the German Army, because most of them were representatives of the old German and Prussian establishment (Williamson 1995, 11-12).

The SS VT was initially formed in March 1935 from the SS Politische Bereitschaften (SS political willingness squads). After 1938, other SS units were also formed from men of German blood residing outside the German *Reich*, the so-called

Volksdeutscher. Volunteers from the 'Nordic' countries and other Western European occupied countries followed them. Later, when the standards for SS membership were reduced due to the demands of war, whole SS divisions were formed from what the Nazis believed to be inferior races, such as the Ukrainians. At the end of World War II no less than thirty-eight Waffen-SS divisions appeared in the German Order of Battle. Fourteen of these units were only of regimental or reinforced battalion strength and others were decimated (Barker 1998, 6 -8). In total the field troops of the Waffen-SS grew from 124,200 soldiers in May 1940 to 160,400 soldiers in June 1941. In 1942 this number fell to 156,400 soldiers, but a year later, in December 1943, it was up to over 257,500 men. In June 1944, the Waffen-SS strength rose to 368,700 men and comprised in December 1944 almost a million soldiers (Munoz 1991, 367). The website on the Waffen-SS Order of the Battle (WSSOB) concludes that this last number is inflated by the inclusion of non Waffen-SS units such as XV SS Kosaken Kavallerie Korps (15th SS Cossack Cavalry Corps) (WSSOB website, 2003).

The first war experience of the Waffen-SS units came in 1939 during the invasion in Poland. Altogether some 18,000 Waffen-SS soldiers participated in this campaign (Barker 1998, 18). Gerald Reitlinger mentions in his book *The SS, Alibi of a Nation* that immediately after the cease-fire in Poland the greater part of the SS troops were withdrawn to be reformed into divisions (1957, 129). The former SS Oberstgruppen-führer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS (four-star general) Paul Hausser described in his book *Wenn alle Brüder schweigen* (When all our brother were silent) these divisions saw action in Western Europe, the Balkans, Greece, Finland, the Soviet Union, Poland,

Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, Austria, Hungary, as well as in the last phase of the war in Germany itself (1973, 593-596).

The Waffen-SS was not the SS organization, which protected concentration camps, such as Dachau, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen. Separate SS units did this. The SS Totenköpfe Verbände (SS Death's Head Units) was specially trained for this task. Williamson pictures that in 1939 the distinction between the Waffen-SS and SS Totenköpfe Verbände became more fluid, when the Totenkopf Division was formed out of SS Totenköpfe Verbände. However, the SS Totenköpfe Verbände itself never became a full military unit and, as such, never became part of the Waffen-SS. Most soldiers of the Waffen-SS never saw a concentration camp. Only a few severely wounded Waffen-SS veterans, who never fully recovered, were transferred to the SS Totenköpfe Verbände to conduct guard duties (Williamson 1994, 54). Charles Sydnor Jr. explains in his book *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division, 1933-1945* that the Totenkopf Division was an exception to the other Waffen-SS units. The Totenkopf Division had during the war still associations with the concentration and extermination camp system. In the spring of 1941, a permanent home administration to handle problems involving personnel, pay, and benefits for soldiers in the division was established in the Dachau concentration camp. The movement of SS personnel of all ranks back and forth between the division and the concentration camps was constant. Most men sent from the division to the guard units in the camps were transferred for individual reasons, such as disability from the war or punishment. Transfers from the camps to the division were less frequent and most of the time involved individuals who possessed certain skills required by the division, such as mechanics, doctors, radio operators, and others (1990, 323-324).

The Waffen-SS and the German Army

The relationship between the Waffen-SS and the German Army was one of rivalry. Weingarten notes that it started with the formation of the SS VT as an armed force. Hitler with Himmler, as leader of the SS, and Field Marshal von Blomberg, Germany's defense minister, reached an agreement formalizing the military status of the SS. The SS VT was to act as an instrument for the preservation of internal order, although possible use on the battlefield was also foreseen. Von Blomberg offered the SS a quantity of arms adequate to outfit one unit of division size. The responsibility for the employment of the SS VT was reserved for the Defense Ministry. This was a substantial concession to the German Army, but it became irrelevant when in February 1938 the Defense Ministry was eliminated and taken over by the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht or High Command of the Armed Forces) under direct command of Hitler. The German Army administered over the flow of recruits to the SS VT and provided it with trainings directives. Instead of the previous disorganized training programs for SS officers, formal officer academies, the so-called Junkerschulen (Schools for officer cadets), were founded, first in Bad Tölz and later in Braunschweig (Brunswick) (Weingarten 1991, 15-16).

Keegan states that in the period just prior to the outbreak of World War II little was heard of major problems between the army and the Waffen-SS.

> Indeed in June 1939, General von Brauchitsch, the army's new commander, ordered that it should seek to develop "a mutual relationship" of trust and comradeship . . . which is the prerequisite for "partnership in battle" and that local SS units should be invited to take part in training periods, courses, sporting events and social occasions run by the army. (1970, 56-57)

Wegner, on the other hand, emphasizes in his book *The Waffen-SS* the friction between the Waffen-SS and the German Army. The friction was not only centered on fundamental aspects, such as the function of the militarized units and the status of SS Junkerschulen, but also on other levels, such as spying by SS members on army units and the recruitment by the Waffen-SS from army units (1990, 106). However, Wegner also states that from the summer of 1938 the use of the Waffen-SS units in combat was taken for granted by OKW. The demarcation line between the Waffen-SS and the German Army shifted noticeably in the former's favour (1990, 114).

There were significant differences between the Waffen-SS and the German Army. Unlike the German Army, it was not possible to enter the leadership cadres of the Waffen-SS with only a diploma from a secondary school. The Waffen-SS selected their potential officers at the very earliest after twelve months service with the recommendation of the unit commander and after a previous selection test. This policy changed by the end of 1940, because the Waffen-SS desperately needed new officers for its combat units. They now accepted graduates from secondary school, who were tested for officer suitability, the so-called SS Führerbewerber (SS officer-candidate), even though Himmler constantly stressed that the cadres of the Waffen-SS were still open for all men (Wegner 1990, 140-144).

The army officers were in general much better educated; they had at least graduated from the secondary school (WSSOB website, 2003). Williamson states that although the SS had much higher physical requirements for officer selection than the German Army, its educational requirements were much lower. Williamson explains that this lower education tended to make SS officers far more adaptable to tough discipline

and ideological indoctrination (1994, 36). Wegner reports that only the general officers of the Waffen-SS, who came from the armed services, had enjoyed a regular officer career. The group of field grade officers, from SS Sturmbannführer (major) up to SS Standartenführer (colonel), was dominated by former non-commissioned officers from the army, who were excluded from an officer career largely because of the lack of educational prerequisites. The main consequence, in Wegner's point of view, was that the numerous noncommissioned officers changed the style of leadership of the Waffen-SS into a more practical method of leading (1990, 262-265).

There were other differences between the Waffen-SS and the German Army. The WSSOB website portrays that most SS troops came from rural background and that Waffen-SS officers in comparison with army officers lacked the Prussian tradition and the class consciousness (2003). Wegner, however, determines that 45 to 50 percent of the Waffen-SS officers came from middle class families and this percentage did not differ from army officers (1990, 244). Wegner's explanation for this relatively high percentage derives from the social changes of a class conscious populace:

> Repeated changes of social status mainly affected persons with a (upper) middle class background. They were the least certain of being able to maintain their social status. . . . This socially unstable group of persons, extremely susceptible to class fluctuations, frequently managed to secure "definitively" their class position only by making a career in the SS. (1990, 261-262)

The WSSOB website states that in the 1930s the relationship between the German Army and the Waffen-SS was even tenuous. The soldiers of the German Army considered themselves as the best soldiers and looked down on SS troops. The soldiers of the SS VT were only amateurs; the soldiers of the SS Totenkopf, the concentration camp guards, were sadist, and the soldiers of the Leibstandarte were "asphalt soldiers," who looked

great on parade ground, but were incapable fighters. After the first German campaigns in Poland and Western Europe, most army officers admired the courage and recklessness with which Waffen-SS units fought, but they felt that overall most SS troops suffered from a combination of recklessness and lack of training (2003).

The WSSOB website explains that the relationship between the German Army and the Waffen-SS reached the rock bottom during the German operations in Yugoslavia in 1941 when SS troops threatened to open fire on army columns. Army and Waffen-SS units were even competing to capture the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade, first. The turning point came during the German campaign in the Soviet Union when the Waffen-SS earned its reputation for bravery and steadfastness. No longer did the German Army look down on SS troops, as their élan and courage propelled many German advances and stopped many Soviet attacks. In 1944 when the SS units were still winning tactical victories on both the Eastern and Western Fronts, many army units even admired the Waffen-SS units, which were constantly rushing over the front, plugging gaps in the line, rescuing encircled troops, and mounting ferocious counterattacks (2003).

At that time Hitler himself influenced the relation between the German Army and the Waffen-SS relation by assigning some Waffen-SS generals, such as Hausser and Dietrich, to command an Army Group. However, no high-ranking SS officer ever served as a permanent member of the OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres or High Command of the German Army) (WSSOB website, 2003). Wegner agrees and states that the Waffen-SS, since the beginning of the war, had a reputation for suffering overproportionally heavy losses in combat. After 1945 this generalization was rather uncritically used to prove the special steadfastness and bravery of SS troops. The losses were interpreted as

evidence of failing SS leadership and ideological motivated misanthropy. However, Wegner mentions that the number of those killed in action, both in the Waffen-SS and the German Army, correspond exactly to the ratio of their total strengths. So, Wegner concludes that the casualties among noncommissioned officers and enlisted men in the German Army and in the Waffen-SS were equivalent, but the casualty rate for officers was different. The deaths among SS officers were almost double that of officers in all combat units. Wegner pictures that Himmler repeatedly, and with pride, spoke of Waffen-SS company and battalion commanders seldom leading their units for more than three or four months because of death, wounding, promotion, or transfer. This rapid rotation in command led to a swift rejuvenation of troop commanders in comparison to the army. At the end of the war the average age of SS regimental commanders was around thirty-two and that of battalion commander around thirty (1990, 315-319).

Leadership in the German Army and the Waffen-SS

This thesis is based on a leadership focus. That means that leadership principles used by the German Army and the Waffen-SS in the 1930s and 1940s must be included in this chapter. Leadership for both the German Army and the Waffen-SS is best described in *Truppenführung* (troop leadership), which was published in 1933. Bruce Condell and David Zabecki note in their book *On the German Art of War: Truppenführung* that *Truppenführung* was a doctrinal manual far ahead of its time. Its purpose was not to give German military leaders a cookbook on how to win battles, but it was rather designed to give them a set of intellectual tools to be applied to complex and ever-unique war fighting situations (2001, 9). *Truppenführung* carried a long list of leadership tools. The ten most important tools were:

1. The command of an army and its subordinate units requires leaders capable of judgment, with clear vision and foresight, and the ability to make independent and decisive decisions and carry them out unwaveringly and positively. Such leaders must be impervious to the changes in the fortunes of war and possess full awareness of the high degree of responsibility placed on their shoulders.

2. An officer is in every sense a leader and a teacher. In addition to his knowledge of men and his sense of justice, he must be distinguished by superior knowledge and experience, by moral excellence, by self-discipline, and by high courage.

3. The example and personal bearing of officers and other soldiers who are responsible for leadership has a decisive effect on the troops. The officer, who in the face of the enemy displays coolness, decisiveness, and courage, carries his troops with him. He also must win their affections and earn their trust through his understanding of their feeling, their way of thinking and through his selfless care for them. Mutual trust is the surest foundation for discipline in times of need and danger.

4. Every leader in every situation must exert himself totally and not avoid responsibility. Willingness to accept responsibility is the most important quality of a leader. It should not, however, be based upon individualism without consideration of the whole, nor used as a justification for failure to carry out orders where seeming to know better may affect obedience. Independence of spirit must not become arbitrariness. By contrast, independence of action within acceptable boundaries is the key to great success.

5. The emptiness of the battlefield requires leaders and soldiers who can think and act independently, who can make calculated, decisive, and daring use of every situation, and who understand that victory depends on each individual. Training, physical

fitness, selflessness, determination, self-confidence and daring equip a man to master the most difficult situations.

6. Leaders must live with their troops and share their dangers and deprivations, their joys and sorrows. They can only thus acquire first-hand knowledge of combat capabilities and needs of soldiers. The personal influence of the commander on his troops is vitally important. He must position himself among the combat-units.

7. From the beginning of every war great importance must be attached to creating and maintaining inner strength and to the discipline and training of units. It is the duty of every officer to act immediately and within any means of his disposal, even with the most severe, against a breakdown in discipline or acts of mutiny, looting, panic, or other negative influences.

8. Uncertainty always will be present on the battlefield. It rarely is possible to obtain exact information on the enemy situation. Clarification of the enemy situation is an obvious necessity, but waiting for information in a tense situation is seldom the sign of strong leadership, more often of weakness.

9. The mission and the situation lead to the decision of the course of action. The course of action must designate a clear objective that will be pursued with all determination. It must be executed with the full will of the commander. Victory often is won by the stronger will. In the changing situations of combat, however, inflexibility clinging to a course of action can lead to failure. The art of leadership consists of the timely recognition of circumstances and of the moment when a new decision is required.

10. The commander must allow his subordinates freedom of action, so long as it does not adversely affect his overall intent. He may not, however, surrender to his

subordinates' decisions for which he alone is responsible (Condell and Zabecki 2001, 17-38).

These aforementioned leadership tools applied for both the German Army and the Waffen-SS, but within the Waffen-SS also some additional leadership tools became valid. Loyalty, obedience, and comradeship were the high standards set for the Waffen-SS and therefore embedded in their leadership. "Loyalty is My Honor" became the device of the Waffen-SS.

Williamson portrays that the Waffen-SS was known for its equality between all ranks. He renders that this might be a common feature of elite units in today's armies, but in those days it was highly unusual, especially in the German armed forces. The German Army was well-known as an organization with Prussian traditions and very formal barriers between officers and other ranks. In the Waffen-SS, officers were to earn the respect of their men and not assume it merely because of their rank. Soldiers were not, as in the German Army, expected to call their officers "sir," but were to address them by their military rank. Officers in turn often shared a drink with their men off duty. Williamson concludes that this comradeship contributed to the Waffen-SS's success on the battlefield. Soldiers had great respect and confidence in their officers and would obey them without question; sure in the awareness that no officer would ask them to do anything he was not fully prepared to do himself. The drawback of this obedience is, in Williamson's point of view, that the Waffen-SS probably took their orders literally, fighting for an objective to the last man and rarely looking for opportunities for tactical withdrawal. On the other hand it is the nature of elite troops to have a short life expectancy. The battlefield is no place for a democratic debate. For soldiers intended to

carry on where even the best might falter, iron discipline and instant obedience are absolute necessities (1995, 32-44). Alfred Kotz says in the *SS Leadership Guide: Command and Obedience:*

> Leadership quality is a gift. . . . One must be a born leader. What makes a leader cannot be gained by office or promotion. The leader among masses is like a diamond in the sand. He is inconspicuous until he is polished. Even unpolished, he is still more valuable than polished glass in a fancy shape. . . . A leader misperceives his task, if he forgets – or is even able to ever forget – that he is above all a comrade to the comrades placed under him. Maintaining authority and nonetheless being a comrade: that is the difficult art the leader must master. . . . The leader is the superior, because he is there *for* others, because he is a comrade, a friend, an advisor . . . , and because his greater strength, will and farsightedness provide him with the inner justification and duty. (2001, 15-24)

Kotz explains in the SS *Leadership Guide* that loyalty and obedience are two manly virtues that determine basic direction in one's way of life. As he says:

> Loyalty is lack of deception . . . it demands reliability and maintenance through action and inaction, so that the trusted one is not deceived. . . . Loyalty is the inner obedience carried by trust and by affirmative love, not servitude. Orders formed by correct obedience look different than hypocrisy in the guise of over-anxious obedience. The enlisted man clearly feels the difference. . . . Good command and obedience rest on one purpose. The commander must know this purpose. . . . This purpose must also be made clear to the subordinate – that's the task of the commander – otherwise effect and subordination seem senseless to him. That kind of obedience becomes blind obedience, whereas it is absolutely essential for a living connection to be established between them and the goal that they must and want to achieve. (2001, 28-38)

Kotz also notes that the Waffen-SS put emphasis on discipline:

> Upon closer examination it will be determined that the German man already stands on a higher level. He often practices discipline without even knowing it. It comes from his kind, from his blood. He seldom gives a name to this kind of discipline, for he has a fine feeling for what must be. Under discipline we must . . . understand a duality. The discipline of external kind regulates the direct relationship of the individual to another or to the whole. Discipline of the inner kind appears to find its termination in the individual's life and . . . it protects against becoming flat. Discipline is authority downward and obedience upward, but both bind through a mutual trust and through loyalty. (2001, 45-46)

The German Army and the Waffen-SS opinions on obedience were different. The German Army encouraged their educated officer to become independent thinkers, where the Waffen-SS officers were more stuck to their orders. There were exceptions in the Waffen-SS to this leadership tool. Men, such as Sepp Dietrich, Fritz Witt, Theodor Wish, Otto Baum, Kurt Meyer, better known as 'Panzermeyer' (see Mark Yeger's *Waffen-SS Commanders: The Army, Corps and Divisional Leaders of a Legend*), Max Wünsche (see Craig Luther's *Blood and Honor, The History of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitler Youth 1943-1945*) and Jochen Peiper, all were able to make their own judgment, thought independently and took the initiative to exploit favorable situations on the battlefield and gained most of the time an enormous advantage on the enemy. These characteristics distinguished these aforementioned officers from others in the Waffen-SS.

The Climate of the Waffen-SS

John Keegan remarks in his book *Waffen-SS, The Asphalt Soldiers* that there surely is a many sided SS legend, such as the SS state within a state, or the janissaries of the Waffen-SS, faithful unto death and fiercer in combat than any other soldiers that fought on the Western Front. Keegan admits that Waffen-SS soldiers were not just soldiers and mentioned two features, which had an impact on the climate of the Waffen-SS: the ideological foundation during the training and selection methods for leadership, and the incorporation of a mythical Nordic heritage and German history. These factors ensured that the Waffen-SS had a superior esprit de corps and a stronger appeal than German Army units. Unit names, such as "Hohenstauffen" and "Totenkopf" echoed the glorious past of the "Life Guards of the Bavarian King" and the "Death Head's Hussars of Frederic the Great" (1970, 132-137). Williamson mentions that it was Himmler

himself who interspersed the Waffen-SS training with history and myth. Himmler had an enormous fascination for the history of the Nordic population and in particularly King Heinrich I, who successfully defended the German lands from a Slavic invasion in the tenth century. Himmler was also captivated by the history of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, and sought to create in his SS a new Teutonic Order to spread his version of Germanic culture throughout Europe. Only the finest of German bloodstock would be accepted into his elite SS, which would commemorate ancient German pagan traditions signified by double Sig-runes of the SS collar patch. Loyalty, discipline and personal honor, as well as a willingness to sacrifice one's own life, became the keynotes in the SS creed and mentality. This loyalty was focused on only one person, Adolf Hitler (who was, of course, the state), rather than the state in general terms or a constitution.

Among the men who set up the first military training for the Waffen-SS were Felix Steiner and Cassius Freiherr (Baron) von Montigny. Steiner had been an officer in the Stoßtruppen in World War I and he wanted to imbue the Waffen-SS with same style and spirit. Von Montigny, a World War I U-boat captain had similarly strong ideas on discipline. Both men set out to create a force that was tough, ruthless and highly disciplined. Williamson remarks that the men were successful to a large degree, although it was recklessness and disregard for human life that led to atrocities for which the Waffen-SS is remembered. Williamson also emphasizes SS ideological indoctrination. Unlike army recruits, the SS man got formal lectures covering the policies of the Nazi Party and intense indoctrination in SS philosophy; particularly the theories of racial superiority, which destined him to rule over what they called *Untermenschen* (sub humans), such as Jews and Slavs. The aim of the lectures was to produce men who firmly

believed in their own destiny as missionaries of the new Aryan order; an order that was destined to rule the whole world. Williamson believes that these factors together with the personal oath of allegiance to Hitler had resulted in the almost desperate determination and bravery of the Waffen-SS soldiers and their apparent disregard of death (1994, 21-37).

Wegner renders that the most noticeable aspect of the SS catalogue of virtues is its conventionality, which was all too easily overlooked after 1945 in the face of the atrocities committed by the Waffen-SS. The same applied for the SS fighting rules, which were propagated by Himmler and resembles the ideals of a fair game. Wegner cites in his book the *Kampfspielregeln* (fighting rules), which were published in 1943 in the *SS Handbuch* (*SS Handbook*):

> Your goal: highest performance. The way: through daily exercise. The unbreakable bond: comradeship. Above your advantage stands the team's victory. At play, be hard and fair. Preserve iron discipline respecting the rules of the game, the decision of the referee and the orders of the team captain. Never tamper with fortune, for this is tantamount to a defeat. Never evade a decision. Never back down. Show modesty in victory and accept defeat without excuses. The cause of your defeat rests solely at your doorstep. Always be chivalrous; always be an SS man at games as in life! (1990, 14-15)

British historian Robin Lumsden explained in his book *SS: Himmler's Black Order, 1923-45* that SS soldiers were formed into adaptable soldier-athletes with a better than average endurance on the march and in combat. Great emphasis was placed on ideological indoctrination, physical exercise and sports as integral parts of daily life. The end product was a higher standard of soldiers, a man who was a storm trooper in the best traditions of the term (1997, 34).

Hans Schmidt, a former soldier in the Leibstandarte-SS, describes in his book *SS Panzergrenadier* that the line between officers and enlisted men was thin. Men and

officers ate in the same location and enlisted men were not supposed to be humble to their officers (2002, 102). Schmidt emphasizes that SS men never lost their dignity nor their individualism:

> I never bought the American claim that it is necessary to destroy the individual characteristics of young men in order to make them better soldiers. I still believe that the will and the voluntary determination to be part of the unit, and to have sound reasons to be proud of it, was or is far more important. The esprit de corps of the Waffen-SS derived to a not inconsiderable part from the truth that most of our officers and non-coms (sic) were themselves good men, and good comrades. (2002, 45-46)

Butler states in his book *SS Leibstandarte* that there was a form of democracy in the Waffen-SS, which was quite unknown in the German Army. This breaking down of social and professional barriers between officers and men had its origin in World War I's German Sturmabteilungen. The legacy of the Sturmabteilungen gave, according to Butler, a significant and valuable advantage: especially during operations on the Soviet battlefield, where it became commonplace for officers of senior field rank to lead combat groups in all-out assaults (2001, 27-29).

Training of the Waffen-SS

Special emphasis is placed on training methods in the Waffen-SS and especially in the officers training course, although training might be seen as part of the whole Waffen-SS climate. Training was an important aspect of the Waffen-SS. Initially the policy for entering the Waffen-SS was that enlisted men signed on for four years, for noncommissioned officers it was twelve years and twenty-five years for officers. Officer candidates had to serve two years before they could apply for officer training. Despite these lengthy commitments and the tough physical, moral and racial requirements, no criminal record and a proven Aryan ancestry (going back to the beginning of the

nineteenth century), there was no shortage of volunteers. In the early years there was an unfortunate shortage of combat-experienced soldiers, especially in the category of field grade officers (Williamson 1994, 36).

Williamson describes the Waffen-SS training in his book *The SS: Hitler's Instrument of Terror.* Initial training for SS recruits was carried out in depots outside each regiment's hometown. The Leibstandarte broadly followed the training program evolved for the SS VT, which was because of its ceremonial and guards duties initially more focused on "spit and polish" training.

The normal training day began at 0500 hours with calisthenics, followed by breakfast and weapons training. As soon as the men were familiar with their weapons the main focus of the course shifted to infantry assault tactics. Instructors put great emphasis on aggression, constantly stressing speed and ferocity in attack with the purpose of winning quickly to minimize casualties. Sports of all types played a major role in the training program, much more than in the German Army. All forms of track and field events were encouraged not only for relaxation but as part of the training itself; as means of improving physical strength and reflexes. There were endless route marches and cross country runs, both with and without full equipment to expand endurance (1994, 36-37). Schmidt admits that the basic training was hard:

> We were driven to the limits of our physical endurance. For me personally, the worst experience was the lack of sleep that soon became the norm. While at most for all regular installations of the German Army reveille was six o'clock in the morning, the Waffen-SS wake-up call came one hour earlier. (2002, 45)

Schmidt explains that the training was realistic and not unfair. He describes in his book *SS Panzergrenadier* that unarmed combat was much more realistic than in other armies. As he says: "There was also none of the stupid drills where new soldiers have to

attack straw bags with their bayonet-spiked rifles . . . while yelling kill, kill, kill." (2002, 45) The treatment by their instructors was fair. Drill instructors were not allowed to touch the recruits or to come within a distance of less than 2 feet without permission of the recruit. And once during a long and exhausting night training, when Schmidt had fallen asleep while marching, his instructor had taken his machine gun, MG-42, from his shoulder and dragged it for most of the march (2002, 45).

