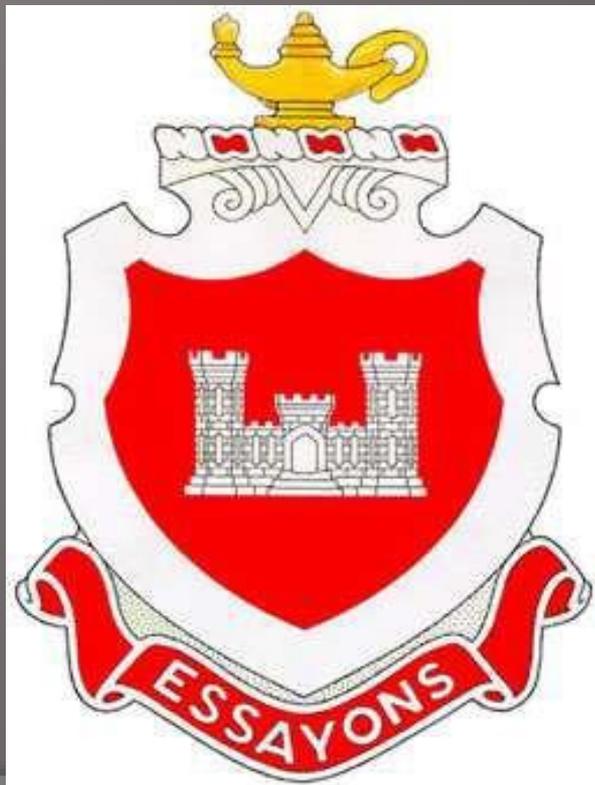


Unclassified

# Officer Professional Development

# BATTLE OF THE BULGE



**Dr. David J. Ulbrich**  
**Former USAES Historian,**  
**2011-2013**

# AGENDA

1. **Conduct OPD on Battle of the Bulge focusing on the 291<sup>st</sup> Engineers and using battle analysis methodology**
2. **Define the Subject**
3. **Set the Stage**
4. **Describe the Battle of the Bulge**
5. **Draw Lessons and Insights**

# DEFINE THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

**WHEN:** 16 December 1944 – 15 January 1945

**WHERE:** Ardennes Forest on border between  
Belgium and Germany

**WHO:**

U.S. Army: 4 Divisions and several Engineer  
Combat Battalions totaling 70,000+ Soldiers  
vs.

German Army: 25 divisions totalling 200,000+  
Soldiers and 2,000 tanks

# SOURCES

## Books:

**Janice Giles, *The Damned Engineers***

Janice Giles, ed., *The GI Journal of SGT Giles*

**David Pergrin and Eric Hammel, *First Across the Rhine: The 291<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion in Belgium, France, and Germany***

Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*

Alfred M. Beck, et al., *The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Germany*

John S.D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods: The Battle of the Bulge*

Peter Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Combat in the World War, Korea, and Vietnam*

