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# The Round Tablette

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Thursday, 9 May 2013

26:11 Volume 21 Number 11

Published by WW II History Round Table

Edited by Dr. Connie Harris

[www.mn-ww2roundtable.org](http://www.mn-ww2roundtable.org)

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**Welcome to the May meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speaker is Danny Parker, author of *Fatal Crossroads: The Untold Story of the Malmédy Massacre at the Battle of the Bulge*. Veterans of the fighting in the Battle of the Bulge will also discuss the atrocity at the Baugnez crossroads and its impact on their morale and willingness to fight.

History is a mystery and historians are its detectives. Trying to find out what actually happened in a certain place at a certain time, especially during wartime, creates a myriad of problems. Witnesses are killed in action, terrain is taken and re-taken, and thorough investigations are never conducted. These are some of the problems that have arisen in reconstructing the events that took place at the Baugnez crossroads near Malmédy, Belgium. What is known is that on December 17, 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge, one of the worst atrocities of the war occurred, when over eighty American prisoners of war were killed by *Waffen* SS troops.

On that day, men from Battery B of the 285<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Observation Battalion were ordered to move from Schevenhutte, near Aachen to St. Vith in the Ardennes. The route included moving through the town of Malmédy and the Baugnez crossroads, known to Americans as Five Points because of the intersection of five roads. Just before reaching the intersection the Americans were fired upon by units of the 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Division *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jochen Peiper. On the Eastern Front, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* became known as the *Lötlampen Abteilung* (Blowtorch Battalion) because of its fiery violence towards towns and civilians. Outgunned by the Germans, the Americans surrendered, but Peiper, impatient over the slow advance, ordered his men to move on and left the scene. The 113 Americans who survived the initial attack were gathered in a field near the Café

Bodarwé at the crossroads. There, *Waffen* SS soldiers opened fire on the 113 men who were in the field. Men from Peiper's unit then went around the field and shot at close range anyone who seemed to be alive, or clubbed them to death. Some Americans survived by playing dead and once the Germans left, stood up and ran.

The intensity of the fighting during the Battle of the Bulge made it impossible for anyone to claim the land where the dead men lay. Finally, on January 14, 1945 the Americans were able to conquer the area for the Allies. Once there, they recovered the bodies preserved by the freezing weather and covered in snow. Shortly after the massacre, 21 survivors made statements to American authorities and gave similar stories of the day's events.

Many have put the blame of the tragedy squarely on the shoulders of the commanding officer, Jochen Peiper. Peiper joined the SS in 1934 and became a personal adjutant to *SS Reichführer* Heinrich Himmler. In August 1941, he rejoined the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* unit to fight in Russia. As a tank commander, he rose through the ranks. His units were successful in the recapture of Kharkov in the winter of 1943 and also fought at Kursk. His unit was moved to the Western Front and Peiper was injured at Caen after the Normandy landings. After the fighting during the Battle of the Bulge, the unit was transferred to Hungary and fought until the end of the war retreating through Austria. After the war, Peiper was arrested and held at first, in Freissing, Germany. Interrogated by Ken Hechler, author of *Goering and his Gang* and a combat historian, described Peiper as "very arrogant, typical SS man, thoroughly imbued with the Nazi philosophy."

In May 1946, Peiper and seventy of his men stood trial at Dachau concentration camp on charges "that they willfully, deliberately and wrongfully permit, encourage, aid, abet, and participate in the killing, shooting, ill treatment, abuse and torture of members of the armed forces of the United States of America." Forty-three of Peiper's men were sentenced to death

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and the others were given prison sentences. The death sentences were commuted to prison sentences and all the men were released by the end of 1956.

Despite the surviving American soldiers' statements, confusion developed after the war over what really happened. Many SS apologists have put forth several theories of what really happened at Malmédy. First, is the idea that the massacre never really happened, that the men died in battle. This does not hold up to scrutiny since the dead Americans had no weapons near them. Second, is the theory that the Americans were running away at the time they were shot. This would exonerate the German troops since it is allowable by international law to shoot escaping prisoners. This version though does not connect with the autopsies that were done on the Americans in 1945. Most of the men were shot facing forward, and for forty-one men death was caused by a close range shot to the head and six died of a severe blow to the skull. In addition, since the 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Division was made up of Eastern front veterans, the tactics of no prisoners being taken was just transferred to the Western front. There is also evidence given at the trial, that Adolf Hitler stated on December 12, 1944 that no prisoners were to be taken in the offensive but there was no written evidence to support this argument. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the controversy over what happened at Malmédy has persisted over the years, even as historians settled the mystery.

