

ONE DAY AT STAVELOT
A TALE OF TWO
ARCHIVES:

THE TIGER II VS. U.S. TANK
DESTROYERS IN THE ARDENNES



A Tale of Two Archives

Content researched and created by the historians of
WW2 Armor, NFP.

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Dedicated to the brave men and women who
fought and died for liberty during World War II.

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FOREWORD:

What really happened on Dec. 19, 1944? When looking at history from a great distance of time, I think it's fair to say we will never know every detail of any given historical event. We do our best to collect every scrap of documentation, every recollection, and then combine them to form the outline of the story. Yet these sources inevitably conflict. It is the age-old problem of the car accident - three witnesses, three stories! As we go through our lives, even in momentous times, we rarely have the time, or presence of mind, to stop and document what is happening. Speaking as a veteran, I realize how much more difficult this is during the stress of combat.

Yet while we can't be certain of achieving 100% accuracy in the retelling of history, we must never turn from that goal! Over time additional bits arise, and we assemble them in the great puzzle that is history. We will never learn the full story, but we can learn enough. Enough to understand, enough to share, enough from which to learn.

Josh and Erik are diligent researchers, free of speculation, and scientific in their approach. They put facts and logic, based on source material, above all else. Their research shines here, as it does everywhere, made more rich by the contributions of cherished veterans such as Harry F. Miller. We owe a great debt to those who served in times of great cataclysm, and we have an obligation to retell their stories with as much accuracy as we can muster. We must then continue to revisit those stories so that the retelling only improves over time. Josh and Erik have done so, and I think you'll agree that it makes for more compelling history.

Rabbi Rob Thomas, Managing Director

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PRELUDE:

Now hear this!

On Dec. 19, 1944, a single M10 Gun Motor Carriage tank destroyer crew with C Company, 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion destroyed four German Tiger II tanks near Stavelot, Belgium.

Is this a statement of fact, or an unsubstantiated claim?

As historians, it's not uncommon to run across such a tale that warrants closer inspection. Such was the case with a story uncovered in the Tank Destroyer Association's publication "Tank Destroyer Forces – WWII". Buried in its pages, there was a tale regarding the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in action on Dec. 19, 1944.

"At noon, the M10s of C Company's 1st Platoon destroyed two German-manned jeeps. Later, they engaged Panzers sighted approaching Stavelot from the east. Five Mark VI Tigers [Tiger II] and a half-track mounted 75mm gun (SdKfz 251/22) were destroyed." ¹

After reading this, a copy of the 823rd TD Bn's after action reports for Dec. 1944 was reviewed for corroborating evidence. The report for Dec. 19 states "... At 1200 C-1 [C Company, 1st Platoon] destroyed two ¼ tons and killed 12 Germans and later during the period when tanks came into sight East of Stavelot destroyed 5 Mk VIs and one half-track SP 75..." ²

¹ Gill, Lonnie. *Tank Destroyer Forces of WWII*. (Nashville: Turner, 1990), 90.

² U.S. Army. *823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Dec 1st-31st After Action Reports*. (ETO, 1945).

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The official U.S. Army record supports the claim in “Tank Destroyer Forces – WWII.”. However, when the German accounts were consulted, the number of Tiger II’s lost on the Dec. 19 was different, which also included losses for the Tiger IIs involved in larger action, when they occurred and even how many took part in the assault.

Therein lies the premise of this book—to lay bare the claims of the U.S. tank destroyer units active in this area, compare them with German reports of those same actions and match them against surviving photographic evidence of destroyed Tiger IIs. Since two U.S. tank destroyer units were active in that sector, we’ve broadened our search to include the records of both. Additionally, we will look at the broader scope of what precipitated this meeting to provide context for this action.

Two different archives, but the tale they reveal between them will help us find the truth on whether the 823rd’s claims could be true.

CHAPTER 1: TIGER IIS IN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

UNTERNEHMEN WACHT AM RHEIN

In December 1944, Hitler set loose a grand surprise on the Allies. Allied troop concentrations were sparse near the Ardennes forest, with only four inexperienced and combat depleted divisions deployed there. On Dec. 16, nearly a quarter million German troops with significant armor support assaulted Allied lines. More than a thousand tanks and armored fighting vehicles were used in the attack, including some of the heaviest armor on the Wehrmacht's rolls – 14 Tiger I and 52 Tiger II tanks.³

THE TIGER II

Of those 52 Tiger II's, 45 were assigned to the 501st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion as part of Kampfgruppe Pieper.⁴ However, only 30-35 were mechanically ready for battle, the rest remained behind in maintenance depots.⁵ This was to be the armored fist at the core of the assault designed to break American resistance and swing northward to Antwerp to split the Allied forces. The Tiger II was a formidable fighting machine. Weighing in at more than 70 tons, armed with an 88mm cannon capable of defeating almost any American tank's armor, it had thick sloped armor all round that was especially thick on the front plate.⁶ They had one major weakness on the offensive though – they used a lot of fuel. With a general paucity of fuel throughout the German forces, the assault's success meant capturing U.S. fuel dumps intact to

³ Zaloga, Steven. *Patton Versus the Panzers*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2016), 250.