# SET STAGE: STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

June 1944-December 1944



**ALLIED Objectives:**  
Land in Europe, defeat and drive German forces back to Germany, and win the war

**GERMAN Objectives:**  
Fight delaying actions and regroup for a stand at the German border



# German Plan of Attack



# TACTICAL SITUATION

mid-December 1944

**Weather:** blizzard, wind chill below zero



# AMERICAN Objectives in Ardennes: Rest/refit in quiet section during winter



## Terrain:

Tree-covered hills &  
ridges 800 feet high

Valleys and streams

Villages at crossroads



**SET THE STAGE:**  
**Compare the Forces**

**Size & Composition**

# US Army Engineer units

1111st EN CBT GP

northern shoulder

**291<sup>st</sup> ECB**

**51<sup>st</sup> ECB**

299<sup>th</sup> ECB

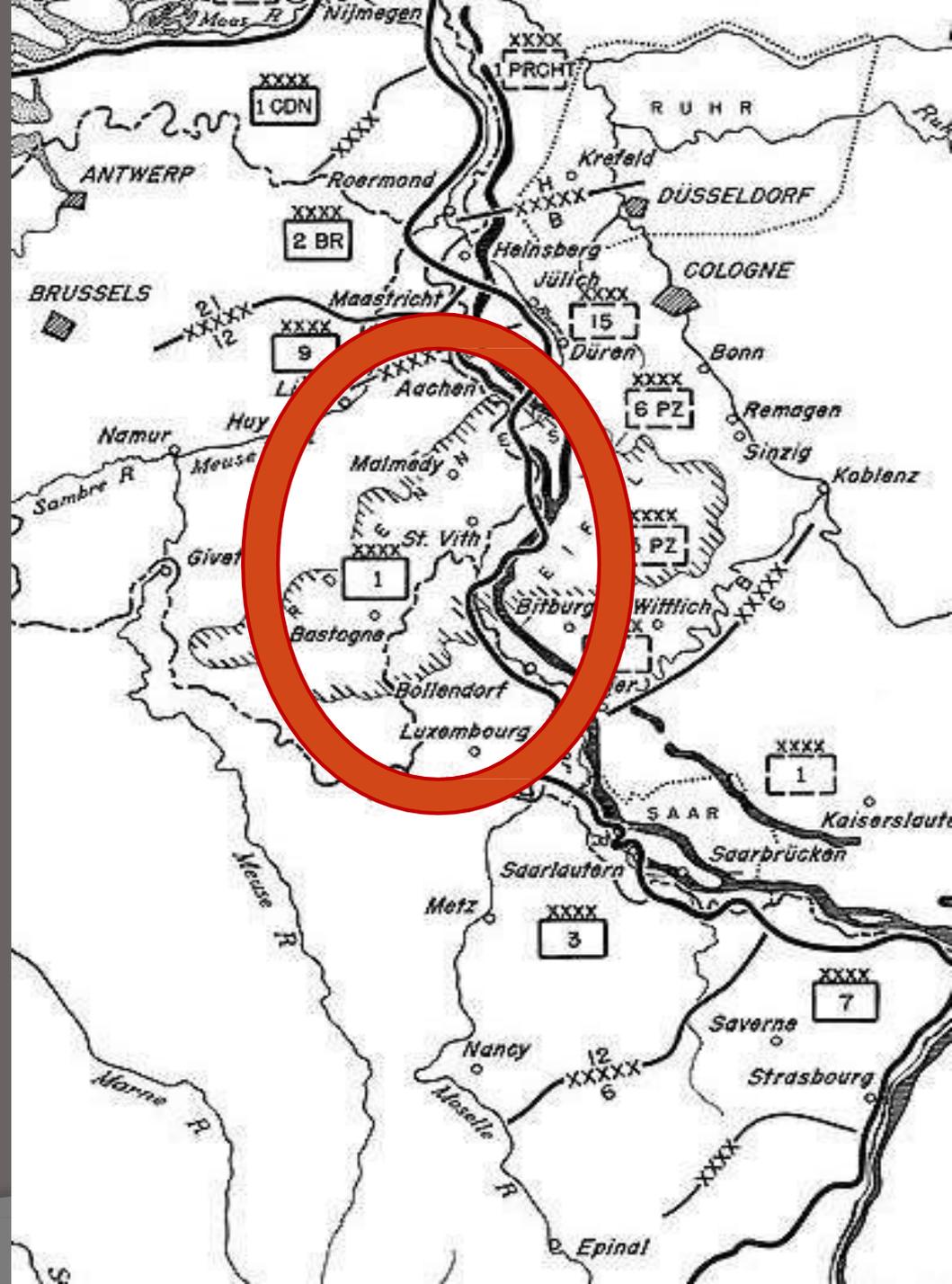
44<sup>th</sup> ECB – Wiltz

35<sup>th</sup> ECB – Bastogne

158<sup>th</sup> ECB – Bastogne

81<sup>st</sup> ECB – St. Vith

Several other battalions  
as division assets



# GERMAN FORCES (northern shoulder)

6<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army (12 divisions & 80,000+ men)

including **Kampfgruppe Peiper** (5,800 men and 100 tanks, such as King Tiger II below )



# SET THE STAGE:

## Compare the Forces

Size & Composition

Technology

Logistics

C3

Intelligence

Doctrine and Training

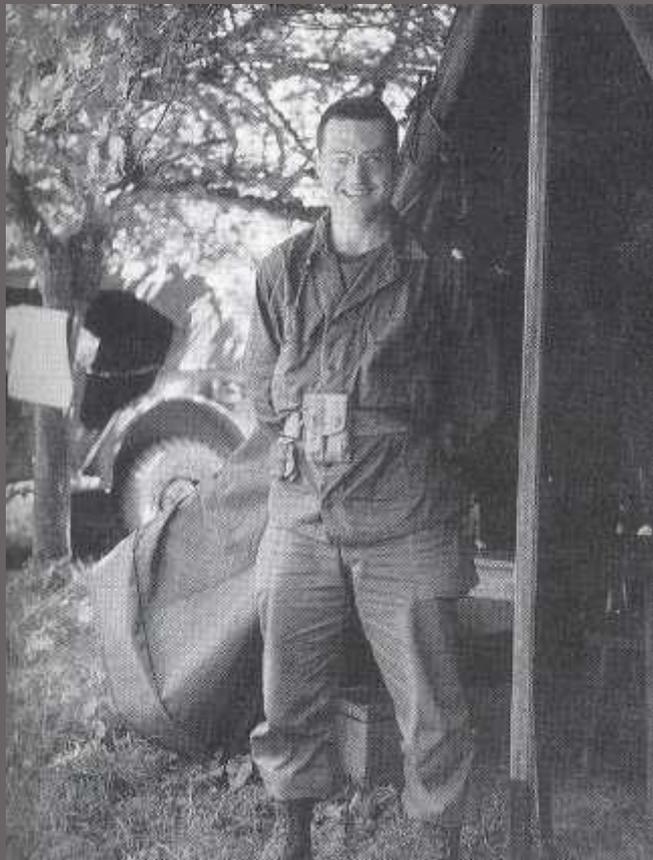
Condition and Morale

Leadership

# LEADERSHIP: OPPOSING COMMANDERS

**LTC DAVID PERGRIN**

CDR, 291<sup>st</sup> Engineer  
Combat Battalion



**LTC JOACHIM PEIPER**

CDR, *Waffen SS*  
*Kampfgruppe*





# Delaying Actions against the German Onslaught (painting of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division)