**Further Reading:**

Danny S. Parker, *Fatal Crossroads: The Untold Story of the Malmédy Massacre at the Battle of the Bulge* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2012).  
 John Bauserman, *Malmédy Massacre* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 2001).  
 Janice Giles, *The Damned Engineers*, Mifflin, 1970  
 Michael Reynolds *The Devil's Adjutant*, (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Books, 2009).  
 Jens Westemeier, *Joachim Peiper: A Biography of Himmler's SS Commander*, (Schiffer Publishing, 2007).  
 Charles Whiting, *Massacre at Malmédy* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Books, 2007).

**Announcements:**

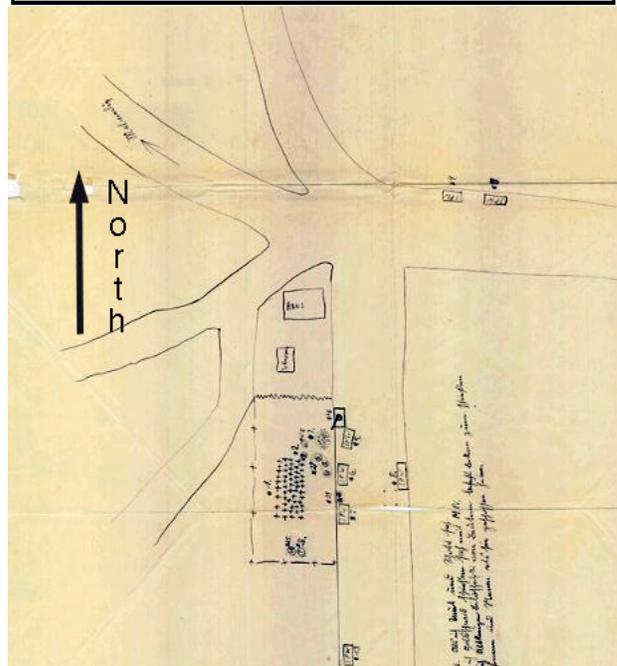
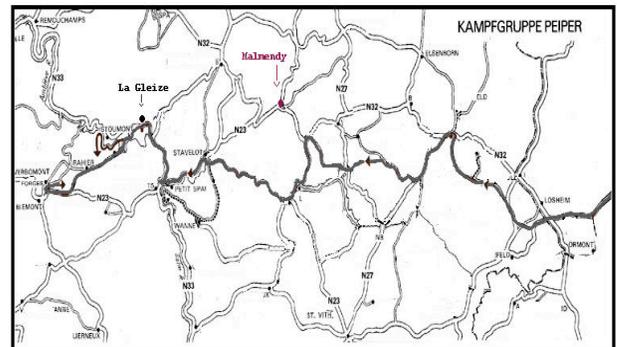
- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - May 21, 2013 the Petersburg Campaign - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)
- St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - May 20, 2013 Gen. John Gordon CSA - Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)
- Rochester WWII History Round Table -507-280-9970; [www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org](http://www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org)
- Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
- Air Show - Eden Prairie - July, 13-14, 2013; <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100

- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) or Bill at 952-201-8400
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523
- Friends of Ft. Snelling, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)
- Fagen Museum in Granite Falls, [www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org](http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org) 320-564-6644
- World War II Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, 8-9 June 2013, <http://events.mnhs.org/calendar/index.cfm>
- Civil War Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, 17-18 August 2013, <http://events.mnhs.org/calendar/index.cfm>

**Round Table Schedule 2013-2014**

12 Sept.	Battle of Britain
10 Oct.	Bombing in the Pacific
24 Oct.	Dog Company, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ranger BN
14 Nov.	Deutsch Lecture: Codebreakers
12 Dec.	Pearl Harbor
9 Jan.	Eastern Front
13 Feb.	World War II in China
13 Mar.	Operation COBRA and Falaise
27 Mar.	Encounters with WW2 Leader
10 Apr.	Rabaul and the SW Pacific
8 May	Landing on Omaha Beach
10-27 May	Tour of Normandy

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)



MASSACRED AMERICAN SOLDIERS NEAR MALMÉDY