Williamson also portrays the rest of a training day. In the afternoon the lessons commenced with "make and mend" sessions during which the barracks were cleaned and uniforms were maintained. Later in the afternoon trainees went outside again for further exercise. In the evening, trainees had some time for themselves. Playing chess was highly recommended to develop both logical thinking and mental flexibility. Additionally, at least three times a week trainees attended ideological lessons on Nazi policies, SS philosophies and especially the theories of racial superiority (1994, 37-38).

Special attention, as described earlier in this section, was paid to officer training. Richard Schulze-Kossens, a former officer in the Leibstandarte-SS and commander of the SS Junkerschule in Bad Tölz, states in his book *Die Junkerschulen: Militärischer Führernachwuchs der Waffen-SS (Officer training in the Waffen-SS)*, while the position of the regimental and battalion commanders could be filled by former officers and noncommissioned officers of the German Army, a new generation of middle and junior officers could be created without attending officer training at a military academy. In 1934 the first officer training school for the Waffen-SS was established in Bad Tölz, followed by a school in Braunschweig. The influence of the German Army is evident to Schulze-Kossens, as the first instructors were trained at the München military academy. This

academy provided advice for the course and the examinations. Later, these SS officer training schools were called the SS Junkerschulen (1999, 79-80). The purpose of the SS Junkerschulen is also declared by Schulze-Kossens: To produce a man with an upright, fearless character, chivalrous, with a clear sense of honor and obedience, ready to help. He is comradely and willing to take responsibility (1999, 84). Schulze-Kossens describes that disloyalty and dishonorable conduct and offences against comrades were harshly punished. It was even forbidden to have locks on personal lockers.

At the SS Junkerschulen, students learned to become battalion adjutants (a sort of operations officer) and orderly officers. The theoretical understanding of troop duties for infantry platoon leader was also taught at SS Junkerschulen, while the practical training for platoon leadership was taught at the arms schools after completion of the initial officers training. The subjects of instructions at the SS Junkerschule included tactics, ideological education, history, the nature of the army and the Waffen-SS, weapons training, field skills, map reading, troop duties, panzer combat, air force, physical training, and horse riding (1999, 84-88). Many stories exist on SS officer training, but most of them are fairytales. Keegan even describes a bizarre test of nerves for officer candidates in which the novice had to balance a hand grenade without pin on top of his helmet and had stand to attention to await the explosion (1970, 53). Schmidt denies this story, because a helmet has a round top, a hand grenade would fall down (2002, 92). Wegner concludes whereas military academies for the army were more focused on a homogeneous and well-educated group, the SS Junkerschulen had the fundamental task to standardize a heterogeneous reservoir of troops. It was probably this fundamental

education, which encouraged authors to exaggerate the training regime at SS Junkerschulen (1990, 151).

Schulze-Kossens also renders that the Waffen-SS did not posses any military staff college for development of command and staff skills. Only a few SS officers were sent to the Army's Kriegsakademie (German Army Staff College). They were selected to serve as *Führungsgehilfen* (command assistants). The term General staff officer, which was commonly used in the German Army, was avoided (1999, 60-61). The Waffen-SS needed simply their officers to command their battalions and units higher up in the hierarchy. A lot of officers were killed, wounded or captured before they reached this level. Only officers, who survived time after time, were able to make career in the Waffen-SS, but they were supposed to develop their command skills for battalion level and higher during combat.

The Special Place of the Leibstandarte-SS within the Waffen-SS

The Leibstandarte-SS was a special unit within the Waffen-SS due to their special relation with Hitler. Some officers in the Leibstandarte-SS even had a personal relation with Hitler. Butler describes in his book *SS Leibstandarte* that in 1933 Hitler, as new Chancellor of the *Reich*, asked his old party comrade and former bodyguard, Josef "Sepp" Dietrich, to form a bodyguard unit. Dietrich reported shortly after to Hitler that he had formed a headquarters guard of loyal men, which he called the Stabswache Berlin (staff guard Berlin), located near the *Reich* Chancellery in Berlin. Later the Stabswache Berlin amalgamated with SS Sonderkommando Zossen (special commando) and SS Sonderkommando Jüterbog into the Adolf-Hitler-Standarte (Adolf Hitler guards). Hitler, himself, changed the name into Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler (bodyguards SS Adolf

Hitler) to prompt memories of the old Bayerische Leibstandarte (Bavarian bodyguards). Their responsibilities grew over time, but the highest profile job remained the twenty-four hours guard duty outside the Chancellery and the Führer's residence in Berlin's Wilhelmstraße (Wilhelm Street) (2001, 11-14). The ceremonial duties earned the men of the Leibstandarte the nickname asphalt soldiers (Williamson 1994, 37). Weingarten reports that the Leibstandarte played a large role in the "Nacht der langer Messer," although it is difficult to determine how many Leibstandarte members were involved in the killings. On 5 July 1934, a month after the purge, twenty-five members, including Dietrich, were promoted for "distinguished service" (1991, 13).

Butler points out that in 1934 the unit was renamed SS Standarte 1-Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, the first of an intended series of numbered SS units, but Hitler did not like the idea of undistinguished numbers for his elite. As a result the Leibstandarte reverted to its previous name and the various components received designations as battalions and companies. Thereafter, the Leibstandarte expanded up to the eve of the war. By May 1935 the Leibstandarte had become a motorized regiment with 2,660 men and by September 1939 the number of men increased to 3,700 (2001, 27-31).

It was Hitler who declared just before the outbreak of the war: "If the army is reluctant to lead the way, a suitable spearhead will be provided by the Leibstandarte." (Butler 2001, 16) During their first operation in Poland in 1939 the Leibstandarte was part of Army Group South under General von Rundstedt. The Leibstandarte's casualties were relatively high: 123 killed, 306 wounded and three men missing in action out of 3,700 soldiers (Butler 2001, 40-54). In May 1940 the Leibstandarte also acted as an independent motorized regiment in the German attack on the Netherlands, Belgium and

France. During their campaign in the Balkans in 1941, the Leibstandarte became a division: SS Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and in 1942, during their recovery in France from operations on the Eastern Front, the division was renamed in SS Panzergrenadier Division Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler. Finally in 1943, because of a re-equipping, the division was called 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler. The Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler together with its sister unit, the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend that was formed in 1943 out of the Leibstandarte, were the only two units allowed to wear the name of Hitler (Butler 2001, 55-188).

The Leibstandarte was with a total of fifty-eight, among the units with the highest rate of recipients of the Knight's Cross, the highest German military decoration in World War II (Williamson 1994, 247). British Major General Reynolds notes in his book *Steel Inferno: I SS Panzer Corps in Normandy* that the Leibstandarte along with the other premier SS divisions became known as the "Führer's Fire Brigade" for their exploits in combat. He cites the German General Eberhard von Mackensen, who wrote as corps commander to the Reichsführer-SS:

> Every unit wants to have the Leibstandarte as its adjacent unit, both in the attack and in the defense. The unit's (sic) internal discipline, its refreshing eagerness, its cheerful enthusiasm, its unshakeable calmness in a crisis no matter how great, and its toughness are examples to us all. Its members' feeling for their fellow soldiers, I would like to emphasize, is exemplary and unsurpassed. . . . This truly is an elite unit. (Reynolds 1997, 9)

Weingarten states that the Leibstandarte earned for itself within the Waffen-SS a well-deserved reputation as a body of dedicated and ruthless fighters during World War II (1991, 146).

Analysis

This chapter concentrates on the first two secondary research questions: What separates the Waffen-SS from the German Army? And what separates the Leibstandarte from other Waffen-SS units? The answer on the first secondary research question is based on seven different factors.

First, the histories of the German Army and the Waffen-SS were different. The German Army was already for decades an accepted institution of German authorities. Even the Treaty of Versailles allowed Germany to have an army of 100,000 soldiers. The Waffen-SS saw its first light in the 1920s as special bodyguard for Hitler. After March 1935 when Germany broke the Treaty of Versailles Hitler decided that both the German Army and the Waffen-SS were to expand. This was the real birth of the Waffen-SS.

Second, Hitler saw in the Waffen-SS armed forces, which he could trust because of their unswerving loyalty and their obedience. The German Army and the Waffen-SS had a competitive relation. The German Army supported the Waffen-SS in the years prior to World War II with equipment and training directives, but the German Army did not trust the Waffen-SS. On the other hand, Hitler did not trust most of his high-ranking officers in the army, because they came from the old ruling class. This mutual mistrust was in favor of the Waffen-SS and it became Hitler's personal army.

Third, there were significant differences between the German Army and the Waffen-SS. German Army officers were in general better educated than their Waffen-SS counterparts, but Waffen-SS officers were more adaptable to loyalty, tough discipline and ideological indoctrination. Most army officers looked down on SS troops. The Waffen-SS was nothing more than a bunch of amateurs. This arrogance changed during the

campaign at the Eastern Front, when soldiers of the Waffen-SS units showed their courage and steadfastness.

Fourth, the German Army and the Waffen-SS had different approaches to leadership. Both the German Army and the Waffen-SS agreed on some tools for leadership, but the Waffen-SS had additional tools. Both kinds of tools are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Tools for Leadership

German Army and Waffen-SS	Only Waffen-SS
1. Accept responsibility. 2. Have a vision. 3. Make independent judgment and decisive decisions. 4. Teach and understand subordinates. 5. Be a role model and lead from the front. 6. Show courage (physically and mentally) and initiative. 7. Be flexible and allow subordinates freedom of action. 8. Enforce inner strength and discipline from yourself and your subordinates	1. Enforce loyalty and obedience and be self obedient 2. Earn respect from subordinates, based on equality between all ranks. 3. Lead with a high 'internal' code of honor 4. Be willing to sacrifice one's own life

Fifth, the Waffen-SS also had a superior esprit de corps in comparison with the German Army. Their ideological foundation during training and leadership selection methods and the incorporation of the German military history leading to glorious and

attractive names for units of the Waffen-SS made that most SS soldiers believed they were fighting for a new Aryan order.

Sixth, the training of the Waffen-SS was much more focused on physical fitness and toughness. The training of officer cadets of the German Army was more academic based on the better educational background of potential officers. This training continued for a selected group at their Kriegsakademie. Only a few Waffen-SS were able to attend the Kriegsakademie. Most young officers in the Waffen-SS commanding at battalion, regimental or even higher level were doomed to on-the-job-training. The term General staff officer did not exist in the Waffen-SS as it did in the German Army.

Seventh, the casualty rate among officers in the Waffen-SS was much higher than in the German Army. This caused rapid changes in command positions and led to a much faster rejuvenation of troop commanders than in the German Army.

The other secondary research question is focused on what separates the Leibstandarte from other Waffen-SS units. The answer to this question leads partly to the origin of both the Waffen-SS and the Leibstandarte. The Waffen-SS started as a special bodyguard of Hitler, which was actually the Leibstandarte. The Leibstandarte had, therefore, a special relation with Hitler. The men of the Leibstandarte were unswervingly loyal to their Führer. Hitler, on the other hand, had a great trust in the military capability of the Leibstandarte. After militarization of the Leibstandarte, Hitler decided that the Leibstandarte was always to spearhead a new operation, which happened in most cases.

Another reason that made the Leibstandarte so special was that soldiers of the Leibstandarte distinguished themselves as disciplined, calm and tough operating warriors on many World War II battlefields. It was not without reason that the Leibstandarte's

nickname changed from asphalt soldiers into the Führer's Fire Brigade as Hitler's fiercest fighting unit. As many historians believe they were the elite among the elite.

CHAPTER 3

THE POSTERBOY

> The railroad engines froze in, and the fight against snow and hungry bandits made the roads insecure. At the time when in towns the rear echelon life was gaining ground and constituted the first crystallization points of a moral disintegration, which extended its magnetic field up to troop headquarters, the front line had to be self sufficient and looked gloomily at the thriving poison flower flourishing in the hinterland. At an average freezing temperature of -30º Celsius, I remained with my company in the foremost ditches without a day of relief.
>
> Jochen Peiper (1945, 6)

Preamble

This chapter together with the next chapter answers the secondary research question: What separates Peiper from other commanders of the Leibstandarte? The chapter describes the career and previous battle experience of Peiper prior to the Battle of the Bulge and tackles the motivation of Peiper. The chapter explains what these two areas, experience and motivation, mean in terms of leadership.

The chapter is divided into six sections: "Peiper's Early Life," "Peiper's War Experiences up to October 1944," "Himmler's Protégé," "His Medals," "His Family Life," "His personality and leadership style." The chapter concludes with an analysis.

Peiper's Early Life

Jochen Peiper was born in Berlin-Wilmersdorf on 30 January 1915. His official name was Joachim Peiper, but he preferred to be called "Jochen." Weingarten suggests in his book *The Malmédy Massacre* that Peiper as many other SS men had a disdain for Biblical names (1979, 20-21). Patrick Agte states in his book *Jochen Peiper: Commander Panzerregiment Leibstandarte* that Peiper joined the German Boy Scouts in 1926. He

later became a leader in the Boy Scouts. As a schoolboy he brought home good grades and he was also very active in various sports. Neither Peiper nor his brothers participated in any political activity or Nazi youth organizations, but in 1933 the German Boy Scouts were incorporated into the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) and Peiper was transferred into the Jungvolk (Young People) as a leader (1999, 7).

Peiper developed a passion to be a professional soldier. Agte describes that his father's stories of his service influenced the young Peiper, but more important was his fundamental interest in Prussian and German history. Peiper intended to enroll in the prestigious German Army's Reiter Regiment 4 (fourth cavalry regiment). Therefore, he joined the Allgemeine SS (General SS) in 1933 to learn horsemanship in the SS Reiterstandarte 7 (seventh SS cavalry unit); a decent unit with a wide variety of men: former cavalry officers, nobility, university students, middle-class youth and schoolboys (1999, 8). Westemeister explains in his biography *Joachim Peiper: SS Standartenführer* that the SS was not yet a powerful organization and it was not really foreseeable that the SS would become what he called such a dreadful organization. Peiper's decision to join the SS should be seen with this fact in mind (1996, 7). Peiper, himself, declared: "From my early youth it had been self-evident to me that I would become a soldier. For that reason, I concerned myself with many military things." (Westemeier 1996, 6)

In 1934 Peiper was enrolled as an SS man with number 132496 and he became an acting squad leader. In this capacity the nineteen-year-old Peiper took part in the Nazi party day Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the Will) in Nuremberg, where he crossed the paths with the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler. Himmler convinced Peiper to join the SS VT or the Leibstandarte-SS to become an officer within the Waffen-SS. Peiper

decided to leave the Goethe-Oberrealschule (Goethe high school), because graduation was not a requirement to join the officer corps of the Waffen-SS (Agte 1999, 9-10; Westemeier 1996, 8-9). Peiper was sent to a SS candidate course in Jüterbog. He was then selected for the SS Junkerschule in Braunschweig, which he entered in April 1935. This selection is remarkable, because normal officer candidates had to spend at least two years in a SS unit before being selected for a SS Junkerschule. Peiper passed the final examinations of the officer course in January 1936 and his school record contained the remarks overall rather good performance. He graduated number sixteen out of 240 cadets. Peiper next attended the platoon leader course and then joined the Leibstandarte in April 1936 as a leader of the third platoon of the eleventh company in the rank of SS Untersturmführer (second lieutenant) (Agte 1999, 10-13; Westemeier 1996, 9-12).

After almost two years, Peiper was transferred to the staff of the third battalion of the Leibstandarte as adjutant where he saw the annexation of Austria into the German *Reich* in March 1938. Heinrich Himmler, himself, directed that Peiper be assigned to duty on his personal staff as adjutant of the Reichsführer-SS (Agte 1999, 13-15; Westemeier 1996, 13). Peiper left Himmler's personal staff in May 1940 during a visit with Himmler in Belgium to join his former company within the Leibstandarte as platoon commander.

Peiper's War Experience up to October 1944

Peiper's war experiences began in France in May and June of 1940, where he commanded both a platoon and a company. Peiper experienced his "baptism of fire" in France when the 3d Battalion of the Leibstandarte (III/LAH) with Peiper's company was ordered to storm the 72-meter high hill of Wattenberg, south of Valenciennes. Two weeks later III/LAH attacked the enemy successfully at Torcy. Peiper handed then over

his unit on 21 June 1940, just four days before the armistice between France and Germany was signed. The reasons for this quick hand-over are vague. Both Agte and Westemeier believed that Peiper was slightly wounded, although he never received a wounded badge nor was a wound ever mentioned in any official document (Agte 1999, 43; Westemeier 1996, 26). He went back to Himmler's personal staff to resume duties as first adjutant for more than a year.

In August 1941 he left Himmler's staff for good and flew to the Soviet Union to join the division staff of the Leibstandarte. The Leibstandarte was taking part in Germany's offensive against the Soviet Union, known as Operation "Barbarossa." The Leibstandarte crossed the River Dniepr and moved along the Sea of Asov to the east (see Appendix A, Map of Ukraine). The commander of the III/LAH was seriously wounded and was replaced by the commander of the 11th Company. On 11 October SS Hauptsturmführer (Captain) Peiper took over command of the 11th Company (Agte 1999, 47; Westemeier 1996, 32). In autumn of that same year the Leibstandarte was involved in heavy combat around the Soviet cities of Taganrog and Rostov. Peiper's company met stubborn resistance during these battles. In December the III/LAH went back to the area of Taganrog and remained in this area until June 1942.

In July 1942 the Leibstandarte went to France to reorganize and refit the six existing infantry battalions into two regiments and to re-equip as a Panzergrenadier division. Peiper became in September 1942, at the age of twenty-seven, commander of the 3rd Battalion of 2nd Panzergrenadier Regiment of the Leibstandarte. Peiper's battalion was transformed into a *Schützenpanzerwagen* battalion equipped with half track armored personnel carriers, and renamed the 3rd Mechanized Battalion. Peiper

immediately supervised an intensive training program focused on winter combat and in the midst of this training, on his twenty-eighth birthday; he was promoted to SS Sturmbannführer (major) (Agte 1999, 49-54; Westemeier 1996, 34-36).

Simultaneously the Leibstandarte moved again to the Eastern Front, where the Soviets were attacking along the Donez Line. Peiper's battalion was ordered to occupy defensive positions at the Ukrainian town of Karkhov as the right flank unit of the Leibstandarte in the SS Panzer Corps defense line. A few days later the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment was ordered to occupy new battle positions and Peiper's unit was placed in reserve. Meanwhile the German 320th Infantry Division was cut off from the main body of the Army Group. This division had suffered more than 1,000 wounded and was instructed to conduct a breakout. The commander of the Leibstandarte, Sepp Dietrich, quickly tasked Peiper's battalion to carry out the rescue (Agte 1999, 98-100; Nipe Jr. 2000, 111-112). George Nipe Jr. describes in his book *Last Victory in Russia: The SS Panzerkorps and Manstein's Kharkov Counteroffensive February-March 1943*:

> The mission called for daring leadership, confidence and determination and Peiper was ideally suited to carry it out. He was one of the young, aggressive unit leaders of "Leibstandarte" who had been hardened by years of fighting. (2000, 111-112)

Peiper's battalion, which had been transformed into a Kampfgruppe (battle group or task force), had to surprise the Soviets in the town of Zmiev, to capture two bridges and the town of Krassnaja Polyana, prior to contacting the 320th Infantry Division at the rendezvous point on the Donez River. Then Peiper had to lead the 320th with its wounded back through Soviet lines to German positions. Peiper started the operation on 12 February in the middle of the night and quickly reached the rendezvous point at the Donez River, although his unit was heavily opposed. Peiper was ordered to cross the river

to make contact with the 320th, but refused this order because the ice was too thin for his half-tracks and because Kampfgruppe Peiper was not equipped to construct a bridge. Shortly before noon Peiper's Kampfgruppe made contact with the first elements of 320th, and found the division commander angry with Peiper for refusing the order. Peiper's argument that the ice was too thin was brushed away as nonsense. This view changed when the first armored vehicle of the 320th broke through the ice. Meanwhile the Soviets had recaptured the bridge over the Udy River and the town of Krassnaja Polyana, cutting off Peiper's line of retreat. There was no alternative but to fight all the way back. Peiper's Kampfgruppe protected the march route of the 320th and then attacked the town of Krassnaja Polyana and the remainder of the bridge, which was used to construct a temporary bridge but not strong enough for Peiper's halftracks. After the remains of the 320th crossed the river safely by foot over the temporary bridge, Peiper's Kampfgruppe fought its way back to Zmiev, turned west and slipped through the defending Soviet units. He reached the German lines some ten miles southwest of Kharkov on the morning of 14 February, and returned that evening to Kharkov clearing it from attacking Soviets (Nipe Jr. 2000, 117-118; Lucas 1993, 126-130; Agte 1999, 100-102; Westemeier 1996, 36-38).

Peiper's battalion remained in the reserve until the end of February and was ordered to conduct several counterattacks. Peiper was able to surprise the Soviets every time. Agte reports that Peiper was known and appreciated throughout the entire Leibstandarte as a daredevil and that his unit earned an outstanding reputation and made a name in many night attacks: "Blowtorch Battalion." The battalion attacked from all sides, at full speed; firing everything they had, setting afire the thatched roofed houses

(1999, 102 - 105). Westemeier, however, claims that the name came from the blowtorches, normally to heat vehicle engines, which were now used as small flame throwers (1996, 39). Peiper gave his own explanation for the name in Williamson's *Loyalty is my Honor:*

> This unit had made quite a name for its night attacks in Russia and was known in divisional and corps areas as the "Blowtorch Battalion." Our troops used this highly practical tool in the winter to pre-heat the engines in our vehicles, to heat water quickly for cooking and many other things. . . . During post-war interrogations, however, this name was twisted from the "Blowtorch battalion" to the "Arson Battalion." It was suggested that the blowtorches were used to burn down houses. In action our armored personnel carriers were in the habit of going into the attack at full speed and with all guns blazing. . . . It would certainly be unnecessary for troops to dismount from their vehicles and use blowtorches to set houses on fire when they would already catch fire during the firing. (1995, 156)

The counter attacks by Peiper's battalion continued and the battalion took part in the German attacks on the city of Kharkov until 13 March. Westemeier calls the recapture of Kharkov one of the biggest military achievements of the entire Waffen-SS (1996, 43). Whiting notes in his book *Jochen Peiper: Battle Commander, SS Liebstandarte (sic) Adolf Hitler* that the Red Square in the middle of Kharkov was renamed into "Platz der Leibstandarte" ("Leibstandarte's square") and that one of the hotly fought over bridges was called the "Peiper Brücke" ("Peiper bridge") (1999, 21-22). Peiper also recaptured five days later by surprise the city of Belgorod, north of Kharkov, and made contact with the German division Großdeutschland. After this action, Peiper's unit was pulled back from the front to the vicinity of Kharkov for rest and refitting (Agte 1999, 109-117; Westemeier 1996, 42-44).

On 30 June all regimental and battalion commanders received orders for the forthcoming offensive, Operation "Zitadelle" (Citadel), at Sepp Dietrich's Leibstandarte division headquarters (Agte 1999, 169). Hitler had decided to concentrate the German

forces in the Ukraine to reduce the Kursk salient. Operation "Zitadelle", better known as the Battle of Kursk, is one of the biggest tank battles ever in history (Haupt 1998, 258-281). Peiper's battalion started its attack together with in total fifty German divisions. Hitler decided to stop Operation "Zitadelle" on 13 July after heavy loses (Agte 1999, 171-179; Haupt 1998, 277; Westemeier 1996, 45-49).