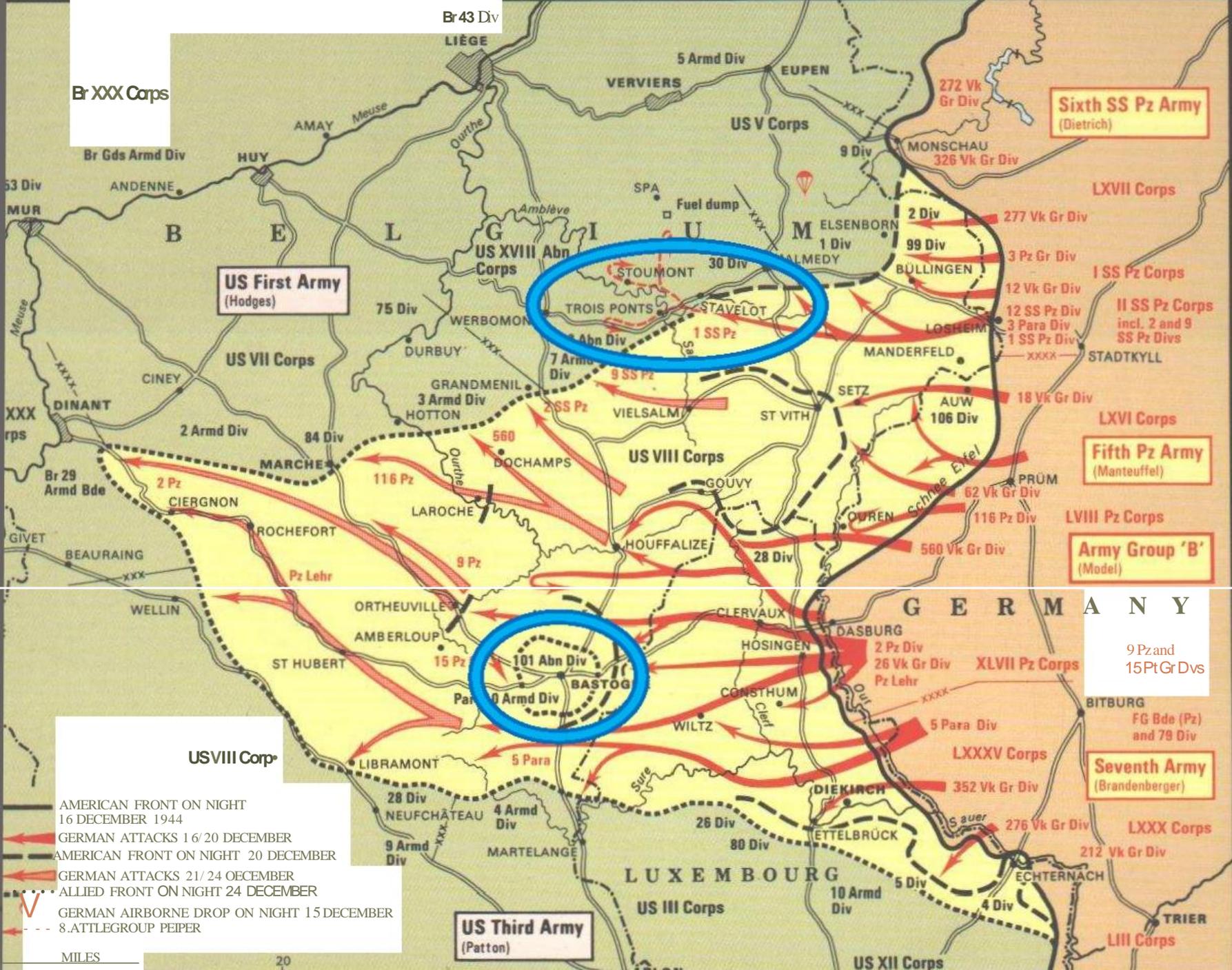


# Engineers & Counter-mobility



Br 43 Div

Br XXX Corps



**US First Army**  
(Hodges)

**US Third Army**  
(Patton)

**US VIII Corp**

**Sixth SS Pz Army**  
(Dietrich)

**Fifth Pz Army**  
(Manteuffel)

**Army Group 'B'**  
(Model)

**Seventh Army**  
(Brandenberger)

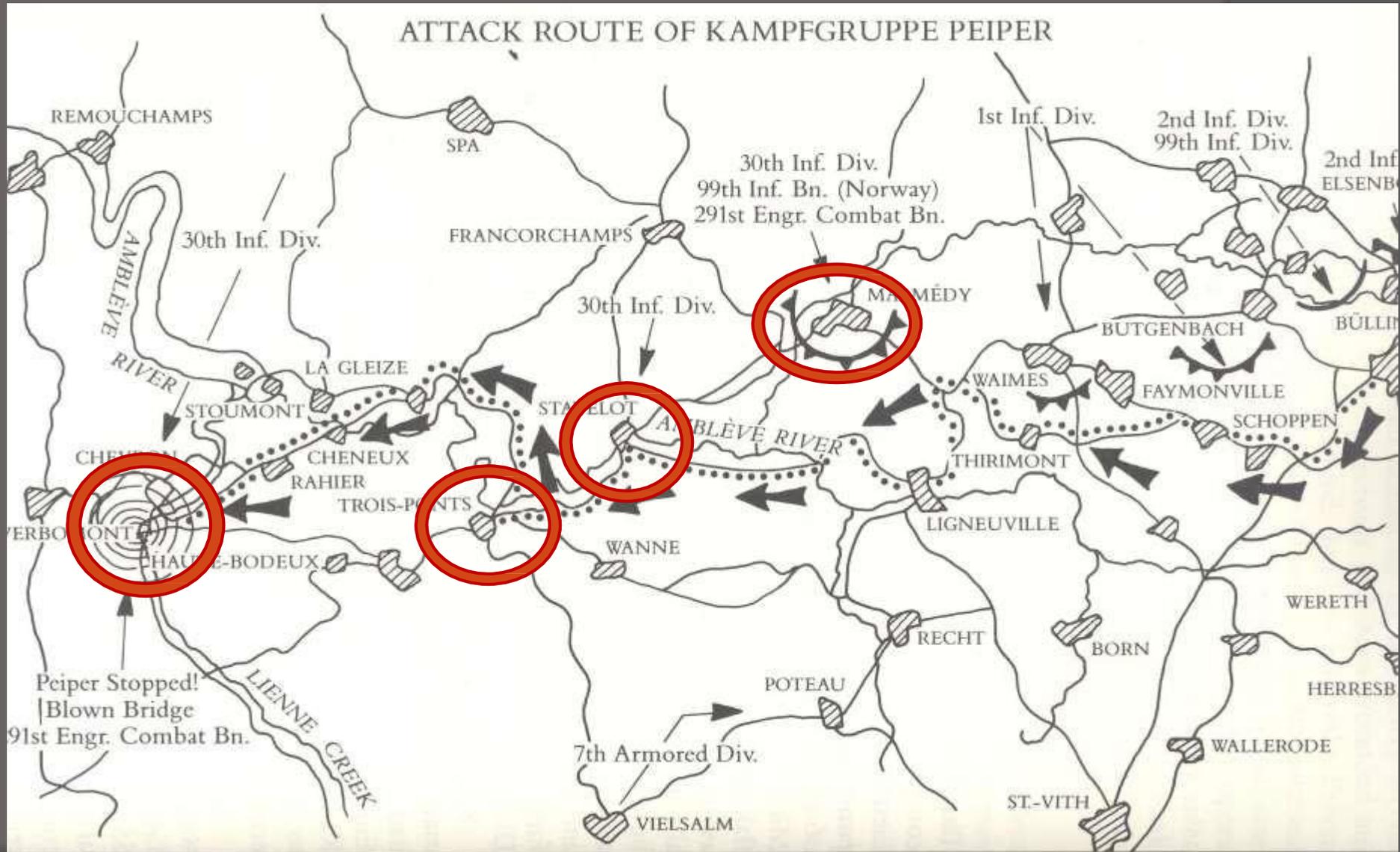
9 Pz and  
15 Pt Gr Dvs

- AMERICAN FRONT ON NIGHT 16 DECEMBER 1944
- GERMAN ATTACKS 16/20 DECEMBER
- AMERICAN FRONT ON NIGHT 20 DECEMBER
- GERMAN ATTACKS 21/24 DECEMBER
- ALLIED FRONT ON NIGHT 24 DECEMBER
- GERMAN AIRBORNE DROP ON NIGHT 15 DECEMBER
- 8. ATTLIEGROUP PEIPER