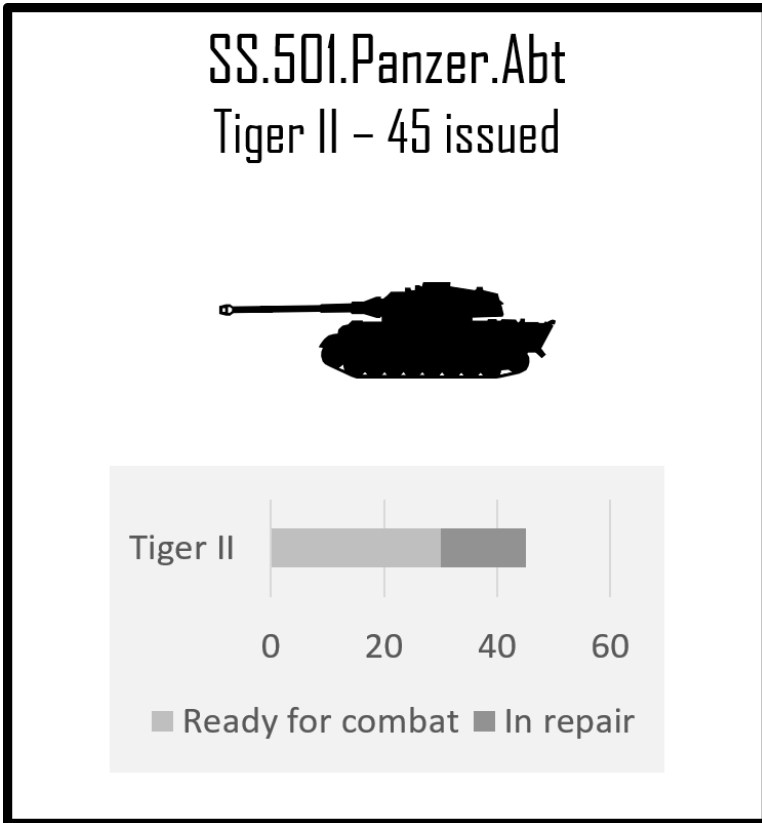
⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 96.

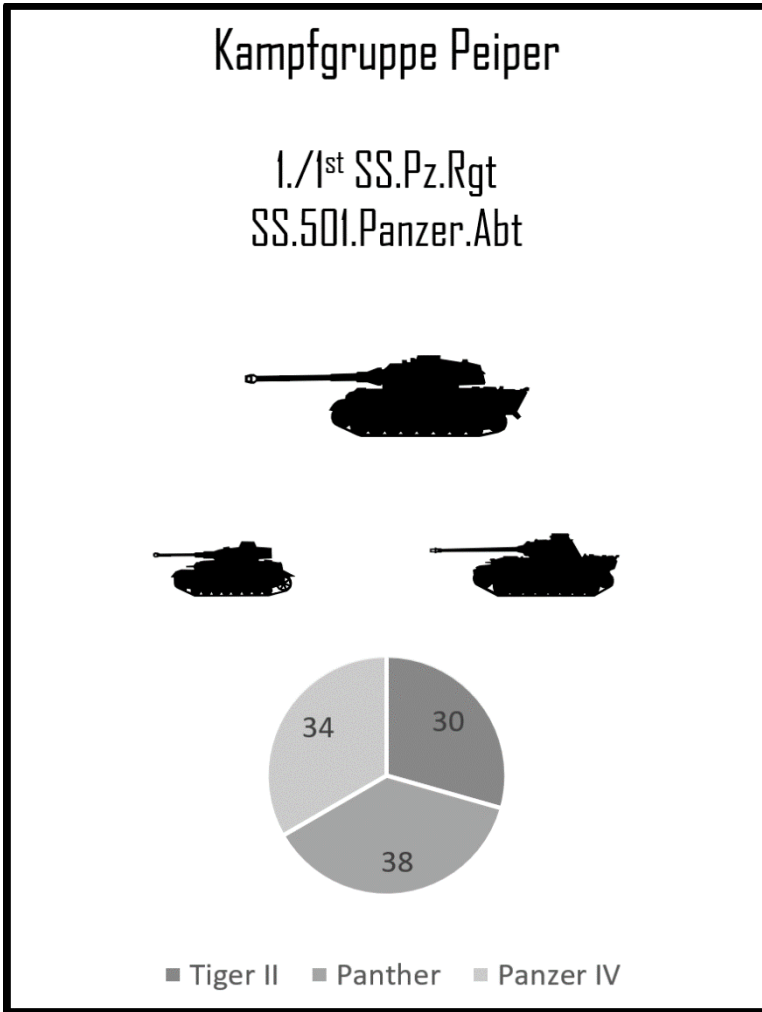
⁶ Doyle, Hilary, Tom Jentz, and Peter Sarson. *King Tiger - Heavy Tank 1942-1945*. (London: Osprey/Reed Consumer Book Ltd., 1993), 28.

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ensure the heavily armored vehicles could make the entirety of the trip. This would not include losses expected due to the Tiger II's propensity for mechanical issues. As a case in point, German status reports for Mar. 15, 1945 reveal that only 59 percent of Tiger II with frontline units were in operation.⁷



⁷ Ibid, 36.

