

TANKS IN THE HEDGEROWS

**The Battle for Villers-Bocage
Normandy, June 1944**



WRITTEN AND
DESIGNED

by

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THE BATTLE FOR VILLERS-BOCAGE



THE PREAMBLE

This study was written primarily to satisfy my own understanding of this battle between British and German forces in the summer of 1944. Much of the literature on Villers-Bocage contradict each other. A few are outright hagiographies of the German SS officer, Wittmann. Others contain embarrassing mistakes and some are outrageously erroneous. That is not to say that the pages that follow are factually error-free. Certainly, I have tried to assemble the best possible picture of what happened during that tumultuous day in June, but there are tracts of data that are still missing. Nevertheless, a few volumes were of tremendous help, including Colonel Forty's *Villers Bocage. Battle Zone Normandy* and *Villers-Bocage: Through the Lens*. I was am also grateful to Lt. Charles Pearce who wrote a very honest letter in the Sharpshooter's Newsletter in 2002, explaining his role in the battle.

Research for this book was accomplished using several primary and secondary sources. Although I have attempted to trace together this confusing battle with the best possible clarity and analysis, there is always the possibility that I might have gone off the mark in some areas. If you should have any new information or wish to correct anything, don't hesitate to contact me.

After having finished this study, I can claim to understand this battle better than before. I hope it helps you in the same way.

Akhil Kadidal
March 2011

E-MAIL

Cover Photo: A Sherman from the Royal Marine Support Group leads two Centaurs down a Norman road during D-Day. (Imperial War Museum)

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CONTENTS

BITTER FIGHTING ON D-DAY	2
THE WEARY DESERT RATS	7
FATEFUL ENCOUNTER	10
REGROUPING IN THE RUBBLE	22
THE AFTERNOON SORTIE	26
BITTER FIGHTING UNTIL THE END	32
BATTLE OF THE "BOX"	35
ORDERS OF BATTLE	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

THE BATTLE FOR VILLERS-BOCAGE

The long column of British tanks and light armor crept up along the gently slanting Norman highway under the bright early-morning sun and came to a stop by the side of the highway. Nearby, barely two hundred yards away, sheltered beyond a tall line of trees and hedgerows, the crew of a German Tiger tank gaped in astonishment. Even as they watched, a sea of khaki figures enveloped the highway, smoking insouciantly and brewing up tea. SS *Obersturmführer* (Lieutenant) Michael Wittmann watched breathlessly. True, they had been told to expect a British probe in the area, towards the direction of the strategically-important city of Caen about a dozen miles to the east, but not so quickly and not without warning. And now the British appeared to be relaxing, even settling down for the day.

“They’re acting as if they’d won the war already,” Wittmann’s gunner, Corporal Balthazar “Bobby” Woll said.

Wittmann glared. “We’re going to prove them wrong,” he said. Ordering his company into the attack, he left three Tigers to guard his flanks and thundered onto the highway, guns blazing — beginning one of the most controversial and misunderstood tank actions of the war.



BUNDESARCHIV

EN-ROUTE Tigers from 101st SS Panzer Battalion’s 2nd Company on its way to Normandy. Wittmann’s Tiger (No. 205) is at front.

BITTER FIGHTING ON D-DAY

At the early dusk spray, men from the British 3rd Infantry Division slogged on the soft, sable-like sand of occupied France. The forces landing on this beach, codenamed “Sword” had a critical mission: push on inland and capture as much of enemy territory as possible. To this end, the division’s assault troops was going in with three entire infantry brigades, with eight infantry battalions, and supported by the 27th Independent Armoured Brigade (with three regiments of Sherman DDs), backed by several support units of engineers, commandos and Royal Navy men. It was a formidable force. Each independent armoured brigade had a standard strength of 190 medium tanks and 33 light tanks — In theory enough to match any German Panzer division. Adding to this a combination of engineers and special troops, the 3rd Division became a fearsome formation. And it needed every unit it could get. Its primary order was to overrun the forward German defenses and seize the important , inland city of Caen by nightfall.

