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James J. Weingartner

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, jweinga@siue.edu

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STRANGE ALLIANCE: AN AMERICAN, A NAZI, AND THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

James J. Weingartner

Department of Historical Studies

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Between December 21 and December 25, 1944, there occurred an encounter between two officers, one American and the other German that is unique in the history of World War II. The American was Major Hal D. McCown and the German, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Joachim Peiper. Passing notice of McCown's account of this encounter have often been included in narratives of the Battle of the Bulge, but the fleeting relationship between these two officers is sufficiently extraordinary as to warrant closer attention and broader contextualization than it has heretofore received.

Of the two men, Peiper is by far the better known, due to his association with the "Malmedy massacre," the killing of 83 American POWs by troops of the battlegroup under his command, and by reason of his mysterious death in 1976. *Kampfgruppe Peiper* had been composed largely of troops of the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler." That unit had been the outgrowth of the Führer's personal guard regiment, of which Peiper had been a member since 1936 following his graduation from *SS-Junkerschule Braunschweig*, one of the academies established for the training of SS officers, and his completion of the platoon leaders' course at the SS training facility at Dachau.¹ Prior to World War II, Peiper had become first adjutant to *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler, chief of the organization that ran Nazi Germany's network of concentration camps and the chief executors of the Holocaust. In that capacity, he had accompanied Himmler on tours of inspection and on one occasion had witnessed an early experiment involving the fatal gassing of prisoners.² The German invasion of Poland saw Peiper assigned to Hitler's military headquarters. He rejoined the Leibstandarte in time to take part in the German attack on the Low Countries and France in 1940, after which he returned to Himmler's staff until August 1941, witnessing the early stages of the Holocaust, before requesting to rejoin the Leibstandarte fighting in Russia. Peiper remained with the Leibstandarte until the end of the war as it evolved into a crack armored division, 1st SS Panzer, playing major combat roles on both the Eastern and Western Fronts, in the course of which he was much decorated for his combat leadership. But his dual identity as a daring and ruthless combat commander and agent of a murderous ideology is reflected in his continued close personal relationship with Himmler until the end of the war.³

Peiper's life and career have exercised a powerful attraction and have been the subject of multiple biographies, as well as the inspiration for a stage play by a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright. This is due in part to his personal notoriety, but it is also the product of a personality that attracted the attention and even admiration of many who came in contact with him. ⁴

Among these admirers was Major Hal D. McCown. An Arkansas native and a graduate of Louisiana State University, as well as an honors cadet of its ROTC program. McCown had entered the U.S. Army in 1940 and had landed in Normandy on June 13, 1944, as a 28 year-old officer in the 30th Infantry Division's 119th Infantry Regiment. Although in U.S. Army uniform for four years, McCown's combat experience began at that point and he readily admitted 43 years later to having been "scared" and for good reason. His regiment was committed to the brutal fighting in Normandy's bocage country, which was ideal defensive terrain for the skilled soldiers which McCown found the Germans to be. He remembered it to have been "the toughest fighting of the war" for his regiment, and casualties were heavy. ⁵

McCown had a narrow escape on July 25th as Lt. General Omar Bradley's 1st Army, of which the 30th Infantry Division was a part, launched Operation Cobra, designed to break through the German lines containing the Allied beachhead and free the mechanized forces concentrated there for rapid movement into the French interior. As is well known, some of the bombs dropped by American bombers in preparation for the attack fell short of German positions and caused significant losses to US ground forces, including a three-star general and members of the headquarters of the 119th Infantry Regiment, to which Major McCown was assigned as operations officer. Shortly before the aerial assault, McCown had providentially been called to the rear for a phone call and escaped the worst of the bombing, although he remembered having been badly "bounced around" by exploding bombs. Regimental headquarters, however, had been squarely hit, with 55 casualties. ⁶ But German lines were breached and US forces began to pour into the French interior.

The 30th Infantry and 1st SS Panzer found themselves confronting one another two weeks later. In a desperate attempt to stem the rapid advance of US troops that threatened to roll up and destroy the whole of the German defenses in

Normandy, Hitler ordered Operation Lüttich, an attack towards Avranches at the base of the Cotentin peninsula to cut off the forces that had been freed by Cobra. The now much-weakened 1st SS Panzer Division and McCown's 30th Infantry Division, which the fierce combat of the previous two months had reduced to 50% of its original strength, were in the thick of the fighting around Mortain. In spite of the fact that its tank force had been reduced to about a third of full strength, McCown remembered the 1st SS Panzer as a "first class" division.⁷

Nevertheless, success in Operation Lüttich, of which Ultra had given the U.S. Army forewarning, was beyond German capabilities. Their defensive positions in Normandy collapsed with heavy losses, and the survivors retreated eastward towards the German border with US forces, including the 30th Infantry Division, in pursuit. In recollections shared with veterans of the 119th Infantry Regiment long after the war, McCown recalled that the 30th Infantry Division had met 1st SS Panzer again in November in the fierce fighting around Aachen. Although the 30th encountered surviving fragments of the division there, the Leibstandarte was rebuilding 100 kilometers to the east in preparation for Hitler's Ardennes offensive.⁸ That bloody encounter would form the context for the brief but fascinating interaction between Peiper and McCown.

The powerful armored battlegroup of about 5000 men under Peiper's command formed the spearhead of an attack aimed at Antwerp, which was launched on December 16th, 1944. The U.S. 30th Infantry Division, also rebuilding, was rushed south the next day to aid in blocking Peiper's advance to capture vital crossings over the Meuse River. Its 119th Infantry Regiment, whose 2nd Battalion was now under McCown's command, took up positions on December 18th east of the Belgian town of Werbomont. While fighting over rough terrain between Stoumont and La Gleize on the afternoon of December 21, McCown, along with his operations sergeant and radio man, were captured by members of Peiper's force.⁹

McCown was taken to the nearby village of La Gleize, where part of what remained of Peiper's battlegroup was nearly surrounded by 30th Infantry Division troops and where its commander had established his headquarters as well as a holding area for other American prisoners. McCown would remain Peiper's prisoner for about 90 hours before succeeding in returning to American lines.

Following his escape, McCown wrote a report of his experiences which was made an annex to the corps intelligence report under the title “Behind the German Lines.”

Attached to the report is an introduction apparently written by an Allied intelligence officer, probably British, which hints at its singular nature.¹⁰

Literally thousands of (German) PWs have given their version of what goes on within German units. Inevitably this is coloured [sic] by a large variety of factors. PWs who give the most information are frequently those who are browned off with their unit, their officers, and the war, and their accounts reflect this feeling, often more subtly than is apparent. Others fall in the familiar category of “anxious to please,” and tend to give what we want to hear. Finally, PWs attempt to evaluate the whole company, the battalion, the regiment, even the division with an actual knowledge of little more than their own platoon. As a result, a really objective report is an unusual occurrence.

The following account, written by an American battalion commander, who was captured and later escaped, is such a case¹¹

McCown's claimed to have dictated his report within a few hours of his escape on Christmas morning.

In La Gleize I was taken to the cellar containing the commander of the German troops whose name I later found out was Lt. Col. Peiper....An interpreter who had spent 16 years in Chicago, USA, served as interpreter. I later found out that the majority of German officers spoke English fairly well. The Colonel spent a few minutes trying to get tactical information from me but seeing the attempt was worthless, sent me away again....

He was taken to another cellar, where a German lieutenant and several NCOs made a further attempt to extract information.

All of the effects were there – I was placed in a chair...where the light of a small electric bulb would fall on my face. One of the NCOs drew his Luger, examined his clip, reloaded the weapon and laid it on the table in front of him. It was with difficulty that I managed to suppress a smile at these obviously studied and rehearsed preparations in a place so identical with

what intelligence officers back in the States teach our troops to expect when in the hands of the enemy.

His captors' efforts to secure tactical information took place to the accompaniment of artillery fire from surrounding U.S. forces that was reducing La Gleize to rubble.

