



101. Schwere SS-Panzerabteilung

2. Kompanie

15 February 1944- Due to the hospitalization of Heinz Kling, legendary tank commander Oberstürmführer Michael Wittmann was elevated to the rank of commander of the 2. Kompanie of the schwere (heavy) Panzer Abteilung 101, shortly after having received the Oakleaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross from Führer himself. The Bavarian-born son of a farmer had come a long way at this point in just 7 short years since his acceptance into the SS-Verfügungstruppe, which would later come to be known as the Waffen-SS.



7 June 1944- Due to the Allied landings in Normandy, Wittmann's 2. Kompanie was given orders to advance to the front from their base via Paris. The route to Normandy was not a safe one by any means, but the numerous air attacks the Tigers faced turned out to be somewhat of a blessing in disguise for Wittmann when Balthasar 'Bobby' Woll's Tiger was crippled. Woll



was one of Wittmann's greatest friends, serving as best man in Wittmann's wedding, and also having originally been Wittmann's gunner before being promoted to Unterscharführer and given his own Tiger. Having now lost his own vehicle, Woll found himself back in the gunner seat of Wittmann's Tiger during the early Normandy campaign. By the time that the 2. Kompanie had reached the outskirts

of the village of Villers-Bocage, he had left at his disposal only 6 serviceable Tigers. The lack of support for Wittmann would lead to what is described as one of the most famous days in armored warfare.

13 June 1944- At around 0800 hours, the Battle of Villers-Bocage kicked off with Oberstürmführer Wittmann facing off against British 7th Armored Division (consisting of the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars, 4th County of London Yeomanry "Sharpshooters", 5th RHA, The Queen's Royal Regiment, The Rifle Brigade, and the 26th Anti-Tank Battery), having only the Tigers of SS Unterstürmführer Hantusch, SS-Unterscharführer Stief and Sowa, and SS-Oberseharführer Brandt and Löttsch at his disposal for the fight. The same day, Wittmann recollected the events of the morning, beginning from his first sighting of the enemy from his

spot at Point 213: "I was in my command post and had given no thought to the idea that the enemy might appear suddenly. I had sent one of my officers to establish contact with a unit deployed up front and was waiting for him to return with fresh reports. Then a man suddenly came into my command post and declared, 'Obersturmführer, tanks are driving past outside. They're a peculiar round shape and I don't think they're German.' I immediately went outside and saw tanks rolling past about 150 to 200 meters distant. They were English and American types. At the same time I saw that the tanks were accompanied by armored troop carriers. It was an entire armored regiment. This armored regiment had taken me by surprise. Yes, I must say that the decision was a very, very difficult one. Never before had I been so impressed by the strength of the enemy as I was by those tanks rolling by; but I knew that it absolutely had to be and I decided to strike out into the enemy." Wittmann ran to his Tiger and to his men who were unaware of the threat. Wittmann roused SS-Rottenführer Lau and Unterscharführer Stief, who got the Tiger to move about 20 meters before they figured out that the motor of that particular Tiger was defective. Wittmann had already made that diagnosis based on the sound of the engine and leapt from that Tiger to



that of Unterscharführer Sowa. Wittmann recalls his attack: "I had no time to assemble my company; instead I had to act quickly, as I had to assume that the enemy had already spotted me and would destroy me where I stood. I set off with one tank and passed the order to the others not to retreat a single step, but to hold their ground. Drove up to the column and surprised the English as much as they had me." SS-Unterscharführer Walter Müller piloted Wittmann's tank down the column expertly as Sturmman Boldt loaded the Tiger faster than he had ever loaded before while Wittmann himself

manned the MG34 mounted in his cupola. Every shot from Wittmann's moving Tiger was a direct hit. The shells of the English Cromwells bounced off the Tiger's frontal armor even at close range. Finally, after a flurry of action up and down the English lines, an Anti-Tank gun managed to cripple Wittmann's Tiger, causing him to have to abandon it and make his way to the command post of the Panzer-Lehr Division in Orbois. "I was able to take out twenty-one tanks, as well as the armored troop carriers. I don't know how many, that remains to be determined." The one thing that was for certain was that Michael Wittmann had near single-handedly halted the British advance.