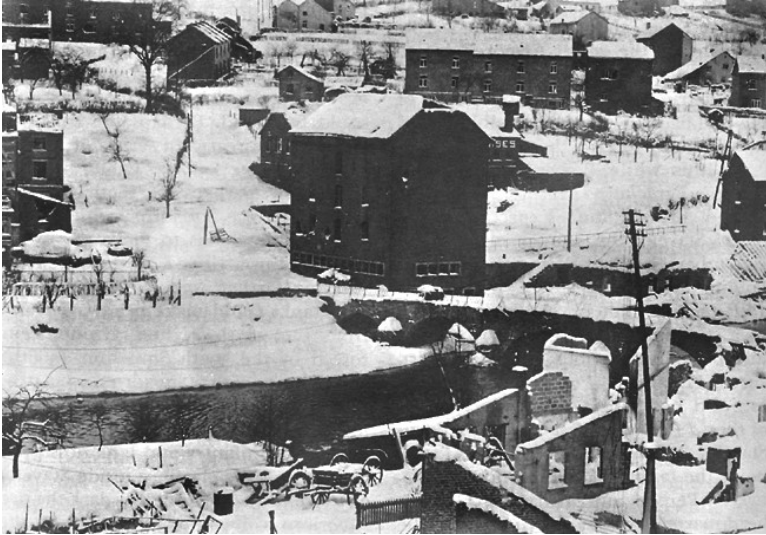


THE PLAN STARTS TO UNRAVEL

As the German forces advanced, looking for a route across the Amblève river, they found bridge after bridge blown up by U.S. forces. Gasoline-starved, multiple actions were fought from around Dec. 18 to Dec. 23 trying to find this avenue. ⁸

⁸ Smith, Stephen, and Simon Forty. *Leibstandarte: Ardennes 1944*. (Casemate, 2017), 24.

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An armored combat focal point: one of Stavelot, Belgium's strategically important bridges over the Amblève River

U.S. resistance in the area only grew more concerted and spirited following the news that American prisoners of war were killed after surrendering in what had since become known as the Malmedy Massacre. Fewer U.S. troops trusted that surrendering was a safe option and therefore refused to accept such an option in battle. The German forces continued to advance, meaning numerous engagements with Allied forces, which further depleted German fuel and ammunition levels. But now, there was the added danger of being cut off by American reinforcements and counterattacks near Stavelot.⁹

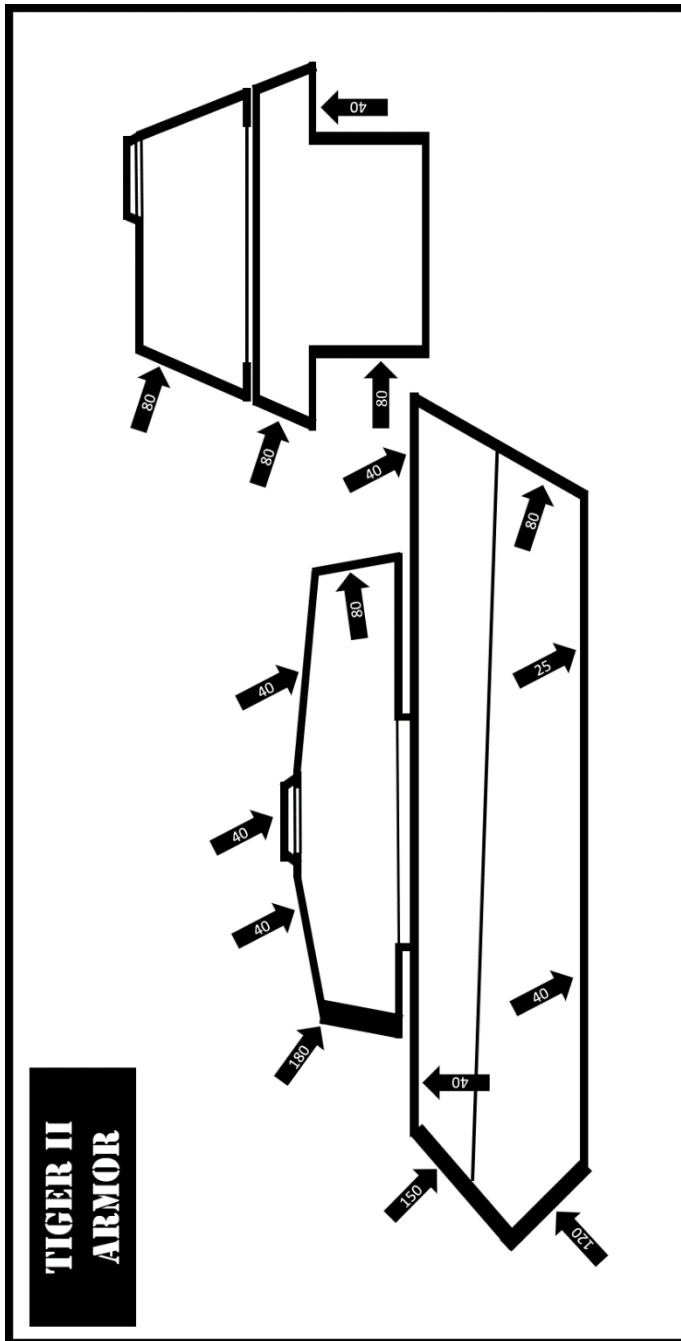
The culmination of these events left the German heavy armor crews almost out of gas and running low on ammunition. The German commander, Col. Joachim Peiper, realized that trying to keep his supply lines flowing was increasingly difficult. As stocks of ammunition and gasoline –the precious lifeblood of