I was surprised to see that as my failure to respond to their threatenings continued they grew no angrier but instead appeared to lose interest in the procedure. Finally, I was taken to another cellar where a warrant officer searched me thoroughly, taking my flashlight and knife but leaving me my wrist watch, ring, a little food I was carrying and my personal papers.

McCown was then moved to yet another cellar, where he joined four captured lieutenants of the 119h Infantry Regiment and exchanged information on their precarious situation.¹²

During the entire time I was in this town [La Gleize] I gathered all the information I could from other captives as well as German officers and men (who talked to a surprising degree) about the strength, disposition and conditions of the Germans in that area. I did my best to determine the objectives of this unit and gained from several sources among the German officers and men that this division [*sic*] would be the first element in LIEGE and MAASTRICHT. Colonel Peiper questioned me fruitlessly several times about bridge conditions in the MAASTRICHT area.¹³

This claim was probably more an effort on McCown's part to distract attention from having blundered into the clutches of the enemy while operating with his new command and to refute possible accusations of fraternization with the enemy to which later events might lend credence than a plausible description of successful intelligence gathering by a cool and resourceful officer. McCown was largely ignorant of the German language and his later claim to have been able to understand much of his captors' language thanks to his schoolboy's knowledge of Latin is patently ridiculous. Although he noted that most of the German officers seemed to speak some English, it is unlikely that they would have done him the courtesy of discussing their unit's situation with him in his language. Much later, he admitted that Peiper, who was fluent in English, had divulged "virtually no hard intelligence."¹⁴

McCown was amazed at the youth of the Germans he encountered. Most of the enlisted men, he reported, were 18 or 19, many recently recruited but seemingly well-trained. Captains and lieutenants ranged in age from 19 to 27. Equipment on the whole was good, with the exception of some reconditioned half-tracks whose state of repair was questionable. Morale was high, although food was in short supply. Relations between officers and men was closer and friendlier than McCown would have expected, and Peiper in particular distinguished himself in this regard, visiting his wounded several times and often dispensing encouraging words and comradely slaps on the back to his men.¹⁵

This, too, must be read with some caution. Although morale and relations between officers and men could have been readily observed as could a scarcity of food, how did McCown ascertain the ages of German officers and enlisted men and their state of training? It's conceivable that Peiper revealed not only his own age (29) but that of his officers to McCown in the course of their long and wide-ranging *tête-à-tête* on the evening of December 21-22. But how could McCown have arrived at the conclusion that some half-tracks, the German SPWs or *Schützenpanzerwagen*, were reconditioned? It is doubtful that Peiper's men or Peiper himself would have volunteered such information or that McCown had been allowed to inspect the vehicles or could have detected evidence of reconditioning of unfamiliar equipment if he had.

The most interesting interaction between McCown and Peiper was the conversation that began on the evening of December 21. McCown was taken to Peiper's headquarters at around 11:00 p.m. for a meeting that continued until 5:00 a.m. the next morning. McCown's description of the six-hour conversation is tantalizingly sparse. Peiper, he noted, seemed most interested in defending Nazism and explaining why Germany was fighting. He professed confidence in Germany's ability to defeat the Allies with newly-raised divisions and revolutionary weapons which, although inferior in quantity to Allied equipment, would decisively best it in quality. How McCown responded to what was an ardent profession of faith in the Third Reich and its Führer by a dedicated Nazi was not addressed in his report. He may well have been reluctant to risk antagonizing a man whom he suspected of complicity in the murder of American POWs south of Malmédy several days earlier, of which he claimed to have knowledge. The danger was real. At his trial, Peiper testified with brutal candor

that he would have ordered his prisoners shot if he had been forced to fight to the end in La Gleize “since I thought it was impossible that all of us would die here and the next day a hundred and fifty [sic] Americans would get new weapons and fight against the German Army. I could not take responsibility for that towards my commanders”¹⁶

Peiper was holding McCown and some 130 other American prisoners, most of whom were members of the 119th Regiment’s 3rd Battalion who had been captured earlier. In addition to his concern for their well-being, McCown may have hoped that a talkative captor might divulge valuable intelligence which he could carry back with him to US lines. And yet, there may have been still another factor involved, implied by McCown’s summary assessment of Peiper included in this section of his report: “I have met few men who impressed me in so short a space of time as did this German officer,” with “straight well-shaped features , with remarkable facial resemblance to the actor, Ray Milland.” It is strange that subjective judgements of this sort should have been included in an intelligence report. Respect and perhaps even a degree of affection for his captor appear to have developed (the Stockholm syndrome *avant la lettre?*). Thirty-two years later, McCown speculated with obvious sympathy for his captor that Peiper’s underlying motive for initiating their 6 hour meeting was simply that “he was lonely.”¹⁷ Perhaps McCown, a product of early 20th century Arkansas and Louisiana society, found aspects of Peiper’s ideological stance expressed in articulate English, not entirely repugnant. Whatever the case, McCown’s high regard for Peiper grew in the course of the events that followed.

Concerning treatment of prisoners by the SS, I can state that at no time were the prisoners of this organization mistreated. Food was scarce, but it was nearly as good as that used by the Germans themselves. The American prisoners were always given cellar space to protect them from the exceedingly heavy American artillery barrages. I was taken for a brief period to the main prisoner enclosure which was a large two-room well - constructed cellar quite superior to any I saw in La Gleize. The men were considerably overcrowded....I organized the entire group of some 130 into sections, appointed a First Sergeant and laid down a few rules concerning rotation sleeping, urinating, equality and distribution of food and got the

German warrant officer in charge of the prisoners settled upon a fairer method of giving water to prisoners and providing ventilation.¹⁸

Two direct hits on the cellar by American shells which McCown judged to be 105mm killed and wounded both prisoners and guards. These were later removed by POWs who were apparently being held in another location and who told McCown that German casualties from artillery fire had been heavy. The report continues:

Late in the afternoon of 23 December I was called once more to Col. Peiper's headquarters. He told me that he had received orders from the commanding general to give up his position and withdraw to the East to the nearest German troops. He said he knew it to be impossible to save any of his vehicles—that it would have to be a foot withdrawal. His immediate concern was what to do with the American prisoners, of which he had nearly 150, as well as his own wounded. He dictated to me a plan of exchange whereby he would leave all American prisoners under the command of the senior PW, a Captain, to be turned over to the American commander as the Americans entered the town the next day.

Of course, McCown was in fact the senior POW, but he was to accompany the retreating Germans, leaving Captain Bruce Crissinger in charge. The report continues:

In exchange for the American prisoners, all German wounded would be turned over to the 1st SS Panzer Division wherever they might be....I would then be released to the American lines as I would be the only prisoner retained during the foot movement of the Germans East from La Gleize." I told Col. Peiper that I could not give him any assurance that the exchange would be carried out as it was a matter for higher headquarters. He said that he fully understood....¹⁹

It is hard to accord much credibility to this scheme. Since Peiper was about to evacuate La Gleize, his prisoners would be repatriated in any case as surrounding US forces occupied the town. The only leverage Peiper had was his custody of McCown. Permission to carry out such an exchange would probably have had to come from higher authority – conceivably from Eisenhower himself. Would recovery of a field-grade officer have been considered valuable enough to justify

the release to the enemy of an uncertain but probably quite large number of their personnel? It is likely that Peiper felt honor-bound to attempt to recover his wounded, in spite of the improbability of success. The words *Meine Ehre heisst Treue* (My Honor is Loyalty) were embossed on every SS-man's belt buckle. Or is it possible that Peiper had another purpose in mind -- perhaps to counteract the impact of the Malmédy massacre, news of which was by December 23 in wide circulation, with evidence of his humane conduct? Whatever the case, McCown's account of Peiper's escape from La Gleize is fascinating:

At 0300 24 December the foot column began to move. Col. Peiper and I moved immediately behind the point, the remainder of his depleted regiment following in single file. Col. Peiper told me he had 800 men to evacuate. I later watched the column pass three separate times, and this number was correct according to my own estimate....At 0500 hours we heard the first tank blow up, and inside of thirty minutes the entire area occupied by Col. Peiper's command was a sea of fiercely burning vehicles, the work of a small detachment he had left behind to complete the destruction of all of his equipment....