After operations in the Soviet Union, the Leibstandarte was transferred to Italy during August 1943. The Germans were worried that Italy was going to collapse after the Allied landings in Sicily and Salerno. The aim of the Leibstandarte was to stabilize the situation, although they used this period also for rest. Peiper even organized some sightseeing flights for his men. In September the Leibstandarte was brought to its highest state of alert, because of expected Allied landings in Northern Italy. The Leibstandarte disarmed the Italians of questionable loyalty. Peiper set up his headquarters at Cuneo, located along the Italian Rivera. It was a confusing time, because not all of the Italian troops were disarmed, and some were wearing civilian clothes while others were still walking around in uniforms. On 19 September two noncommissioned officers of Peiper's battalion were kidnapped on the way from Cuneo to Boves by Italian troops. Peiper ordered one of his company commanders to recover the abducted men and ordered also his other two companies to deploy. They were met with heavy resistance. Many houses in Boves caught fire and the two noncommissioned officers were able to escape. Later, in 1965, Peiper and his company commanders were accused of committing war crimes: arson and murdering civilians (Agte 1999, 206-210; Westemeier 1996, 49-51). Westemeier concludes that this is an overblown accusation. The inhabitants of Boves were not interested in the case for more than twenty years. They even received a

decoration from the Italian government for their heroic defense of the town. The name of Peiper popped up again in the press after the publication of John Toland's *Battle: The Story of the Bulge* in Italy and by 1965 he already was stigmatized as a war criminal because of Malmédy. The Italians made their case in Germany, but it was dismissed in 1968 by the District Court in Stuttgart (Westemeier 1996, 52-65).

At the end of October the Leibstandarte was reorganized into a panzer division and was ordered back to the Eastern Front, which had dramatically changed for the Germans in the previous months. The Soviets had been able to establish three bridgeheads across the River Dniepr. Peiper's battalion went directly from off-loading in Shitomir to combat, attacking to the north towards the road Kiev-Shitomir. On 20 November 1943 the new division commander of the Leibstandarte, SS Oberführer (senior colonel) Wish, gave command of the 1st SS Panzer Regiment to Peiper after its previous commander was killed. Agte explains that this command meant a change in tactical leadership for Peiper, because he was trained as a Panzergrenadier (armored infantry man). Peiper and his regiment participated in many battles in the Ukraine from the end of 1943 into the beginning of 1944 (Agte 1999, 274-275).

Peiper was promoted to SS Obersturmbannführer (lieutenant-colonel) on his twenty-ninth birthday in January 1944. After a short leave in Germany, Peiper underwent a medical exam at the Waffen-SS Health and Fitness Center at Dachau to discover the cause of his continuous fatigue. The physical team concluded that he had low blood pressure in combination with a tremendous combat exhaustion. The doctors did not allow him to return to the Eastern Front and he was forced to stay home for a few months (Agte 1999, 276; Westemeier 1996, 70).

Meanwhile, at the end of April 1944, the Leibstandarte was ordered to Flanders in Belgium. Peiper linked up again with his regiment, after his recuperation, in a small town called Hasselt. He immediately started an intensive training program to integrate the new replacements. At Pentecost four recruits were accused of stealing chickens from a Belgium farm. The next day, after a brief trial, the four men were executed. Westemeier describes that the Belgian population was shocked (Westemeier 1996, 71). Agte notes that even in Peiper's regiment the sentence was considered to be excessive, yet this incident did not impact Peiper's popularity in the Leibstandarte (1999, 352).

On 6 June 1944 the Allies landed at Normandy. The Leibstandarte was alerted and moved into an area east of Bruges during the night of 10 June to defend against an expected landing at the mouth of the River Schelde. This inactive period ended on 17 June when the Leibstandarte moved to defensive positions south of Caen in Normandy (Agte 1999, 354-357; Westemeier 1996, 72-73). The division completed its movement by the end of 6 July despite heavy Allied air attacks. Peiper's regiment was immediately involved in small unit actions with the Allies (Agte 1999, 358-370; Westemeier 1996, 73-75; Reynolds 1997, 160-203).

On 2 August 1944 Peiper fell ill with non-infectious jaundice caused by a gall bladder infection. Peiper went to a hospital in Tegersee in Germany near his family home, while his regiment was fighting against American troops in the Falaise Pocket in Normandy. The Leibstandarte suffered heavy losses in fierce combat. Yet, it escaped from the Falaise Pocket and removed to an area around Cologne in Germany, where Peiper joined it in October 1944 (Agte 1999, 370-374; Westemeier 1996, 75-76; Reynolds 1997, 227-265).

The Relationship with Himmler

Both Himmler and Peiper were impressed by each other since their first meeting in September 1934. Westemeier explains that a young intelligent nineteen-year-old boy, who was the ideal type of the Aryan race, impressed Himmler. Peiper was very proud that Himmler asked him to become a member of the Waffen-SS. Himmler was already one of the leading figures in the German Third *Reich.* Peiper wrote in his curriculum vitae, composed on 14 January 1935 in the Old Camp of the Jüterbog Troop Training Area: I decided, on basis of a personal request by the Reichsführer-SS Himmler . . . to select a career as a higher ranking SS officer. (Westemeier 1996, 8; Agte 1999, 10) It became clear that Peiper, in an early stage of his life, became Himmler's protégé.

Some researchers see the hand of Himmler in the fast selection of Peiper for the SS Junkerschule. Normally officer candidates had to serve at least two years in a SS unit before they were allowed to attend an SS officer training course, but Peiper immediately joined the course at the SS Junkerschule in Braunschweig after he finished the candidate course in Jüterbog. However, no evidence is found that Himmler ever speeded up Peiper's selection for the SS Junkerschule.

Himmler, himself, selected Peiper as one of his adjutants in 1938. Westemeier believes that Himmler was willing to give young Peiper an opportunity to work in a bureau where the hierarchical lines of all SS organizations and the German police converged. There was also a practical reason. Himmler was concerned that Dietrich and his military Leibstandarte would become too much independent instead of being part of his higher "Third *Reich's* Black Order of Knights." He, therefore, assigned ambitious Waffen-SS soldiers to his own staff and Peiper was one of these soldiers (Westemeier

1996, 15). Agte notes that it was a more normal and frequently used procedure that Peiper became Himmler's adjutant. Hitler, Himmler, von Ribbentrop (Germany's Foreign Minister) and other Nazi officials recruited their adjutants from the Waffen-SS. Agte thinks that Himmler asked for Peiper, because they had been familiar since their first meeting in 1934 (Agte 1999, 15).

Westemeier and Whiting note that Himmler was surprised when he learned that Peiper was not a Nazi Party member. The Leibstandarte already had arranged a party number for Peiper as part of his membership of this prestigious SS unit, but this number was in the eyes of Himmler not a correct one. His adjutant was to have a low ranking party number. So, Himmler, himself, immediately arranged a low ranking party number, but Peiper always refused to become a party member (Westemeier 1996, 18-19; Whiting 1999, 11-12). In this one might conclude that Peiper was not interested in the Nazi ideology and fascisms, but by entering the Waffen-SS he was only interested in fulfilling a long held wish. The real argument why Peiper refused to become party member is not known. Whiting argues that Peiper had been a fanatical adherent to the National Socialist cause, but he had lacked the basic equipment of a true Nazi.

It is also remarkable that Peiper left Himmler's staff in the late spring of 1940 to join the Leibstandarte for war in France. Some researchers conclude that Peiper had been given an opportunity by Himmler to earn some battle honors. It was prestigious for the Reichsführer-SS to have a decorated military adjutant. Reynolds notes that Peiper was released from his duties with Himmler to win his spurs on active service in Western Europe (1995, 25). Others see a relation in the facts that Peiper's first child was born in the beginning of July and that Peiper returned to his assignment in Berlin by the end of

June. They supposed that Himmler arranged Peiper's release from front duties to spent time with his wife who was in the last phase of her pregnancy. This theory was never proven.

Both Whiting and Westemeier note that Himmler was tremendously pleased when he heard that Peiper and Max Wünsche, another favorite and assigned as orderly to Hitler, both won, while serving in the Leibstandarte, the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class during combat in France. Himmler immediately ordered that two cars liberated in France were to be maintained at Hitler's headquarters for the personal use of Peiper and Wünsche. Of course, after the German victory the two cars were to be replaced with German made vehicles (Whiting 1999, 14; Westemeier 1996, 26).

What impact did the assignment as Himmler's adjutant have on Peiper? Was he already aware of the terrible crimes that were being committed in the Third *Reich* by members belonging to Allgemeine SS or the Geheime Staats Polizei (Gestapo or Secret State Police)? The Gestapo with almost 45,000 members was also under the command of the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler (Hammer 1996, 3-4). Charles Whiting mentions in his book *Jochen Peiper: Battle Commander Liebstandarte (sic) Adolf Hitler* that it was unknown whether Peiper was aware of what happened with people arrested by the Gestapo and what was already happening in the concentration camps. Whiting states: When the assignment was extended, we can suppose that the astute young officer came to his own conclusion (1999, 11). Reynolds concludes that it is inconceivable that Peiper did not know about the resettlement program in Poland, involving the expulsion or elimination of undesirables (1995, 25). Agte does not mention this aspect in his book. Westemeier concludes that Peiper must have known what was happening in Germany at

that time, because all the mail for the Reichsführer-SS pasted his desk. Westemeier believes that Peiper was unaware of the final plans on the holocaust, because this came finally to a solution during the Wannsee conference in January 1942 (1996, 20-24 and 28-29).

His Decorations

Peiper won his first two prestigious decorations within two weeks. He earned the Iron Cross Second Class for his superb leadership of his company during the assault on the Wattenberg hill, south of Valenciennes in France. Two weeks later Peiper's company attacked the enemy again successful in the vicinity of Torcy. Peiper received the Iron Cross First Class for bravery during this action (Agte 1999, 43). As seen in the previous section Himmler was very pleased with a decorated adjutant.

Peiper received on 26 February 1943 the German Cross in Gold, the second highest German decoration for distinguished leadership and valor in World War II, for his leadership in the daring action to rescue the 320th Infantry Division. His citation read:

> Peiper was ordered to take Zmiev and make contact with the 320. Infanterie (sic) Division. Peiper carried out this mission and brought back 750 wounded from the 320. Infanterie (sic) Division. While doing so he completely destroyed an enemy snowshoe battalion, which blocked his way back. (Agte 1999, 101)

Peiper received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, Germany's highest decoration for bravery and outstanding leadership and comparable with the American Medal of Honor, for his actions in the bridgehead at Bridok-Federowka on 6 March 1943, just two weeks after he received his German Cross. This might be seen as a very remarkable fact. Peiper's unit quickly broke through Soviet defensive lines at the southern outskirts of Peressel. On his own initiative he advanced far beyond the main objective, and held this bridgehead although he was cut off from all rearward lines of

communication. His unit laid the groundwork for the successful attack on Walki by the 1st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment the next day. On 9 March Peiper received a telegram from the Reichsführer SS, saying: "My sincere, good wishes on the award of the Knight's Cross, my dear Jochen! I'm proud of you!" May the fortunes of war continue to shine on you. (Agte 1999, 107-108; Westemeier 1995, 40-41) Agte notes that SS war reporter Dr. Arthur Venn wrote in well-known Nazi rhetoric in "Das Schwarze Korps" ("The Black Corps," the official magazine of the Waffen-SS):

> In every phase . . . Peiper was master of the situation. . . . He made rapid decisions and issued his orders with formal precision. These decisions were often daring and unusual, but they were given from a sovereign mastery of the situation. . . . Of course, the fortunes of war also smiled on the commander. But the unconditional trust of his men was based on something else, on the feeling that a born leader was in command there, filled with the greatest feeling of responsibility for the life of every individual man but still able to be hard when necessary. (1999, 109)

On 27 January 1944, Peiper was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knights Cross, because Peiper's regiment forced a breakthrough in the main enemy lines east of Shitomir. Peiper had smashed deeply into enemy territory on his own initiative. The Oak Leaves meant that Peiper earned the Knight's Cross for the second time. He received a telegram from Adolf Hitler saying: "In grateful recognition of heroic actions in fighting for the future of our people." A few days later the Führer, himself, presented Peiper the Oak Leaves and spent some time with him in detailed conversation. The German press reported his award of the Oak Leaves. The "Völkisch Beobachter" ("People's Observer"), the official magazine of the Nazi party, spent a large article on Peiper's heroic actions (Agte 1999, 275; Westemeier 1996, 70). The whole Nazi propaganda machine created with Peiper a handsome and daring idol. Nice pictures of Peiper were

taken to spread over Germany and he was seen in cinema news. He became in the true sense Germany's poster boy.

His Family Life

Peiper's father, *Hauptmann* (Captain) Woldemar Peiper, served in Turkey and German East Africa during World War I (George Nipe 2002, 265). Whiting portrays that Woldemar Peiper had been severely wounded in East Africa and sent back to Germany to experience the shame of defeat. This background of Peiper's father had a reflection on his education. Peiper had been brought up in the Prussian traditions of self-discipline and self-sacrifice together with a strong feeling of patriotism (Whiting 1986, xii and 6-7). Agte notes that Peiper grew up in the protected atmosphere of Berlin's middle class. He had two older brothers and he spent a great deal of time together with his brother Horst (Agte 1999, 7). Peiper's eldest brother, Hans Hasso, attempted suicide during high school. He incurred brain damage in the attempt from which he never fully recovered. Peiper's other brother, Horst, died in 1941 in what was officially reported as a "car accident," while serving in the SS Totenkopf Division. Both Agte and Reynolds think that this car accident was just camouflage for the real reason, suicide, because Horst was accused in his SS unit of being a homosexual (Agte 1999, 7 and 45-47; Reynolds 1995, 21). Westemeier gives only the car accident as reason for Horst's death (1996, 30-31). Peiper received a hard blow when he heard of Horst's death in 1941. Agte concludes that Horst's death must have contributed to Peiper's well-known reserve and must have added to the hardness, which he demanded from himself and his subordinates (1999, 45-46). Peiper's eldest brother Hans-Hasso died in 1942 of tuberculosis. Agte notes that with Hans-Hasso's death Peiper became the last surviving son of the Peiper family. He could

have appealed under the sole-surviving-son clause, which would have pulled him out of direct frontline service, but Peiper refused to pursue that option (1999, 49).

Peiper met his future wife, Sigurd Hinrichsen, during his assignment as Himmler's adjutant. Hinrichsen was one of Himmler's personal secretaries. She was almost three years older than Peiper. The couple married in September 1939 and had three children: two daughters, Elke and Silke, respectively born on 7 July 1940 and 7 March 1944, and a son Hinrich, born on 14 April 1942 (Agte 1999, 20, 47-49, and 276; Westemeier 1996, 29-34 and 70; Reynolds 1995, 25). The couple first lived in Berlin, but later moved to a large villa in Rottach-Egern on Lake Tegern in Bavaria near to Himmler's family. The Peiper family, who only occupied a few rooms on the third floor, lived there together with a family called von Podewil and members of the Jewish family Nathan, the owners of the villa (Agte 1999, 276). This is another remarkable fact: the family of Germany's poster boy living together with a Jewish family. It is evidence that Peiper was still a man with emotions and probably not interested in the Nazi racist theories.

His Personality and Way of Leading

Peiper received his first leadership experience when he entered the German Boy Scouts, where he became a group leader, though little is known of this period (Agte 1999, 7-9; Westemeier 1996, 5-6). His next leadership experience was in the SS Reiter Standarte where he became an acting squad leader. Agte cites Peiper's commander, who wrote in his daily report:

> His continuous attention to duty, his diligence and his military enthusiasm are exemplary; as a result, in spite of his youth, Peiper has been nominated as acting squad leader. (1999, 10)

Both Weingarten and Whiting report the account of the German Army psychiatrists who examined Peiper prior to his admission to the SS Junkerschule in Braunschweig. They found Peiper to be intelligent but egocentric and mistrustful of others. His unceasing efforts to impress other people with his connections were also registered by the psychiatrists. They found Peiper strong of will, and inclined to realize that will in quick impulsive thrusts (Weingarten 1979, 23; Whiting 1999, 7-8). Weingarten concludes that the recorded mistrust of others might be an explanation for his enthusiasm for a career in the Waffen-SS, an organization defeating the enemies of a society with which Peiper had early identified himself (1979, 23). Whiting emphasizes that Peiper's strong will and impulsiveness were the qualities, which made him one of the most outstanding young commanders of World War II (1999, 8). Later his instructor at the SS Junkerschule, SS Hauptsturmführer Lochmüller, graded him:

> Very good in front of soldiers and in the lecture hall. Very good ability and performance. Very industrious and good powers of judgment. Hard on himself and others. A born soldier. Fully mature in spite of his youth. Responsible. Self-sacrificing comrade, who possesses a good character. Suitable officer "materiel." (Agte 1999, 12)

From his early time in the Leibstandarte Peiper impressed his soldiers. Heinrich Heinermann, a former soldier in his platoon, describes Peiper:

> Even his outward appearance was impressive. Peiper radiated a certain "something." He was well liked, and he knew it, but he was still a regular guy with his feet on the ground. He was not only a superior, but also an example and a comrade. (Agte 1999, 13)

Agte notes that Peiper became in a very short time an adored and respected platoon leader, because of his attitude, his personality and his personal and professional ability (1999, 14). As company commander on the Eastern Front he impressed his former regimental commander, SS Obersturmbannführer Fritz Witt, who wrote on his report:

> In character, straight and above-board, reserved. Sharp observer. Hard and even cynical in criticism. Calm and clear thinking combat leader. Meticulous and innovative in training. Clear tactical thinking and actions. (Agte 1999, 50)

As a battalion commander Peiper had a vision for how to improve the capability of his unit. He began extensive field exercises, which expanded to involve the entire battalion, including the company commanders. Agte mentions that the men in his unit were impressed by Peiper's virtually identical treatment of officers, noncommissioned officers and men. He demanded a high training standard in his battalion. Junior leaders were to know the intents of their company commanders exactly. The creed in his battalion was "Sweat saves blood" (1999, 50 - 53). SS Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, Peiper's acting regimental commander, wrote in his personal report on Peiper:

> Intellectual abilities are far above average. He has a very good general education. . . . He is tough and has endurance. . . . He is a sharp observer and critical in his judgments. His professional knowledge and accomplishments are to be rated as very good in the fields of tactics and combat training. (Agte 1999, 53)

During operations on the Eastern Front Peiper distinguished himself for exemplary leadership and for valor. SS Untersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop, son of Germany's Foreign Minister, who served for a short time under Peiper, described Peiper's behavior at Kharkov: "It was unforgettable, the cool, sometimes almost blasé manner in which Peiper made his reports." (Agte 1999, 101) Westemeier reports that during this period of war the myth of Peiper's leadership had begun. He was an idol to his men. He had a large influence on them. Within the officer corps of the Leibstandarte, Peiper was known as one of the best, the most daring and the most intelligent officers. (1996, 41) Agte notes that Peiper's battalion won a reputation as an outstanding combat unit in the Leibstandarte. Peiper led from the front and often participated in actions with his half-track. This leadership style caused sometimes frantic situations, but Peiper was

lucky. Peiper and his battalion command halftrack were surrounded by Soviet troops during Operation "Zitadelle" at Kursk in 1943. During the rescue operation two Leibstandarte soldiers were killed, but Peiper was able to escape unwounded. Later, just after Peiper had taken over command of the panzer regiment, Peiper's halftrack received a hit, killing his radio operator, but again Peiper survived and transferred to another vehicle (1999, 105, 172, and 249). Peiper's adjutant, SS Obersturmführer Otto Dinse, described Peiper's combat leadership style in Agte's book:

> For me, although he was three years younger, he was always a role model. Of high intelligence, Peiper, himself, was always a model to his soldiers for behavior; he spared himself nothing, especially in combat. (1999, 105)

SS Untersturmführer (second lieutenant) Gerhard Stiller, one of Peiper's platoon commanders, remembered his regimental commander in Agte's book:

> At the time Peiper was, in my humble opinion, the most highly educated senior officer in our division, literally as well as figuratively. My . . . company commander . . . once described his frequent long discussions with Peiper, which could be regarded as private tutoring on every aspect of a general education. Since he always required proper behavior from his officers, it stands to reason that he was no advocate of so-called stag parties. Human weakness of any kind, even when alcohol was involved, awoke his displeasure and he reacted accordingly. (1999, 353)

His former orderly, SS Oberscharführer (staff sergeant) Werner Hentschel, wrote in Agte's book about his leading by example:

> The relationship of the regimental commander with his officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted men was excellent. A high value was placed on proper care for all of the men of the regiment. He never demanded anything from anybody, which he wouldn't do himself. He didn't like raised voices … Jochen Peiper was an example to all of the men of the regiment. His orders were enthusiastically executed without any reservation because everyone knew he would not order any nonsense. (1999, 354)

Agte points out that Peiper availed himself of unconventional leadership. As an example, he frequently ignored radio messages from the regiment while he was carrying

out an attack. This quirk was known and accepted in the whole regiment (1999, 105). Another example of Peiper's unconventional leadership is the way he motivated his men in leading by example. Additionally, he did not give rewards easily. Agte pictures that he was very reserved in his recommendations for the highest awards based on his own special high standards. Agte suggests that Peiper perhaps inherited the Prussian tradition in which bravery was expected of an officer (1999, 207). Peiper was in his communications terse and exact. He was not a man to engage anyone in long conversations. His verbal orders were always very clear and unambiguous and his order conferences were short, precise and well thought out (Agte 1999, 254).

Neither Agte nor Westemeier are surprised that Peiper was given command of a panzer regiment. Peiper had commanded his armored infantry battalion with great success and worked with several armored units. He also had the reputation for being an outstanding tactician and for his aggressiveness (Agte 1999, 247; Westemeier 1996, 66). The men of his regiment immediately accepted him after he took over command. Wilhelm Nußhag, radio operator in Peiper's regimental command post, confirmed:

> When Peiper took over the regiment you could see a certain change in the regiment's leadership style. Whereas Schönberger (the previous commander) was regarded as a rather timid leader, Peiper more or less embodied the opposite. Peiper was able to win the trust of both officer and men after only a short time. Through his exemplary courage in action and his solutions to the most difficult situations, he was the ideal leader for our regiment. (Agte 1999, 253)

Agte describes Peiper leading his panzer regiment by his markedly strong personality. At that time his fellow officers numbered him among the most charismatic leaders of the Waffen-SS (1999, 35). Westemeier adds that after the war SS Brigadeführer (major-general) Fritz Krämer, Chief of Staff 1st SS Panzer Corps, explained the losses of the Leibstandarte's counterattack in Avranches in Normandy

while Peiper had already left the fighting: “This would not have happened, had Peiper been at the front.” (Westemeier 1996, 75)

Notwithstanding his reputation as fine leader, Peiper was controversial in his approach towards the Nazi regime. John Eisenhower calls him in his book *The Bitter Woods: The Battle of the Bulge* a strange mixture of conflicting qualities (1995, 16). On one hand, he uncritically absorbed the culture of the Waffen-SS and especially the culture of the Leibstandarte. On the other hand, Peiper was very intelligent, and also critical of his Nazi superiors. Agte notes that when Peiper received his Oak Leaves to the Knight’s Cross, he gave Hitler an honest, sober and dispassionate description of the German forces status on the Eastern Front (1999, 275). Westemeier reports that Peiper doubted a German victory on the Eastern Front, also that he made sarcastic remarks on the German situation at the Eastern Front to Himmler during his visit to the front. He even suggested that Himmler might soon have to create female battalions in the Waffen-SS to win the war (1996, 70). Agte mentions that Peiper asked Dr. Goebbels, Germany’s propaganda minister, during a visit in 1944 whether Goebbels still believed in a German victory (1999, 276). These remarks and questions today may seem innocent, but at that time in Nazi Germany, it was still very dangerous to make such statements, even for a Knight’s Cross holder.

Analysis

This chapter addresses the question what separates Peiper from other Leibstandarte officers. It is divided into two tertiary research questions. The first tertiary research question is focused on the career and battle experience of Jochen Peiper. Peiper entered the SS at the age of nineteen through the SS Reiterstandarte and was encouraged

by Himmler to enter the Waffen-SS. He was quickly commissioned into the prestigious Leibstandarte, which he left only for an assignment as Himmler's adjutant. With Himmler he established a special relationship. Together with the Leibstandarte Peiper faced many battles in many different locations and in many various commanding positions, which earned him the highest German decorations for bravery and outstanding leadership. The German war machine used his charming outward appearance in combination with his war record and his decorations and created in him Germany's poster boy.