Initially all went well. Compared to deadly fighting in the American “Omaha” beach sector and the Canadian “Juno” sector just a few short miles west, the German resistance at Sword was surprisingly short. Much of the German troops in the sector were from the 716th Division, a poorly-equipped, depleted coastal division under a scared-face Major General named Wilhelm Richter. The only serious predicament facing the equipment-laden British troops was how to wade ashore in four feet of churning, cold water, while clinging to ropes running out to the beach while struggling with all their heavy equipment. Still, by 11 a.m., three infantry battalions had assembled inland, past the beach and had set up a divisional headquarters at Hermanville. Now the troops set about trying to get Caen. The KSLI, or otherwise, the King’s own Shropshire Light Infantry, a mouthful for a non-Englishman, led the way, accompanied by several Shermans from the Staffordshire Yeomanry.



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

CONTINENTAL ENDEAVOUR Commandos move past Sword Beach with Sherman Duplex-Drive (DD) tanks of the 27th Armoured Brigade.

Both infantry and the tankers were in good spirits. Most of the Staffordshires had landed properly, better than on exercises, and they had even taken the time to boil hot cocoa on the beach as the infantry assembled. But already, events had started to move beyond the control of the English. On the KSLI flank, the 1st Suffolk Regiment had come up against two major German defensive points named “Morris” and “Hillman” and like a whirlpool, these sucked in more and more resources from the assault force. Even worse, as Lt-Colonel F. J. Maurice of the KSLI discovered, much of the Staffordshire’s tanks had become embroiled in traffic jams on the beach and the infantry was ordered to move on foot with the promise that the rest of the Staffords would arrive soon.

But Morris and Hillman would become vital thorns in the English side. “Morris” only fell at 1 that afternoon; “Hillman” would continue to hold out until the evening, causing heavy casualties to other regiments trailing after KSLI. At Biéville, the KSLI’s luck finally ran out when it came up against self-propelled guns. A pitched battle erupted and just as the German guns pulled out, reinforcements from the German 21st Panzer Division, veterans of North Africa, arrived. By 6 o’ clock, the British advance had stalled. The drive to Caen had been thwarted.

Meantime, on the western beaches, British 50th Northumbrian Division advanced out of “Gold” beach and by nightfall reached the Bayeux-Caen road. Although short of its D-Day objectives the division firmly entrenched in its sector and awaited reinforcements. They entered Bayeux at mid-day on the next day, the 7th, only to discover that the Germans had abandoned it. But progress afterwards was slow and Caen was an ever-present reminder of lost opportunities.

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the commander of the 21st Army Group ordered his men to take the city in a direct assault (June 7-8), which failed miserably. Most of his divisions had inched forward but German resistance was tremendous. The best advance had been by the 50th Northumbrian Division which had pushed on for a mere three miles towards Seulles, Longues and an inland village named Tilly-sur-Seulles. Frustrated at the lack of swift advance, Montgomery came ashore on June 8 and set up his headquarters at the Chateau de Cruelly only to find out the tactical situation was markedly different that he had envisaged.

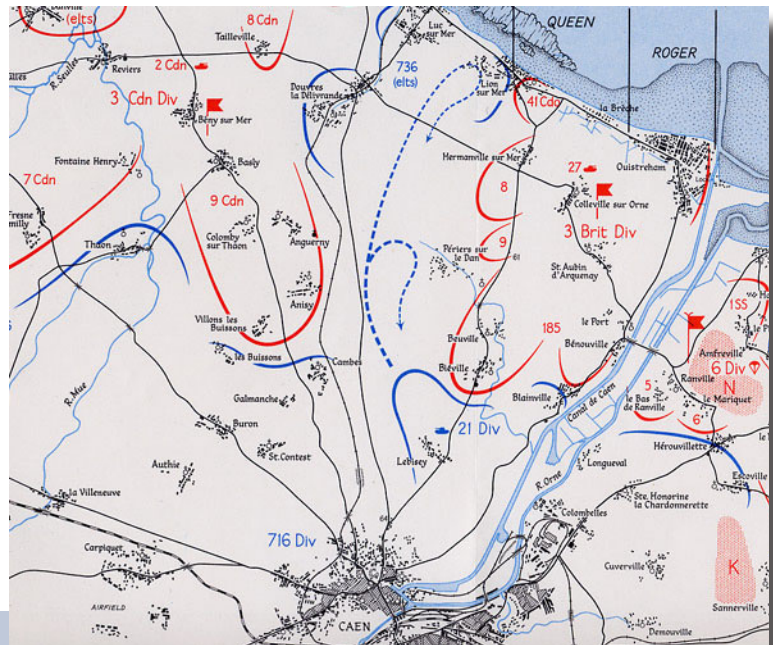
His lead divisions had been in constant contact with the enemy for two days non-stop, and had becoming visibly tired. The prospect of capturing Caen or even breaking southwards seemed to grow more and more remote by the hours. Worse still, the first of the elite German panzer divisions had arrived in the battlefield. They took up positions against the highly-experienced but weak British infantry divisions, who apart from the form of a few armoured brigades, were badly deprived of heavy tank support that could only come from the conventional armoured divisions still bivouacked in England.