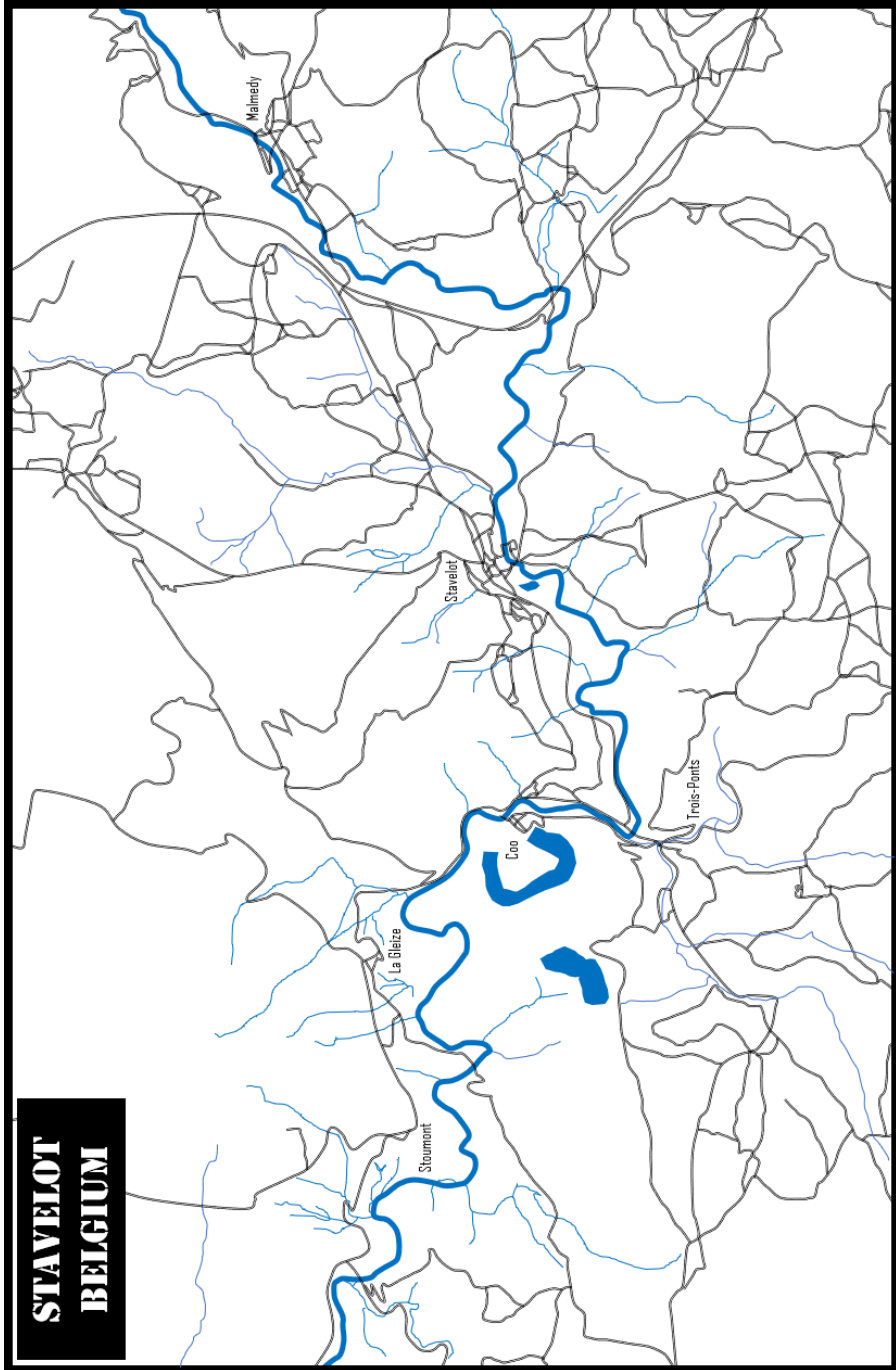
⁹ Cole, Hugh. *United States Army in World War II - The European Theater of Operations - The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*. (Washington D.C., Center of Military History, United States Army, 1993), 338.

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armored units — dwindled and battlefield losses mounted, both offensive and defensive actions on hard-won terrain stalled out for Kampfgruppe Pieper having made it only as far as La Gleize and Stoumont, Belgium. While still a few miles from Stavelot, Pieper and his troops were ultimately forced to abandon most of their vehicles and heavy armor and escape on foot back east.

It was, perhaps, an ignoble end for what was one of the largest gathering of Tiger II tanks in action on the Western Front. But perhaps unsurprising in its conclusion, and even predictable given the hilly and winding roads traversing the rugged terrain these massive beasts were sent through. The intensive maneuvering along the twisting forest roads meant that not only was more stress placed on the tanks' already overloaded powertrain, it also increased fuel consumption. Additionally, the forest terrain meant crews were often more susceptible to ambushes targeting the tanks' weaker side and rear armor.





CHAPTER 2: WHEN IS A TANK TRULY LOST?

When IS a tank truly lost? There are an astounding number of things that can render a tank out of action: a broken firing pin, running out of fuel or ammunition, mechanical failure, loss of a track, hitting a mine, getting stuck in the mud, fire, getting hit by enemy armor piercing ammunition, turret jamming, crew abandonment and so forth. To list them all would take a very long time.

Typically, a tank has one of two fates after being hit by enemy fire. The first is immobilization, where the crew can no longer move the tank, but often can still make use of the turret and the tank's main weaponry. The second is, suffering catastrophic damage via ballistic force, or a fire that burns out the hull and weakens the very structure of the metal used in the armor.

A frustrating session may await those who go into the archives to determine the exact time and location a specific tank was lost in action during World War II. This information is often very dependent on how the recording force, either Germany or the United States chose to do so.