The second area was Peiper's motivation. Peiper was not interested in politics, but was deeply affected by the heroic history of Prussia and Germany; he determined at a very early age to become a soldier. The conversation with Himmler catalyzed Peiper's decision to join the Waffen-SS. During the officer course at SS Junkerschule in Braunschweig, he became fascinated by SS ideology with its emphasis on Prussian and German history and its strong belief in a superior Aryan race and a great German Third *Reich*. Peiper was impressed by Waffen-SS culture, which became the basis for his own personal standards. As stated in the oath of the Waffen-SS: Loyalty, courage and obedience unto death to Adolf Hitler. This culture led to a fatalistic approach in which Peiper was willing to give his life. The death of his brother Horst contributed to Peiper's well-known reserve and led to hardness for himself. Peiper was a mixture of conflicting qualities. He was very intelligent, which made him critical of his superiors, but he was blind to the excesses of the Third *Reich,* led by SS ideology.

What do these two aforementioned areas, experience and motivation, mean in terms of Peiper's leadership? To make a judgment of his leadership style, one must place

Peiper in his historical context. Therefore the twelve leadership tools for the Waffen-SS (eight tools for the German Army and the Waffen-SS and four tools specifically for the Waffen-SS), mentioned in chapter 2, are used:

1. Responsibility: Peiper was already willing to take up a leadership role in German Boy Scouts at the age of eleven. Later he commanded almost every level in the Leibstandarte; from platoon up to regiment. This makes clear that Peiper was willing to accept responsibility.

2. Vision: Peiper had a clear vision of his unit, but also of every operation he was involved in. This vision led to actions, which gained the Germans many favorable situations on the battlefield. Outside the battlefield Peiper, as battalion commander as well as regimental commander, had a clear vision for how to improve the capabilities of his units. Moreover, he had not only a vision, but he was also able to communicate this vision clearly to his subordinates.

3. Independent judgment and decisive decisions: Peiper was an intelligent officer with a clear mind. As a schoolboy he was very determined to leave school early to become an officer in the armed service as quickly as possible. It was his boy's dream. Later, during combat, Peiper had a reputation for being an independent thinker. He never hesitated and always acted with self-confidence; he was in control of the situation.

4. Teach and understand subordinates: Peiper knew exactly when to train, how to train and what to train. He encouraged his subordinates to train a lot so that they were able to understand each other's intentions, but his teaching went beyond this. Peiper was for most junior officers and noncommissioned officer also a tutor on general education.

5. Role model and leading from front: Subordinates of Peiper described him all for his leading by example. He never demanded things which he would not do himself, although he still demanded much of his subordinates. He was always among his unit at the front line; sometimes causing frantic moments. He always escaped and survived and, in Himmler's words, he was lucky that the fortunes of war continued to shine on him up to that time.

6. Courage and initiative: Peiper distinguished himself several times on different battlefields with his daring actions. These actions were most of the time based on his initiative and own judgment. He was also in an open way critical, sometimes even skeptical, of his Nazi superiors. That was not without risk in Nazi Germany.

7. Flexibility and freedom of action for subordinates: Peiper showed several times his flexibility on the battlefield with its constantly changing situations. He never gave up. He adapted the changes and survived by his strong will. He and his subordinates established a command culture, which was dominated by mutual trust. This trust gave certain basic latitude to his subordinate commanders. Peiper was sometimes impulsive and interfered with the execution of his orders, but his subordinates accepted this.

8. Inner strength and discipline: Peiper had high standards on proper care and proper human behavior and demanded this from all his subordinates. He certainly was not a supporter of human weakness and always opposed it with corrective measures.

9. Loyalty and obedience: Peiper was unswervingly loyal; loyal to his Leibstandarte and his favorite commander Dietrich. His obedience did not always meet the SS standards for obedience, but that distinguished Peiper from most other SS officers.

10. Respect: Subordinates, from the lowest rank up to his direct subordinates, all described the respect they had for Peiper. He had a reputation for treating all his subordinates in a equal way.

11. SS code of honor: Peiper was without any doubt very impressed by SS culture with its influences from German history and its own high chivalry standards. His unit burned whole villages in the Soviet Union and Italy, in whatever way, without any hesitation, but stealing a chicken was another story. These four recruits infringed the SS code of honor. Peiper saw this as a major offense which had to be solved in the most severe way: death penalty.

12. Willingness to sacrifice one's own life: Peiper developed during the war a very fatalistic approach. This approach is best described by Whiting:

> His personality had hardened into that particularly German combination of naïve, almost boyish idealism, linked to the savage of spirit of brutal soldier of fortune, who knows only one loyalty. Not to God, not to his country, not even his family, but to his own unit, *die Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*! Now, if the Leibstandarte was to go under, he was prepared to go under with it. There was no alternative. (1999, 40)

Peiper might be seen as a real exponent of the Waffen-SS leadership style and sometimes even beyond which distinguished him from other Waffen-SS officers.

Some, including SS soldiers who served under Peiper, argue that Peiper was a real charismatic leader. They are right. Peiper was above all a charismatic leader. The word charisma originates from the Greek word ????µ? and means "for nothing" or a "gift of God" (Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon, 1984). For the interpretation of charismatic leadership, the vision of Bernhard Bass is used in combination with the ideas of Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo. Bass explains in his book *Transformational*

Leadership: Industrial, Military and Educational Impact that charisma comes from behavior that enables leaders to be role models. As Bass explains:

> Such leaders are admired, respected, and trusted because of their extraordinary capabilities, persistence and determination. They are willing to take risks, they are consistent rather than arbitrary, and they maintain high standards of moral and ethical conduct. (1998, 5)

The high standards of moral and ethical conduct must be regarded within the standards of SS ideology, yet for most part, Peiper's leadership perfectly fits into this model. He was always soon accepted as leader whether in the German Boy Scouts or in a panzer regiment of the Leibstandarte. He was admired by his subordinates, He had a strong will and was willing to take risks; not only on the battlefield but also toward his superiors.

Conger and Kanungo described three stages in the *Charismatic Leadership Influence Process,* which contrasted the difference between charismatic and non-charismatic leadership: Stage one in which leader behavior is the assessment of the environmental resources and the realization of deficiencies in the status quo. Stage two is the formulation and effective articulation of the inspirational vision that separates them from the norm. Stage three is focused on the unconventional means to achieve the vision, such as personal example and risk, self-confidence, building trust and motivation. The hypothesized outcomes of this process are high cohesion and consensus in the team, high emotional attachment of followers to the leader and finally a high task performance of the team (1988, 78-82).

Peiper's leadership met the above-mentioned standards. He had the ability to make profound tactical analyses in operations and surprised his opponents every time with his counterattacks. He had a clear vision for his unit not only in combat but also

during rest and refitting periods in which his unit conducted innovative training programs. He was not a man of many words, but what he said was clear and to the point. He led with self-confidence and always from the front, inspiring his men. They trusted him as a leader and followed him in combat, even in the extreme conditions of the Eastern Front, where his unit earned an outstanding reputation. His unit was a cohesive group with very committed soldiers. These features explain why Peiper can be seen as a real charismatic leader.

CHAPTER 4

AUTUMN 1944

> We had to scrape the dead bodies of old men, women and kids off the wall, it was that bad! I could have castrated the first Ami who did that to those people with a blunt piece of glass!
>
> Jochen Peiper's reaction on an American bombardment during 12 December 1944 (Whiting 2002, 184)

Preamble

This chapter considers, as like the previous chapter, the last secondary research question: What separates Peiper from other commanders within the Waffen-SS? The chapter clarifies why Peiper was so special, compared to other commanders in the Leibstandarte. It also concentrates on the preparations of Peiper's Kampfgruppe and on circumstances other than leadership, which led to the decision of having Peiper command the spearhead unit.

The chapter is divided into four sections to discus the abovementioned subjects: "The Leibstandarte and Peiper's 1st SS Panzer Regiment," "Hitler's Plan for the Offensive," "Last Preparations for *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein""* and "Other Commanders in the Leibstandarte." The chapter concludes with an analysis.

The Leibstandarte and Peiper's regiment

Steve Kane states in his book *The 1st SS Panzer Division in the Battle of the Bulge* that Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the German Propaganda minister, convinced Hitler to put Germany on a total war footing. The first step was restoring the smashed divisions that had been beaten in France and at the Eastern Front during the summer of 1944, including the Leibstandarte. The Leibstandarte was to become part of the newly formed

Sixth Panzer Army under command of Sepp Dietrich, who was promoted to the rank of SS Oberstgruppenführer and Panzer Generaloberst der Waffen-SS. Hitler wanted to see his Leibstandarte raised to its former strength. Its new replacements were to be merged with the veteran troops, who had escaped from the Falaise pocket to Germany. The new troops came from five sources: young men from the 1926 and 1927 classes who had been sped through training, officer cadets from the SS Junkerschulen in Bad Tölz and Braunschweig, *Volksdeutscher* from Siebenbürgen (Part of today's Rumania and Southeastern Hungary) and Transylvania (North and Central part of today's Rumania), returning veterans recovered from their wounds, and some foreign volunteers mainly from the Netherlands, Belgium and France (1997, 8). Ralf Tiemann describes in his book *Leibstandarte IV/2* that SS Oberführer Wilhelm Mohnke became the new division commander, because his predecessor, SS Brigadeführer Theodor Wish, was severely wounded during the breakout from the Falaise pocket (1998, 9).

The Allied forces advanced in the meantime to the north. In September 1944 they launched Operation "Market-Garden," an airborne assault in the Netherlands with as purpose to march on to Germany, but this operation failed. Westemeier adds that the Germans were able to stop the Allies at the end of September 1944 at The Rhine and along the West Wall, the border between Germany, France and Belgium (1996, 77). The Leibstandarte, which was not involved in Operation "Market-Garden," moved at the end of September 1944 to its new assembly area near Lübbecke in Westphalia, where it reorganized.

Agte mentions that the training status of the newly arrived troops was extremely poor. Some crewmen had never seen a tank, let alone driven one or fired rounds from one

(1999, 422). Peiper himself was more positive. In "Ethint Nr. 10," he stated in interviews that the Leibstandarte was badly mangled in Normandy and during the retreat across France. The Leibstandarte received about 3,500 new combat troops, bringing the division up to full strength of 22,000. The condition and training status of these new troops were in Peiper's opinion appropriate, compared to Germany's general situation in the autumn of 1944 (1979, 1).

Peiper returned to the Leibstandarte on 13 October 1944 after he recovered from jaundice and immediately ordered intensive combat training for his new men. A part of his panzer regiment moved to the training area at Munster, located on the North German Plain. Another part of the panzer regiment was sent to Grafenwöhr to collect new tanks, although it was obvious that the regiment would not obtain enough tanks to recover full combat strength (Agte 1999, 422-423). Reynolds and Westemeier both explain that Peiper's regiment was to have two separate panzer battalions at full combat strength, one equipped with Mark IV tanks, Germany's most used tank in World War II, and the other one equipped with Mark V tanks or Panthers (its heavier weight and bigger gun made it the best tank in World War II). Due to shortage Peiper merged his poorly equipped panzer units into one mixed panzer battalion (Reynolds 1995, 43-47; Westemeier 1996, 79). There was not only a shortage of equipment, but also a shortage of supplies. Peiper described in Agte's book:

> Training continued in a persevering manner and the upcoming operations were still prepared with professionalism. Please don't ask, however, how that was accomplished. The cannon rounds were simulated with coaxial machine gun and the Panzer IV's were pulled into position by teams of soldiers. (1999, 424)

Agte notes that Peiper could not get along with his new division commander, Wilhelm Mohnke. Peiper wanted a change in command in the Leibstandarte. He

discussed this topic several times confidentially with fellow Leibstandarte officers. He even attempted to mediate with Himmler, who made a visit to the Leibstandarte at the beginning of November, but Peiper was unable to present his case to the Reichsführer-SS. In stead, Himmler met with Mohnke and promoted him to SS Oberführer (senior colonel).

Tiemann notes that halfway through November 1944 the Leibstandarte received a warning order from 1st SS Panzer Corps to transfer into an area west of Cologne, which was accomplished on 18 November 1944 (1998, 12). Although the war situation for Germany was becoming worse every day, the fighting spirit in the Leibstandarte was high. Peiper described in Agte's book the motivation of the soldiers in his regiment:

> The companies were deployed far apart from each other in small wooded areas. The crews were housed dug-in under their tanks. Training continued. . . . Despite everything, the morale of the troops was exemplary. No pathos, no political motivation and no fanaticism at all, which the enemy propaganda liked to conjure up about us. In its place was a melancholy "end-of-the-world" mood, a farewell to all that for which one had fought and suffered and a defiant determination to make it as difficult as possible for the victors even at the end. (1999, 475)

Agte makes clear that the Leibstandarte was given cover missions to mask the forthcoming offensive. During one of these tasks on 12 December 1944, the men of Peiper's unit witnessed an attack of American bombers on Düren. The bombardment caused numerous casualties among the civilian population (1999, 475). Peiper described the scene in Agte's book:

> The widespread destruction, which lay before them, was worse than at the front. What was even worse was the feeling of powerlessness and helplessness, which came over them in the face of this catastrophe… Encouragement and orders were unnecessary. Everyone was filled with the desire to help and also filled with horror, sympathy and rage! . . . Bastards. . . . This isn't war; it's mass murder! (1999, 475)

This scene had a huge impact on the men of Peiper's regiment. Whiting notes that as the day of the last great counter-offensive in the west came ever closer, the commander, who would lead the Sixth Army's drive for the sea was filled with burning desire for revenge. (1999, 40) Peiper, himself, gave comments on the impact of the American bombardment on his men in Reynolds's book:

> I recognized that after the battle of Normandy my unit was composed mainly of young soldiers. A good deal of them had lost their parents, their sisters and brothers during the bombings. They had seen for themselves in Köln thousands of mangled corpses after a terror raid had passed. Their hatred for the enemy was such, I swear it, I could not always keep it under control. (1995, 36)

Meanwhile 501st Heavy Armored Battalion of the 1st SS Panzer Corps under command of SS Obersturmbannführer Hein von Westernhagen arrived in the area and was placed under command of Peiper. Von Westernhagen and Peiper were old friends, serving together at the Eastern Front. Von Westernhagen's battalion consisted of thirty-four Mark VI or King's Tigers, the largest tanks produced during World War II (Reynolds 1996, 43-48). It was Peiper's task, as regimental commander, to weld these units together, but he was severely hindered by the shortage of fuel and ammunition. Agte states that Peiper could therefore not carry out exercises at company level and higher. He carefully practiced his officers for the approaching operation, although Peiper did at the time not know of any plan for *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* He taught his officers to constantly evaluate the situation according to the principle: What can I do? What am I doing now? What am I accomplishing? (1999, 475)

Hitler's Plan for the Offensive

What exactly was Hitler's plan for the offensive in the Ardennes? And, how was it passed in the chain of command to the Leibstandarte? Both Trevor Dupuy, in his book

Hitler's Last Gamble: The Battle of the Bulge, December 1944 - January 1945, and Danny Parker, who researched German archives for his book *The Battle of the Bulge: The German View,* came to the conclusion that Hitler already decided on 16 September 1944 to launch an offensive at the Western Front after he had been briefed on the small successful German counterattacks of the 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich in the Ardennes. Hitler yelled that he came to a momentous decision: a counterattack out of the Ardennes with the objective Antwerp (Dupuy 1994, 1-2; Parker 1999, 16). Dupuy believes that Hitler's plan was to force the Allies to agree with a negotiated peace with this offensive. The Allied logistics were vulnerable and depended on the shipping capacity of several ports with Antwerp being the most important one. Hitler's plan was to concentrate forces in the west to break through a weak, American-held sector of the Allied front and to retake the harbor of Antwerp and simultaneously isolate the majority of the British-Canadian 21st Army Group under command of Field Marshal Montgomery, deployed in Flanders and the southern part of the Netherlands. Dupuy notes that Hitler wanted to attack the Americans because he believed that they were less capable soldiers than the British and that they were unable to fight back against his hardened soldiers. The area for the offensive was the Ardennes with its winding river valleys and steep hills covered by dense pine tree forests (see Appendix B, Map of *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"*) (1995, 9-10).

Reynolds, Dupuy, Jean-Paul Pallud, in his book *Ardennes 1944: Peiper & Skorzeny,* and also John Toland, in his book *Battle: The Story of the Bulge,* all describe the attack more in detail. After a long planning process Hitler's operation was called *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* after an old German song. The name of the operation,

"Wacht am Rhein," was to suggest that the units in the Cologne area were forming a defense line along the Rhine to block an expected Allied attack into the Ruhr. The German Army took comprehensive security measures and spread false rumors. *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* comprised in total three separate operations. *Unternehmen "Greif"* (Operation "Griffin") was to be carried out by the 150th Panzerbrigade, made up of English-speaking infiltration teams dressed in American uniforms. They were to slip through the American front line and seize the crucial bridges over the Meuse River for the panzer spearhead. They also were to spread confusion and disorder in the rear areas. The second special operation was *Unternehmen "Stösser"* (Operation "Hawk") in which an airborne force of 800 men was to jump in the night prior to the start of the ground offensive. They were to seize an important road junction at Baraque Michel, north of Malmédy (Reynolds, 1995, p. 39). The third and main operation, *Unternehmen "Herbstnebel"* (Operation "Autumn Mist"), had to be carried out by Army Group B under Field Marshal Walter Model. It specified a ninety-six kilometers broad offensive by three armies: the Fifth Panzer Army under General Hasso von Manteuffel, the Sixth Panzer Army under Sepp Dietrich and the Seventh Army under General Erich Brandenberger (Dupuy 1995, 11-12; Reynolds 1995, 35- 43; Pallud 2000, 3-6; Toland 1999, 17).

Tiemann states that Army Group B issued their operation order for the offensive on 29 November 1944. The main effort for this offensive was for Sepp Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army, which was to seize Antwerp. Model decided that his best panzer units were to break through the American lines. Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army consisted of three corps: the LXVII Corps, the 1st and 2nd SS Panzer Corps. The order issue was followed

on 6 December 1944 by a Sixth Panzer Army's planning meeting for the corps commanders, their chiefs of staff and divisional commanders to explain the orders and to provide additional instructions (1998, 16 – 21).

On 11 December 1944, Adolf Hitler himself gave a speech for all commanders from Army Group B from division on up. Tiemann cites SS Sturmbannführer Hein Springer, former Leibstandarte officer and the Aid-de-Camp of Field Marshal Model, who remembered Hitler's speech:

> It was not a situation briefing in the usual sense, with proposals and decisions, it was like . . . the speech before the Battle of Leuthen on 4 January 1757 . . . by Frederick the Great.. . . Hitler's closing words were something like: "Gentlemen, if we do not achieve the breakthrough of Lüttich on the way to Antwerp, we face a bloody end to the war. . . . This is effectively the last opportunity to change the fate of war in our favor." This Hitler knew how to describe lively and convincingly. (1998, 21)

Sayer and Botting conclude that in this speech Hitler had urged his commanders to fight brutally and ruthlessly. All human dignity was rejected. However, existing speech transcripts do not support this claim. Sayer and Botting emphasize that there was little doubt however that Sepp Dietrich passed these kinds of feelings down the chain of command in his Sixth Panzer Army (1989, 241). Both Sayer and Botting, and also John Bauserman, in his book *The Malmédy Massacre*, note that Sixth Panzer Army's order of the day, issued on 14 December 1944, stated in essence that "our" troops have to be preceded by a wave of terror and fright and that no humane inhibition should be shown, that every resistance is to be broken by terror. Dietrich did not mention prisoners of war. When asked where to put prisoners, Dietrich replied: "Prisoners? You know what to do with them." (Sayer and Botting 1989, 241-242; Bauserman 1995, 4) Kane states that

Dietrich later claimed to have meant to handle all prisoners in the normal way under the accord of Geneva Convention (1997, 13).

Charles Messenger notes in his book *Sepp Dietrich: Hitler's Gladiator* that both Dietrich and his Chief of Staff, Fritz Krämer, were concerned about the strength and combat readiness of their newly built-up subordinate units, as well as their supply situation. They calculated that vehicles would consume in the Ardennes twice as much fuel as in a normal situation. Sixth Panzer Army had sufficient fuel for 200 kilometers under Ardennes conditions, but only the divisions held a proportion of it. The remainder was held in dumps west of the Rhine. Krämer asserted that the divisions had to rely on captured fuel stocks (1988, 149-153).

Dietrich explained in "Ethint Nr. 15" that in his plan the 1st SS Panzer Corps was the attacking corps with the Leibstandarte as the main effort in the center. The LXVII Corps should cut off the Elsenborn Ridge north of the 1st SS Panzer Corps and the 2nd SS Panzer Corps was to exploit the success as soon as the 1st Panzer Corps had established a bridgehead at the Meuse River (1945, 8-18).

The Last Preparations

Agte describes that Peiper heard on 11 December 1944 for the first time about the plan of an offensive in the Ardennes. Peiper himself explained in "Ethint Nr. 10" that he deduced it five days before the start of the offensive:

> Krämer, C of S of Sixth SS Panzer Army *(sic, Peiper called it an SS Panzer Army, although it was officially not earlier designated as an SS Panzer Army until April 1945)*, asked me on 11 Dec 44 what I thought about the possibilities of an attack in the Eifel region *(sic, Peiper called the whole mountain area the Eifel area, although only the German part of this area is the Eifel, the Belgian and Luxemburg part are called the Ardennes)*, and how much time it would take a panzer regiment to proceed 80 km in one night. Feeling that it was not a good idea to decide the answer to such a question merely by looking at a map, I made a test

> run of 80 km with a Panther tank myself, driving down the route Euskirchen—Muenstereiffel—Blankenheim. (1979, 2)

Peiper's conclusion was that he was able to make this drive of 80 km in one night with a free road and only one tank, but with a whole regiment that would be a totally different question (Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 2-3). Whiting adds that Peiper also, very angry, reported to Krämer that most of the roads were just broad enough for a bicycle and certainly not for a tank (1999, 44).

Peiper expounded in his account *Kampfgruppe Peiper, 15-26 December 1944* that during the night of 13 on 14 December 1944, the regiment moved into a new area in the Blankenheim Forest. The movement was concluded at 1000 hours on 14 December (1945, 1). Peiper also explained in "Ethint Nr. 10" that he was not able to accomplish any training between the time he deduced the German plan for an offensive and the start of *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein:"*

> I could give them a few tips about how to drive tanks through mountainous terrain and over icy roads, but no other training or instructions were possible, because the American forces were then attacking in the Aachen – Düren area, and we had to remain on the alert as Sixth SS Panzer Army (*sic*). (1979, 3)

Agte describes that Peiper was ordered during the morning of 14 December 1944 to the divisional command post in Tondorf, where SS Oberführer Wilhelm Mohnke informed him and the other regimental commanders officially of the planned attack. During the briefing the avenues of advance for the entire division were made known and maps were distributed with necessary information. There were no written orders (Agte 1999, 476). Reynolds renders that Mohnke divided his division into four Kampfgruppen (battle groups or combat teams). Peiper was placed in command of what Reynolds called the most important Kampfgruppe based on his own 1st SS Panzer Regiment. The

Germans called Peiper‘s group officially Gepanzerte Gruppe Peiper (or Armored Group Peiper), but it is better known as Kampfgruppe Peiper. A Gepanzerte Gruppe is not to be confused with a Panzergruppe, such as Panzergruppe von Kleist in May 1940, because a Panzergruppe is a panzer army minus rear zone administrative echelon.

Two Kampfgruppen in the Leibstandarte were based on both SS Panzergrenadier regiments. The reconnaissance battalion was the nucleus for a special Kampfgruppe, better known as Schnellgruppe (fast group). The plan for the Leibstandarte was simple. After a heavy artillery bombardment the Volksgrenadier Division and the Fallschirmjäger Division of the 1st SS Panzer Corps would break through the American defense lines. The Kampfgruppen of the Leibstandarte were then to pour through the breaches and strike hard for the Meuse River with Peiper’s Kampfgruppe as spear unit. The Kampfgruppen were expected to bypass opposition whenever possible. It was foreseen that panic was to cause the entire American defense to collapse and the Meuse River crossing was to be accomplished within three days, as the German Army did before in 1940 (Reynolds 1995, 38).