Col. Peiper, his staff and myself with my two guards spent all day of the 24th reconnoitering for a route to rejoin other German forces. No food was available at any time after we left La Gleize; the only subsistence I received was four small pieces of dried biscuit and two swallows of cognac which one of the junior officers gave me. The German regimental surgeon gave me one piece of Charms candy, the sugar of which did me lots of good during the later long march. At 1700, just before dark, the column started moving again on the selected route; we pushed down into a valley in single column with a heavily armed point out ahead.

McCown was astounded by the column's march discipline. It "was so perfect that I could hardly believe that they could accomplish it....I believe we could have passed within 200 yards of an outpost without detection."

As the point neared the base of the hill I could hear quite clearly an American voice call out 'Halt! Who is there?' The challenge was repeated three times, then the American sentry fired three shots. A moment later, the order came along the column to turn around and move back up the hill.

The entire column was half way back up the hillside in a very few minutes. A German passed by me limping. He was undoubtedly leading the point, as he had just received a bullet through the leg. The colonel spoke briefly to him but would not permit the medicos to put on a dressing; he fell in the column and continued moving on without first aid. The point moved along the side of the hill for a distance of a half mile, then again turned down into the valley, this time passing undetected through the valley and the paved road which ran along the base. Several American vehicles chopped the column but at no time was its presence detected. The entire 800 men were closed into the trees on the other side of the valley in an amazingly short period of time.

McCown concluded that Peiper was reduced to trying to gauge the proximity and location of German lines by the sound of the fall of American artillery fire on their positions and that he was, in fact, lost. At around 10:00 p.m., Peiper, his executive officer and operations officer disappeared and command of the column was assumed by a young captain.

I tried in vain to find out where Col. Peiper went; one friendly enlisted man of Col. Peiper's headquarters told me that Col. Peiper was very tired and I believe that he and a few selected members of his staff must have holed up in some isolated house for food and rest—to be sent for from the main body after they had located friendly forces.

The stamina of Peiper's hard-pressed men continued to astound McCown.

Whereas Col. Peiper had given a rest 'break' every hour or so, there were no 'breaks' given under the new command from that time until I escaped. The country we were now passing through was the most rugged we had yet encountered. All of the officers were continuously exhorting the men to greater effort and to laugh at weakness. I was not carrying anything except my canteen, which was empty, but I know from my own physical reaction how tired the men with heavy weapons must have been. I heard repeated again and again the warning that if any man fell behind the tail of the column, he would be shot. I saw some men crawling on hands and knees. I saw others who were wounded but were being supported by comrades up the steep slopes; there were fully two dozen wounded in the column, the

majority of whom were going along quite well by themselves. There was one captain who was rather severely wounded, the colonel had told me, who moved along supported by another officer and a medical NCO and was still with the unit the last I saw of him.

It seemed evident to McCown that Peiper's men were in desperate need of food and rest. He claimed to have overheard conversation from his captors indicating that a small village had been located that might serve for respite. Before the column resumed its movement, the Germans' luck in avoiding detection ran out.

...firing broke out not very far from where I was standing. My guards and I hit the ground, tracer bullets flashed all around us, and we could hear the machine gun bullets cutting the trees very close over us. The American unit, which I later found out was a company, drove forward again to clear what it obviously thought was a stray patrol, this time using mortar fire as well. The mortar fire fell all around on the German position. I do not know if my guards were injured or not—shrapnel cut the trees all around us....There was considerable movement around me in the darkness. I lay still for some time waiting for one of my guards to give me a command. After some time I arose cautiously and began to move at right angles from the direction of the American attack, watching carefully to my rear to see if anyone was covering me or following me. After moving approximately 100 yards, I turned and moved directly toward the direction from which the American attack had come. I can remember that I whistled some American tune, but I have forgotten which one it was. I had not gone over 200 yards before I was challenged by an American outpost of the 82nd Airborne Division.²⁰

McCown had returned to American lines in time for a welcome Christmas dinner with Major General Leland Hobbs, the 30th Infantry Division's commander.²¹ At about the same time the German unit which had been his home for 90 hours had succeeded in breaking through American lines and uniting with friendly forces. Unlike McCown's, Peiper's report to his corps commander, *SS-Gruppenführer* Hermann Priess, was delayed until the following morning. He claimed not to have slept for the nine days of his battlegroup's abortive advance and probably had been able to function as a commander under prolonged and highly stressful conditions with the assistance of Pervitin, the methamphetamine stimulant

widely used by German forces. In any event, in addition to suffering from exhaustion, he had been slightly wounded in the course of the withdrawal, collapsed on his return to German lines, and was carried to an aid station under the care of a regimental surgeon.²²

The war ended for both men 18 weeks later, for McCown in central Germany on the Elbe, for Peiper in Austria, far from the man whose name the Leibstandarte bore. Both would meet again under very different circumstances a year later in a U.S. Army courtroom in Dachau, Germany—Peiper, as chief defendant in the Malmédy Massacre trial and McCown, as star witness for the defense.

There was no realistic chance of acquittal for most if any of the 73 defendants. The American public demanded vengeance and the evidence against them seemed overwhelming. The prosecution team led by Lt. Col. Burton Ellis had charged the defendants with the murders of far more than 83 U.S. prisoners near Malmédy, Belgium. It claimed to be able to prove the murders of 538 to 749 prisoners of war and more than 90 Belgian civilians in numerous incidents during Peiper's December 1944 advance. Of these, 175 to 311 prisoners and 3 Belgian civilians were alleged to have been slaughtered in La Gleize.²³ But while the prosecution was able to produce a few witnesses to some of the atrocities, the most notable being Lieutenant Virgil P. Lary, one of the survivors of the Malmédy massacre, the bulk of the incriminating evidence was in the form of sworn statements from the defendants themselves, the circumstances surrounding the securing of which would form the heart of the trial controversy.

The morally rigorous Brigadier General William K. Harrison had been assistant commander of the 30th Infantry Division at the time of the Germans' Ardennes offensive. The Malmédy trial had begun on the morning of May 16th, 1946 and was widely publicized in the United States. At the end of the month, Harrison sent a letter to the office of the Adjutant General in Washington, D.C. In it, Harrison noted that troops under his command had recaptured La Gleize on December 24, 1944, and had found no evidence of the murders alleged at trial by the prosecution. Harrison bluntly declared his belief that the alleged La Gleize murders were "figments of the imagination" and requested that his letter be forwarded to Dachau "in order that no injustice be done."²⁴

Colonel John S. Guthries, an intelligence officer of Third Army who was following news reports of the trial, recognized Peiper's name as having figured in an intelligence report he had seen and quickly identified McCown, then stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, as its author. His report was made available to Colonel Willis Everett, leader of the defense team, who requested McCown's presence as a witness. Although he initially had reservations about testifying for the defense, he was ordered by the Department of the Army to proceed to Germany, arriving at Dachau on June 14, allowing ample time for Everett to confer with him prior to his testimony on June 20th.²⁵

From the witness stand McCown outlined the circumstances of his capture and the fact that he was able to ascertain that the American prisoners were being on the whole well-treated and complained only of poor food and the theft of watches and rings. When asked if he had observed any infractions of the Geneva Convention, McCown again cited inadequate food and pilfering of personal effects, but added that "inasmuch as we are guilty of the same...". It was immediately made clear that testimony regarding American infractions of the laws of war would not be tolerated. The prosecution objected and the president of the court ordered it stricken from the record.²⁶