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GERMAN TANK LOSSES

The Tiger II was first used against British troops in Normandy and despite experiencing combat losses from that point forward, the German army records don't record a single Tiger II loss until October.¹⁰ This reporting goes to counter Allied archival photographs, showing Tiger IIs knocked out in fighting during the summer months as Allied forces pushed inland from the Normandy landings.

Were German record keepers purposefully trying to suppress loss claims for propaganda purposes, or were they just keeping poor and outdated records? Is either of those assertions the right answer?



A German Tiger II tank lays in a bomb crater in France with the turret blown off. This is most likely due to the crew scuttling the vehicle after it became unrecoverable.

¹⁰ Mueller-Hillebrand, Burkhart. *Project # 47 GERMAN TANK LOSSES*. (Historical Division European Command, 1950), 39.

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Eisenhower examines an overturned Tiger tank in France

German records do not appear to report lost tanks until an indeterminate time after the loss occurred and only if it was a total loss. Tanks that suffered hits to the running gear or drive train and were recovered and repaired were not written off like U.S. tanks were. Those repairable vehicles maintained an active spot on the German tank roster, even while under repair, and were pressed back into service when fixed. If they were not recovered or found, at some point they were then eventually finally written off. This can often yield some difficulty when comparing German and U.S. accounts regarding whether a German tank was truly lost.

On the flip side, the German form of documenting a tank's service record could also mean that U.S. records noting tank "kills" that were the result of immobilization and/or abandonment, could also mean the tank was recovered afterward by the Germans, repaired and placed back into service. Whoever ended up owning the battlefield after an engagement would have a big effect on the tanks they could recover. The side that lost access to the terrain would often permanently lose tanks that had been immobilized or even knocked out but still recoverable and repairable.

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This recording process is therefore dependent on archival records, veteran recollections, and photographic evidence. While none of these are infallible or inexhaustible by themselves, together they can provide a more complete picture, even if they sometimes fail to capture in exact detail the incredible scope and chaos surrounding combat actions.

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U.S. TANK LOSSES

U.S. after action reports generally reflected immediate casualties and losses sustained in battle, including tanks and other vehicles, as seen in the graphs of data of tanks reviewed in the U.S. Army Operations Research study ORO T-117.¹¹ Any lost or abandoned tanks were counted as such immediately and crews were given a new or newly-repaired tank.



Damaged M4 Sherman tanks await repairs at an ordnance depot in the ETO

¹¹ U.S. Army Operations Research Office. *Technical Memorandum ORO-T117, SURVEY OF ALLIED TANK CASUALTIES IN WORLD WAR II*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Operations Research Office, 1951), 47.

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This system yielded what may initially seem like high tank loss numbers. However, it also provided highly accurate on-hand numbers that showed very high effective strength despite combat losses¹²,

After an engagement, recovery teams would retrieve recoverable tanks and identify them via the hull serial number. Repairable tanks would then be taken back to a maintenance depot, overhauled and pressed back into service. Repaired tanks and tank destroyers were reassigned along with newly arrived vehicles to units which had suffered losses.

Due to the mass manufacturing techniques the U.S. used in their creation, spare parts including engines, transmissions, and turrets could be swapped with standardized spare parts for rapid refurbishment. Spare parts could also be cannibalized from vehicles too damaged in other respects to be salvaged.

Having a ready supply of tanks that were spared a trip to the scrap heap meant that fewer had to be transported virtually half-way around the world.

Both sides often put in significant time and effort to retrieve as many disabled tanks as possible, keeping as many tanks in the fight as they could.

¹² Ruppenthal, Roland G. *Logistical Support of the Armies - Vol I: May 1941 - September 1944*. (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1995), 524.

CHAPTER 3: U.S. TANK DESTROYER TIGER II CLAIMS FOR DEC. 18 THROUGH DEC. 22, 1944

There were two U.S. tank destroyer battalions in the geographic area of Stavelot between Dec. 18 and Dec. 22, 1944.

The 825th Tank Destroyer Battalion, as part of Task Force Hansen, was pulled into the defense of Stavelot starting on Dec. 18, and the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached to the 30th Infantry Division.

823RD TD BN.'S MK VI [TIGER II] KILL CLAIMS FROM AFTER ACTION REPORTS

DEC. 18,

“...During the afternoon when enemy armor attacks were launched West and East of Stavelot C-1 destroyed 1 Mk V and 1 personnel carrier while C-2 destroyed 2 Mk Vs and 1 personnel carrier with 1 additional Mk V being listed as probable and hit and probably destroyed a total of 8 to 10 additional tanks all believed to be Mk VIs.”¹³

DEC. 19,

“...Upon withdrawal of friendly Infantry, TD guns were one by one flanked by enemy tanks and personnel driven from the guns by small arms and machine gun fire although 1 Mk VI was

¹³ U.S. Army, 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Dec 1st-31st After Action Reports. (ETO, 1945).

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*destroyed by a "A" Co gun and the German Infantry held off for some time."*¹⁴

*"...At 1200 C-1 destroyed two ¼ tons and killed 12 Germans and later during the period when tanks came into sight East of STAVELOT destroyed 5 Mk VIs and one half-track SP 75."*¹⁵

DEC. 21,

*"...Between 0130 and 0400 a light German counter-attack on B-1 [B Company, 1st Platoon] positions resulted in the destruction of 1 M VI, 1 M-8 and 1 ¼ ton both being then occupied by German troops."*¹⁶

*"...After fear of encirclement by enemy penetration caused C-3 to withdraw 200 yards taking up new positions necessitated by the penetration C-3 moved 1 towed 3" gun into a forward exposed position and the gun effectively blunted the Germans striking power by destroying 1 Mk VI, 1 Sherman tank, 1 M-10 (in disguise) being manned by German personnel and 2 additional tanks which were either Mk Vs or Mk VIs."*¹⁷

SUMMARY:

Dec. 18, three Mk V, one probable. Eight to ten "believed to be Mk VI" probable in Stavelot.

