

## Stavelot, Belgium

On the night of December 17, KG Peiper reached the heights above the town of Stavelot. After a brief skirmish with American Engineers, Peiper paused to consolidate his column, which was strung out for some 15 miles to the rear. Before sunrise on the 18th, a company from the 526th Armored Infantry Battalion, under the command of Major Paul Solis, arrived to support the small contingent of engineers assigned to blow the bridge. Peiper advanced on the town before the engineers could carry out their assignment, however, and by 8 AM, had forced the Armored Infantry out of the town. The Armored Infantry scattered, with some retreating east towards Malmedy, some to the west towards Trois Ponts, and yet others (including Major Solis) retreated north along the road to Spa. A short distance up this road was a major American fuel depot, guarded by a platoon of Belgian troops. With the help of the Belgians, Solis created a flaming roadblock to prevent Peiper from capturing the fuel. After securing Stavelot, Peiper turned his attention towards the west and the vital town of Trois Ponts, knowing that he must secure a bridge over the Ambleve at that location in order to continue on his route to the Meuse River crossings. He left only a small contingent in Stavelot, thinking that troops from the 3rd FJ Division were following in his wake. Within hours after Peiper's departure, the 1st Battalion of the 30 Infantry Division's 117th Regiment reached the gasoline depot in the woods above Stavelot. During the day and into the night, the 1st Battalion pushed its way into Stavelot. The Germans, realizing that Peiper's supply route was now in jeopardy, launched a series of attacks to retake the town. An attack by ten Mark IV tanks was turned away with the help of American fighter planes, while another attack carried out by three King Tiger tanks from the south end of the town was dealt with by the TD's supporting the 1st Battalion. In the wake of these failures, Peiper was increasingly concerned about the situation at Stavelot. It had to be retaken, or else Peiper would be cut off north of the Ambleve River. The Germans strongest attempt yet to retake it would take place on the after of December 19. The Ambleve River could not be forded by vehicles, but infantry could (and did) ford the river.