22 June 1944- The events that transpired at Villers-Bocage led to Wittmann being promoted to the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer and receiving the Swords to his Knight's Cross and Oakleaves, again personally receiving the honor from the Führer. Wittmann's rise continued following the success at Villers-Bocage. He found himself thrust into the spotlight of the

propaganda and was offered an instructor's position teaching at the Panzer training school in Paderborn. Rather than accept this, he opted to return to the front after having spent a brief period of time with his family.

10 July 1944- SS-Obersturmbannführer Heinz ("Hein") von Westernhagen sustained serious head injuries and was unable to continue as battalion commander of the 101st SS Panzer Battalion, leaving SS-Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann as natural successor. Wittmann handed over the reins as commander of 2. Kompanie to SS-Obersturmführer Helmut "Bubi" Wendorff and took over his new command Tiger, that of the battalion commander von Westernhagen, Nr. 007. This newly assigned command vehicle would be Wittmann's last Tiger.

8 August 1944- Allies launch another heavy attack with the intent of sealing off the pocket around Falaise, termed Operation

"Totalize". Wittmann and his company were attached at this time to the 12.SS Pz. Gren. Division 'Hitlerjugend', which was commanded by the legendary Kurt "Panzer" Meyer. Wittmann had elected to participate in the fight, despite having lost Bobby Woll to medical leave due to sustaining a head injury. This no doubt contributed to the grave feeling of

foreboding that Wittmann appeared to exhibit on that fateful day, according to reports of his colleagues. Despite this hesitance, Wittmann felt he had to follow newly-appointed commander of the 3. Kompanie SS-Hauptsturmführer Franz Heurich into battle due to his lack of battlefield experience. Some of Wittmann's last uttered words were: "I must go with them." The actual death of Wittmann has become something of World War II myth, with several



theories and nations laying claim to having been skilled enough to best the legendary tank ace. What is accepted as fact is that Wittmann's Tiger left out at around 1230 hours to launch an attack on Cintheaux (on N158 between Caen and Falaise) and shortly encountered several Sherman tanks of the 4th Canadian Armored Division who were also advancing towards that point. Wittmann's tank knocked out several of the Shermans. At 1247 hours, Wittmann's Tiger sustained an attack that disabled the track mechanism and set it alight. At 1255 hours, SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Höflinger of 2. Kompanie saw Wittmann's Tiger stationary, but still intact. At this time, neither Höflinger nor medical officer SS-



Hauptsturmführer Dr. Wolfgang Rabe were able to reach the tank of Wittmann and were forced to retreat away. It was some time after that the turret of Wittmann's 007 Tiger was found separated from the hull. Canadians claimed that Wittmann was surrounded by Shermans of the 4th Armor and taken out. Polish 1st Armored Division also claimed to have knocked out Wittmann, while others speculate he was victim to an Allied airborne assault. The last theory emerged in 2006 when a British tabloid published that then 21 year old Firefly gunner Joe Ekins of the 1st Northants Yeomanry stated that he gunned down the tank of Wittmann, having not even realized it until after the battle was well over. All of these hypotheses are heavily disputed, as many feel that the way in which the turret was blown from the hull that there had to have been some sort of internal explosion in the Tiger, rather than simply being hit by the enemy. The truth regarding his death may never be known, but what is certain is that less than an hour into the afternoon, Germany's beloved "Michel" was pronounced missing in action. Wittmann career numbers are hotly debated, but stand from one source as being 132 anti-tank guns and heavy artillery pieces, 138 enemy tanks, and hundreds of other light vehicles. It also bears mention that most of these numbers were achieved under the helm of a Sturmgeschütz-III, which makes one wonder what he would have achieved had the Tiger tank been developed earlier in the war.



References:

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WAFFEN-SS
EINTRITT NACH VOLLENDETEM 17. LEBENSJAHR