Dec. 19, five Mk VI East of Stavelot

Dec. 21, two Mk VI, two Mk V or VI, one Panther Ersatz M10, two unidentified.

Total 823rd TD Bn. tank kills for Dec. 18 through Dec. 21.

- Seven Tiger II.
- Eight to ten Tiger II "probables", unconfirmed
- Three Panthers.

¹⁴ U.S. Army. *823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Dec 1st-31st After Action Reports.* (ETO, 1945).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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- One Panther probable.
- One Panther Ersatz M10 disguised tank.
- Two unidentified tanks.
- Two Panther or Tiger II's.

Best case kills, 19 Tiger II kills. Worst case, seven Tiger II.

The eight to ten potential Tiger II kills claim on Dec. 18 most likely will not stand up well to close examination. Even the individual who originally recorded it counted them as probable with no firm identification.

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The C Co. 823rd TD Bn. crew claimed responsible in the AAR for destroying four Tiger II's in Stavelot on Dec. 19: (L to R) Robert Crout, Raymond Clements, Clyde West, Buell C. Sheridan, Clyde Gentry, and Arion Revis. ¹⁸

¹⁸ Gill, Lonnie. *Tank Destroyer Forces of WWII*. (Nashville: Turner, 1990), 154.

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825TH MK VI [TIGER II] KILL CLAIMS FROM AFTER ACTION REPORTS

DEC. 18,

*“...Four (4) Mark VI German tanks were observed, and taken under fire by the section which remained in STAVELOT. Each squad knocked out two (2) tanks. A fifth tank (Tiger Royal) had come into town by another route and could be heard reconnoitering the town by fire. A gun was moved to a position in the center of the street at (719012) so as to permit firing on the approaching tank. Some 15 rounds were exchanged in the fire fight. One of the rounds from the 3” gun hit the tank at the point where the gun extends from the turret, and the tank withdrew. In doing so, the tank backed into a brick building, and pulled the building down pinning the tank underneath the wreckage.”*¹⁹

DEC. 21,

*“... An attack by the enemy was expected and all personnel were alerted at 0300 hours 21 December 1944. At approximately 0700 hours one section of the 2nd platoon located at (778037) made contact with the enemy, and destroyed one (1) ¼ ton truck, one (1) half-track and one (1) Mark VI German Tank.”*²⁰

SUMMARY:

Dec. 18, one Tiger II, 1 hit and backed into building in Stavelot

Dec. 21, one Mk VI

Totals tanks kills for Dec. 18 through Dec. 21.

- Two Tiger II, four identified as Mk VI.

While typically Mk VI was used to refer to Tigers in after action reports, the curious use of ‘Royal Tiger’ afterward on the entry

¹⁹ U.S. Army. *825th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Dec 17th-31st After Action Reports*. (ETO, 1945).

²⁰ Ibid.

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for Dec. 18 and the lack of Tiger I's in the assault force would lead us to assume that only one of these was a Tiger II. Candidates for misidentification would most likely be a Panther or Mk IV. Another explanation is that the author could have inverted the IV for VI and did not notice it.



The 825th TD Bn. used towed M5 3-inch anti-tank guns in the defense of Stavelot, like this example of the 825th in action in Oct. 1944. A gun crew managed to defeat Tiger 105 with a frontal shot that deflected off the gun mantlet and caused the tank to back up into a building. This resulted in it becoming stuck and the crew abandoned it.

CHAPTER 4: GERMAN TIGER II LOSS CLAIMS FOR THE DEC. 18 THROUGH DEC. 22, 1944

DEC. 18: (THREE TIGER IIS LOST)

Tiger 105 is hit by a U.S. anti-tank gun in Stavelot, Belgium and the crew backs the tank into a building to get away.²¹²² When it becomes stuck, the tank is abandoned by the crew. This account of its end is mirrored in the 825th TD Bn. records exactly.



²¹ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 214.

²² Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 111.

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Tiger 332 suffers mechanical damage and was abandoned by the crew near Coe, Belgium, on Dec. 18. It was later attacked and captured intact by the 740th Tank Bn. Its position was reported so it could be later recovered by U.S. ordnance personnel and brought back from overseas. German records do not list its loss until Dec. 25, when the 740th Tank Bn. captured the vehicle. This tank currently resides at Fort Benning, Ga., and was previously part of the Patton Museum of Armor at Fort Knox, Ky.²³²⁴



²³ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 214.

²⁴ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 121.

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Tiger 008 was abandoned near Trois-Ponts, Belgium, approximately 3 miles southwest of Stavelot. It was later destroyed by its former crew.²⁵



²⁵ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 214.

DEC. 19: (FOUR TIGER IIS LOST)

Tiger 104 is immobilized outside of La Gleize, Belgium on the 19th, abandoned on Dec. 23²⁶ and was finally declared lost on Dec. 24. After its capture, it was towed over to a small road where U.S. troops later used it for target practice with bazookas and captured panzerfausts to test their ability to penetrate its thick armor.²⁷



²⁶ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 215.

²⁷ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014).

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Tiger 222 was knocked out while approaching a bridge in Stavelot.²⁸ Other photos clearly show that U.S. anti-tank rounds penetrated the right hull armor.