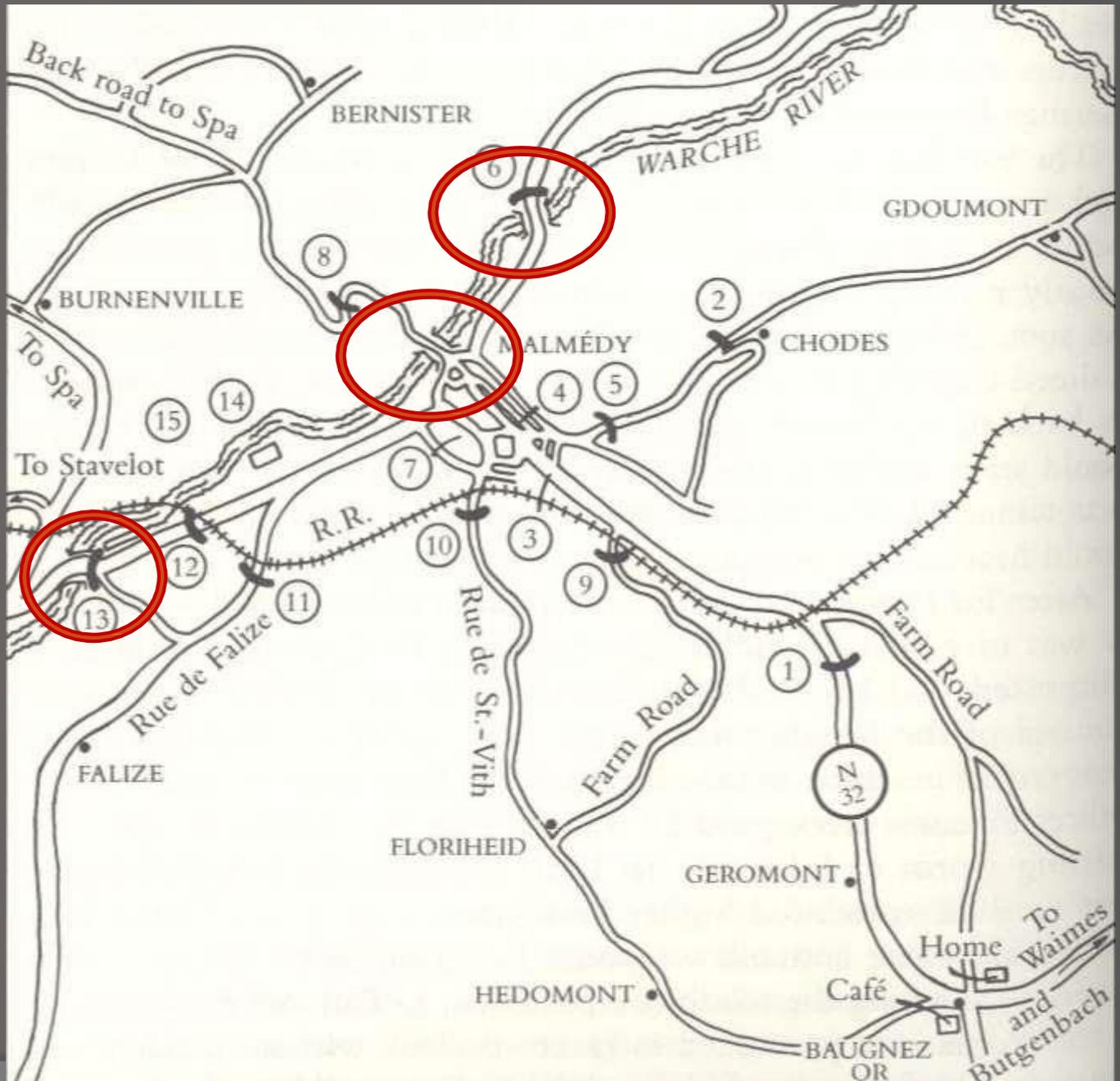
MILES

20

# Area of Operations of the 291<sup>st</sup> ECB and 51<sup>st</sup> ECB



**291<sup>st</sup>'s  
defenses  