Sayer and Botting state that Mohnke was very clear to Peiper. He told Peiper that success of the entire offensive depended on him. It was an operation of extreme daring, but the Führer expected his Leibstandarte to fight fanatically and to accept self-sacrifice to achieve the impossible. Speed, surprise and ruthlessness were paramount (1989, 244). These were the characteristics that made Peiper famous. Peiper, himself, described in “Ethint Nr. 10:”

> They said that my Kampfgruppe in the center was to have the decisive role in the Offensive. I was not to bother about my flanks but was to drive rapidly to the Meuse River, making full use of the element of surprise. (1945, 8)

Whiting explains that the thought of a completely self-contained and independent command pleased the young SS Obersturmbannführer, but Peiper was concerned whether his fuel supply was enough to reach the Meuse River. Mohnke consoled Peiper with the information on a large American fuel depot just near Büllingen in Belgium, only ten miles distant from the border with Germany. Peiper objected because Büllingen was not on his advance route, but Mohnke quoted the orders of the 1st SS Panzer Corps: "The corps and the divisions have the freedom of movement within this area. Thus march routes are not rigid and divisions are allowed to deviate whenever the situation such demands." (1999, 47)

Peiper left Mohnke's command post to return to his own. Sayer and Botting quote Peiper on this situation in their book:

> I did not read the material given to me at the division command post, because I was in a hurry, and was also in a bad mood, because I disagreed with the entire preparation for the undertaking, which looked highly defective to me. I returned . . . to my command post. . . . First, I ordered my adjutant to call a commander's meeting for the same day at about 1600 hours. This left me about two hours which I used to study the materiel handed to me at the division. (1989, 245)

Agte explains that this meeting was meant to inform Peiper's subordinate commanders. The next day, 15 December, at 1100 hours Peiper attended an additional briefing at the command post of 1st SS Panzer Corps and in the afternoon he issued his orders orally and assigned objectives to his battalion commanders. In the evening the company commanders in Peiper's Kampfgruppe were able to inform their men of the attack. The written version of the regimental orders were prepared in the evening and only distributed to the commanders after midnight during the night of 16 December 1944 (1999, 476).

Agte makes clear that Peiper placed special emphasis on the organization and deployment of his Kampfgruppe. The Kampfgruppe was an amalgamation of a mixed

panzer battalion (with Mark IV's and Panthers), a heavy armored battalion (with King's Tigers), an armored infantry battalion (with half tracks) from the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment, an additional armored infantry company, an artillery battalion, an engineer battalion, an AAA-battalion, and logistical units. Peiper's Kampfgruppe comprised more than 4,800 men and some 800 vehicles. Peiper's total march column had a length of about fifteen miles. Agte also notes that Peiper organized his units in a way he believed were to give him the greatest tactical advantage in employing them. Tanks and half-tracks did not move out as company units, but were separated into platoons and distributed at various points within the march column. In front of the Kampfgruppe was a special formed armored advance guard. Peiper selected the tank commanders for this guard from several different companies with special care. It took him several hours to organize his Kampfgruppe, but in the night of 16 December 1944 Peiper's Kampfgruppe was ready for the attack (1999, 476-477).

Other Commanders in the Leibstandarte

This thesis focuses mainly on Jochen Peiper, but who were the other commanders in the Leibstandarte prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein*?" Mark Yerger describes in his work *Waffen-SS Commanders: The Army, Corps and Divisional Leaders of a Legend* that SS Oberführer Wilhelm Mohnke born in 1911 in Lübeck, led the Leibstandarte in the autumn 1944. He joined the Nazi party and the SS in 1931 at the age of twenty. Mohnke soon transferred to Hitler's bodyguard units under the command of Sepp Dietrich and was commissioned in 1933. A year later he assumed command of a company in the Leibstandarte and stayed in this assignment for many years. Mohnke took part in the Polish campaign in 1939 and in May 1940, just before the advance of the Leibstandarte in

Western Europe, he assumed command of the second battalion in the Leibstandarte regiment. During the offensive in Yugoslavia in April 1941, Mohnke was severely wounded and lost one of his feet. (1999, 115). Both Yerger and Luther, in his book *Blood and Honor: The History of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitler Youth, 1943-1945*, conclude that Mohnke, because of this amputation, became an addict to morphine and alcohol (Yerger 1999, 115; Luther 1987; 47). Yerger notes that in December 1941, while Mohnke was still recuperating, he received the German Cross in Gold for his actions in the Balkans. Four months later he was given command of the replacement battalion of the Leibstandarte. Promoted to SS Obersturmbannführer in June 1943, Mohnke became a regimental commander in the newly formed 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend, the sister unit of the Leibstandarte. Mohnke also received a Knight's Cross in July 1944 for his exploits in Normandy. By the end of August 1944 Mohnke escaped with his Kampfgruppe through the Falaise pocket and became involved in the fighting for the Seine River crossings. He was to become commander of the Leibstandarte soon after. Yerger concludes that Mohnke, despite praise from Sepp Dietrich, was not well liked by most of his subordinates and many senior army field commanders considered him brutal (1999, 115-117).

One of Peiper's fellow regimental commanders was SS Obersturmbannführer Max Hansen. Reynolds describes Hansen as adored by his men. Hansen was born in 1908 in Niebüll (Schleswig), the northern part of Germany. He joined the SS VT from the start and transferred in 1934 to the Leibstandarte. He commanded every level in the Leibstandarte from platoon up to 1st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment. In 1941 he had been awarded the German Cross in Gold for his actions in the Balkans and in 1943 he

received, as battalion commander, the Knight's Cross for his part in the retaking of Kharkov (Ukraine), where his battalion fought difficult urban combat. Hansen was wounded nine times during World War II. His Kampfgruppe in *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* was directed to take a route more southern than Peiper's Kampfgruppe and was to follow behind the Leibstandarte*'s* spearhead unit. Kampfgruppe Hansen had almost 4,500 men and 750 vehicles (Reynolds 1995, 50; Krätschmer 1957, 158; Geocities website 2004).

The other regimental commander was Rudolf or Rudi Sandig, who was born in 1911 in Eppendorf near Hamburg. Reynolds states that SS Obersturmbannführer Sandig was known, even within the Leibstandarte, as an obedient and very hard noncommissioned officer. He started as one of Dietrich's bodyguards in 1934. Later he became one of the twelve sergeant majors at the SS Candidate course in Jüterbog in July 1934. He was commissioned in 1939 and assigned in the Leibstandarte. He commanded every level in the Leibstandarte from platoon up to 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment, but, as Krätschmer states in his book *Die Ritterkreuzträger der Waffen-SS* (*Knight's Cross bearers of the Waffen-SS)*, the second battalion of the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment was his home. He served together with Peiper as battalion commander in the 2nd SS Panzer Regiment during the defense of Kharkov in 1943. He was awarded the German Cross in Gold for his actions in the Balkans and the Knight's Cross for his exploits as battalion commander on the Eastern Front. Sandig's 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment gave up a battalion to provide Peiper with infantry, but his Kampfgruppe still consisted of about 3,000 men and 400 vehicles. Kampfgruppe Sandig was to follow

Peiper's Kampfgruppe on the northern route of the Leibstandarte (Reynolds 1995, 50; Krätschmer 1957, 200 – 201; Geocities website, 2004).

Another high-ranking commander in the Leibstandarte was SS Sturmbannführer Gustav Knittel, who commanded the fourth Kampfgruppe in the Leibstandarte during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* Knittel, born in 1914 in Neu-Ulm near the *Donau* (Danube River), was known as a loyal and obedient officer. Reynolds notes that his career was restricted to the Leibstandarte*'s* reconnaissance battalion, including an assignment as company commander. In 1943 he took over the command of this battalion. Knittel received both the German Cross in Gold and the Knight's Cross for his actions at the Eastern Front in 1943 and 1944. His reconnaissance battalion formed the nucleus of the Kampfgruppe, which comprised almost 1,500 men and 150 vehicles. Knittel's Kampfgruppe was to follow Hansen's Kampfgruppe on the Leibstandarte's southern route (Reynolds 1995, 50-51; 1997, 14; Krätschmer 1957, 272 and Geocities website 2004)

Analysis

This chapter concentrates on the secondary research question of what separates Peiper from other commanders in the Leibstandarte. The question is divided into three tertiary research questions. The first of these questions is focused on the preparations of Peiper's Kampfgruppe prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* Peiper returned in October 1944 to his unit after suffering from jaundice, while the Leibstandarte refitted and re-equipped its units in an assembly area in Westphalia. The whole division received about 3,500 new combat troops, but due to a shortage of new tanks Peiper was forced to merge his two panzer battalions into one mixed panzer battalion. The war situation in

Germany became worse every day. This led to a shortage of supplies, which impacted proper training to integrate the new troops into the remainder of the division. The fighting spirit of the Leibstandarte, however, was still high. They were determined to make it troublesome for the Allies even at the end. The Leibstandarte was moved during November 1944 to an assembly area near Cologne where they were given cover missions to mask the forthcoming operation. During one of these missions soldiers of the Leibstandarte were confronted with terrible scenes caused by American aerial bombardments. This confrontation had an enormous impact on the young Leibstandarte soldiers. They hated the enemy so much that even Peiper admitted, after the war, that he was not always able to keep them under control. Yet Peiper still demanded an intensive training program in his regiment, although the regiment was hindered by a lack of fuel and ammunition. Peiper's purpose was to form a new combat ready team of the remainder of his regiment together with the new arrivals. In the last days prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* Peiper used his time to attend orders and briefings, to issue orders himself, and to reorganize his unit for the forthcoming operation.

The second question was whether there were circumstances other than leadership, which led to the choice of Peiper as commander of the spearhead unit. Before answering this question, it is necessary to analyze Hitler's considerations for the offensive. When Hitler was briefed in September 1944 on the situation of 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich, he decided to launch a counter attack through the Ardennes. Hitler must have thought of the glorious advance of the Germans in Belgium and France in 1940. Shepperd describes in his book *France 1940: Blitzkrieg in the West* the situation in the German Army attacking Belgium and France in May 1940. Seven panzer divisions were

concentrated under command of General von Kleist, better known as Panzer Group von Kleist, and were to advance through, what Shepperd called, the impenetrable Ardennes country to cross the Meuse River between Sedan and Dinant. North of Panzer Group von Kleist were another four panzer divisions (2002, 20 -30). These panzer units crossed the Meuse River within three days. Hitler was still impressed by achievements of his panzer units in 1940 and he was convinced that his panzers would be able to reach the Meuse again within three days. That leads to another question. Why was Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army chosen to be in the main effort? This choice was much more a personal affair. Hitler had a special relation with his former bodyguard commander Sepp Dietrich. Dietrich, very loyal to Hitler, had taken part in many campaigns with his Leibstandarte and had quite a dare devil reputation. Lucas describes in his book *Hitler's Enforcers* that Dietrich was regarded as a military legend, which had worked his way up, but he lacked any military strategic skills (1997, 13). Nevertheless, Hitler had an unswerving trust in his former bodyguard commander. This trust together with Hitler's determination to use the remainder of his panzer units, led to the choice of Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army as the decisive unit in *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* Field Marshal Walter Model, the commander of the Army Group, had been provided with this guidance during the planning of the *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* He knew that the Germans needed panzer troops to break through the American defense lines. He gave orders to Dietrich to prepare a plan to cross the Meuse River and to advance to Antwerp. Sepp Dietrich, for his part, also made a tactical decision that one of his two panzer corps had to be in the main effort. His choice was the 1st SS Panzer Corps, the unit he commanded before with his beloved Leibstandarte as the decisive unit.

Returning to the question of whether any circumstances other than leadership played a role in the decision to make Peiper the commander of the spearhead unit. The answer is: "yes." The key decision makers, Hitler, Model and Dietrich, all decided that the panzer units were the units with the most decisive role. It was also clear for Mohnke, commander of the Leibstandarte, that a reinforced panzer regiment had to head his formation, because speed and surprise were vital. Peiper happened to be the commander of the panzer regiment in the Leibstandarte. Thus, one factor other than leadership was the tactical considerations on the use of panzers as weapons to break through the American defensive lines.

The second factor other than leadership was that Hitler had a special relation with Dietrich. He knew Dietrich much better and longer than the other Army commanders, von Manteuffel and Brandenburg. Dietrich also had a reputation for being loyal to Hitler and for his courage during actions. Hitler, therefore, wanted Dietrich's unit as the main effort. Dietrich, for his part, was determined to have his former units, the 1st SS Panzer Corps and the Leibstandarte, in a leading role. And, of course, the Leibstandarte was still Hitler's favorite division and Hitler, as seen in chapter two, had determined in 1938 that the Leibstandarte had to spearhead every operation. Within the Leibstandarte it was obvious that Hitler's poster boy would be in the leading role. So, it was also a we-know-what-to-expect-principle that led to the decision of Peiper commanding the spearhead unit.

The third factor other than leadership was that Peiper had more than his share of luck up to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* Peiper survived every combat situation in which he took part. His command half-track in France even received a hit at the front,

which killed his radio-operator, but Peiper was never even seriously wounded. Prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* he was still serving with his beloved unit, the Leibstandarte, although many of his SS officer class were already out of action for whatever reason.

The last tertiary question in this chapter is focused on why Peiper was so special compared to other commanders in the Leibstandarte. This question is actually restricted to only officers in the Leibstandarte, because the Leibstandarte was the unit, among all other units, with the key role in *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* The other commanders in the Leibstandarte have been introduced in the previous section. Mohnke, the Leibstandarte commander, was four years older than Peiper and belonged to an earlier generation Leibstandarte officers. He already was beyond the level of commanding a regiment or a Kampfgruppe and he was now the direct superior of Peiper. Mohnke was also less well-known in Germany and the German Armed Forces, although his division, the Leibstandarte, had been chosen to conduct the decisive operation during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."*

Compared to the other Leibstandarte Kampfgruppe commanders, Hansen, Sandig and Knittel, Peiper was the youngest. At the age of twenty-nine, he was the youngest regimental commander in the German Armed Forces. All of the aforementioned Leibstandarte commanders had outstanding war records. They were all holders of both the Knight's Cross and the German Cross in Gold. They all scored high on the twelve Waffen-SS leadership tools, mentioned in chapter two, which brought them to the level of commanding a Kampfgruppe in the Leibstandarte, because the Leibstandarte only selected the best combat leaders. And like Peiper, all these men were charismatic leaders.

So, what was the difference between these commanders and Peiper? The answer is Peiper's popularity. Peiper was prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* not only a holder of the Knight's Cross, but also a holder of the Oak Leaves of the Knight's Cross. His brave actions in combination with his calm leadership, his feel of the battlefield, his self-confidence and the use of surprise were known in Germany and the German Armed Forces. Peiper's heroic exploits were used and most of the time enlarged by the German war propaganda machine. Another reason was that Peiper was Himmler's protégé, which brought him some opportunities in his career. Peiper was able to convert these opportunities into success on the battlefield for his unit and for himself. That gave him an unassailable side, which impressed both his subordinates and his superiors. Last but not least, Peiper was one of the few Waffen-SS officers who distinguished themselves for being an independent thinker. His judgment of the battlefield in combination with his initiative contributed to his reputation for being an outstanding field commander.

The Leibstandarte Kampfgruppe commanders had a lot in common, but the mentioned features of Peiper made the difference.

Table 2 shows the similarities and differences between the Leibstandarte's Kampfgruppe commanders.

Table 2. The Four Kampfgruppe Commanders in the Leibstandarte

Similarities and differences	Max Hansen	Rudolf Sandig	Max Knittel	Jochen Peiper
Age in December 1944	36	33	30	29
Rank	SS Obersturm-bannführer	SS Obersturm-bannführer	SS Sturmbann-führer	SS Obersturm-bannführer
Unit in December 1944	1st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment	2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment	SS Reconnaissance Battalion	1st SS Panzer Regiment
Decorations in December 1944	1941: German Cross in Gold. 1943: Knight's Cross	1943: German Cross in Gold. 1943: Knight's Cross.	1943: German Cross in Gold. 1944: Knight's Cross.	1943: German Cross in Gold. 1943: Knight's Cross. 1944: Oak Leaves
Leadership	• Exponent of SS leadership. • Charismatic. • Adored.	• Exponent of SS leadership. • Hard. • Obedient.	• Exponent of SS leadership. • Loyal. • Obedient.	• Exponent of SS leadership. • Charismatic. • Dare Devil. • Independent.
Extraordinary	Wounded nine times.	Former Noncommissioned officer.	Served only in Reconnaissance Battalion.	• Himmler's Protégé. • Popular: Hitler's poster boy.

Peiper was without doubt special in the Leibstandarte, but that leads to another question: Were there outside the Leibstandarte any commanders comparable with Peiper? In the long list of excellent battle commanders there were only two officers, who had close similarity to Peiper. The first is his fellow Waffen-SS officer, SS Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche, who started his career in the Leibstandarte and later transferred to its sister unit 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend. Luther portrays Wünsche as a tall, slim, blue eyed, blonde, good-looking and charismatic leader, who had a reputation for being a *Draufgänger* (dare devil). Like Peiper he was also an ideal model

for the German war machine. After the SS Junkerschule in Bad Tölz, he was commissioned into the Leibstandarte in 1936 and he was given command of a platoon at the same time. In September 1938 Wünsche transferred to the personal staff of Hitler as orderly. In May 1940, he went, just like Peiper, back to the Leibstandarte and took part in the western offensive as a platoon and company commander. For his actions in this campaign he won both the Iron Cross First and Second Class. Wünsche served as divisional adjutant during the Balkan campaign in 1941. He continued as a staff officer in the Leibstandarte on the Eastern Front. Wünsche had been given command of the assault gun battalion in February 1942. He played a significant role in the defenses on the Eastern Front. After the withdrawal of the Leibstandarte to France, Wünsche attended the Kriegsakademie (Staff College) in Berlin, and in October he assumed command of a panzer battalion in the Leibstandarte's Panzerregiment. In February 1943 he received the German Cross in Gold and in March 1943 he was awarded the Knight's Cross for actions around Kharkov. In June 1943 Wünsche transferred to newly formed 12 SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend to become the commander of the panzer regiment. Wünsche's regiment took part in combat in Normandy. Wünsche received the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 11 August 1944. Canadian forces captured him during the night of 20 August 1944 while he was trying to escape with his unit from the Falaise pocket (1987, 74-76; and Geocities website 2004). His capture made a big difference with Peiper. Had Wünsche still been the commander of the 12th Division's panzer regiment, just prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein,"* he was probably not designated to command the ultimate spearhead, because his division was not to have the decisive role during the operation. Table 3 shows the similarities and differences between Peiper and Wünsche.

Table 3. Max Wünsche and Jochen Peiper		
Similarity and differences	**Wünsche**	**Peiper**
Born	20 April 1914 in Kittlitz (Saxony)	30 January 1915 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf
Education	SS Junkerschule in Bad Tölz in 1935-1936 and German Staff College in 1942	Only SS Junkerschule in Braunschweig.
Leadership	Charismatic and audacious.	Charismatic and audacious.
Career in combat units	• 1936-1938: Platoon Commander in the Leibstandarte. • 1940: Platoon and Company Commander in the Leibstandarte in France • 1941: Division Adjutant in the Leibstandarte during the Balkan Campaign. • 1941-1942: Staff Officer Leibstandarte on the Eastern Front. • 1942: Battalion Commander in the Leibstandarte on the Eastern Front. • 1943: Commander of the Panzer Regiment of 12 SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend on the Eastern Front. • 1944: Commander of the Panzer Regiment of 12 SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend in Normandy.	• 1936-1938: Platoon Commander in the Leibstandarte. • 1940: Platoon and Company Commander in the Leibstandarte in France • 1941: Company Commander in the Leibstandarte on the Eastern Front. • 1942: Battalion Commander in the Leibstandarte on the Eastern Front. • 1943: Commander of the Panzer Regiment in the Leibstandarte on the Eastern Front. • 1944: Commander of the Panzer Regiment of the Leibstandarte in Normandy.
Nazi Mentorship	Wünsche served on the personal staff of Adolf Hitler as orderly. He became Himmler's protégé.	Peiper served on the personal staff of Heinrich Himmler as adjutant. He became Himmler's protégé.
Decorations: • Iron Cross First and Second Class: • German Cross in Gold • Knights Cross of the Iron Cross: • Oak Leaves:	France, June 1940 Eastern Front, February 1943 Eastern Front, March 1943 Normandy, August 1944	France, June 1940 Eastern Front, February 1943 Eastern Front, March 1943 Eastern Front, January 1944
Extraordinary	Blond, blue eyes, smart, and war hero ? Aryan role model.	• Blond, blue eyes, smart, and war hero ? Aryan role model. • Hitler's poster boy.
Luck	Captured in August 1944 in France.	Still serving in the Leibstandarte in December 1944.

The other officer was Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Although Rommel was twenty-four years older than Peiper and lived in a different time with different influences, the careers of both officers showed notable similarities. Rommel and Peiper were well-known in Germany during World War II as courageous panzer leaders, while both of them started their career as infantrymen. Captain Basil Liddell Hart described Rommel in his book *The German Generals Talk* as the sun-hero from Africa:

> From 1941 onwards the names of all other German generals came to be overshadowed by that of Erwin Rommel. He had the most startling rise of any – from colonel to field marshal. . . . His fame was deliberately fostered – not only by his own efforts but also by Hitler's calculated choice. (1975, 45)

Rommel was born in Heidenheim, a small town near Ulm (Württemberg) in 1891 as son of a schoolmaster. Desmond Young notes in his book *Rommel: The Desert Fox* that Rommel joined the 124th Infantry Regiment as cadet in 1910 and was selected for the War Academy in Danzig (today Poland's Gdansk) in 1911. This was remarkable, because cadets normally first had to spend at least two years in a regiment before selected for an officer course in Germany in the period prior to World War I. Rommel duly passed his examinations in 1912 and was commissioned into his former regiment (1978, 15).

Ward Rutherford notes in his book *Rommel* that Rommel won in an early stage of the World War I both the Iron Cross First and Second Class for brave actions as a platoon commander in France. In 1915 Rommel left his regiment and joined a new, more prestigious organization, the Royal Württemberger Mountain Battalion. This battalion never fought as an entity, but always in detachments of varying size. The commanders of these detachments, to whom Rommel now belonged, were allowed considerable freedom of action (1981, 11-15).

David Fraser describes in his book *Knight's Cross: A Life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel* that Rommel had become a famous regimental personality while he served with his initial battalion in France. He fired everyone with his infectious enthusiasm and his feel for the battle and the enemy's likely plans and reactions, which infused great faith into the men he led. After a long training period Rommel's unit was first deployed in the French Vosges (Alsace) and later in Rumania. Unlike the static warfare at the Western Front, Rommel's company was involved in mobile warfare. Fraser calls it warfare in which the enemy might be found anywhere at any time, and also warfare which would always reward the quickest eye, mind and decision. This kind of warfare was meat and drink to Rommel. After a long period of combat, Rommel had been given leave because he was suffered from a total exhaustion. When he returned, his battalion had moved to Austrian Carinthia to take part in the Italian Campaign. Rommel, still a first lieutenant, sometimes commanded a unit the size of three mountain companies and a machinegun company, better known as the Rommel Detachment. It was with the Rommel Detachment that Rommel received at the age of twenty-six the highest German medal for courage in World War I, the Pour le Mérite (For bravery and virtue) (1993, 43-78).

Charles Douglas-Home writes in *Rommel* that Rommel served in the inter bellum period mainly as an instructor at the Infantry School in Dresden, for the SA and at the Kriegsakademie (German Staff College) in Potsdam. He liked to teach subordinates. As a follower of General Hans von Seeckt, Rommel was not involved in any political activity. Von Seeckt was the man who created a new German Army after World War I. He prohibited his officers to participate in any political debate and even forbade them to vote. Rommel, promoted to lieutenant colonel in the meantime, had been chosen to

command a guard of honor for the Führer himself in 1935. This was the first time that Rommel came to the Führer's attention (1973, 37-44). The second time was in 1937 when Rommel's book *Infanterie Greift An (Infantry Attacks)* impressed Hitler. He asked Rommel to become battalion commander of the Führerbegleitbattailon, the battalion responsible for Hitler's personal safety, during the march into Sudetenland in 1938 and the rest of Czechoslovakia in 1939. This was the first time that Rommel was brought to close quarters with the Führer. Just prior to the Poland campaign, in September 1939, Rommel was promoted to major-general and posted to Hitler's staff and was again responsible for Hitler's safety (Young 1978, 40 – 45).

Rommel was given command of 7th Panzer Division in February 1940 and took part in the Western campaign. He was famous for leading his division from the front. He commanded the German Africa Corps from 1941 up to 1943, but was again sent home for sick leave because of total exhaustion in the spring of 1943. After recovery, he became Commander-in-Chief of Army Group B in France. He died in October 1944 of what many believed suicide. The Nazi authorities thought that he had relations with what they called the conspirators, who tried to kill Hitler in July 1944. He was forced to commit suicide, although the official version in Germany was that he died of wounds gained in Normandy in July 1944. He was promoted to field marshal in 1943 and awarded the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds (Website of Achtung Panzer 2004).