Two unidentified Tigers of 3./ [third platoon] 501st SS Panzer Battalion are both reported as hit but not destroyed by the 823rd TD Bn. near Stavelot. They are later recovered and thus not counted as losses by the Germans.

No photos were found to collaborate these claims as their turret numbers were not specifically identified beyond being in the third platoon. They were later recovered by German forces and moved after the engagement, making a positive identification against photos from the battle nearly impossible.²⁹

²⁸ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2.* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 215.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

DEC. 22: (FOUR TIGER IIS LOST)

Tiger 334 is hit and abandoned at Les Tchéous, Belgium. ³⁰³¹



Tiger 211 knocked out in La Gleize, Belgium at the Werimount farm. ³²

³⁰ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 215.

³¹ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 121.

³² Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 215.

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Tiger 213, knocked out in La Gleize at the Werimount farm.³³³⁴



³³ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 215.

³⁴ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 115.

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Tiger 133 is hit in the turret ring and the shot deflected down into the Radio Operator's position, damaging the transmission and killing him.³⁵ This made the driver unable to hear the tank commander, and subsequently backed the tank into a ditch where it became stuck. The crew then abandoned the vehicle.³⁶ It was ultimately lost to the Germans outside Trois Ponts on Dec. 25 and when it becomes apparent that it is unrecoverable and is abandoned.

DEC. 18 TO DEC. 22 LOSS TALLY:

Eleven Tiger II's were lost at various points in combat action in this four-day period, although those listed as a total loss are a mere seven.

These discrepancies may come from a lag in reporting. Tigers **332** and **104** haven't been declared lost yet and the two unidentified Tigers from 3./ are recovered and therefore not counted by the Germans.³⁷ Tiger **133** is abandoned, but not considered unrecoverable and lost until Dec. 25.

³⁵ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 56

³⁶ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 215.

³⁷ Ibid.

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This segment we included to help finish out the German claims of losses during the withdrawal from the area.

DEC. 24 (TWO TIGER IIS LOST)

Tigers 204 and **231** are abandoned on the road to Gue near Point K22, **104** is finally counted as lost. ³⁸



Tiger 204 lost near La Gleize on Dec. 24

DEC. 25: (TWO TIGER IIS LOST)

Tigers 111 and **312** are abandoned, **332** and **133** are counted as lost.

³⁸ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 216.



Tiger 312 which was lost on the Dec. 25.

Total reported lost: 15 Tiger II's, two of which were recovered.

The ultimate tally at this point as presented by Schneider is 32 tanks left of the 45 the 501st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion was first issued, although again, apparently, only 30-35 left the depots to participate in the battle.³⁹ This would indicate that their remaining effective combat strength was around half of what they had started out with, all within 7 days of combat.

The loss totals tend to bounce around. Take for example Tiger **332**, after suffering mechanical issues, it was abandoned by its crew on Dec. 18. However, it wasn't counted as a loss by Germans until its ultimate loss to the 740th Tank Bn. attacking it days later.⁴⁰ We have counted its loss up front here and then

³⁹ Walden, Gregory. *Tigers in the Ardennes - The 501st Heavy Tank Battalion in the Battle of the Bulge*. (Schiffler, 2014), 96.

⁴⁰ Schneider, Wolfgang. *Tigers in Combat, Vol. 2*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 216.

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made a note of the date reported lost, in order to match up with the U.S. records more closely. We also added the two Tiger IIs from 3./ into the total, as from the U.S. side they would have most likely noted them as 'kills'.

CHAPTER 5: DAY BY DAY DIRECT COMPARISON FOR DEC. 18 THROUGH DEC. 22, 1944

DIRECT COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE TWO ARCHIVES

DEC. 18

823rd TD Bn. - eight to ten "believed to be Mk VI" probable in Stavelot.

825th TD Bn.- one Mk VI, hit and backed into a building in Stavelot.

501st SS Panzer Bn. – Tiger **105** hit and backed into a building in Stavelot, Tiger **332** immobilized near Coo and captured on 25 Dec., Tiger **008** near Trois-Ponts.

DEC. 19

823rd TD Bn.- five Mk VI east of Stavelot

825th TD Bn.- none.

501st SS Panzer Bn. - Tiger **104** near La Gleize, Tiger **222** bridge in Stavelot, two unidentified Tiger IIs of 3./ near Stavelot.

DEC. 21

823rd TD Bn.- two Mk VI, two Mk V or VI, two unidentified.

825th TD Bn.- one Mk VI.

501st SS Panzer Bn. – none recorded.

DEC. 22

823rd TD Bn.- none.

825th TD Bn.- none.

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501st SS Panzer Bn. - Tiger's **334**, **211**, **213** near La Gleize and **133** near Stavelot.

DEC. 24 THROUGH DEC. 25

The Germans further lose four Tiger IIs comprised of **204**, **231**, **111**, and **312** between Dec. 24 and Dec. 25. They also officially record the loss of **104**, **133** and **332**.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, the truth is still somewhat shrouded despite efforts to peel back such layers, as we are dependent on what U.S. and German soldiers penned about it during the fighting.

Archival photographs are plentiful and yield a solid visual record on the number of Tiger II's recovered by U.S. troops, however, they obviously didn't capture the whole of the conflict.