around  
Malmédy**

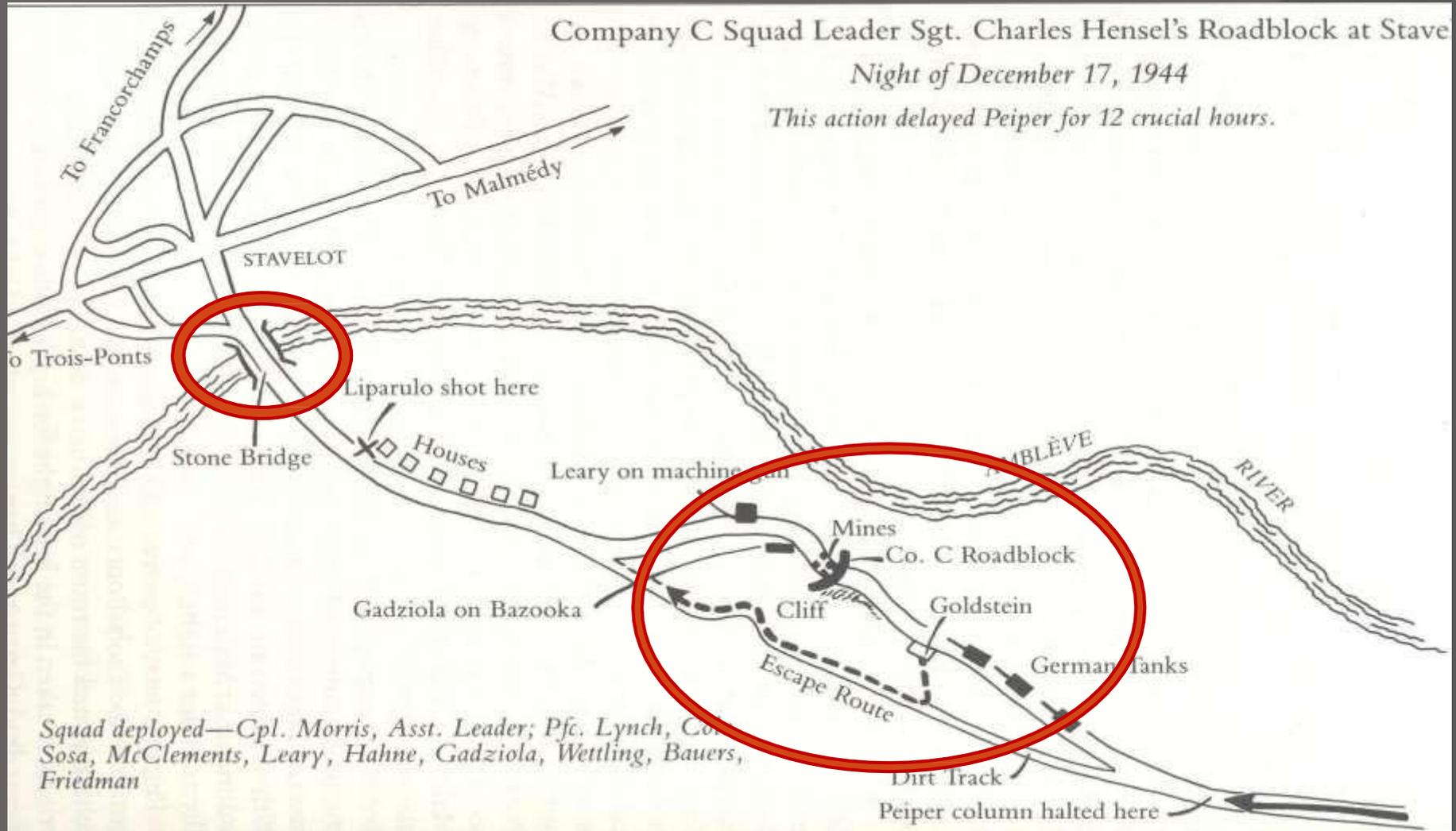


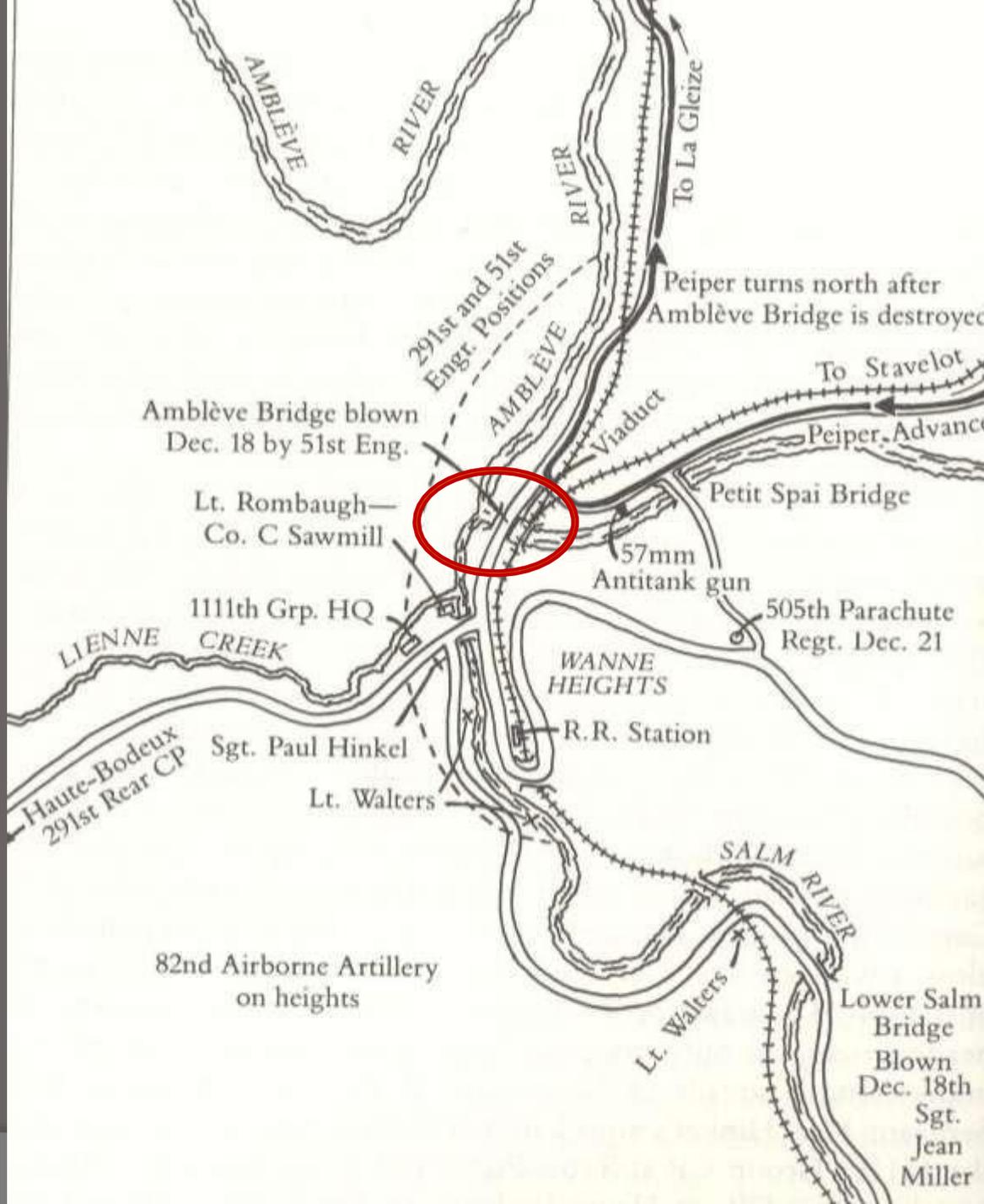
# 291<sup>st</sup>'s big bluff at Stavelot