Martin Blumenson sums up the features, which made Rommel special and well-known, in Correlli Barnett's book *Hitler's Generals*:

> In nearly half-century since the Second World War, while the reputations of many major military participants have diminished, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's has grown. Highly admired by both sides, not merely for his inspirational leadership and skills but also for his charisma and chivalry, Rommel was a throwback to the medieval knight in his personal traits, a master of modern warfare. . . . Boldness, the use of surprise, a readiness to accept risks, and an intuitive feel of the battlefield distinguished Rommel's exercise of command. (1993, 293)

Returning to the comparison of Peiper and Rommel, who distinguished themselves from the rest, both men shared many characteristics and combat experiences. Rommel lived in another time period than Peiper and was confronted with an inter war period in which promotion was not very common. Peiper entered the Waffen-SS in a period when the armed services in Germany were expanding. But looking to their careers, there are many similarities which made both men very special leaders and this was not only limited to their way of leading, but also to other things that impacted their leadership.

Table 4 shows the similarities between Peiper and Rommel:

Table 4. Similarities between Erwin Rommel and Jochen Peiper

Similarity	**Rommel**	**Peiper**
Early selection for officer course	Rommel spent not even a year in a regiment before selection for the officer academy. Common rule was to serve at least two years in a regiment.	Peiper went strait from the SS candidate course in Jüterbog to the SS Junkerschule in Braunschweig. Common rule was to serve at least two years in an SS unit.

Table 4. Similarities between Erwin Rommel and Jochen Peiper		
Similarity	**Rommel**	**Peiper**
Young commanders in combat	Rommel commanded at the age of twenty-five in World War I in Romania and Italy a unit the size of a reinforced battalion, known as the Rommel Detachment	Peiper commanded at the age of twenty-seven in World War II in the Soviet Union, Italy and France a battalion and at the age of twenty-eight a regiment.
Symbol for German war machine	Rommel's exploits in Africa were used for propaganda in the German media.	Peiper's actions in the Soviet Union were used for propaganda in the German media.
No political interest	Rommel was not interested in politics up to 1944. He was mainly focused on the military organization in Germany.	Peiper was not interested in politics, although he became infected by SS ideology. He was mainly focused on the Leibstandarte.
High Nazi mentor	Rommel came to Hitler's attention in the late 1930s and became Hitler's protégé up to July 1944. He spent a few years in Hitler's personal staff.	Peiper crossed Himmler's path in 1934 and became Himmler's protégé until the end of war. He spent a few years in Himmler's personal staff.
Leading from front	Rommel led in both World Wars from the front whether as a platoon commander or as a divisional commander. Rommel was as division commander in France 1940 famous for leading from the front	Peiper led from the front as a platoon commander up to a regimental commander.
Use of surprise and 'feel' of the battlefield	Rommel had a very good feeling for the intention of the enemy and was able to use surprise either in France, Romania and Italy in World War I as well as in France and Africa in World War II.	Peiper had a very good tactical feeling and was consistently able to surprise the enemy at the Eastern front.

Table 4. Similarities between Erwin Rommel and Jochen Peiper		
Similarity	**Rommel**	**Peiper**
Courageous	Rommel was courageous on the battlefield (physically) and in his relations with superiors (mentally). He was awarded the Pour le Mérite in World War I and the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds in World War II.	Peiper was famous for his bravery on the battlefield (physical) and his criticism of his superiors (mentally). Peiper was awarded the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords and the German Cross in Gold.
Independent, risk and initiative	Rommel had a clear vision and he was able to mobilize people to reach this vision without involvement of superiors. He was willing to take risks. He showed this in Romania and Italy in World War I and in France and Africa in World War II.	Peiper made his own judgments and was willing to take risks. When he saw an opportunity to gain a favorable situation, he took the initiative and did not wait for any orders from superiors. Peiper showed these features many times at the Eastern Front.
Teaching subordinates	Rommel loved to teach his subordinates. In the interwar period he was an instructor for several years.	Peiper was focused on teaching his subordinates in all kind of military skills, such as decision-making and the art of command and tactics. For many subordinates he was also a tutor on every aspect of life.
High standards and self discipline	Rommel had high personal standards. He was seen as a throwback of the medieval knight. He was very self-disciplined. An example is that he never smoked and never drank any alcohol. He went beyond his physical limits, and was sent home to recover from total combat exhaustion in both wars.	Peiper had high standards on proper care and proper human behavior. He adopted the SS code of honor, with its chivalry side and its disgusting side, as his own personal values. He went beyond his personal physical limits the last year of the war. He was in bad health and suffered from total combat exhaustion and jaundice.
Charisma	Rommel was able to spot deficiencies on the battlefield. He had vision and was able to	Peiper had the ability to make profound tactical analysis and surprised his opponents. He had a

Table 4. Similarities between Erwin Rommel and Jochen Peiper		
Similarity	**Rommel**	**Peiper**
	mobilize people to reach this vision with group cohesion, and followers who felt comfortable under his command.	clear vision for his unit and communicated it. His men trusted him as a leader, even under extreme conditions.

There was, however, at least one big difference between Peiper and Rommel. Rommel was twenty-four years older and from another generation. At the beginning of World War II Rommel had risen to the rank of colonel and was promoted to major-general just prior to the Poland campaign. He was, just like Peiper, also a very special officer, but at another level. It is always precarious to theorize with 'what if' by placing a person into another time and by extrapolating his further life. But had Peiper been born in the early 1890s and had he been confronted with same circumstances as Rommel, he probably also might have made it to field marshal based on his charismatic leadership, his character, his combat experiences, his luck, his value as an icon for Germany and his mentorship by a high ranking Nazi.

CHAPTER 5

PEIPER'S ADVANCE

> If our infantry had broken through by 0700 as originally planned . . . I think we might have reached the Meuse in one day.
>
> Jochen Peiper (Ethint Nr.10 1979, 9)

Preamble

This chapter is meant as an evaluation of Peiper's actions during *Operation "Wacht am Rhein"* (see also Appendix C, Map of Peiper's Advance in the Ardennes). The decision that Peiper was to command the spearhead had already been made, and it is interesting to learn how well Peiper and his Kampfgruppe performed during the operation.

The chapter is divided into nine chronological sections: "16 December 1944," "17 December 1944," "18 December 1944," "19 December 1944," "20 December 1944," " 21 December 1944," "22 December 1944," "23 December 1944" and "24 to 26 December 1944." The chapter ends with an analysis.

16 December 1944

Westemeier notes that *Unternehmen "Herbstnebel,"* the ground offensive as part of *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein,"* started at 0530 hrs with a huge preparation fire in which more than 5,000 German artillery guns and grenade throwers of Sixth Panzer Army were involved. The temperature was low and the visibility was limited that first day, because of the cold misty winter weather (1996, 62). Peiper himself described in "Ethint Nr. 10" that he had gone to the command post of Major General Engel's 12th Volksgrenadier (Infantry) Division at 0500 hrs, which was to breach through the

American defense, to observe the attack and to estimate the proper moment for launching his push forward (1979, 13). Peiper also described in his personal account, *Kampfgruppe Peiper15-26 December 1944*, that his Kampfgruppe moved at 0800 hrs from its assembly areas in the Blankenheim Forest to an area immediately behind the front sector held by the 12th Volksgrenadier Division in the Losheimer Graben (1945, 2). Pallud notes that the Kampfgruppe became intertwined in a mass of vehicles belonging to the Leibstandarte, the 12th Volksgrenadier Division, and the 3rd Fallschirmjäger (Airborne) Division. The road from Scheid to Losheim was one solid traffic jam, due to the bridge over a railway cutting about two kilometers east of Losheimer Graben had been blown up by Germans earlier that year during their retreat from the area (2000, 21). Meanwhile Peiper learned at Engel's headquarters that the grenadiers were not moving as rapidly as expected. He stayed at the headquarters the whole morning. Peiper described in "Ethint Nr. 10": "It turned out I was actually at Engel's command post until 1400 hrs" (1979, 13). Pallud notes that when Peiper joined his unit at 1430 hrs he was so irritated by the whole chaos and delay that he ordered his column to move swiftly ahead, shouldering off the road anything that got in its way (2000, 21). Kane states that Peiper, in his lead armored car, immediately drove down to the blown up bridge with his other vehicles right behind him (1997, 20). Peiper described that once having reached the railway overpass, he learned that it was still out. He soon found a detour around the bridge, which was a deep cut in the terrain.

Peiper reached Losheim at 1930 hrs and was then ordered by the Leibstandarte headquarters to swing westward to Lanzerath to meet elements of the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division. On the way to Lanzerath, American mines and anti-tank knocked out five tanks

and five other armored vehicles (Ethint Nr. 10, 1979, 14). Peiper could have proceeded with more caution, according to Kane, by sending his engineers ahead to disarm the mines, but he had already wasted time the entire day and he was not to tolerate any further delay. Speed and surprise were paramount for this operation. All mines were simply to be rolled over (1997, 20).

Pallud states that Peiper's first elements reached Lanzerath just before midnight. Peiper met the commanding officer of the 9th Fallschirmjäger Regiment, Oberst (colonel) von Hoffman in the village café. The two men became involved in a heated argument, as Peiper was not happy about, in his point of view, Hoffmann's overcautious attitude (2000, 22). Peiper explained his anger:

> I asked him for all the information that he had on the enemy situation. His answer was that the woods were heavily fortified, and that scattered fires from prepared "pill boxes" plus mines in the road were holding up his advance. He told me that it was impossible to attack under these circumstances. I asked him if he had personally reconnoitered the American positions in the woods, and he replied that he received the information from one of his battalion commanders. I asked the battalion commander, and he said that he had got the information from a Hauptmann (captain) in his battalion. I called the Hauptmann and he averred that he had not personally seen the American forces but it had been "reported to him." At this point I became very angry and ordered the Fallschirmjäger Regiment to give me one battalion and I would lead the breakthrough. (Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 15)

17 December 1944

Peiper held a conference with his subordinate commanders at 0100 hrs. He ordered his troops to breakthrough at 0400hrs. He organized his Kampfgruppe with two Panther tanks in the lead followed by a mixture of halftracks, Panthers and Mark IV tanks (Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 15). Pallud notes that the night was very dark and the vehicles moved ahead under blackout conditions along small roads through the woods, with German paratroopers holding white handkerchiefs walking beside to guide the drivers. At

about 0500 hrs the column passed Bucholtz without encountering any resistance and at around 0600 hrs, just before daybreak, the column entered Honsfeld (2000, 22-23). In Honsfeld the first elements of Peiper's team managed to merge into a long column of American vehicles and they entered Honsfeld before any fighting broke out (Kane 1997, 21). Peiper was not afraid:

> One kilometer northwest of Honsfeld we received some small arms fire, but this didn't make us unhappy because although there was a slight delay, it allowed rear vehicles to close up. (Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 15)

Kane described Peiper being in a good mood for the first time since the start of the offensive. Now he hoped to move to the Meuse against little or no opposition. The breakthrough seemed to be complete; however Peiper's tanks were beginning to run low on fuel. The traffic jam in the Losheimer Gap and the subsequent cross-country rerouting of his Kampfgruppe had consumed the vehicles' gasoline (1997, 21). Peiper knew that an American gasoline dump probably existed at Büllingen. Judging by the noise to the northeast he concluded that the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend was advancing slower than expected. Peiper, without any contact with his division headquarters, decided to change his advance route to Büllingen, which was actually on one of the advanced routes of 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend (Ethint Nr.10 1979, p. 16).

Kane notes that Peiper reached Büllingen at around 0800 hrs that morning. The American garrison at Büllingen was effortlessly overwhelmed and Peiper's Kampfgruppe seized more than fifty thousand gallons of fuel. Fifty American prisoners were forced to fill the fuel tanks of the German vehicles. After a small American air and artillery bombardment at 0930 hrs Peiper pulled out of Büllingen and headed west on the prescribed route (Kane 1997, 21).

Peiper described in his own account that the terrain in the Büllingen – Ligneville sector proved to be particularly difficult; the most difficult during the advance. Where the prescribed route left the hard surface, it was practically impossible to advance. As a result of the thaw, the subsoil of the secondary roads had become soft and panzers soon plowed it up. It became impossible for the wheeled vehicles to follow the panzers (1945, 4). Pallud notes that Peiper's first elements overran Moderscheid by the late morning without any significant resistance (2000, 22).

Sometime between 1200 and 1300 hrs Peiper's advance guard had reached the crossroads at Baugnez, a small village a few miles near Malmédy. They spotted parts of the B Battery of the U.S. 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. What then happened is known as the Malmédy incident. Pallud notes that the Germans shot up the convoy, and quickly rounding up about 125 prisoners. To this were added about twenty-five other Americans who were captured earlier that morning. The prisoners were grouped in an open field next to the crossroads and remained there under light guard. Peiper headed forward with his advance guard towards Ligneville. Approximately fifteen minutes later the main body of Peiper's Kampfgruppe under command of one of Peiper's battalion commanders, SS Sturmbannführer Werner Pötschke, who was killed in Hungary in March 1945, passed the crossroads. What then happened is still a mystery, but shots rang out, followed by heavy machine gun fire. More then seventy American prisoners were killed in the resulting confusion. Authorities never agreed on the number of prisoners, ranging from seventy-one to 125 or even more. Bauserman described that some men of the Kampfgruppe entered the field to finish off the Americans who were still alive. This part of the atrocity lasted about ten to fifteen minutes. Shortly afterward, the

remainder of the main body of the Kampfgruppe passed by and shot into the bodies lying in the field. This continued for about an hour. After the German column passed, the survivors laid quietly in the field until 1630 when most attempted to escape. After four days the survivors reached American lines and were able to give their statements about the atrocity (Bauserman 1995, x).

Many conflicting accounts have been written about this incident. Even today it is very difficult to reconstruct precisely what happened at Baugnez. Bauserman gives in his book *The Malmédy Massacre* an American and a German interpretation of the incident (1995, 19-32 and 61-67). Weingarten states in his book *Crossroads of Death* that Kampfgruppe Peiper killed prisoners of war, although the circumstances under which the killings took place are unclear. Even investigations and a process at Dachau were not able to clarify what happened. Weingarten believed that there had been no conspiracy among the SS soldiers to violate the laws of war, but notes that they had been exposed to influences, such as the SS command climate and their experiences on the Eastern Front, which encouraged such violations (1979, 239-260). Westemeier thinks that some of the American prisoners were able to pick up their weapons. A tragic mistake happened when the main body of the Kampfgruppe came to the scene. German grenadiers opened fire as they approached, mistaking the men in the field for combatants (1997, 85-86). Lothar Greil notes in his book *Die Wahrheit über Malmedy (The truth on Malmédy)* that the Germans started to fire only after a mass escape attempt by the prisoners (1958, 12-13). Pallud states that the story produced by the prosecution at the post-war trial held at Dachau, describing an ordered and carefully prepared massacre, is far from convincing. Many details then accepted proved to be wrong. Pallud believes that the Malmédy

massacre has to be seen as a genuine battle incident that probably started when some prisoners tried to escape. For this or for some other reason, a German fired a shot, causing panic on both sides. Other German grenadiers opened fire with machine guns. It became a deliberate violation of the laws and usages of war, in others words a war crime, when some of the grenadiers lost control and started to kill. A few Germans even walked among the fallen to give the Americans, who still showed a sign of life, their coup de grace (2000, 26-27). This last version sounds very logical. As seen in the previous chapter, Hitler spoke in his speech of a wave of terror and Dietrich was not clear on what to do with prisoners, although Kane states that Peiper at no time during the war ever ordered the execution of captured prisoners. Dietrich was astounded when he learned of the Malmédy incident and ordered an immediate investigation (1997, 13). Peiper's Kampfgruppe consisted of a mixture of veterans and inexperienced soldiers, who might have lost control when faced with the tension and reality of war. Moreover, most of these men were still determined to retaliate against the Americans, because they saw, as seen in the previous chapter, the terrible results of American air bombardments in the week prior to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."*

Meanwhile Peiper's first panzers entered Ligneville during the afternoon, where they met the most spirited American opposition they had yet encountered. The American resistance came from the supply trains of the U.S. 9th Armored Division's Combat Command B (Kane 1997, 23). Pallud described the scene in which Peiper was involved. Charging towards the Amblève Bridge, the lead panzer was hit by an American Sherman tank. In a halftrack some distance behind, Peiper saw the Sherman's turret traversing toward his own vehicle. His driver was aware of the threat and hurriedly pulled back

behind a house, but another German halftrack was hit. Peiper jumped out his halftrack and, taking a *Panzerfaust* (handheld anti-tank weapon), he began to creep up on the Sherman, but before the Sherman was within range it was hit by one of Peiper's panzers (2000, 28).

Peiper explained that he had information from an American prisoner in Honsfeld about a brigade headquarters in Ligneville, but the commander and his staff of the 49th AAA Brigade had just left Ligneville before Peiper arrived. Peiper described: "We were too late and only captured their lunch." (Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 17).

Pallud notes that Peiper reorganized his Kampfgruppe and moved west, after a two hour break. Peiper was not at the front during this stage, because he was conferring in Ligneville with his division commander, SS Oberführer Mohnke (2000, 29). By late afternoon the first panzers had established a position on the edge of Stavelot. From their vantage point the Germans were able to see the entire area. One of the things they spotted, were American trucks rushing back and forth through Stavelot. It gave the impression that Stavelot was heavily defended, but in reality, unknown to the Leibstandarte, the vehicles were evacuating another large American fuel depot. Stavelot itself was defended by a handful of American engineers (Kane 1997, 24).

The bridge at Stavelot was essential to Peiper, because the Amblève River formed an anti-tank barrier. Three tanks attempted to rush to the bridge, but a mine hit the lead vehicle. Sixty dismounted German grenadiers who ran forward to seize the bridge followed this attack, but they were stopped by defensive fire. Peiper's advance had temporarily stopped at the second day of *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* (Pallud 2000, 29; Kane 1997, 24).

18 December 1944

Pallud notes that Peiper was back with the vanguard at 0630 hrs that morning. He opened his attack on Stavelot with an artillery barrage that lasted until 0800 hrs. Then the German panzers started rolling towards Stavelot. The Kampfgruppe quickly reached the center of the village; the bridge was still intact (2000, 29). Peiper described in his account that tanks supported the American defense. A fierce tank battle broke out, which lasted two hours and was costly for both sides (1945, 7). The Germans maneuvered dexterously before slowly moving across the bridge at around 1000 hrs, but nothing happened. The Germans crossed the bridge without trouble. Something had gone wrong for the American defenders, because engineers prepared the bridge for destruction (Pallud 2000, 29).

The following report of the afternoon and evening of 18 December 1944 originated from Peiper's own descriptions. Peiper did not want to lose any time. The advance guard of his Kampfgruppe continued their westward movement at top speed without waiting to mop up Stavelot. Peiper's next target was the vital bridge at Trois Ponts. The Kampfgruppe reached Trois Ponts around 1100 hrs, but an anti-tank gun near the bridge delayed the advance briefly. The leading panzers destroyed the gun, but the Americans blew up the bridge right in the face of Peiper's Kampfgruppe. Peiper had no more options but to go westward. He decided to make a detour to the north first, second to advance through La Gleize and Cheneux and third to reach back again to the prescribed march route. La Gleize was passed at 1300 hrs without any resistance and the Germans easily took the bridge near Cheneux. However, during the afternoon the weather cleared and Peiper's advance guard was attacked by American fighter-bombers. Two

tanks and five halftracks were hit on the road. This caused a delay, because the road was too narrow to by-pass the broken vehicles. The Kampfgruppe was not able to get moving again until about 1600 hrs, when fog came down and Peiper was covered from the air. At about 1800 hrs Peiper moved up towards the original route.

Only two bridges remained between Peiper and the Meuse: one over the Ourthe River and one over the small Lienne River. The bridge over the Lienne had been blown when Peiper's Kampfgruppe approached. Not being able to find another bridge in the vicinity, Peiper decided to go north to Stoumont and La Gleize. Without any major opposition Peiper reached La Gleize. He halted his Kampfgruppe in the woods between La Gleize and Stoumont and sent out a group to reconnoiter towards Stoumont. This group reported that Stoumont was strongly held and that powerful American forces were moving from Spa to Stoumont (1945, 7-8; Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 20 -21).

Pallud notes that to the rear of the Leibstandarte, as Kampfgruppe Hansen was not making any progress along Leibstandarte*'s* southern advance route, SS Oberführer Mohnke ordered Schnellgruppe Knittel, which was initially planned to follow Hansen on the southern route, to move north instead, to support Peiper. SS Sturmbannführer Knittel crossed the bridge at Stavelot around 1900 hrs. The situation became dangerous for the Germans, because U.S. infantry of the 117th regiment was attacking Stavelot. Nevertheless, Knittel pressed on towards La Gleize, but that night Stavelot was back in American hands and Peiper was in danger of being cut off (2000, 32).

19 December 1944

Peiper attacked Stoumont at daylight, completely surprising his opponents. His infantry, consisting of one battalion of armored infantry from 2nd SS Panzergrenadier

Regiment and a company Fallschirmjäger, infiltrated through the American positions around Stoumont. Peiper then sent in his panzers at full speed, establishing a strong foothold on the eastern edge of the town. At the same time an American tank battalion arrived, forcing the Germans to fight their way through the remainder of Stoumont. A two hour battle followed and although Peiper lost at least six panzers, by 1030 hrs he was in firm control of Stoumont (Kane 1997, 27).

Peiper notes that from then on events turned rapidly against his Kampfgruppe. SS Sturmbannführer Knittel was able to reach Peiper's panzer column, but reported to Peiper that Stavelot had been retaken by American troops. Peiper immediately ordered Knittel to clear Stavelot. The supply situation in Peiper's Kampfgruppe made further operations impossible. He realized that the Kampfgruppe did not have sufficient gasoline to cross the bridge west of Stoumont. He then ordered his battalions to hold their positions. One panzer battalion was to hold positions west of Stoumont while the other battalion was still in La Gleize. The armored infantry battalion was to support the panzers in Stoumont and to support the AAA battalion in Cheneux. That afternoon the Americans launched three counterattacks at Stoumont, but Peiper's panzer battalion repelled these. However, Peiper decided at 2100 hrs to withdraw the positions west of Stoumont to the edge of the village, because his troops were too weak to maintain their three kilometers long defense line outside the village (1945, 8-11; Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 22).

Late that evening the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division under Major General James Gavin arrived in the area and Gavin immediately gave orders to deploy. One parachute infantry regiment was sent to the vicinity of Cheneux and another was ordered to proceed along Peiper's originally planned route. The third parachute infantry regiment was to

support both deployed regiments and the glider infantry regiment was kept in reserve (Kane 1997, 29-30). This marks the end of day four for Peiper during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."*

20 December 1944

Pallud notes that SS Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS (lieutenant-general) Herman Prieß, commander of 1st SS Panzer Corps, realized that the situation for the panzer corps was at a turning point. 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend did not make much progress in the north and Leibstandarte's Kampfgruppe Peiper had achieved a deep penetration but was now blocked and its logistic situation was critical. Prieß understood that his best chance of moving westwards lay with Peiper. He therefore ordered the Leibstandarte to back up Peiper's efforts. Kampfgruppe Sandig was ordered to take Stavelot, Kampfgruppe Hansen was to advance at the southern route, while Schnellgruppe Knittel was sent back from La Gleize to Trois Ponts to hold open the vital supply route through Stavelot. Hansen, however, still faced difficulties due to the bad condition of the roads on the southern route. Knittel made some progress on the heights west of Stavelot and Sandig failed to cross the Amblève River at Stavelot. He ordered one of his armored infantry battalions to detour to the south and to fight its way to Peiper's Kampfgruppe to reinforce this unit (2000, 46).

Peiper described that meanwhile his Kampfgruppe faced a comparatively quiet night, in which combat activity decreased with only the artillery remaining active. Peiper decided to conduct an attack with all the troops, panzers and supplies available, but with little success. American troops attacked Peiper's positions at La Gleize and Cheneux and took a camouflage convoy by surprise, which was trying to resupply Peiper at La Gleize.

Kampfgruppe Peiper was now completely cut off (Ethint Nr. 10 1979, 22-23). That evening small American infantry attacks on Peiper's dispersed locations continued, sometimes resulting in fierce hand-to-hand fighting (Kane 1997, 31).