McCown was then questioned specifically about the prosecution's charge that 175 to 311 American prisoners had been murdered in La Gleize between December 18th and 23rd, including a large number allegedly shot against a cemetery wall adjacent to the only church in the village of 50 to 60 houses. McCown replied that while he had not seen every street and corner, he had moved around the town and past the church while under guard and had seen no dead Americans beyond those killed by the American artillery fire which had struck the cellar where they were being held. Had they been called as witnesses, General Harrison and other members of the 30th Infantry Division who had captured La Gleize would presumably have been able to reinforce McCown's testimony, as did several civilian residents including the village priest from whom the defense submitted affidavits.²⁷

It seems likely that the alleged murders of American prisoners in La Gleize were indeed "figments of the imagination."²⁸ But the crime by which the trial is best-known, the Malmédy massacre, was no fiction. The victims' bodies had been

found and identified and survivors had testified to the circumstances of the slaughter, primarily by automatic weapons fire from some German vehicles parked at a road junction south of Malmédy, where prisoners of Battery B of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion had been assembled. Although there is no convincing evidence that Peiper was present at the massacre site or had ordered it he, like Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita who had been tried the year before and hanged three months prior to the opening of the Malmédy trial for atrocities committed in the Philippines, had held “command responsibility” for this and other atrocities, both real and imagined.²⁹

Everett’s unwillingness to accept the court’s verdict and sentences was based primarily on his conviction that many of the crucial sworn statements had been extracted from the defendants by foul means. But there was more behind his resistance. Although not a veteran of combat, he knew that American troops had been guilty of similar offences and both McCown and Brigadier General Josiah Dalbey, president of the court, appear to have reinforced that belief. Everett claimed to have been told by McCown of his personal knowledge of hundreds of German prisoners having been killed by U.S. troops; moreover, Everett recalled a post-trial conversation with Dalbey in which the general declared that the sentencing of the 73 defendants had been the most difficult assignment he had ever undertaken because he knew that American soldiers had committed similar crimes.³⁰ Although a *tu quoque* defense was not permissible, Everett’s belief that Peiper’s violations of the laws of war were no worse than those committed by Americans and had gone unpunished strengthened his conviction that justice had not been done in the Dachau courtroom.³¹

Following his trial testimony and before his return to the United States, McCown visited Peiper in his Dachau cell. He recalled 20 years later that Peiper had told him of a phone call he had received from Hitler in the last days of the war, informing him of his promotion to the rank of full colonel (SS Standartenführer) when what remained of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler was fighting a hopeless battle against the Red Army in Austria. McCown’s visit and Peiper’s highly personal revelation are further evidence of the strange relationship that had developed between the two men during those 90 hours in LaGleize. It would have repercussions for McCown.

Thirty years after the trial, McCown recalled that the law member of the Malmédy court, Colonel Abraham H. Rosenfeld, had conducted himself in a way that he had found disturbing.

During my testimony, it became apparent that Colonel Rosenfeld was under some sort of a mental stress. He subsequently became overly emotional on several occasions. In at least two of these outbursts, the President of the Court, a First Infantry Division Brigadier General, admonished Colonel Rosenfeld in words which amounted to 'calm down.' Since I had no dealings with this officer either prior [to] or since my testimony, I have no idea of what personal problems or misapprehensions he may be laboring under.³²

Rosenfeld had been angered by what he regarded as McCown's highly improper if not outright treasonous conduct during the 90 hours as Peiper's prisoner. Three years later in the course of a U.S. Senate investigation of the Malmedy case, his emotions were still raw.

I did not like McCown's testimony. That wasn't a question of a lawyer sitting on a bench evaluating his testimony. That was a question of one soldier who had been in combat evaluating another soldier who had been in combat. I just didn't like the manner in which he presented his testimony, I didn't like the manner in which he took the stand. I didn't like the manner, his manner on the stand, and no other member of the court—I should say this—strike that—all the other members of the court agreed with me unanimously. McCown—I don't know; I don't know whether McCown was telling the truth or not. I can't go behind it, but—and I am glad to say this for the record—after 3 ½ years, I personally doubt the veracity of his testimony....

Now, McCown and Peiper were entirely too friendly those nights they spent together. Peiper, with 600 [*sic*] of his men, was able to escape the trap when he was completely surrounded, and when he escaped McCown was with him; and then McCown simply said—and I think I am stating the exact words he said—it is in the record that, when they got to a certain stage in their march out of La Gleize, McCown simply walked off and Peiper went in another direction with his some 600 men.

I have no faith—and I am glad to say at this time I didn't have one bit of faith in the testimony of the then Major McCown.³³

Rosenfeld's highly emotional and semi-incoherent assessment of McCown's testimony was of little probative value, except perhaps to lend credence to the belief held by the anti-Semitic Everett that the Dachau court had been hopelessly biased against the defendants, a circumstance he believed that was largely the work of Jews who were involved in the trial. But by that time, McCown's association with Peiper had undergone two additional analyses which differed in many respects from McCown's account.

One of them had preceded the trial by six months. On September 15, 1945, Peiper had been interrogated by Captain Larry Vogel of the Counter Intelligence Corps in regard to his interaction with McCown and the latter's post-escape report. An actual record of the interrogation appears not to have been made, but Vogel submitted a report to Colonel William Philp, Commander of the European Intelligence Service Center at Oberursel where Peiper was then being held, that was potentially highly damaging to McCown:

During the massing of the American arty [artillery] on 23 December 1944 Maj McCount [*sic*] was able to estimate the progress of the American preparations by the caliber of the shell used and the direction of the fire. He predicted an Inf [infantry] attack by dawn the following day. When Peiper confided to him that he intended to withdraw between 0300 and 0500 hrs, Maj McCount warned him that he could not expect to get out after 0100 hours. The German withdrawal took place accordingly. Peiper states that the Major's predictions were fully confirmed by the ensuing events.

Vogel reported that the conversation between McCown and Peiper was not limited to military matters.

Maj McCount told Peiper that the Americans' task was to pull British chestnuts out of the fire, as the British preferred to let their allies do their fighting for them. He expressed his regrets at the Russo-American alliance against the German-Japanese combine. As he did not expect to return to the American lines so soon, he offered his services to help fight the

Russians. He told Peiper that he could reciprocate by coming to America after the war and help him hang the Jews.³⁴

Vogel's report had been made available to the prosecution shortly after McCown's trial testimony and had probably been seen by Rosenfeld as well. It was a report which "reflected against the integrity of Major McCown" and led to a recommendation that Peiper be further interrogated to determine his and McCown's credibility.³⁵ The Malmédy investigation and trial would delay that interrogation by more than a year.

On October 30, 1946 Peiper, now a prisoner in Landsberg Prison and wearing the red jacket of those under sentence of death, was interrogated under oath in the prison commandant's office by Deputy Inspector General Colonel F.J. Pearson, which led to a very different conclusion in regard to McCown and to Peiper himself. In fluent English, Peiper offered his account of what followed McCown's capture on December 21, which differed in some interesting respects from the American officer's:

Q. Did you see him [McCown] later?

A. Yes, that evening. I was impressed by the attitude of this officer and, after interrogating him about road conditions and troop movements in the American rear, which he only answered with a smile. Later I had a long conversation with him.

Q. Why did you stop interrogating this officer?

A. Because he would not give any information.

Q. Did this conversation you had later divulge any information about the American plans?

A. No sir. My whole plan of operation was a desperate one and at that time I already knew very well that I was fighting a losing fight and that I was going to be encircled entirely; that there was only little hope to succeed in my task and now it was my first opportunity to speak in a friendly manner and, on a human basis, with an opponent. It was a big contrast to the cruel and inhuman fighting style of the Eastern front and therefore I was very glad to see that real front line soldiers speak the same language – and this

feeling was the basis for our conversation. Here we were, sitting together in a small cellar in a small village which was going to be blown to pieces by the American artillery and any moment death might come and therefore we both spoke in a very open manner about our feelings in a very sincere way.

