

21 Panzer Division

Normandie Frankreich June 1944 (D-Day)

Don Knight

21st Panzer comprised the following when committed to action: 4 PzKpfw II, 117 PzKpfw IV, 12 Flakpanzer 38(t), 2 Panzerbefehlswagen, 10 Sturmgeschütz

For the first day of the Allied landings 21st Panzer operated alone. Hampered by enemy air attacks, it managed to find and engage British Paratroop forces at Ranville. The division gave the British a hard fight until it received orders to withdraw in the late morning. Ordered to check the British advance on Caen in the evening the Germans succeeded in reaching the coast and drove a wedge between the British 3rd Infantry Division and the 3rd Canadian Division.

Rommel believed that the invasion needed to be stopped on the beaches, von Rundstedt, along with Heinz Guderian disagreed. Hitler vacillated and placed them in the middle, far enough to be useless to Rommel, not far enough for von Rundstedt. As a result of this 21st Panzer was placed near Caen, in the area of the British landings. The SS units that were supposed to support the division could not be released as they were under Hitler's direct command.

Rommel had been away from the front during the first days of the invasion but arrived back and assumed command on 9 June. The division was grouped with two SS units under the command of Sepp Dietrich, which were to push Northwest to retake Bayeux, but this plan was abandoned when the divisional staff were killed in a bombing raid.

The division continued to fight as part of the front throughout June and July. Between 6 June and 8 July, 21st Panzer reported the loss of 54 PzKpfw IV, with 17 PzKpfw IV arriving as replacements. On 3 July a German report stated the following number of enemy tanks destroyed by 21st Panzer according to weapon used: Pz: 37, Sturmgeschütz: 15, Mot. Pak & Flak: 41, Artillery: 3, Infantry: 5. Total 101. To 27 July German tank losses continued in similar numbers.

Between 6 June and 7 August, British reports based on captured vehicles suggested that about half of German tanks killed were by armor-piercing shot, and the rest by a roughly equal combination of: infantry anti tank weapons, artillery, aircraft rockets or cannon, abandoned/destroyed by crew.

The last major action the 21st Panzer took part in on the Western front was the stubborn resistance it gave the Guards Armoured Division during Operation

Bluecoat, on 1 August 1944. The surviving forces of the 21st Panzer were then almost entirely lost in the Falaise Pocket. The remnants of the unit then merged 16th Luftwaffe Field Division. Of the 223 tanks of the 21st and other Divisions captured in the area by British forces between 8-31 August, about three quarters were abandoned/destroyed by their crew.

In September 1944 the unit was again reformed by expanding the 112th Panzer Brigade with the 100th Panzer Regiment, which had been equipped with two companies of Panther tank

s and two companies of PzKpfw IV's. The much reduced division took part in the retreat to the German border and fought notable defensive battles in Epinel, Nancy, Metz and the Saar area. It was withdrawn to refit in Kaiserslautern.

In December, Rundstedt decided not to commit the 21st to offensive actions in Operation Wacht am Rhein (Battle of the Bulge), leaving it to provide flank cover, which probably saved it from total destruction. On 29 December, 21st Panzer reported the following strength: 72 PzKpfw IV, 38 PzKpfw V, 8 Flakpanzer IV.

Units of Note: 21st Panzer Division (June 1944)

(for FOW unit history only)

Commander: GeneralMajor Edgar Feuchtinger

- 125 Panzer Grenadier Regiment (Major Hans von Luck)
- 200 Sturmgeschutz Abt (Major Becker)
- 22 Pzr Regiment Abt. 4 Ko. (Oberleutnant Hoffman)

KampfGruppe (Oberstleutnant Ritter)

This (1500 point) force is an Adhoc (most likely fictional but may have existed in the fog of war) or KampfGruppe unit formed from units of the 125 Pzr. Grenadier Regiment attached to a battery from the 200 StuG Abt. Most likely commanded by a Hauptman or Oberstleutnant.. This type of unit would be used for a flanking, delay or stop gap reserve action. Elements from the Divisional support 22 Panzer Regiment were used for breakthrough and flanking support.

Note on Kampfgruppe Luck:

The Kampfgruppe was stationed east of the Orne on D-Day, with one company actually conducting an anti-parachute exercise when the landings started. This availed them none, however, as this company was only armed with blank ammunition! Von Luck quickly mobilized his Kampfgruppe and soon counterattacked against the British-Canadian 6th Airborne Division near Ranville – being the first major German formation to do so. Contrary to his claims however, he was not involved in the battle for Pegasus Bridge, though elements of his Panzergrenadier-Regiment 125 were involved, but actually as part of Kampfgruppe Oppeln. Von Luck spent the entire campaign east of the Orne and was instrumental in halting the Operation ‘Goodwood’ offensive in July at Bourguébus Ridge.

Picture below: General Rommel inspecting a GW H39 7.5cm PAK 40 and crew. France



1 © 2000-2001 by the author

Picture below: General Rommel inspecting a 10.5 cm IFH GW H39 and crew.



Information, Footnotes and Histories:

Photographs from BundesArchives

History excerpts: Wikipedia, Battlefield Miniatures, www.feldgrau.com,

www.axishistory.com and www.spearhead1944.com and

www.fireandfury.com/orbats/late21pz.pdf

Books: Battlefront Miniatures codex's, The Essential Vehicle Identification Guide:

PanzerGrenadier Divisions 1939-1945 by Chris Bishop, Amber Books Ltd. (August 2007)

Editors Note: Parts of the original script have been adjusted for article flow purposes.