Company C Squad Leader Sgt. Charles Hensel's Roadblock at Stave

Night of December 17, 1944

*This action delayed Peiper for 12 crucial hours.*

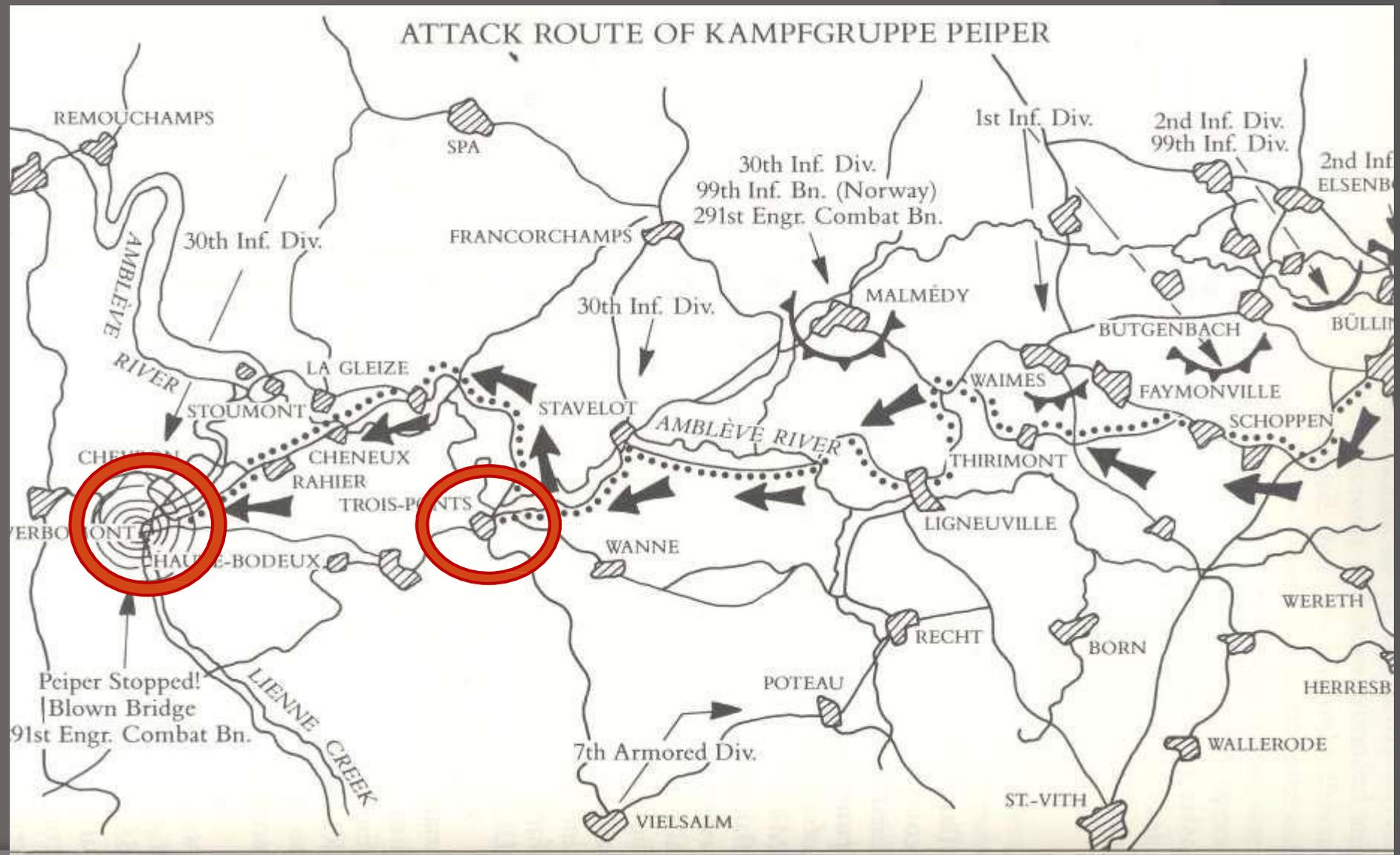




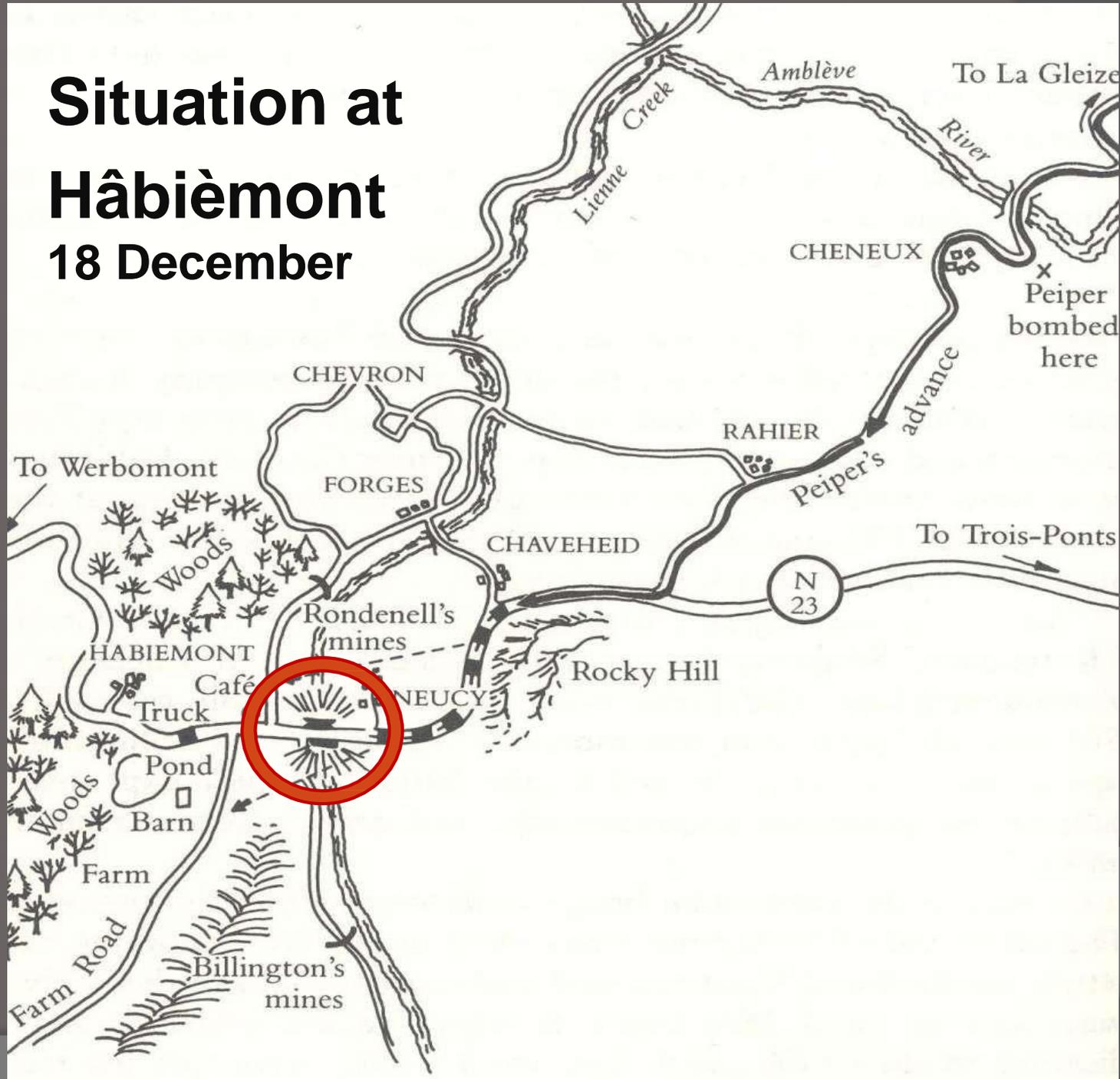
# TROIS PONT

291<sup>st</sup> and  
51<sup>st</sup>  
blow the  
Ambleve  
bridge on  
18  
December