The 12th SS “Hitler Jugend” Panzer Division, with as many seasoned veterans as fanatical teenagers within its ranks, occupied positions across from the British I and XXX Corps south of Bayeux. On the east flank, the 21st Panzer had been holding the line despite efforts by the Staffordshire Yeomanry and the 3rd Division to break through. Montgomery quickly grasped that an offensive against these two first-class divisions would spell disaster for his tired troops. Instead, he decided to flank them. Flank them as Field Marshal Erwin Rommel of the Afrika Korps had repeatedly flanked the Eighth Army in North Africa two years ago, until there was no room left

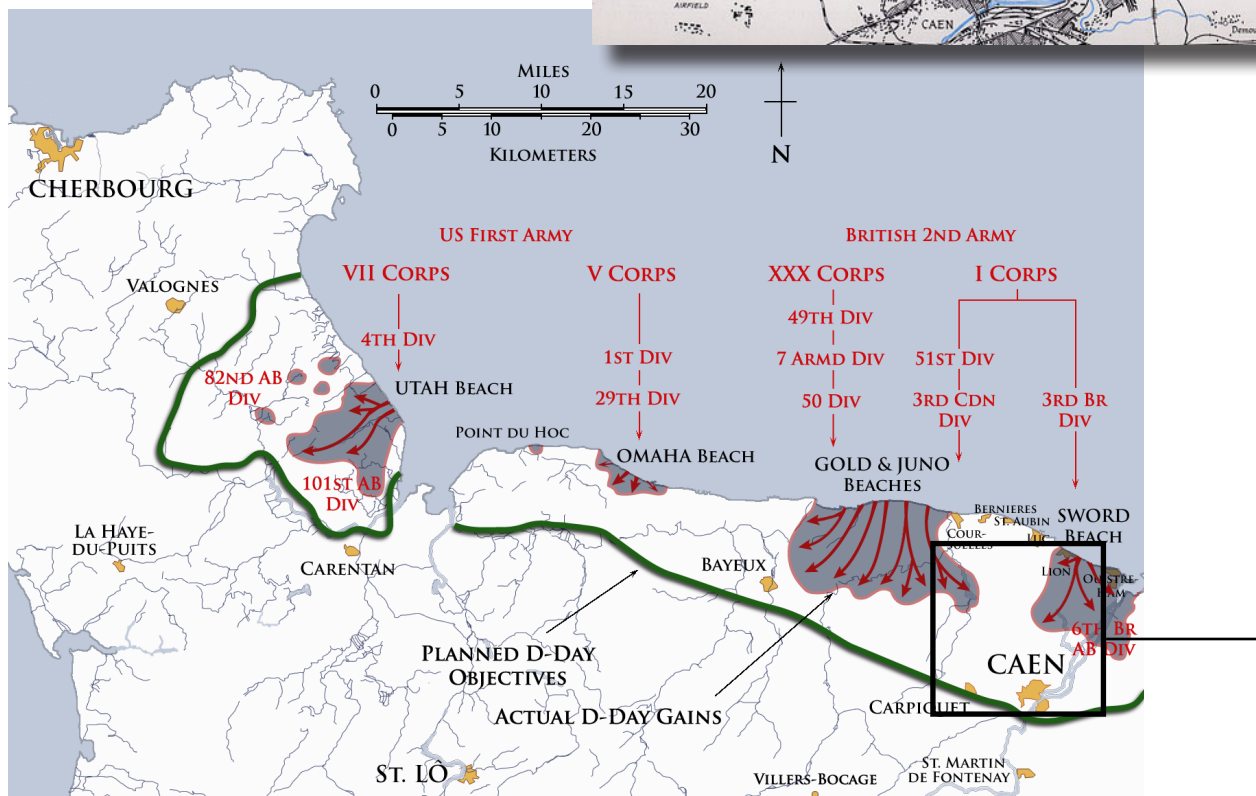
to flank. The narrows of passable desert around the Egyptian town of El Alamein had spelled the end of the flank and the resulting direct assault on Allied troops had been a complete fiasco. Now that the roles had been reversed, he wondering if Rommel, (now in command of Army Group B on the other side of the line) had noticed.