Q. Was this officer held by you as a prisoner of war?

A. Yes, he was.

Q. Was he ever placed on parole?

A. Yes. During the early morning of the 24th, about an hour before leaving La Gleize. We made a written agreement about the exchange of prisoners and in which I wanted him to accompany me. I told him 'Now Major, I would like you to give me your word of honor you will not try to escape during my break.' His answer was 'I do not think that fair.' Therefore, I told him the reason I would like it. I said, 'I consider you a gentleman and therefore I don't want to give you a guard who will be with you all the time with a machine pistol because during the night incidents are possible. I want you to wear a white hat band around your helmet so you are visible for all my men who will be informed that no one will have to take care of you.' I only wanted to prevent an incident during the night, and Major McCown evidently understood for he gave me his word and wore the white band. He accompanied me more as an attaché than a prisoner.

Q. Did you know when he escaped?

A. No. I found out later. I was wounded and, due to the fighting, I was unable to keep track of Major McCown. Sometime later I asked for him and was informed he couldn't be found. ³⁶

Colonel Pearson then turned his attention to the matter of Peiper's interrogation the previous year by Captain Vogel.

Q. I read you an extract from that interrogation. 'Peiper states that during Major McCount's stay with the 1st Pz. Regt., 1SS Pz Div Adolph [sic] Hitler he was not under guard as he had given his word not to escape.' Apparently, from your previous statement to me, he was under guard for some time; will you explain this?

A. As I have told you previously, he was a prisoner under guard for some time and later on the 24th he was placed on parole when he was accompanying me with my retreating combat group.

Q. During the conversation you had with Major McCown...did he discuss with you the artillery preparation?

A. No. We spoke of military matters. I told him something about the German way of attack, using artillery support, and what I would do were I in the American shoes. Then I spoke about my experience with American artillery, about the value of American infantry and that I believed the Air Force and artillery played the most important role, especially that of the Americans. We spoke about American mortars and the very good American communications, and of course he answered me about my opinions but definitely without giving me any information or special information. It was just the same as you have previously noted – the conversation of two professional soldiers. The tenure [*sic*] of our conversation was that of two foreigners, meeting at the Olympic Games. We exchanged addresses and hoped we would meet again after this bloody war was over.

Q. Did Major McCown make any statement as to predicting the infantry movements?

A. No, he did not. I would like to say here that I had more experience than Major McCown and that I myself was able to recognize the signs of enemy preparations and to decide by the increasing artillery fire the hour of the expected American attack. I knew pretty well what was going to happen and I spoke with Major McCown about these impressions....

Q. I will read you another statement you were reported to have made....'He predicted an infantry attack at dawn of the following day. When Peiper confided to him that he intended to withdraw between 0300 and 0500 hours, Major McCown warned him that he could not expect to get out after 0100 hours. The German withdrawal took place accordingly. Peiper states that the Major's predictions were fully confirmed by the ensuing events.' Is that correct?

A. He didn't make such statements. The statement you have just read to me is incorrect. They are words put in my mouth and Major McCown did not make any such statements. I told Major McCown that I was going to try a break early in the morning. He asked me when. I said, 'I don't know for sure but about 0200 or 0300, maybe later, because all the time I played the 'strong man' before Major McCown because I didn't want to show him, at any time, how desperate the situation really was....Major McCown did not know I was going to make the break on foot. I recall he was under the impression I was going to break with all my vehicles as he said, 'I'm very glad to have the opportunity to ride in a German tank.' When I told him I would try this break at 0200 or 0300 he did say 'don't you think it will be too late?' The artillery fire was so intense that any experienced soldier would have easily recognized the attack would come early in the morning. Please remember, Colonel, that Major McCown was with me for three days and I felt I knew more about the disposition of the American troops than he did at that time.³⁷

Q. I read you another extract from your previous interrogation. 'Major McCown told Peiper that America's task in this war was to pull British chestnuts out of the fire, as the British preferred to let the Allies do their fighting for them.' What can you say on that?

A. I commented to Major McCown that I felt the British were not willing to waste their blood and he said 'Yes, that may be.' He may have made the statements about the chestnuts, I can't recall.

Q. I read you another extract. 'He expressed his regrets at the Russo-American alliance against the German-Japanese combine. As he did not expect to return to the American lines so soon, he offered his services to help fight the Russians.' Have you any comment on that?

A. I cannot recall the statement as you quote it. I told him it was a pity our ally is Japan and yours is the Russians and he said he had the same feeling. May I say that this conversation was more along the line of a joke as we were trying to keep our spirits up. I recall he said, 'Well, I guess the war is over on this front for me, so I'll help you fight the Russians.' Again I say, this

was all in a joking manner and I never took him seriously. This was more to keep our spirits up.

Q. I read you another extract. 'He told Peiper that he could reciprocate by coming to America after the war and help him hang the Jews.' Can you recall any such statement?

A. I can't recall the details. We had a long conversation about the Jews. He was interested to learn something about the German situation ... and my personal opinion of Hitler. He wanted to know why we persecuted the Jews and so I tried to explain to him the Jewish situation in Germany, how it came about. I told him we see America only through the eyes of propaganda and you do the same about Germany. I was interested to learn where the Jews played such an important role in the States as we were taught. I asked him if all influential positions in the States were held by the Jewish people. He told me something about the strong financial interest they had and I believe I said, 'OK, when this war is over, I'll pay back your support against the Russians and help you hang the Jews.' These remarks were also made in a joking manner. ³⁸

Q. You have mentioned that 'words were put in your mouth' by the former interrogator and have denied several of the statements attributed to you. Can you tell me how you were interrogated and under what conditions?

A. Yes, I will be glad to. I was not sworn and, from the very beginning, I had the impression the interrogator was not sincere. That he told me wrong things to get me in an excited mood and condition because he saw that I was not willing to speak anything against Major McCown, and therefore he gave me many statements of Major McCown against me to bring me in a bad mood. I was not shown the statement I made. He did not record everything I said as you do – he only made a few notes on which he must have elaborated later.

Q. Do you hold any personal grievances against Major McCown?

A. No, Sir. I consider him to be an honorable officer and a gentleman and consider it fortunate that during this bloody war I was able to make his

acquaintance. As I have already told you, I was impressed by his attitude – therefore I treated him not so much as an enemy but in a friendly manner.

Q. I will now read you a statement made by Major McCown of his contact with you. (The entire statement of Major McCown was read). Have you any comments on this?

A. That statement is basically correct. I cannot say about his escape for I was not there.

Q. In his statement Major McCown stated that you did not destroy all vehicles [sic]. Is that correct?

A. I did leave a few vehicles behind me that I did not destroy as they were adjacent to buildings in which I knew there were wounded, and had I blown these vehicles up, it would have damaged the buildings and possibly killed many of the wounded....

Q. Did anything Major McCown said influence you in any way I making your tactical decisions?

A. Definitely not. I considered I was better qualified professionally to make my own decisions....

Q. Have you anything more to say that will assist in this investigation?

A. Nothing more than I have been misquoted and that I consider Major McCown absolutely an honorable man and certainly one who conducted himself while in my hands with dignity and as a good soldier.³⁹

As had McCown, Pearson reacted positively to his encounter with Peiper, finding that “his attitude during the entire interview was courteous, dignified and sincere.” The acts attributed to him in McCown’s report, he concluded, “hardly identify PW Joachim Peiper as an individual capable of committing the crime attributed to him in the Malmédy incident. In fairness to the prisoner, and my own conscience,” he concluded, “I feel that this report should be submitted, to be considered in the review of this case.”⁴⁰

The purpose of the “interview,” of course, was not to judge the fairness of Peiper’s conviction, but to ascertain whether McCown had given him militarily

valuable information. Peiper had denied it, but could he be trusted? Pearson declared himself

...convinced that the answers given to the questions submitted to him are sincere. The man has nothing to lose, being condemned to death and waiting day by day for his execution. The conversation held between the two officers was perfectly natural in their discussions of comparison [*sic*] tactics and, as Colonel Peiper said, 'I was acting the 'strong man' and was trying to avoid letting Major McCown know the tight spot I was in.' A case of bluff and pride. ⁴¹

The investigation of the strange wartime association between a U.S. Army major and an *Obersturmbannführer* (lieutenant colonel) of the Waffen-SS was to all intents terminated with a recommendation from Colonel Rosser L. Hunter, Chief of the Inspector General's Investigation Group, to the Adjutant General in Washington, D.C.

