

The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the December meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War Two History Roundtable. Tonight's program is on the Battle of the Bulge by author and historian Steve Rusiecki and veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

Joachim Peiper

One of the major commanders in the Battle of the Bulge was Joachim Peiper. Peiper (1/30/15 – 7/13/76) was also known as Jochen Peiper from the common German nickname for Joachim. He was a senior Waffen-SS officer and commander of the Panzer campaigns of 1939 – 1945. By the end of his military career, Peiper was the youngest regimental colonel in the Waffen-SS, officially known as: SS-Standartenfuhrer Joachim Peiper, 1st SS Panzer Division, Leibstandarte- SS Adolf Hitler.

Born in Berlin, Peiper was recruited into the SS-Verfügungstruppe in 1933. Sepp Dietrich reviewed his application and admitted him into the "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" honor guard regiment. Initially he served as an Adjutant on Heinrich Himmler's staff before moving on to command various Panzer units. While on Himmler's staff, Peiper met and married his wife, Sigurd, with whom he had 3 children. Himmler was particularly fond of Peiper and took a keen interest in Peiper's ascension towards command. At age 29, Peiper was a full colonel of the Waffen-SS, well respected and a holder of one of wartime Germany's highest decorations, the Knight's Cross with Swords personally awarded to him by Adolf Hitler.

Peiper was a skilled combat leader and took part in a number of major Panzer

battles of the war. His men were fiercely loyal to him, regarded by many as a charismatic leader. He commanded the Kampfgruppe Peiper assigned to the 6th SS Panzer Army during Operation Wacht am Rhein (Battle of the Bulge). Kampfgruppe Peiper advanced on the town of La Gleize, Belgium, before running out of fuel and coming under heavy fire from American artillery and tanks. Peiper was forced to abandon over a hundred vehicles in the town, including 6 Tiger II tanks, and made his way back to the German lines with 800 men on foot.

Tiger II Tanks

The Tiger II was the heaviest production tank of World War Two. Its design was a direct result of lessons learned by the Germans in fighting heavily armored Russian tanks. The Tiger II had sloping armor on all sides, a small turret front and gun mantel to create a more difficult head-on target and a long-barreled high velocity gun. The tank was so much larger and more powerful than its predecessor that its nickname was probably inevitable: an Army captain, upon seeing the new vehicle at the Henschel factory where it was produced, reportedly exclaimed that it was not a Tiger anymore, but a King Tiger. The tank had a crew of five: tank commander, gunner, loader, driver, and radio operator.

The King Tiger's strengths lay in its thick armor plating and powerful gun. The steel armor was 180mm thick on the front of the turret, 150mm on the front of the hull and 80mm on the turret and hull sides. In contrast, the American Sherman tank carried a maximum of 89mm of armor in front. The thick armor of the Tiger II made it virtually impervious to frontal penetration

by American tanks or antitank guns. American tankers generally planned on numerical superiority of five or more Shermans to one Tiger, and always tried for flank shots to ensure success.

The superior gun of the King Tiger enabled it to destroy nearly all Allied tanks at ranges beyond which they could effectively engage. The 88mm gun mounted on the King Tiger developed a muzzle velocity of around 1100 meters per second. It was the longest gun mounted on any German tank. The gun could fire high explosive shells against bunkers or lightly armored targets, and two types of armor piercing rounds against tank targets. The Panzergranate 39 was an explosive shell tipped with a hardened steel cap to penetrate armor and explode inside the target. The Panzergranate 40 was a high velocity solid shot with a sub-caliber tungsten core. Upon impact, the tungsten core penetrated the target vehicle. The tank carried a total of 84 main gun rounds. The new gun and ammunition gave Tiger II crews the ability to penetrate 140mm of armor at 2500 meters range; more than enough to deal with any Allied armor. The turret was moved by a hydraulic motor with final sighting adjustments made manually with traverse and elevation hand wheels. The gun was not stabilized to remain on target as modern tanks are; the Tiger tank had to be stationary to fire accurately. The gunner used a telescopic sight with range indices to engage targets. Range was estimated by the tank commander and announced to the gunner.

The Tiger II's powerful gun was not without disadvantages. Its great length meant that it was difficult to balance the turret, making it less accurate than the shorter one in the Tiger I. It could be knocked out of adjustment by repeated firing, driving in very rough terrain, or impacts from enemy fire. The barrel was subject to more wear from high velocity rounds. It was still one of the most powerful tank guns used in WW II.

More Reading on Tonight's Topic:

The Key to the Bulge; The Battle for Losheimergraben

By Stephen Rusiecki

The Battle East of Elsenborn and The Twin Villages

By William C. C. Cavanagh

Pen and Sword Books

South Yorkshire, England 2004

A Time For Trumpets

By Charles B. MacDonald

William Morrow and Co.

New York, New York 1985

The Bitter Woods

By John S. D. Eisenhower

De Capo Press

New York, New York 1969

Hitler's Last Gamble

By Trevor Dupuy

Harper Collins

New York, New York 1994

The Devil's Adjutant

By Michael Reynolds

Sarpedon Publ.

New York, New York 1995

Civil War Roundtables:

Twin Cities Civil War Roundtable

December 19 Lee's Surrender

Officer's Club Ft. Snelling

6:00 PM dinner

St. Croix Valley Civil War Roundtable

December - No Meeting

**Happy Holidays!
See You Next Year!**