Pallud describes that the remainder of the Leibstandarte was unsuccessful. Hansen was still struggling on the southern march route. Knittel had disengaged from the heights around Stavelot and Sandig launched without success another attack against Stavelot (2000, 48).

21 December 1944

Pallud portrays that Prieß envisaged the possibility of Kampfgruppe Peiper breaking its way out of the impasse, but Dietrich rejected this idea of withdrawal. Dietrich ordered Prieß to increase its efforts to back Peiper's Kampfgruppe. During the morning small units of the U.S. 2nd Battalion of the 119th Regiment attacked the German positions. They almost reached the road between Stoumont and La Gleize, but the German SS grenadiers threw them back and many Americans were taken prisoner, including their battalion commander, Major Hal McCown (2000, 48-49).

At around noon Peiper called together his senior commanders at his command post. This conference was the result of a radio message from Leibstandarte headquarters: "Division intends to advance through Trois Ponts and to relieve Kampfgruppe Peiper." Neither Stoumont nor Cheneux was to be held under the prevailing conditions any longer. To keep in line with the division's intention, Peiper decided to concentrate all available elements of the Kampfgruppe around La Gleize (Peiper 1945, 12).

In the evening the Germans withdrew to La Gleize, which was carried out without any incident or American interference. The evacuation of the positions at Stoumont left

the Froid-Cour castle outside the new perimeter. The castle accommodated about 130 American prisoners and about 150 German and American wounded. Before the line was pulled back to La Gleize, all the German walking wounded and all the prisoners were taken to La Gleize. About eighty wounded Germans and all the wounded Americans were left in the castle under care of a German medical sergeant and two American privates. In Cheneux fierce house-to-house fighting persisted between American paratroopers belonging to 82nd Airborne Division and the rearguard of Peiper's Kampfgruppe covering the retreat (Peiper 1945, 13; Pallud 2000, p. 49).

22 December 1944

Kane states that the Americans hoped to crush Peiper's Kampfgruppe on the 21st, but this did not occur. Gasoline and ammunition for Peiper's Kampfgruppe were now very low, and food was non-existent, but the SS men's will to fight was still unbroken. The Americans were determined to smash the Kampfgruppe on the 22nd and American artillery shelled the La Gleize area in the early hours (1997, 33).

That night, the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) showed up, after three days of delay, and attempted to resupply the Kampfgruppe with fuel and ammunition by air. Twenty aircraft were dispatched for this attempt and set off for Stoumont. Kane describes that Peiper, who was no longer in Stoumont, radioed the exact grid coordinates for the drop, but Mohnke somehow insisted that Peiper did not know where he was (1997, 34). The result was that many containers with fuel, ammunition and food were dropped in Stoumont, parachuting straight into Americans hands. Only three planes returned to their base, forcing the Luftwaffe to cancel any further airdrops. Peiper estimated that only ten per cent of the supplies dropped actually reached his men (Pallud 2000, 49; Kane 1997,

34). Pallud notes that the amount of fuel was too small to have any effect, being just enough to keep the radio functioning and to get a few panzers into firing position (2000, 49-50).

Kane notes that Peiper and his prisoner, Major Hal McCown, had long conversations from midnight to dawn in a cellar in La Gleize. Peiper's English was fluent and as the night wore on McCown and Peiper spoke about several topics: the forthcoming Christmas, McCown's treatment as a prisoner, the Geneva Convention, the total heartlessness of Germany and the Soviet Union toward each other, and the threat of communism in Europe. This last subject was, in Peiper's point of view, the primary reason for the war and the USA and Great Britain should join Germany to fight against this big threat from the east. But first, as Peiper told McCown, Germany would reach Antwerp and win the war against the Allies. Later on Peiper told McCown that he felt that the Germans, although not necessary lost, could not longer win the war, (1997, 34).

Peiper described that in the morning the situation in the La Gleize pocket was very grave. The artillery bombardments became more intense, concentrated on German positions at the edge of the village. At around 1400 hrs the American forces launched a concentric attack along all roads leading to La Gleize. The result was a fierce urban fight which lasted more than two hours. The Germans were able to repel the Americans and to restore the old line of resistance. At 1700 hrs the fighting subsided and the calm that followed permitted Peiper's men to conduct some necessary rescue missions (1945, 13-14).

It was in the evening that the last hope for relief for Peiper by units of the Leibstandarte was given up. Pallud notes that Knittel's Schnellgruppe was pulled back

from the fighting for Stavelot. Sandig was still stuck down and Hansen's Kampfgruppe was making some progress now on the southern route, but was unable to get any closer to La Gleize (Pallud 2000, 50).

23 December 1944

Peiper described that the situation in the La Gleize pocket still remained grave. He was surprised that, for some unknown reason to him, the American infantry and tank units were not able to resume their attack against his Kampfgruppe (1945, 14).

Kane states that most of the surrounding Americans spent this day resting and reorganizing content to shell Peiper's positions with artillery in the center of La Gleize. The next day, the 24th, would see an all-out attack on La Gleize. (1997, 35).

Kane also notes that Peiper had sent a message to Mohnke in which he explained the desperate situation of his Kampfgruppe. Finally at around 1700 hrs Leibstandarte*'s* headquarters replied. They informed Peiper that he could not expect any more *Otto* (gasoline) and *Hermann* (ammunition). Peiper demanded permission to break out. Headquarters gave him permission but only if he took his vehicles and wounded with him out of the perimeter. Peiper realized that a breakout under such conditions was impossible. There was not enough gasoline for his vehicles to breakout and the Americans were holding all the roads to his rear. Ammunition was very low and this forced Peiper to avoid Americans, rather then to seek a fight with them. Later that evening, Peiper pleaded again to leave the La Gleize pocket without vehicles and wounded, but the division headquarters held to their decision. In disgust, Peiper blew the radio up. Permission or not, he was determined to break out (1997, 36).

Peiper noted that he called together all his battalion commanders at the Kampfgruppe's command post in the cellar of a farmhouse that evening. He decided that one of the German medical officers was to be left behind to take care of the German and American wounded (1945, 15).

24 to 26 December 1944

Peiper noted that the remnants of his Kampfgruppe started breaking out of the pocket during early morning at about 0200 hrs, after all armored vehicles had been blown up (1945, 15). Pallud states that Peiper left a small rearguard to hold off the Americans. The American prisoners and German wounded had been left behind but, according to an agreement Peiper had proposed to his senior prisoner, Major Hal McCown, the German wounded were to be set free after recovery in American hospitals in return for American prisoners left behind in La Gleize. McCown had to remain with his captors, to be exchanged when the wounded Germans were handed over (2000, 51).

Peiper described that the Kampfgruppe with about 800 soldiers reached the Amblève River without encountering resistance. They crossed the river over a small bridge and in a long drawn-out column they reached the wooded area west of Trois Ponts under the most difficult conditions (1945, 15). Kane described that Peiper joked with his men. He halted every hour to check up on each man and to give everyone a bit of rest and encouragement (1997, 36).

They remained hidden in the woods all day to avoid being spotted by Allied aircraft, and it was late afternoon when the column began moving southwards again. Just after dark they ran into an American outpost of the 82nd Airborne Division and during the confusion Major Hal McCown managed to escape. Early on Christmas morning the

Kampfgruppe reached the Salm River. They swam across the icy and turbulent river and broke through the American lines. Contact with the Leibstandarte's advance elements was made six kilometers to the east in Wanne.

Peiper reported to his corps commander, Herman Prieß, at 1000 hrs that morning (Peiper 1945, 16; Pallud 2000, 51-52). Pallud cites Prieß, who recalled after the war:

> The Kampfgruppe had made the breakout with about 800 men and had succeeded in arriving with 770. The group had been in combat, under the most severe conditions, for an uninterrupted period of a week, and they were so exhausted that it was only by the use of force that the men were prevented from falling asleep while on the march. (2000, 52)

Kampfgruppe Peiper was disbanded by divisional order, which became effective on 26 December 1944 and which returned the individual units to their respective regiments. On the same day Peiper's panzer regiment was transferred to an area due west of St. Vith for rehabilitation (Peiper, 1945, 16). Kane notes that meanwhile in a patch woods north of La Gleize a group of about thirty SS men, belonging to Peiper's Kampfgruppe, stayed behind and were spotted by an American patrol during the 24th. Heavy fighting broke out. By Christmas morning, just as Peiper reached the Leibstandarte, all fifty Germans lay dead; not one survived. With their deaths, the ten day saga of Peiper's Kampfgruppe came to an end (1997, 37).

Analysis

The previous chapters made clear that it was a logical decision to assign SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper as the commander of the spearhead unit during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein,"* because Peiper was a special leader within one of Germany's most elite divisions. This chapter puts the focus on what had happened during

these cold days in December 1944 and is meant as an evaluation of this decision. Was it the right decision to assign Peiper as commander of the spearhead unit?

To evaluate Peiper's actions during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein,"* the twelve Waffen-SS leadership tools, introduced in chapter two, are used together with some characteristics that made him so special within the Leibstandarte. These leadership tools and features were decisive in Peiper's selection as spearhead unit commander in the Leibstandarte.

Peiper was very willing to take responsibility and to assume command of the spearhead unit. Everyone in the Leibstandarte knew Peiper and all accepted without any doubt this assignment. Peiper was still the ideal commander for most of his subordinates. At the higher level, men like Mohnke, Dietrich and even Hitler, knew Peiper's reputation and all were convinced that Peiper was the right man for this task.

Peiper knew that speed and surprise were to play an important role in this offensive. His vision and his understanding of the battlefield told him that if the attack to the Meuse took more than one day the surprise effect would have vanished. The shock, the chaos and panic, all caused by the attack, would then go over in a certain awareness in which the Americans would collect themselves to respond to this German attack. The first twenty-four to forty-eight hours were crucial.

Peiper realized that the Germans would lose their momentum if he had to wait for the completion of 12th Volksgrenadier Division's breach in the American defense lines. He judged the tactical situation and launched his Kampfgruppe while the 12th Division was still conducting their operation. This caused huge traffic jams, but the benefit of this launch was that the Germans did not lose the initiative during the first days of the

offensive. Peiper also realized prior to the attack that the shortage of supplies could play a decisive role in this attack. He was concerned about the logistical situation of his Kampfgruppe, but he was not able to solve this problem. He had to rely on good intelligence, and on captured Americans supplies. That was indeed a risky logistic plan and a cause for failure.

Peiper made several independent decisions during the advance to detour from the initial planned route. He was not rigid in his thinking and in his approach to this attack. He had doubts about the preparation. He even had doubts about a German victory, but he was still loyal to his Leibstandarte and very determined to reach the Meuse River. He led from the front without interference in the decision making of his subordinates. He allowed his subordinate commanders certain latitude; especially the commanders in the rear who had full freedom.

Peiper knew the physical limitations of his men, especially at the end of the advance and during the breakout. He realized that his men were at the end of their strength. However, Peiper underestimated the impact of his new troops on the performance of his Kampfgruppe. It is most likely that some inexperienced soldiers of his Kampfgruppe lost their nerves at the crossroads in Baugnez leading to the Malmédy incident. This lack of discipline did not fit in the SS code of honor, although the Eastern Front experience with the total heartlessness of both the Soviets and Germans towards each other changed the initial chivalry of Waffen-SS soldiers into a mentality of ruthless combat. Peiper himself was exposed to the inhumane war at the Eastern Front for almost three years, which marked him deeply. His ethics in command, his judgment on 'good and evil,' decreased because of his Eastern Front experiences combined with the body of

thoughts of SS ideology on a greater Germany. Peiper focused on his task to reach the Meuse, regardless of the enemy situation. Peiper had also another side. As soon as he came in contact with Major Hal McCown, Peiper showed his human side and started profound discussions with him.

Peiper was ambitious and determined to add this advance to his long list of heroic exploits. Even after five days of fierce fighting and not much progress towards the Meuse River, Peiper still believed that the Germans could reach Antwerp. Maybe not his Kampfgruppe, but at least another part of the Sixth Panzer Army was to make it to the Belgian harbor. The turning point came when Peiper culminated in La Gleize. He was disappointed. His own Leibstandarte was not able to provide him with sufficient supplies. His direct superior, SS Oberführer Mohnke, gave him unfeasible orders to breakout with vehicles and wounded. He, again, made his own judgment and decided to break out by foot with the remainder of his Kampfgruppe.

This analysis is not a hagiography on Peiper, but by analyzing Peiper's actions during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein,"* it is evident that Peiper was the right choice to command the spearhead unit. However, Peiper did not succeed in his task; he culminated on 19 December when he realized that his supplies were not sufficient. One might argue that this whole mission was unfeasible under these logistical circumstances, but Peiper thought otherwise. He estimated that the 12th Volksgrenadier Division was able to make a breach in the American defense lines before 0700 hrs in the morning of the first day and that his Kampfgruppe was able to reach the Meuse within one day without any delay, and with capturing American fuel on his way but these were huge miscalculations. It was

actually not the Sixth Panzer Division that was most successful, but the Fifth Panzer Division under von Manteuffel, in the south, which made the furthest advance.

For Peiper *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein"* was the beginning of the end. Germany lost this last risky operation in the winter of 1945. After this operation Allied and Soviet forces soon broke the last German resistance. Germany capitulated in May 1945 and Peiper was captured. The Americans held Peiper responsible for the killing of American prisoners on 17 December 1944 in Baugnez. He was sentenced to death in 1946 and waited every day for five years for execution while in solitary confinement. After five years his sentence was changed into life imprisonment. In 1956 Peiper was released from Landsberg Prison (ironically the prison in which Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* in the 1920s). Weingarten notes that Peiper tried to make a living in a world, which was quite different from the one he had known. Volkswagen employed him by Porsche Motor Company, but labor protests against him, in part by Italian guest workers, cost Peiper his job. Feeling that his German countrymen had betrayed him, he moved to Traves at the end of the 1960s, a small village in eastern France. For four years he led a modest but happy life, supporting himself and his family by translating books; especially on German history. As he passed his sixtieth birthday in 1975, Peiper seemed to have found peace. That illusion came abruptly to an end when the French communist newspaper "L'Humanité" published a sensational article on the "dishonorable resident" of Traves. Peiper was threatened and harassed for weeks after the publication. It finally ended with a fire-bomb attack on his house, killing Peiper at the age of sixty-one. Weingarten called him one more victim of the crossroads of death at Malmédy and hopefully the last one (1979, 262-263).

CHAPTER 6

FINAL REMARKS

Preamble

This chapter comprises the summarizing analysis, the conclusion and a discussion. The conclusion is the final answer to the main research question. For the discussion this chapter makes a huge step forward in time to learn whether the findings on Peiper's leadership are useful for today's Royal Netherlands Army. This section refers to the last tertiary research question: Is Peiper's leadership style or elements thereof useful for today's Dutch military vision on leadership?

Summarizing analysis

This thesis outlines the leadership of SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper prior to the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. A deductive approach is used to explain Peiper's leadership. Peiper was an officer in the Leibstandarte-SS and that leads to three sequential steps.

First, the Waffen-SS was a special service among the other German armed services. Unlike with the German Army, Hitler had a mutual relation based on trust with the Waffen-SS. Most army officers, who were generally better educated than their Waffen-SS counterparts, looked down on SS troops. This arrogance disappeared after the start of the campaign at the Eastern Front, when Waffen-SS soldiers showed their courage and steadfastness.

The Waffen-SS had a special culture with an impact on their leadership. The Waffen-SS adopted the eight main leadership tools of the army and, because of its unique

esprit de corps, added four other tools to the army's leadership list. The leadership tools are shown in table 5.

Table 5. Tools for Leadership

German Army and Waffen-SS	Only Waffen-SS
1. Accept responsibility. 2. Have a vision. 3. Make independent judgment and decisive decisions. 4. Teach and understand subordinates. 5. Be a role model and lead from the front. 6. Show courage (physically and mentally) and initiative. 7. Be flexible and allow subordinates freedom of action. 8. Enforce inner strength and discipline from yourself and your subordinates	1. Enforce loyalty and obedience and be self obedient 2. Earn respect from subordinates, based on equality between all ranks. 3. Lead with a high internal code of honor 4. Be willing to sacrifice one's own life

The casualty rate among Waffen-SS officers was much higher than in the German Army and caused rapid changes in command positions. Also many officers did not receive any additional staff and command training after they left their officer course at one of the SS Junkerschulen.

By 1944 Germany had passed its power climax. The regression had an enormous impact on morale of the German Army units, but not on Waffen-SS units. Waffen-SS soldiers were still motivated, their fighting spirit was unaffected and they were rushing over the fronts to fill the gaps in the lines and to mount vicious counterattacks. These

features separated the Waffen-SS from the German Army and made the Waffen-SS unique. Many considered the Waffen-SS as a real special force.

The second step in the deductive approach is the special status of the Leibstandarte among other Waffen SS units. The Waffen-SS started as a special bodyguard of Hitler, which was actually the Leibstandarte. After militarization of the Leibstandarte, Hitler had great trust in his former bodyguard unit. He decided that the Leibstandarte was always to spearhead a new operation. Soldiers of the Leibstandarte also distinguished themselves as disciplined, calm and tough warriors on many World War II battlefields, but especially on the Eastern Front. Many historians believe that they were the elite among the elite.

The third step in the deductive approach is Peiper's uniqueness as commander in the Leibstandarte. Peiper showed that he was willing to accept responsibility. He led his units with self-confidence and his subordinates were impressed by his charisma. He had a vision at every level that he commanded. Some say that he had unique understanding of the battlefield. He had the ability to make profound tactical analyses. He judged many tactical situations independently and was willing to take the initiative, which gained the Germans many favorable positions on the battlefield. He was always among his front troops, inspiring his men. They trusted him as a leader, even in the most extreme conditions. For most of the junior leaders, officers as well as noncommissioned officers, Peiper was not only a teacher in tactics and leadership, but also a coach for general education. Without any doubt he earned the respect of his subordinates. He never asked his men to do things, which he would not do himself. He had high standards on proper care and proper human behavior and demanded this from his subordinates.

Peiper's leadership is not only a positive story. There is also another side to Peiper's heroic exploits and his impressive leadership. Peiper was without any doubt very impressed by the SS culture, which was based on the Nazi interpretation of German history and the chivalrous SS code of honor. The SS ideology indoctrination during the officer course produced men who firmly believed in their destiny as missionaries of a new Aryan order that was to rule the whole world with Germany in the center.

This is not the only aspect of Peiper's personality. Peiper also developed a very fatalistic approach during the war. He knew only one loyalty: the Leibstandarte. If the Leibstandarte was to go under, he was prepared to give his life. His long Eastern Front experience took its toll. Peiper hardened towards the war environment and the enemy. The inhumane war between Germany and the Soviet Union left deep marks on Peiper. He had suffered from battle exhaustion, but he was determined to go back to his unit. He would never let his Leibstandarte down. These negative features made him blind to proportionality. Chicken thieves within his unit were sentenced to death, while his men without any repercussion fired on civilian houses and burned entire villages on the Eastern Front. His ethics in command deteriorated; his judgment between good and evil decreased. His initial chivalry on the battlefield changed into a brutal and dehumanizing fighting spirit.

These leadership characteristics were not unique in the Leibstandarte. Many Waffen-SS commanders were selected because they possessed in a greater or lesser degree these characteristics. But even in comparison to his fellow Leibstandarte commanders Peiper was special. At the age of twenty-nine, he was the youngest regimental commander in the German armed forces and he was popular in Germany. He

was the holder of the Knights Cross with Oak Leaves. His daring actions in combination with his leadership and tactical knowledge were well known in the German Armed Forces. Peiper's popularity and Himmler's mentorship brought him opportunities in his military career. Peiper was foremost one of the few Waffen-SS officers who distinguished themselves for being independent thinkers. His judgment in combination with his initiative and decisiveness gave him the reputation of an outstanding field leader.

Mohnke, commander of the Leibstandarte, needed a man with such a reputation to lead his spearhead unit during *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein,"* although the relation between Peiper and Mohnke was rocky. Germany's future was at stake. Speed and surprise together with independent thinking and inspiration were the magic words for the leader of the spearhead unit. Peiper was the man. Germany's poster boy was to break through the American defensive lines in the Ardennes in December 1944.

There were factors other than leadership that led to the choice of Peiper. First, it was a tactical decision. The German chain of command, starting with Hitler and ending with Mohnke, decided that panzers were the weapons to break through the American lines. Peiper happened to be the commander of the only panzer regiment within the Leibstandarte. Second, the we-know-what-to-expect-principle led to Peiper commanding the spearhead unit. Hitler trusted Dietrich, the former commander of his bodyguard, and decided that Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army was to conduct the decisive operation. Dietrich, for his part, was determined to have his former unit, the Leibstandarte in the leading role. It was obvious to Dietrich that Hitler's poster boy would be in the starring role. Third, Peiper had had more than his share of luck up to *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* Peiper survived every combat action in which he took part. He was still serving

at the end of 1944, although many of his SS officer class were already killed or otherwise out of action. These three factors, however, were not decisive in choosing Peiper as the spearhead unit commander. Rather it was his reputation and his leadership style. The steps and factors leading to the decision are shown in figure 1.

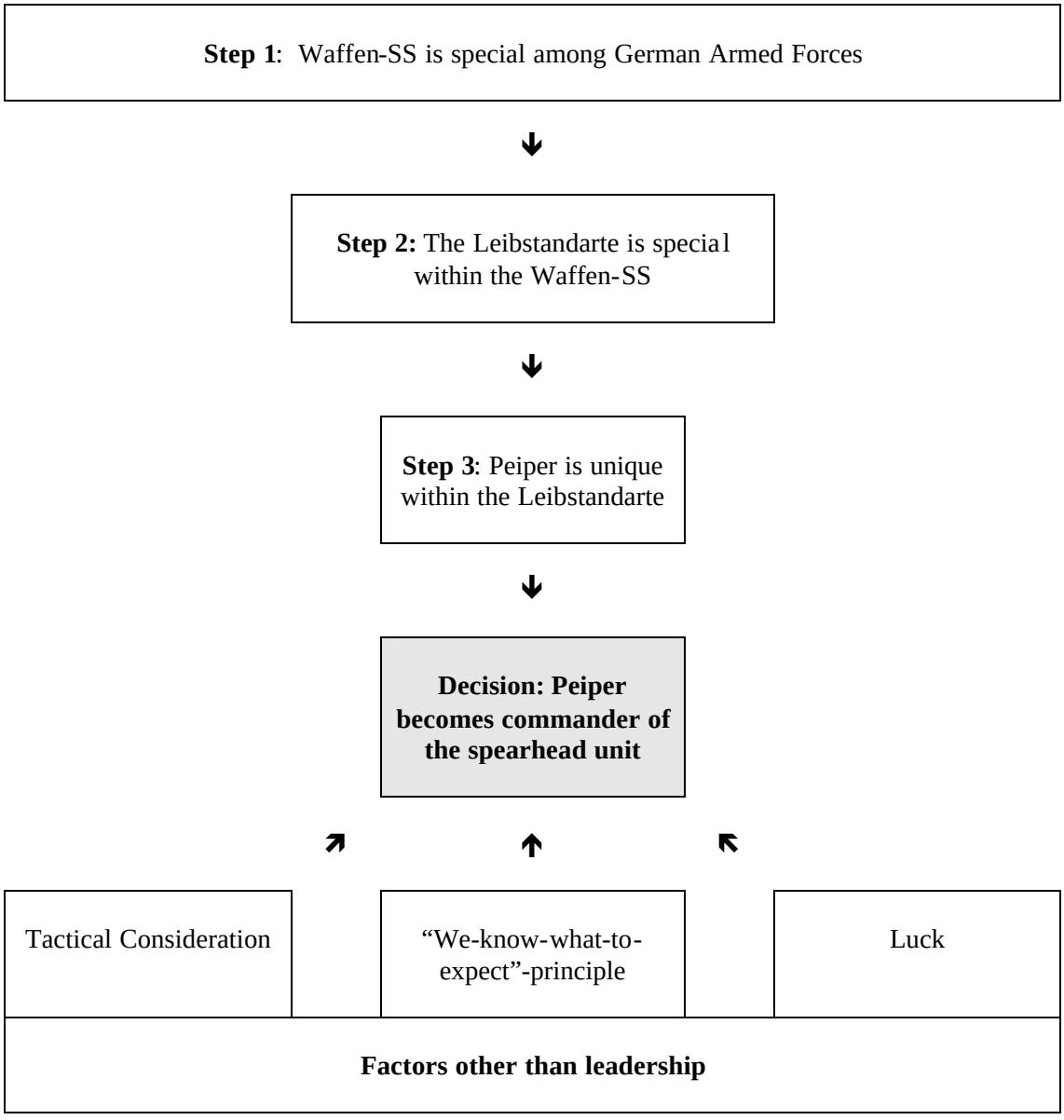


Figure 1. Factors Leading to the Decision of Peiper as Spearhead Unit Commander

Analyzing his exploits during the Battle of the Bulge, it is evident that Peiper was the right choice. His initiative, his judgment, his decisiveness and his independent thinking turned out to be vital, although he did not succeed in his mission. Peiper's ambition to add another daring exploit to his long list of courageous actions made him believe that he could reach the Meuse without sufficient supplies. That was naïve. His Kampfgruppe culminated early on the third day because of lack of gasoline, ammunition and good food. He was stuck at La Gleize for almost a week and had lost the initiative. The Americans were able to respond and encircled his Kampfgruppe with experienced units like the 82nd Airborne Division. But Peiper's personal firmness enabled him to break out from the perimeter with the remaining 800 men of his Kampfgruppe.