# Area of Operations of the 291<sup>st</sup> ECB and 51<sup>st</sup> ECB



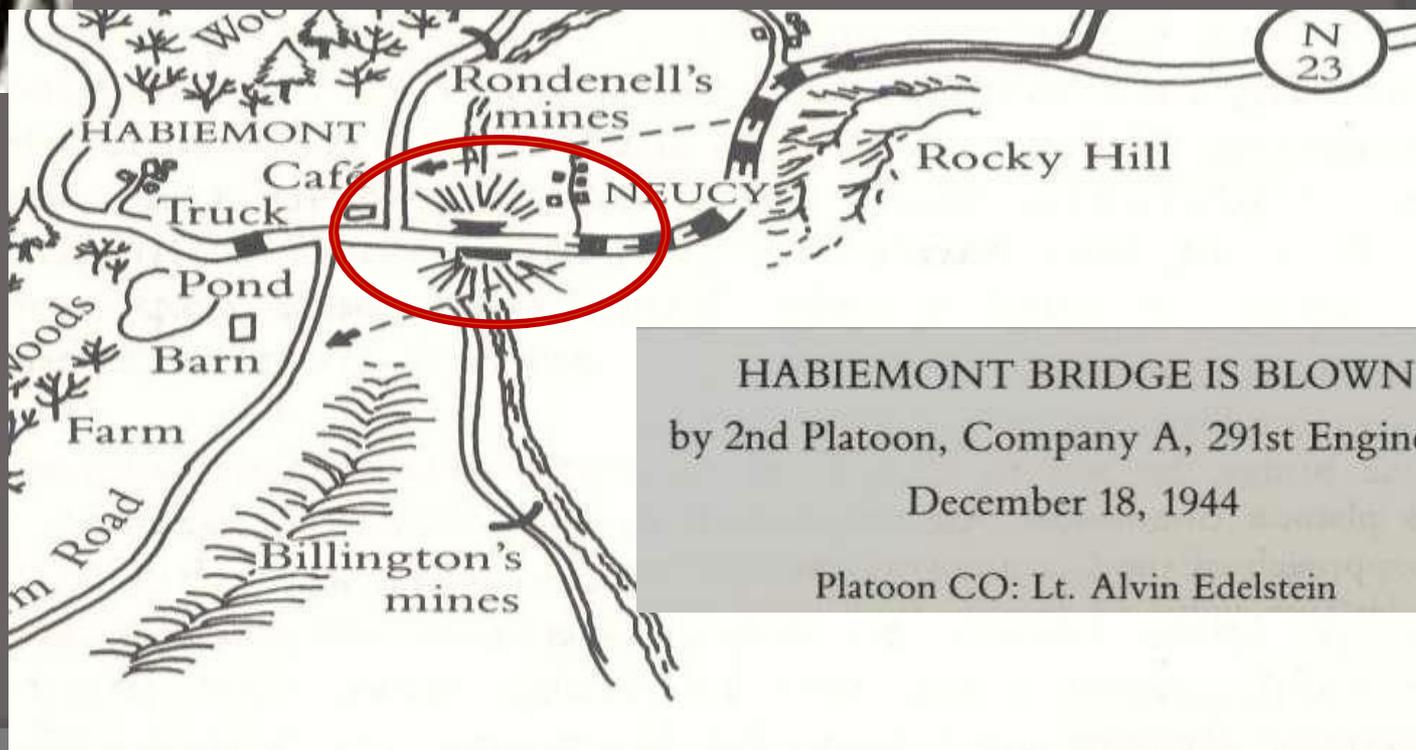
# Situation at Hâbièmont 18 December





When the 291<sup>st</sup> Engineers blew a bridge in front of him at Hâbièmont, LTC Joachim Peiper...

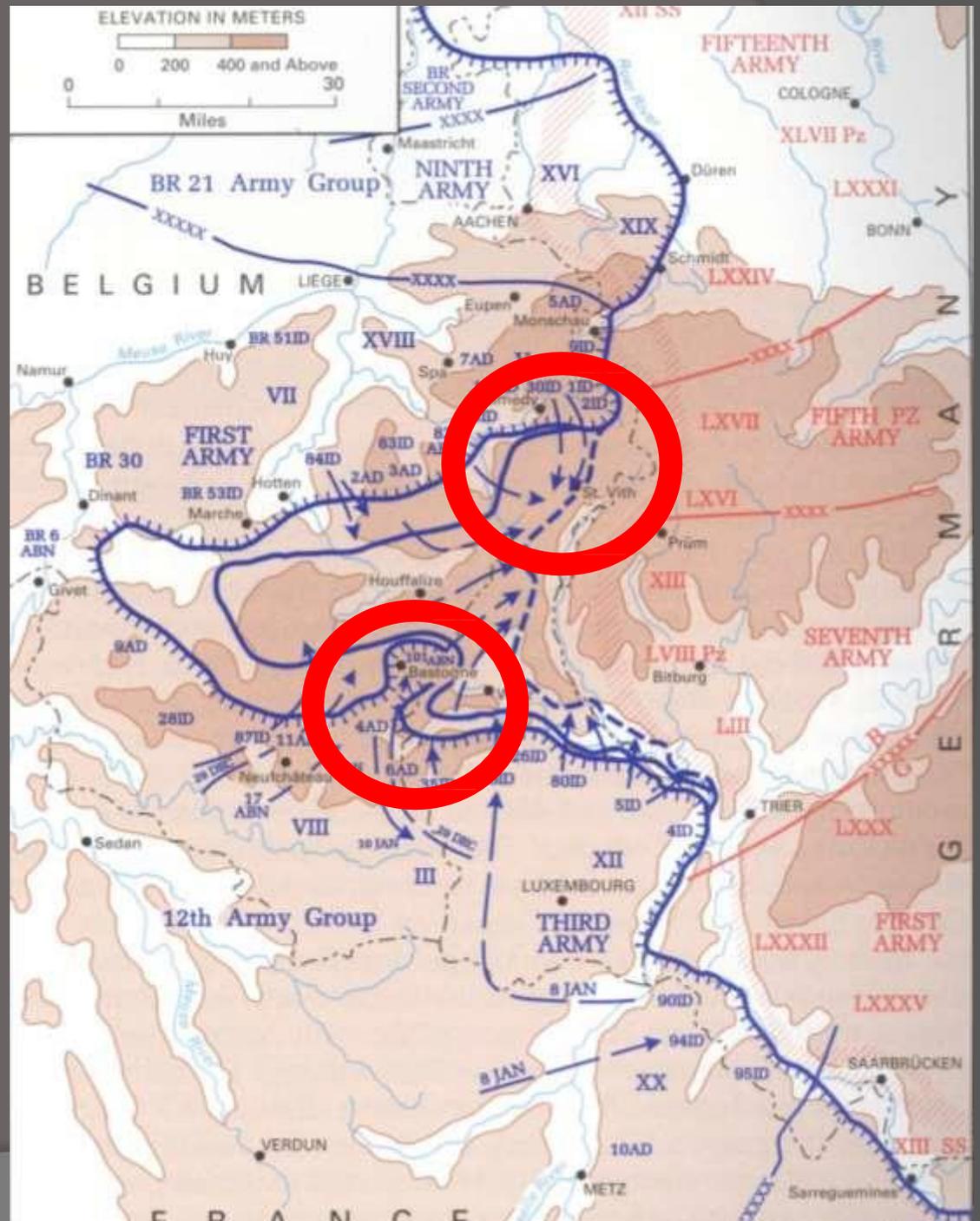
*“could only sit helplessly, pound his knee and swear, ‘The damned engineers! The damned engineers!’”*