He stated his decision in a letter to the Military Secretary at the War Office on June 8, writing that: "The Germans are doing everything they can to hold on to Caen. I have decided not to have a lot of casualties by butting against the place. So I have ordered the Second Army to keep up a good pressure at and to make its main effort [in a flank] towards Villers-Bocage and Evrecy, and thence southeast towards Falaise."

Much of the German tank opposition at this stage of the fighting had been in the form of the old Panzer Mark IV, albeit upgraded and an even match for Sherman and Cromwell tanks. But in defense, the 75mm cannon-armed Sherman DD's of the Staffordshire Yeomanry had fared better than expected, inflicting notable casualties to the 21st Panzer Division from June 7 to 8th. Consequently, several senior Allied officers wanted the tanks to get on by themselves and forge the lead in a sort of armored *schwerpunkt*, which some of the armour did to a degree. On D-Day, Shermans from the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade had managed to



MAP SOURCE: VICTORY IN THE WEST



**OVERCONFIDENT
LEADER**

Montgomery, normally a cautious, methodical commander, had high hopes for his flank around Caen, but had not reckoned on the ferocity of the German defense.



CORBIS

reach the Caen-Bayeux road by themselves, only to be recalled to the beachhead because there had been no infantry to cover them. The 8th Armoured Brigade which had landed on “Gold” with the 50th Northumbrians, attempted to do same thing. But driving inland, they were frustrated by hedgerow-heavy terrain, poor visibility and Germans fielding hand-held portable anti-tank weapons. Tank commanders especially became wary of snipers and the Panzerfaust 30, a short-range throwaway hollow-charge rocket which could punch through 200mm of armour (the Sherman Mk V’s maximum armor was 76mm — and that too only in the frontal area of the turret). Even worse, the weather was turning sour, and in any case, Montgomery could not advance in the next few days without the benefit of air support which had only one in three days of clear weather. At this critical moment, when the Germans were disorganized and partly clinging to the notion that the main assault would fall in the Calais area of France, the British could not proceed because of the elements.

The loss in momentum now began to work for the Germans who used the respite to bring in fresh divisions from the south. One was the 130th Panzer Lehr Division under an old desert hand, Lt-General Fritz Bayerlein, a former staff officer in Rommel’s PanzerArmee Afrika headquarters. Although untested, the Panzer Lehr was considered an elite unit owing to of its high level of training. Accordingly, it was equipped with the best equipment, including 99 Mk IVs and 89 Panthers. On the evening of June 9, the division moved into the line near Tilly-sur-Seulles after a trying 90-mile drive from Chartres, during which they had endured several attacks by Allied fighter-bombers, losing about 130 trucks, five tanks and 84 self-propelled guns. Although tank losses had been low, the loss of the support trucks had become a serious headache. Nevertheless, the division joined the 21st Panzer and the 12th SS “Hitler Jugend” Panzers on the defense, and coupled with these, formed the main shield around Caen along with the remnants of various static infantry divisions.

In the British camp meantime, the commander of the Second Army, Lt-General Miles Dempsey, who had originally foreseen that Caen might not be taken easily, fell back on a pre-D-Day contingency. He proposed executing, Operation "Perch," a wide flanking drive west of Caen of XXX Corps to Tilly-Sur-Seulles and then on to Mont Pinçon, a 1,183 foot mountain 20 miles southwest of Caen.

Montgomery wholeheartedly agreed. This was exactly the sort of flanking attack that he needed. British reinforcements had been arriving at a brisk pace and the moment for ripe for a bold dash south. By now, Major-General George "Bobby" Erskine's 7th Armoured Division, the famed "Desert Rats" who had made their reputation fighting Rommel's troops in North Africa, had started to land at "Gold" on the evening of June 6. By the evening on the 7th, the division's 22nd Armoured Brigade landed in its entirety but it was not until June 12 that the accompanying 131st (Queen's) Infantry Brigade arrived. The division, long used to the sprawling wastelands of the desert was taken aback by the close quarters of Normandy. Massive towering *bocages* (hedgerows), some as much as twelve foot high seemed to border every field, road and track behind which an entire German regiment could have lain in ambush. On one occasion, a tank commander of the 5th Royal Tank Regiment, whilst maneuvering his Sherman along a road, was forced to fight off German infantrymen who leapt onboard his tank from several high embankments in hand-to-hand combat. Nevertheless, Montgomery certainly hoped that the employment of this rested, heavily-experienced formation would redress the odds on the frontline.