Peiper's men shot American prisoners at the crossroads at Baugnez at the second day of the operation. What exactly happened at the crossroads on 17 December 1944 will always remain in question. Peiper's troops were probably ill disciplined. The actual cause of the incident is still unknown, but what started as a battle incident became rapidly a ruthless mass killing. Peiper as the commander was responsible for this, although he was not present at the scene. The incident casts a slur on his reputation as battlefield leader.

Conclusion

The main research question for this thesis is: Why had SS Obersturmbannführer Jochen Peiper been chosen to be the leader of the spearhead unit of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944? The answer is that Jochen Peiper was foremost a unique leader in the Leibstandarte, an

elite Waffen-SS unit that was in the main effort of *Unternehmen "Wacht am Rhein."* It was therefore that Peiper was chosen as commander of the spearhead unit. There were, however, factors other than leadership leading to this decision, but they were less dominant. First, it was a tactical decision to make Peiper's panzer regiment the leading element. Second, the "we-know-what-to-expect"-principle had also an impact on the decision. Hitler trusted Dietrich and Dietrich trusted Peiper. Last but not least, Peiper was lucky that he was serving in the Leibstandarte in December 1944. While most Waffen-SS officers of his class were captured, killed or unable to fight, Peiper was still commanding his regiment.

Discussion and Recommendations

This section makes a huge step forward in time to concentrate on the relevance for today's world. The section also answers the last tertiary research question: Is this leadership style or elements thereof useful for today's Dutch military vision on leadership? The aim of this section is not to glorify Peiper's actions and his way of leading, but to be critical on his leadership, both positive and negative.

Before judging Peiper's leadership against today's Dutch military vision on leadership, one must realize that during the last sixty years, the environment and the context in which military units operate has changed completely. Peiper served in a unit, which was special for his head of state. Hitler created within a few years a totalitarian regime in Germany. The Germans started to believe in their superiority. The whole German society became involved in the war. Generations of men served in the armed forces, while the women stayed at home and tried to keep the war industry going. This is not comparable with today's situation in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a

democracy with a multi party system. One of the aims of Dutch foreign policy is the encouragement of free trade, because the Dutch economy is mainly based on free trade. Even the Constitution of the Netherlands declares that the government has to promote the development of the international legal order. Netherlands Army doctrine explains that this is the basis for deploying Dutch forces worldwide in any operation (1996, 25). Only a small part of Dutch society is involved in military operations. The Royal Netherlands Army has a modest size of 32,000 soldiers and civilians and participated in the last ten years only in peace operations: Cambodia, Angola, Rwanda, Haiti, Cyprus, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iraq. Only a few people in the Netherlands are actually really interested in military operations. Since the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, in which a Dutch infantry battalion was involved, politicians have been worried about the mandate for the participating units. In February 2004, the chairman of the committee of Procurator-generals in the Netherlands was worried about the rules of engagement used by Dutch troops in Iraq because of a shooting incident. The average Dutchman, however, does not pay much attention to his armed forces. These aspects are totally different from the situation of the armed forces in Germany prior to and during World War II.

Returning to the relevance, the answer concentrates around five issues: (1) The three basic principles of leadership in the Royal Netherlands Army, (2) lack of political antenna, (3) training, (4) ethics in command, and (5) military and the media.

The handbook on leadership in the Royal Netherlands Army explains that the Dutch military vision on leadership is based on three basic principles: “mutual trust,” “mutual respect,” and “independent proceeding.” Mutual trust is the basis for sharing

responsibility, and comes sequentially before independent proceeding. Within a team people have to trust and support each other. For a leader mutual respect means know your people, not only in the way they do their job but also know their interests and their backgrounds. As a leader, be open and among your people, face the same circumstances and then your people will know who their leader is. Independent proceeding means that a leader is willing to give certain latitude to conduct a given task. Today's Royal Netherlands Army acts all around the world and leaders in this army have to be prepared to operate on their own if the situation demands such. An important effect of independent proceeding is that many people appreciate bearing responsibility and that will motivate them (Royal Netherlands Army 2002, 281-282).

Peiper's leadership style verifies these three basic elements. Both his superiors and his subordinates trusted Peiper. His subordinates trusted him even under the most severe conditions, such as a winter on the Eastern Front. Peiper also trusted his subordinates. He allowed them to use their own judgments and to make their own decisions. Sometimes the tactical situation forced Peiper to operate in such a way because of the dispersed situation of his units. Also, Peiper respected his subordinates. He had high standards on human behavior and interpersonal contact. He never screamed at his subordinates and stayed very calm in every situation. He was always among his frontline troops and he never asked his men to do things, which he would not do himself. With these features he earned the respect of his men. Peiper was an independent thinker and proceeded accordingly, which gained his unit many favorable situations. All these examples of Peiper's leadership substantiate the three basic principles of leadership in the Netherlands Army.

But is this all? No, because Peiper also showed that he was a good coach not only to his officers, but also to his noncommissioned officers. That is missing in the Dutch military vision on leadership. The US Army manual on leadership, *FM 22-100*, says:

> One of the most important duties of all direct, organizational, and strategic leaders is to develop subordinates. Mentoring, which links the operating and improving leader actions, plays a major part in developing competent and confident future leaders. Counseling is an interpersonal skill essential to effective mentoring. (1999, 4-6)

The US Army writes that mentoring is very important and that it belongs to all levels of leadership, not only at the direct level of leadership but also at the organizational and strategic levels. This leads to the recommendation that the Royal Netherlands Army has to make or accept mentoring as their fourth basic principle of leadership. Leadership is not only building a good team with mutual trust, mutual respect, and independent proceeding, but the mentoring of people within a team is also a key element of leadership.

The next point is the lack of a political antenna among many Dutch military officers. After the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, the Dutch Government asked the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation to make an inquiry of the causes of the fall. One of the outcomes of this research was that Dutch officers were lacking a political antenna (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation 2002). Going back to World War II one might see that most German officers were not involved in politics. General Hans von Seeckt, the founder of the German Army after World War I, even forbade his officers to vote. Not even the slightest political involvement was allowed. Peiper was an exponent of this culture. He closed his eyes to the terrible Nazi political system. He was interested in becoming a soldier. As a soldier he only focused on the tactical level; he never

considered any consequences at the operational or strategic levels. The fact that he worked for almost two years on the personal staff of the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, did not change Peiper's focus. He refused to look at the political environment. In the Dutch army there is a tendency among officers, even among officers who were and are selected to join the Dutch Staff College, to focus only on the tactical level. Their collective opinion is that the tactical level is the proper level for their military profession. These officers want to stay in what they see as their comfort zone and do not go beyond. The tactical level comprises, according to Netherlands Army doctrine, platoon up to corps level. It reads:

> Tactics are the deployment and conduct of operations by units, aimed at helping to achieve the operational objective of a major operation or campaign by means of battles and other types of military operations, carried out in a particular order and relationship to each other. At tactical level units actually fight to accomplish tactical assignments embedded in the campaign plan. During peace support and similar operations, units also operate tactically. (1996, 14)

The operational level involves the planning and conducting of joint campaigns and major operations to achieve military-strategic objectives and it forms the link between these objectives and the tactical deployment of units. The strategic level is, from the Dutch point of view, divided into two levels. The political-strategic level coordinates systematically the development and application of a nation's or alliance economic, diplomatic, psychological, informational, military and other political means to secure national and allied interests. The military-strategic level coordinates systematically the development and the application of military means of power that a nation or an alliance employs to realize the military elements of political-military strategic objectives. In this context, military-strategic authorities are e.g. a Chief of Defense Staff, a Commander-in-

Chief or a Chief-of-Staff of a Service or the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) (Royal Netherlands Army1996, 12-14).

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 these levels were separate but for the last fifteen years they have become more overlapping in nature. Netherlands Army doctrine says that even during the Cold War there was only limited interaction between the various levels. Only the two adjacent levels influenced a specific level directly. But this has changed, partly as a result of direct press coverage of every operation. Even an operation on the tactical level might have political-strategic implications that commanders have to be aware of (Royal Netherlands Army 1996, 16). But how could commanders become more aware of political considerations? The first step is to divide leadership into different levels. In *FM 22-100*, the US Army distinguishes three levels: direct leadership, organizational leadership and strategic leadership. Direct leadership focuses on the lower levels in an organization; the direct relation between a leader and his people. Organizational leaders continue to use direct leadership skills, however, their larger organizations and spans of authority require them to master additional skills. Strategic leaders are the Army's highest-level thinkers, war fighters, and political-military experts. They look at the environment outside today's Army to understand the context for the institution's future role (1999, 4-1, 6-1, and 7-1). It leads to the recommendation for the Royal Netherlands Army to distinguish different levels in leadership and to implement these different levels into training and career courses. Another recommendation for Dutch society is to set up an equivalent of the American White House Fellowship program in which talented officers and outstanding public servants may participate to develop a more sophisticated political understanding. The

White House Fellowship was established in October 1964 and its alumni includes former four star generals such as Colin Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and today's American Secretary of State, and Wesley Clark, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe and former nominee for the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. The purpose of the White House Fellowship is:

> The White House Fellowship Program is to provide gifted and highly motivated young Americans with some first-hand experience in the process of governing the Nation and a sense of personal involvement in leadership of society. It is essential to the healthy functioning of our system that we have in the non-governmental sector a generous supply of leaders who have an understanding – gained at first hand – of the problem of national government. (Website of the White House Fellowship Program)

The third point is creating realistic training. Peiper was eager to establish a training program at every level he commanded. He encouraged his subordinate commanders to train their young leaders in understanding commanders' intents. That was important to him. Leaders at all levels in his unit were prepared to act independently. Even during the months prior to the Battle of the Bulge, when his unit was lacking sufficient supplies to conduct realistic training, Peiper taught his officers to constantly evaluate the situation according to the principle: What can I do? What am I doing now? What am I accomplishing? The Royal Netherlands Army encourages mission command as a variant of the German *Auftragstaktik*. The Netherlands field manual on command and control says:

> This method of command and control must be increasingly regarded as an urgent requirement. Instability, unpredictability and lack of clarity, in other words chaos and friction, are the hallmarks of military operations: this means every situation is unique. (2000, 45)

In the Dutch point of view mission command is based on taking initiative and responsibility at all times, even without specific orders, as the most important feature of a

leader's conduct. It requires great moral courage together with the ability to form independent judgments, and self-confidence. Closely related is the courage to take risks and to make resolute decisions. There is, after all, never enough information and each situation is unique, which means that there is never a perfect situation. Essentially a commander gives his orders in a way his subordinate commanders can understand his intent, their own tasks, the objective and the broader context of the tasks. A commander will inform his subordinates of the objectives, which they have to achieve, and why these objectives are necessary (Royal Netherlands Army 2000, 47 - 48). The Netherlands field manual on command and control also says that an essential element in the practical application of mission command is the personal supervision or coaching by the commander in the education and training of his subordinates (2000, 50). The Royal Netherlands Army omits to give any tools or examples on how to set up such training and education. (They probably would like to give the commanders certain latitude in the best mission command tradition.) The recommendation is to set up better requirements in the Royal Netherlands Army to train mission command. The nucleus of mission command training is the understanding of the intent of the commander. Peiper was able to conduct training without his panzers and without ammunition. The Royal Netherlands Army should encourage their commanders at every level to set up weekly sessions in which a commander and his subordinate commanders face a tactical situation that demands direct action. The commander and the subordinates should discuss decisions. Such a method is neither expensive nor time consuming. It will take a commander and his chain of command approximately one to two hours at a time to participate in such a session with his higher echelon and approximately one to two hours to participate in a session with his

subordinate commanders. The preparation of a tactical scenario will not take much time. They can use historical case studies or today's operational situations. Another recommendation is to make decision-making training and education more realistic. Students at the Dutch Staff College are thoroughly trained in the Operational Decision-making Process (ODP), a variant of the American Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP), as a method to solve any tactical problem. But is this realistic? No, the ODP as well as the MDMP are deliberate planning processes. They are time consuming. The battlefield demands other tools to make a good decision. Peiper sometimes had to make a decision within a split second. This has not changed since.

Gary Klein introduces in his book *Sources of Power, How People Make Decisions* the Recognition-Primed Decision model (RPD model) as a crisis decision ma king model to deal with the limited time factor. The RPD model actually fuses two processes: the way decision makers assess the situation to recognize which course of action makes sense, and the way they evaluate that course of action by imagining it. The RPD model claims that with experienced decision-makers the focus is on the way a decision maker recognizes a situation as familiar. The focus is not on formulating courses of action and comparing them as it is in the ODP as well as in the MDMP. Courses of action in the RPD model can be quickly evaluated by imagining how they will be carried out, not by formal analysis. Decision makers usually look for the first workable option instead of generating a large set of options. This model saves time, which is valuable in a crisis.

Klein explains that the emphasis in the RPD model is on being poised to act rather than being paralyzed until all the analysis and evaluations have been completed. The model relies on skilled decision makers who can depend on their intuition. Klein relates

intuition to the use of experience to recognize key patterns that indicate the dynamics of the situation, and he clarifies that the part of intuition that involves pattern matching and recognition of familiar and typical cases can be trained. One way of training is to expand the experience base of decision makers by providing them with increasingly difficult cases. Another way is to provide a decision maker within short period of time numerous realistic situations (1999, 24-33). The recommendation is to incorporate this decision-making model into the Royal Netherlands Army, especially during career level courses.

The fourth discussion point is ethics in command. Peiper's ethics in command decreased dramatically during the war. He started as a follower of the chivalrous SS code of honor, but later during the war he was less able to make a correct judgment on good and evil. The Royal Netherlands Army is operating in a much more complex environment involving opposing forces (and not real enemies), the political element, the press, and non-governmental organizations. All of these parties have their own interests, which sometimes do not even overlap. A commander has to be aware of this complex situation. The handbook on leadership in the Royal Netherlands Army provides a leader with a so-called ethical awareness model. This model comprises four steps:

1. Identify the central problem.
2. Identify parties involved in the dilemma and what their interests are;
3. Name possible solutions for the dilemma and test them:
    a. Weight all interests of those involved and set priorities.
    b. Choose the solutions that are justified and explain why.
    c. Check whether the solutions are legal.
4. Make a decision.

The handbook also describes that military leaders are to be trained to such a level that even under extreme conditions they are able to make ethically correct decisions. Training and education is of eminent importance (2002, 81). Education and training in ethical awareness is a continuous process. The French call it *éducation permanente* (continuous education). The Royal Netherlands Army only spends a few hours on it during officer training courses and career courses. The recommendation is to integrate this ethical awareness much more into the education and training regime. Military students should face weekly a dilemma, which requires for ethical awareness.

The last addition to the discussion is military and the media. Peiper was an icon in Germany during the war. The German war machine used his Aryan appearance and his battlefield performance. The German media portrayed him as the ideal Aryan young man. In Germany during the war the media was part of the whole propaganda machine, but today the media in most democracies emphasize their independent status. They are eager to collect their news. Many soldiers in the Royal Netherlands Army, especially officers and noncommissioned officers, still see the media as a threat. Their opinion is that media, if not embedded, is out of control. Journalists, they feel, are most of the time only looking for negative news. History showed that there is always negative news during operations. They forget that most media are just looking for news and they do not realize that positive news is also news. The recommendation is that the Royal Netherlands Army has to make their leaders more aware of the positive side of the media. Commanders and units have to establish good relations with journalists. They have to understand how journalists operate and how and why these journalists make an interview into an article or a television program in a certain way. They have to become aware of the impact of the

media on the home front. Media is another opportunity for getting across a message to the supporting society back home rather than a threat. This change in approach demands a good awareness and a training program under the creed: Media sometimes might be the most powerful strategic weapon in the hands of a tactical commander.

Closing notes

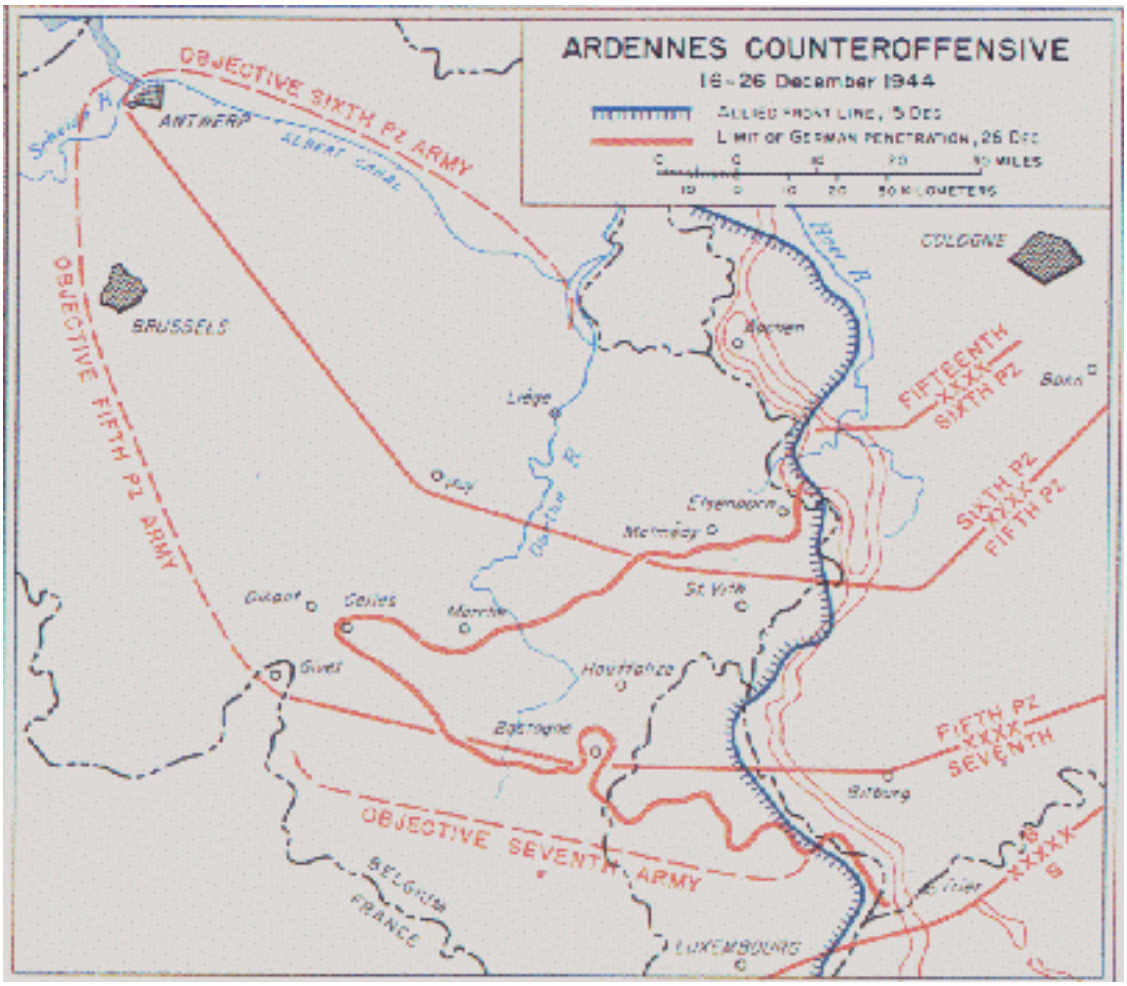
This relevance concludes the thesis for the Master in Military Art and Science program in which the focus was on the leadership of Jochen Peiper. Peiper is by many people stigmatized as a war criminal. Nevertheless, he was the youngest German regimental commander during World War II. That makes a research in his leadership style intriguing. Although Peiper was a member of an organization with an evil reputation more than sixty years ago, some parts of his leadership are still relevant for today's Royal Netherlands Army vision on leadership, such as respect, trust, independent proceeding and mentorship. Other parts of Peiper's leadership give food for thought, such as the lost of the moral high ground and why it happened. Moreover, it is important to study historical cases, even the more sensitive ones, such as the leadership of Jochen Peiper, and to learn their relevance for today's situation.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF UKRAINE

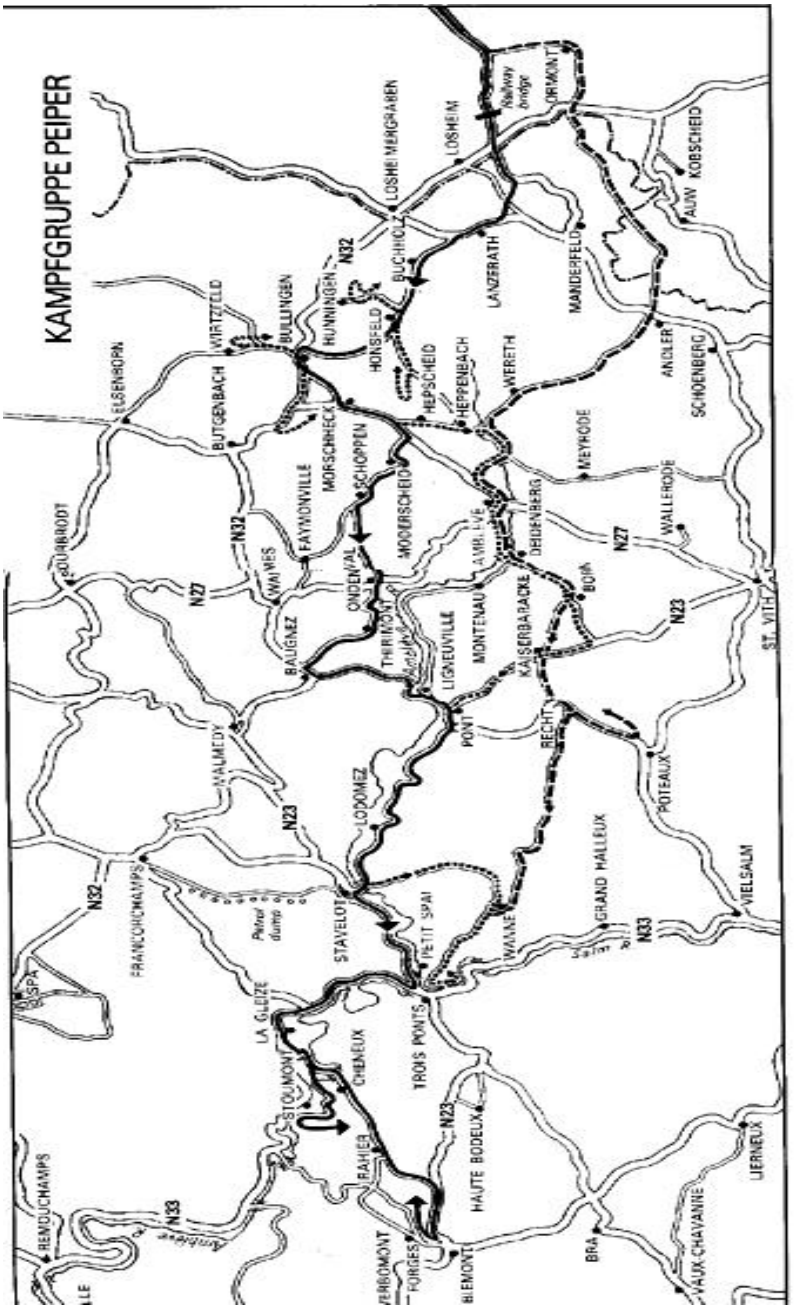
APPENDIX B

MAP OF UNTERNEHMEN “WACHT AM RHEIN”



APPENDIX C

MAP OF PEIPER'S ADVANCE IN THE ARDENNES



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