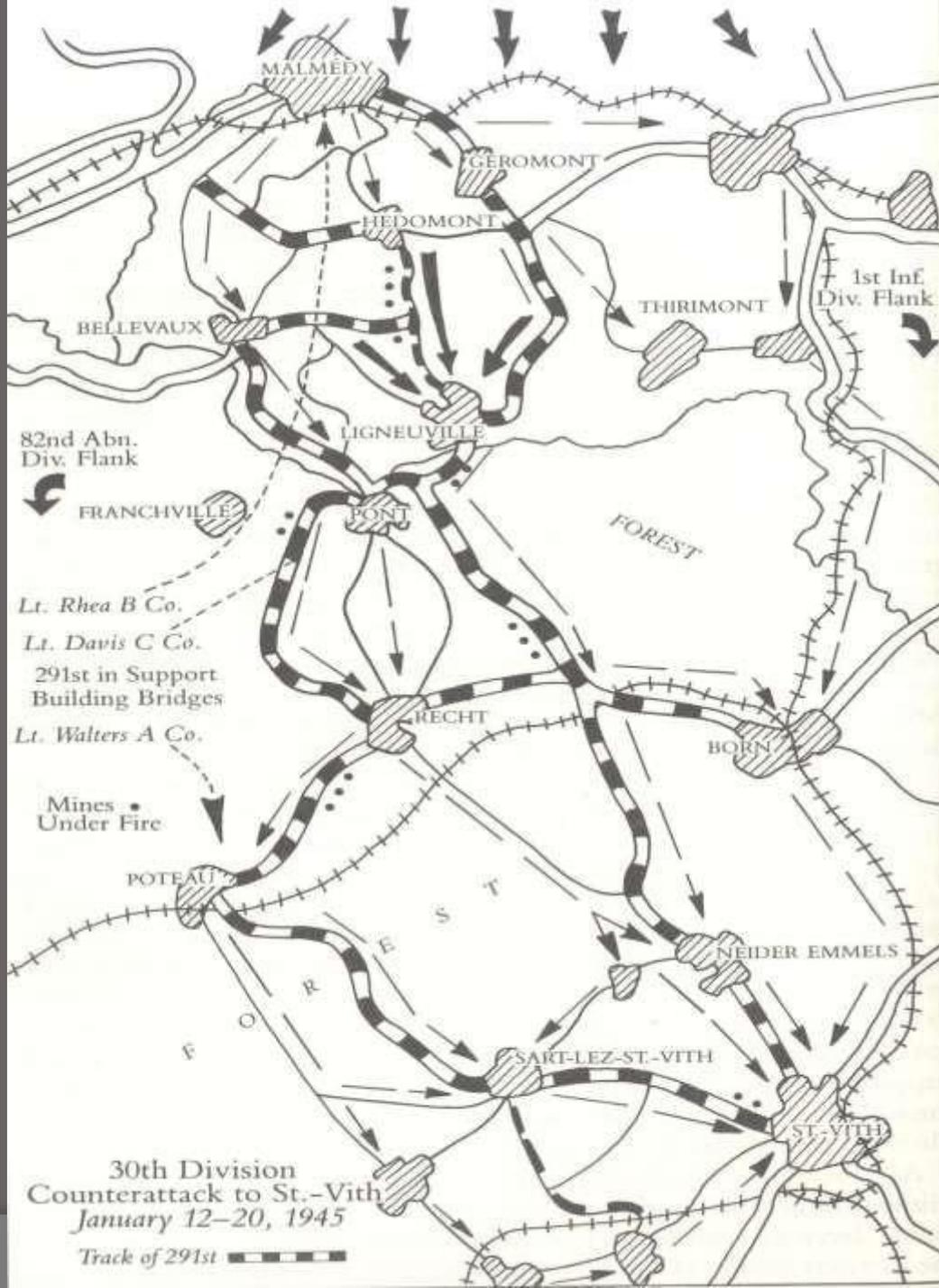


HABIEMONT BRIDGE IS BLOWN  
by 2nd Platoon, Company A, 291st Engineers  
December 18, 1944  
Platoon CO: Lt. Alvin Edelstein

# American Counter-attack

26 Dec 44  
-15 Jan 45





**291<sup>st</sup>  
efforts in  
American  
counter-  
attack**

# Engineers & Mobility





**Engineers of the 307<sup>th</sup> use bulldozer to push an abandoned German vehicle from snow-covered forest road.**

# LESSONS LEARNED & INSIGHTS GLEANED

WHO WON?

WHO LOST?

## WHY?

Principles of War

Intelligence Preparation of Battlefield

Engineer battlefield functions

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