But initial British advances as per "Perch" were already slowing down as the Panzer Lehr fought hard to contain Tilly. Frustrated, Dempsey and his staff proposed an even more ambitious undertaking. Calling their plan, "Wild Oats," they suggested sending the armoured forces in a quick dash west of Caen where they would be met south of the city by the British 1st Airborne Division. At the same time, on the east lines of Caen, the 51st Highland Division, another veteran of North Africa, was to break out and also link up with the Paras, effectively encircling the city.

It was a radical plan that contained as much chance of dazzling success as it did of failure, and unfortunately for its planners, foundered at the office of the Allied air commander, Air Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, always a skeptic of airborne operations. Nevertheless, the army officers wanted to give it a go. The 7th Armoured Division was included in the "Wild Oats" order of battle, but precious time was wasted in trying to organize the effort. By when Erskine's tanks were ready it was already June 10 and "Wild Oats" had started to fade as an operational practicality.

Afraid that the front was "congealing," Dempsey called for the 7th Armoured to be employed more actively. In a series of discussions on June 12, Dempsey, Erskine and Lt-General Gerard Bucknall of XXX Corps altered "Perch." Erskine was ordered to leave most of his divisional troops (the 131st (Queen's) Brigade along with the 8th Armoured Brigade) at the line opposite Tilly, and take his tanks with a small number of Queen's infantry on a western flanking maneuver. A critical gap had opened in the German lines between Panzer Lehr and the 352nd Infantry Division and the 22nd Armoured under Brig. Robert "Loony" Hinde was to advance through and capture Villers-Bocage before driving into the flanks of Panzer Lehr.

Speed and aggressiveness were both important. But like some of the best-laid plans, a single outside trigger would, as the later English author, James Burke put it, upset the entire plan.

THE WEARY DESERT RATS

When asked why he had chosen not to commit the two veterans of his North African victories, the 7th Armoured and 51st Highland Divisions, on D-Day, Montgomery had replied: “You don’t send your best batsmen in first.”

But there were signs that the 7th Armoured had rapidly faded from being a best batsmen, or even first-rate. When the division had returned home to England in late-1943, most of its men had not seen the U.K. since before the war. Comrades had been killed in nearly three years of uninterrupted combat in the Mediterranean and most knew that they would likely be headed towards more heavy fighting in Western Europe. There was a near unanimous but whispered opinion that the division had done its bit in North Africa while other divisions had trained in the comparative safety of England. Now it was time for the rest of the army to step up. Erskine was aware of this sentiment but the problem of maintaining discipline became difficult when a significant number of experienced officers and NCOs were transferred to green units. Even more damaging to the *esprit de corps* of those left behind was the replacement of their trusted Shermans with British-made Cromwells (in some ways a better tank), but mechanically less reliable. Some of the anger was smoothed over by the introduction of Sherman Fireflies in January 1944, a variant armed with the ferocious 17 pounder cannon that gave the crews a better chance of knocking out the German big tanks. This was the result of several attempts to equip British forces with better equipment. Much of the desert campaign from 1940 to 1942 had been spent with inadequate or hopelessly outclassed tanks and weapons against the better armed Germans. An army report in 1942 compounded the situation by claiming that the British needed a no bigger tank gun than the 75mm cannon — a statement that markedly failed to take into account that the Germans might upgrade their weaponry.

Fortunately for the British, even before D-Day, Dempsey and Lt-General Richard O’Conner of VIII Corps had noted that the British army’s anti-tank striking power needed to be improved. “17 Pounders in all forms and sabot ammunition are absolutely first rate in our priority for equipment,” they said. At least 144 crews officially recorded their impressions of mating the 17 Pounder to the Sherman. “At last, a gun which one could trust to get its teeth really deep into a German tank it met,” one sergeant said. Even Montgomery, a sort

MOVING OFF THE BEACH The 4th Country of London Yeomanry drives away from “Gold Beach.” In the lead is a Cromwell, followed by a Firefly.