In view of the sworn statements of Lt. Col. Peiper concerning the conduct of Lt. Col. McCown while the latter was a prisoner of the former, it is the opinion of this office, after careful consideration of this case, that further investigation of this matter...would be fruitless and uneconomical. While it appears that Lt. Col. McCown was unusually friendly and cooperative with an enemy on the instant occasion, there is insufficient evidence to warrant disciplinary action in connection therewith. It is not reasonable to assume that Lt. Col. McCown would furnish the necessary evidence and it appears that the true relationship between him and Lt. Col. Peiper during the period concerned is a matter known only to those two individuals. ⁴²

While Peiper could have been motivated by a sincere desire to protect an officer who had been willing to jeopardize his career by testifying for the defense in the Malmédy trial, even more important may have been the opportunity to portray himself as a purely professional soldier, thus obscuring his association with Himmler's SS and its genocidal crimes. In this effort, he enjoyed the cooperation not only of Hal McCown, but of other officers of the U.S. Army who probed the relationship between the two men. Nowhere in the text of the documents generated by McCown's captivity and the investigation thereof is the Waffen-SS mentioned. Peiper is identified as "Lt. Colonel," never by his SS ranks of SS-

Obersturmbannführer or *SS-Standartenführer*, equivalent to Colonel, his rank at the end of the war. This may have been due simply to the U.S. Army's unfamiliarity with Nazi terminology, but sympathy rather than ignorance is suggested by Peiper's interrogation at the hands of Colonel Pearson. In the introduction to Pearson's report, Peiper is identified as "a former officer of the German Army" and is asked at the start of the interrogation, "Were you a member of the Germany Army in December 1944?" "I was", he answered. Peiper's image as nothing more than a professional soldier might have suffered if McCown and Pearson had been privy to a letter he had written a few months earlier following the conclusion of the Malmedy trial and his own sentence of death. In melodramatic reminiscing about his wartime experiences that dripped with devotion to the Nazi cause, he observed,

I fought and bled in all European theaters and became a preferred favorite of the god of hosts. In spite of all, it was a proud and heroic time! Where we were standing was Germany and as far as my tank gun reached was my kingdom! We had no personal aspirations. Our vision has always been the 'Dream of Reich.' In the end of war [*sic*], when the Führer was needing his Leibstandarte the most...fate had separated us from him....⁴³

History remembers Peiper's "dream" as a nightmare.

Peiper and McCown are long dead. Their postwar lives followed very different courses. McCown made the U.S Army his career, and there is no evidence that his questionable association with Peiper worked to his disadvantage. Shortly after his escape, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was awarded the Silver Star, the U.S. military's third highest award for valor. He served as commander of the 17th Infantry Regiment during the Korean War and later commanded in three major assignments in Vietnam and Thailand, including as Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, prior to retiring to his home state of Arkansas with the rank of Major General in 1972.⁴⁴

Post-war reflection had not significantly changed his assessment of Peiper. In 1976, he wrote that

My attitude towards Peiper was initially one of apprehension. I early learned Peiper had 135 US POWs, and I was concerned for their safety and well-being as the senior officer present. The news of the Malmédy Massacre had crossed the front the previous day and I believed it possible that the unit that had captured me might have been involved. When Peiper by both words and actions lived up to the Geneva Rules as well as his own surrounded and supply-deficient position would permit, my respect for him increased and my apprehensions over prisoner safety were considerably allayed. My overall impression of him after my period of capture was that he appeared to be a highly competent professional soldier emotionally balanced in all contacts I had with him, showed an occasional sense of humor and was reasonably responsive to all requests I made of him concerning U.S. prisoners of war.⁴⁵

In 1987, McCown was invited to address a reunion of veterans of the 119th Infantry Regiment's E Company. His address took the form of his recollections of the regiment's experiences following the 30th Infantry Division's June 1944 combat debut in Normandy. He elected to say nothing about his 90 hours as Peiper's prisoner beyond noting that he had gotten only one decent meal, which seemed to suggest mistreatment by his captors. In the original description of his captivity, however, he had stated that he and his fellow POWs had eaten almost as well (or as poorly) as the Germans themselves. McCown may have doubted that recollections of his comradely interaction with the man widely regarded as responsible for the Malmédy massacre and his chivalrous treatment by his command would be well-received by the assembled veterans.⁴⁶

But McCown's admiration for the battlefield prowess of the Waffen-SS is evident and not only in the context of his description of combat operations. Following the end of the war in Europe, the 119th Infantry Regiment found itself billeted in a dismal French town. Nearby was the resort of Deauville, with its luxurious hotels, casinos, and beautiful beaches but, alas, it was reserved for high-ranking officers. McCown proudly described how he had persuaded the Major in charge of billeting to open Deauville to the 119th by proudly pointing out that, not only had European Theater historian S.L.A. Marshall ranked the 30th Infantry Division as the premier U.S. infantry division in Europe, but that it had allegedly earned the reputation of being "Roosevelt's SS." McCown was referring to a broadcast

supposedly made during the Battle of the Bulge by “Axis Sally,” the American Mildred Gillars, who was working for the Germans as a radio propagandist. She was quoted as declaring that “The fanatical 30th Division, Roosevelt’s SS, are en route to rescue their First Army, but this time it will be annihilated.” McCown’s evident pride in that designation had apparently been shared by other members of the division. The U.S. Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* reported on January 7, 1945, that

The boys rather fancied the idea. They pointed out that they really were Elite Troops, a chosen few and top-notch fighters. Major E.L. Glaser of Palm Beach, Fla. decided to adopt the designation and make a new division patch to go with it. The result was a design, now under consideration at division headquarters, which combines the O and the H of the 30th’s Old Hickory, with the two flashes of lightning which comprise the SS troopers’ insignia and to top it off with the President’s well-known initials.

Permission for the alteration was never granted, although some of the 30th’s GIs allegedly improvised their own SS patches.⁴⁷ Had he known of it, Peiper who, like other Germans, tended to attribute the successes of U.S. Army ground forces to the overwhelming superiority of American air power and artillery, would probably not have been pleased.

For Peiper, death came on a very personal battlefield 31 years after the war’s end. His death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment in 1951. Shortly before Christmas 1956, he was released on parole from Landsberg prison. The story of his struggle to reintegrate himself into a German society very different from the one he had known and his death at the hands of French arsonists at his residence in the tiny village of Traves sur Saône in the early morning hours of Bastille Day, 1976, need not be repeated here.⁴⁸ Suffice it to say that he could not escape the notoriety that pursued him to his death.

As McCown remembered him with admiration, so too did Peiper remember McCown. Immediately following his conviction and convinced that some of his men had testified against him to save their own skins, he wrote to Everett that “In time of deepest human disappointments, you and McCown have returned to me much faith I already had lost....”⁴⁹ In his 1946 interrogation by Colonel Pearson,

Peiper had characterized McCown as “an honorable officer and a gentleman.” By 1971, 15 years after his release, some of the gloss on Peiper’s assessment of McCown had faded. McCown’s account of his interaction with Peiper, he claimed, was characterized by self-justification and embellishment, as to some degree it undoubtedly was. Did McCown’s description of their conversations in La Gleize now embarrass him, as McCown may have judged praise for Peiper best forgotten in 1987? In any event, Peiper’s esteem for McCown was understandably overshadowed by that for Everett, to whom he probably owed his life. At the time of his death, Peiper was gathering material for a book on his experiences of the Malmédy incident and its aftermath, which he planned to dedicate to Everett and in which McCown would likely have figured.⁵⁰

McCown and Peiper interacted with one another over a period of 90 hours. The evidence on which their mutual judgements were based was necessarily extremely limited. Each man attempted to use the other as a source of military intelligence, while Peiper saw in McCown a means of recovering his wounded. For his part, McCown cooperated with Peiper in an effort to insure the well-being of a large number of American prisoners of war.