This brief, but sharp, period of fighting saw U.S. tank destroyer and armor crews matched up with one of the largest heavy tanks the Germans had to offer during the war and in large numbers. Within days of fighting, the Germans lost more than a third of the armored vehicles provided to the SS panzer Battalion. for the attack, and nearly fifty percent of the 30-35 which were in running shape and able to participate. Whether loss was due to gunfire, empty gas tanks, or the crew abandoning them, the Germans were unable to recover the tanks listed and shown above. The after-action reports for the 823rd and 825th TD Bn. do show a significant amount of crossover with German accounts. Some Tiger II's losses in the area were also the result of actions by U.S. tanks and not the tank destroyer units.

Some misidentification of the specific German tank models is also likely to have occurred, which could account for much of the remaining differences. That fact is even noted in the report, which simply says eight to 10 tanks, possibly Tigers. The identification was a quick battlefield assessment, rather than a deeply researched point. The 825th TD Bn. after action report for Dec. 18, the entry regarding "4 Mk VI's" could be an anomaly. The identification of an additional 'Royal Tiger' tank in the same report may highlight this as a case of misidentification or transcription error as there were no Tiger I's in the German assault force in this engagement.

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While the two accounts often do show significant crossover, obviously there are some differences in the loss/kill accounts and an apparent lag as to when tanks were declared lost by German records as losses start to stack up near the end of the engagement, as the larger look starts to reveal.

When focused on the events near Stavelot on Dec. 19 for the 823rd Tank Destroyer battalion, as highlighted in the introduction, the German and U.S. records for that day differ by a single kill if immobilizing hits are counted. Tiger **104**, however, was knocked out about 3 miles away from Stavelot. While no one can claim with absolute clarity the actions that truly occurred that day, there is evidence that does support at least some of the claim.

There's ultimately much to learn here, as deep dive research into these kinds of events and claims can help us gain a better understanding of the facts of what truly happened and help dispel enduring myths.

That is all.

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HARRY'S TALE: BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE CAPTURE OF TIGER 332



This tale is based on the memories and provided written account of the perspective of Harry F. Miller, a World War II veteran who served with the U.S. Army's 740th Tank Battalion, these are his words edited for brevity and grammar.

Dec. 16, 1944, saw the start of the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes forest of Belgium, which ran until Jan. 26, 1945. During this time, the 740th Tank Battalion of the U.S. First Army was available for assignment to any infantry division which required tank support. The 740th was first assigned to the 30th Infantry division, remained attached for five days before being reassigned to the 82nd Airborne Division which had been

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ordered to hold the line on the northern front of the unfolding action.

While the siege of Bastogne has captured much attention and publicity as a critical part of the Battle of the Bulge, it was but a smaller element of a much larger assault. Developed as a three-pronged attack with the German 6th Panzer Army on the north, the 5th Panzer Army in the center, and the 7th Army to the south; nearly a quarter million German troops with significant armor support assaulted Allied lines. More than 1000 tanks and armored fighting vehicles participated in the attack, including some of the heaviest armor on the Wehrmacht's rolls – 14 Tiger I and 52 Tiger II tanks.

One of these tanks was a Tiger II, turret number 332. German records show it suffered mechanical damage and was originally abandoned by the crew near Coe, Belgium, on Dec. 18, soon after the assault started. However, it appears that it was repaired and reassigned a new crew by the Germans by Dec. 25 or manned by stragglers.

During the night on 25 Dec. 1944, Sgt. Glenn D. George was on a patrol in the Ardennes with other members of his unit. They suddenly came upon Tiger 332, which remained motionless. George suspected the German crew might be sleeping, so readied his .50 caliber machine gun and gave orders for his gunner to fire a flare directly above the enemy vehicle. When the flare went off, the German crew, bailed out of the tank. As they abandoned the vehicle, George opened fire with the .50 cal., killing three, wounding another, and said he believed the fifth crewman escaped unhurt. Although unverified by official records, Sgt. George claims to have divided his crew between his M4 Sherman tank and Tiger 332 and then ran 332 until it ran out of gasoline looking for German vehicles to attack.

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News of the capture of an intact Tiger II spread quickly. 740th radio operator Tech 4. LeRoy Mayer said he remembered monitoring a conversation between George and Col. George K. Rubel, commander of the 740th Tank Bn., informing the colonel of the location of Tiger 332 for possible future recovery.

The following morning, Ruble informed First Army headquarters that a functional Tiger II tank had been and captured and where it was located. The 463rd Ordnance Evacuation Company was summarily dispatched to recover the tank, which was tough going. The tracks had since frozen to the ground and were unfrozen by pouring gasoline over them. The flatbed trailed the ordnance unit brought was rated for Sherman tanks, which weighed roughly half that of a Tiger II. Loading Tiger 332 on the trailer promptly flattened all the tires and the tractor unit was nearly unable to move. With great difficulty, Tiger 332 was moved to the rail station at Spa, Belgium, and loaded onto railcar for shipping. At this point, "463 ORD EVAC" was painted on the turret, which led some to believe it had been captured by the ordnance company.

Tiger 332 was shipped from Spa to Antwerp and from there to the United States. After being thoroughly examined and studied, it was placed on outdoor display at the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md., where it remained for nearly half a century. It was later shipped to the Patton Museum of Armor in Fort Knox, Ky., where it was labeled as being captured by the 463rd. After seeing Tiger 332 on display, Miller contacted the museum curator and arranged for recorded witness statements to be provided to correct the tank's backstory.

Tiger 332 has since been moved to the restoration garage of Fort Benning Ga., where it awaits further restoration.

Sgt. Glenn D. George passed away on Aug. 23, 1992, . He never saw Tiger 332 again after abandoning it in Belgium in 1944.

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