Both men claimed to have found respect for one another as professional soldiers, but how similar in fact had their “professional” experiences been? While McCown had been an LSU upperclassman, ROTC cadet, and junior officer in a U.S. Army preparing for war, Peiper had been serving on *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler’s staff, where he was witness to the early stages of the Holocaust and frequently in Adolf Hitler’s company. Although both were approximately the same age, in terms of pure combat experience, McCown was a neophyte compared to his captor. At the time of his capture, McCown had been in a combat zone for about six months. Peiper’s career as a combat officer had begun briefly in France in the spring of 1940, but most of his battle experience had been gained in Russia following his reassignment by his own request in August 1941. The kind of war that Peiper had waged in that eastern vastness was far different from anything McCown had experienced and possibly could imagine. There, Nazi Germany and Peiper had waged a war of annihilation against both combatants and civilians justified by a racist ideology that regarded the Slav as *Untermensch* or “subhuman.” In Russia, anything remotely similar to those ninety hours in La Gleize would have been unthinkable. Peiper was a complex and selectively

sensitive personality and may have found in McCown a therapeutic opportunity after the dehumanizing horrors of the Eastern Front to interact with the enemy as human being, particularly in light of his by then clearly failed military mission.

McCown's statement that he had seldom met anyone who had impressed him as much as Peiper had cries out for analysis. In fact, most Americans who came into contact with Peiper in the course of his captivity and trial as well as later were impressed by him. He was good-looking, intelligent, well-read, and expressed himself in articulate English. McCown noted that he showed a sense of humor in spite of being surrounded by American forces and in a near hopeless position. He seemed, in short, a "cool customer." He had already come to admire the formidable fighting qualities of German soldiers and had assessed Peiper's division, the 1st SS Panzer, as a first-class armored unit. McCown may well have been primed to hold in high regard one of its officers whose battlefield experience greatly exceeded his own, particularly one who proved himself willing to observe the rules of war, at least in regard to the American prisoners he held in La Gleize. Those are qualities that McCown esteemed, but might there have been more?

McCown had reported little about any exchanges not directly related to the current military situation, but Peiper had been more forthcoming. In his September 1945 interrogation by Captain Vogel, he had allegedly stated that McCown had offered to help Germany fight the Russians if, in return, Peiper would come to America after the war to help him hang Jews. When queried about this by Colonel Pearson, Peiper confirmed the exchange, but brushed it off as a joke. It was of course a "joke" but one that hinted at a horrifying reality. Could it have reflected a degree of attitudinal affinity on race between a committed Nazi and an officer in an army that was no stranger to antisemitism? Unfortunately, McCown was not interrogated by U.S. Army authorities in regard to his association with Peiper while his prisoner. It is likely that the report he submitted immediately after his return to American lines on December 24, 1944 did not tell the whole story.

There is of course a deep divide between the anti-Jewish prejudice common at that time in the United States and in its army and the murderous anti-Semitism that was at the heart of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* with which Peiper was

thoroughly familiar and to which he subscribed.⁵¹ Himmler intended the Waffen-SS to be a force of “political soldiers,” by which he meant militarily trained men indoctrinated with and motivated by Nazi racism combined with *Härte* (hardness or harshness) of which Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Security Main Office and one of main organizers of the Holocaust, was considered the ideal embodiment.⁵² SS educational guides, the *SS-Leithefte*, provide useful insights into the content of this indoctrination. “Where unlike meet, hatred holds sway, ... Here God wants no love”, read a poem that was offered to the SS reader in 1942.⁵³ A wartime article entitled “*Du oder ich*” (“You or Me”) informed the SS man that as long as he was fighting for victory, he was also fighting for right and justice. Harshness in combat was holy while mercy was unacceptable.⁵⁴ A letter purportedly written by a young Waffen-SS officer shortly before his death on the Eastern Front, described orders received and carried out to shoot Russian prisoners, observing that “we have learned to be fearfully harsh when it serves a purpose.”⁵⁵ A January 1943 *Leitheft* contains a chilling manifesto: “The SS is hard as steel, a community committed to death....We have a right to be hard on others because we have been hard on ourselves.” In a speech delivered to high-ranking SS officers in November 1938, Himmler declared that in war, an SS man was never to surrender to the enemy and was under no obligation to take prisoners.⁵⁶

American soldiers could be “fearfully harsh,” too, as McCown knew. His own capture, ironically, had resulted in an order to his battalion to take no prisoners, based on the assumption that Peiper’s men would shoot its commander.⁵⁷ Historian Stephen Ambrose notes that out of the more than 1000 American veterans of the World War II European Theater whom he interviewed, one third reported having witnessed German prisoners with their hands raised being shot.⁵⁸ But SS culture with its sanctification of killing and years of unrestrained savagery in Russia where racist *Härte* had been given free rein undoubtedly increased the frequency with which the laws of war were violated in the West by Waffen-SS units.

In a wartime speech, Himmler observed that “...we must be honorable, decent, loyal and comradely to bearers of our own blood, but to no one else.”⁵⁹ SS literature defined most Americans, unlike Russians, as racial equals, although corrupted by crass (and largely Jewish) materialism.⁶⁰ Peiper’s ideological milieu,

therefore, could accept both the purposeful and “fearfully harsh” murder of prisoners of war and the chivalrous treatment of a U.S. Army major.

While together in La Gleize, Peiper and McCown briefly traded the status of enemy for that of quasi-ally and possibly “soul-mate”. Whatever might have motivated them, those 90 hours spent in a Belgian village on the eve of Christmas 1944 expand our perspective on the range of human responses to the hellish stresses of combat. They also provide evidence that war, like politics, can produce strange bed-fellows.

¹ Bernd Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten. Die Waffen-SS 1933-1945* (Paderborn, 1982), 89; "Auf den SS-Führerschulen Tölz und Braunschweig ausgebildete SS-Führer" in *Dienstaltersliste der Schutzstaffel der NSDAP, Stand vom 1. Dezember, 1936*, U.S. National Archives, T-175/204/26744095-98.

² *U.S. v. Valentin Bersin, et al*, U.S. National Archives Record Group No. 153, Roll 3, Frames 000189-90.

³ The best work on Peiper is the exhaustively researched biography by Danny S. Parker, *Hitler's Warrior. The Life and Wars of SS Colonel Jochen Peiper* (Boston, 2014). Parker followed this five years later with his *Peiper's War. The Wartime Years of SS Leader Jochen Peiper: 1941-44* (Barnsley, Yorkshire and Philadelphia, 2019). See also Jens Westemeier, *Joachim Peiper: A Biography of Himmler's SS Commander* (Altglan, Pa., 2007) and Michael Reynolds, *The Devil's Adjutant. Jochen Peiper, Panzer Leader* (New York, 1995).

⁴ Michael Cristofer's *Black Angel* was first presented at The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 1978.

⁵ McCown, Hal, MG, *Together We Served.com*; Major General Hal D. McCown, "Memories of War," recorded talk for a 1987 reunion of E Company, 119th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division, *YouTube*; Charles B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets. The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York, 1985), 458.

⁶ McCown, "Memories;" *Combat History of the 119th Infantry Regiment* (Washington, D.C., 1946), 23

⁶ See Alwyn Featherston, *Saving the Breakout. The 30th Division's Heroic Stand at Mortain, August 7-12, 1944* (Novato, CA, 1993); McCown, "Memories;" . Parker, *Peiper's War*, 333-41.

⁸ K.-G. Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS. Eine Dokumentation* (Osnabrück, 1965), 89; *Peiper's War*, 373.

⁹ MacDonald, *Time for Trumpets*, 455-56.

¹⁰ The 30th Infantry Division was at that time attached to the British 21st Army group>

¹¹ "Behind the German Lines," Annexe to Part C of Intelligence Notes NO. 43 dated 6 January 1945, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁴ In his recorded talk to veterans of E Company, 119th Infantry Regiment, McCown mangled the pronunciation of *Leibstandarte* which came out "Leebstandard!" McCown, "Memories.;" McCown to James Weingartner, Sept. 17, 1976, 4-5.

¹⁵ "Behind the German Lines," 2.

¹⁶ *U.S. v. Bersin*, 153/3/000208.

¹⁷ McCown to Weingartner, 4.

¹⁸ "Behind the German Lines," 3. What McCown meant by an SS "warrant officer" is not clear.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

²¹ McCown, "Memories."

²² Peiper's trial testimony, *U.S. v. Bersin*, 152/3/000183-84; Megan Garber, "' Pilot's Salt.' The Third Reich Kept Its Soldiers Alert with Meth," *The Atlantic*, May 31, 2013.

²³ *U.S. v. Bersin*, 153/1/00097-103.

²⁴ Brigadier General William K. Harrison to Adjutant General, May 27, 1946, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives and Records Service, Record Group 407, Adjutant General 000.5.

²⁵ "U.S. 'Prisoner' to Testify for SS Colonel," *The Stars and Stripes*, June 21, 1946; Everett to Family, June 14, 1946, Everett Papers.

²⁶ *U.S. v. Bersin*, 153/2/000044.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 153/4/000300-308.

²⁸ Peiper admitted to having been told by one of his officers that 8 prisoners had been shot while trying to escape and that one of his own men had been executed on suspicion of preparing to desert. *U.S. v. Bersin*, 153/3/000177-86.

²⁹ A. Frank Reel, *The Case of General Yamashita* (Chicago, 1949), 173; Allan A. Ryan, *Yamashita's Ghost. War Crimes, MacArthur's Justice and Command Accountability* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2012), 237-38.

³⁰ Everett to Family, n.d., Everett Papers.

³¹ On Everett's 10 year fight against the verdicts and sentences, see James J. Weingartner, *A Peculiar Crusade. Willis M. Everett and the Malmedy Massacre* (New York and London, 2000). The most recent scholarly treatment of the trial and its aftermath is Steven P. Remy, *The Malmedy Massacre. The War Crimes Trial Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2017). Remy challenges Weingartner's perspective.

³² McCown to Weingartner, 5-6.

³³ *Malmédy Massacre Investigation. Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, Eighty-First Congress, First Session, Pursuant to S. Res. 42* (Washington, D.C., 1949), 1429.

³⁴ Captain Leroy Vogel to Colonel Philp, September 15, 1945, Headquarters, USFET NIS Center.

³⁵ Remy, *Malmédy Massacre*, 110-11; Lt. Colonel William M. Connor, Jr. "Internal Route Slip, Headquarters U.S. Forces European Theater," File No. 350.09, November 19, 1945.

³⁶ Interrogation of Colonel Joachim Peiper by Colonel F.J. Pearson, IGD, at Landsberg, Germany, October 30, 1946, declassified by SB, NARA Authority NND968133, 1-2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5; Remy, *The Malmedy Massacre*, 110-111.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, "Discussion," Tab "A"; Pearson to Judge Advocate Headquarters, European Command, p.2.

⁴¹ "Discussion," Tab "A."

⁴² Colonel Rosser L. Hunter to The Inspector General, November 15, 1946, WDSIG 333.9 – McCown.

⁴³ Peiper to Everett, July 14, 1946, Everett Papers.

⁴⁴ McCown, Hal, MG, *Together We Served.com*; McCown to Weingartner, 2. See also Lt. Gen. Stanley Robert Larsen and Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr., *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 37. It is of interest given his experiences of December 1944 that McCown while in Vietnam authored a work entitled *Debriefing of Officers Returning from Field Assignments* (Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 1963).

⁴⁵ McCown to Weingartner, 2-3.

⁴⁶ He offered to make available copies of his post-captivity report to interested attendees. "Memories of War."

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; Robert W. Baumer, *Old Hickory. The 30th Division: The Top-Rated American Infantry Division in World War II* (Guilford, Conn., 2017), 356; Martin King, David Hilborn and Michael Collins, *The Fighting 30th Division. They Called Them Roosevelt's SS* (Philadelphia and Oxford, 2015), 17 and photo opposite 206. The initials "FDR" would have roughly paralleled the 1st SS Panzer Division's use of "LAH" (Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler) on the shoulder straps of some uniforms. See Roger James Bender and Hugh Page Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization and History of the Waffen-SS* (Mountain View, CA, 1969), I, 138. The 119th Infantry Regiment's combat history (p.89) states that "The German radio had been calling us for some time 'Roosevelt's SS troops.' This cry was evidently supposed to be a gross insult....' That German propagandists would have thought it an insult to equate an American division with the elite of Nazi Germany's armed forces is implausible. In any case, it is clear that some members of the 30th were far from insulted. Hank Stairs, a veteran of the 30th Infantry Division's 117th Infantry Regiment, recalled it as a "hard-won battle honor."

⁴⁸ See Parker, *Hitler's Warrior*, 245-285.

⁴⁹ Peiper to Everett, July 14, 1946, Everett papers.

⁵⁰ Jens Westemeier, *Joachim Peiper: Eine Biographie* (Osnabrück, 1996), 150.

⁵¹ Parker, *Hitler's Warrior*, 135-36.

⁵² Hans Bucheim , et al., *Anatomie des SS-Staates* (Olten and Freiburg im Breisgau, 1965), 253.

⁵³ Oskar Winter, "Gott," *SS-Leitheft*, 4 (1942), 3ff.

⁵⁴ "Du ode ich. Gedanken über die Härte im Kampf und die Willen zum Sieg," *Leitheft* 7, Folge 10b, 11f.

⁵⁵ "Das Herz mit dem stählernen Ring," *SS-Leitheft* 9 (Januar 1943), 15f.

⁵⁶ "Unsere Härte," *Ibid.*, 1-3; Josef Ackermann, *Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen, 1970), 125. In developing its case against the Malmedy defendants, the prosecution made much of the fact that Himmler encouraged SS officers to read a book by Michael Prawdin on the ruthless Mongol conqueror, Genghis Khan. The Mongols of old seem to have served a dual purpose for the SS, both as an example of the effectiveness of terror in warfare and as a terrifying embodiment of the threat from the East to Aryan civilization against which it was Germany's mission to defend. See Parker, *Hitler's Warrior*, 38; Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide. Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York, 1991), 39-41

⁵⁷ King, et al. *The Fighting 30th Division*, 264.

⁵⁸ Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945* (New York, 1997), 352-53. An excellent analysis of this issue is Gerald F. Linderman, *The World Within War. America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York, 1997), 118-32. See also: Stephen G. Fritz, *Endkampf: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington, Kentucky, 2004), 73-74; Grady P. Arrington, *Infantryman at the Front* (New York, 1959), 165-66; Justin Michael Harris, "American Soldiers and POW Killing in the European Theater of World War II," M.A. thesis, Texas State University, 2009, 13-22

⁵⁹ Ackermann, *Himmler als Ideologe*, 153.

⁶⁰ "Warum sind sie uns nicht gewachsen?," *Politische Wochenschau*, December 6, 1944. For the American soldier, Germans and Japanese represented a roughly similar duality. See James J. Weingartner, "War Against Subhumans: Comparisons between the German War Against the Soviet Union and the American War Against Japan, 1941-1945," *The Historian* (Spring 1996), 557-73.