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM 4700-29 B 5251

of uniformed martinet on tank warfare, acknowledged that the “17 Pounder is most popular.” For hitting power and accuracy, the gun rivaled the German long-barreled 75mm KwK guns and the formidable 88mm cannon. But it was not perfect. Occasions arose when a round failed to penetrate the frontal armor of the German big cats, the Tigers and Panthers, and the cannon’s accuracy fell off noticeably at over a thousand yards. The fact the gun had been designed as a high-velocity anti-tank weapon was also important. It could barely accommodate lower velocity HE shells for use against infantry and this delayed its employment for much of 1944 until a solution was found in September. In the meantime, when the Firefly went to Normandy, it numbered only four tanks in each armoured squadron.¹

With valuable time wasted over the aborted “Wild Oats,” Dempsey went to Bucknall’s headquarters on June 11 to goad XXX Corps into action. Back at the front, Erskine was frustrated at the lack of proper orders. Convinced that “Perch” should have gone into action a day earlier, he privately raged at the lethargy of headquarters. Now that orders had finally come to get a move on, he went to the task with glee, later telling his superiors that he “never felt serious difficulty in beating down the enemy resistance.” The predominant gap between Caumont and Villers-Bocage was rife with exploitation. The German 2nd Panzer and 17th SS Panzergrenadier Divisions had intended to plug the breach but they had been delayed in transit. Then at mid-day on June 12, Dempsey made an important decision. A report from the 22nd Brigade summed up the choice:

Because of the difficulty of the terrain and resulting slow progress...the 7th Armoured would Division would attempt to turn the enemy position on the left of the American sector. The Americans were already to the north of Caumont and there was a chance of exploiting a success towards Villers-Bocage and if possible to occupy Hill 113.

¹ One in each troop. There were only 84 Fireflies in Normandy on June 11, 149 by the end of the month and 235 by the end of July.



BUNDESARCHIV

**OBERSTURM-
BANNFÜHRER
HEINZ VON
WESTERNHAGEN**



BUNDESARCHIV

**OBERSTURMFÜHRER
MICHAEL
WITTMANN**



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM 85326

BRASS Three senior British commanders emerge from their forward field headquarters at Ranville. From left: Lt-Generals John Crocker of I Corps, Miles Dempsey, the commander of the 2nd Army and Gerard Bucknall of XXX Corps

Erskine, now doubly eager to make up for lost time, sent the tanks of the 4th County of London Yeomanry Regiment (4CLY) with elements of the 1st Rifle Brigade, reconnaissance and infantry into the gap. At about the same time, another German unit began to arrive in the sector. This was the 101st SS schwere Panzer Battalion, a heavy tank unit equipped with Tiger I tanks commanded by Lt-Colonel Heinz von Westernhagen.

Originally stationed at Beauvais, the battalion had received orders to move to the front on June 6. With a strength of 45 Tigers, it set off in the early morning hours of June 7. Much of its officers were men who had served on the Eastern Front. Westernhagen had been severely wounded during the battle at Kursk and had only rejoined the battalion in February. One of his subordinates, Lt. Michael Wittmann of the 2nd Company had amassed a tally of over 100 tank kills during his time in Russia. Most of the men in Wittmann's company were themselves veterans of Russia who had served under Wittmann in a different unit. Aside from them, another man, the commander of the 1st Company, Rolf Möbius, was also a budding panzer ace who would be credited with destruction of more than a hundred enemy tanks during the war.

At 3 o'clock on the morning of June 7, the Tigers passed through Gournay-en-Bray and made for the Seine. They passed through Paris on June 8 but as they reached Versailles, Allied fighter-bombers struck. Several Tigers were damaged or knocked-out with nine men killed and eighteen wounded. Dispersing to mitigate further casualties, the battalion would not reach Villers-Bocage until the evening of June 12. When they finally reached their destination, they parked under the shady recesses of small woods south of N175 and exhausted by five nerve-wracking days on the road, collapsed into a stupor on the ground beside their Tigers, too weary to even go to sleep.²

On the other side, the British had been making slow progress. On the afternoon of June 12, the "Desert Rats" had bypassed Tilly and swung westwards before moving along on a southeast arc. The advance was largely uneventful until the 22nd Brigade's Cromwells encountered and knocked out a German Mark IV at a hamlet called Jerusalem. The reconnaissance tanks of 11th and 8th Hussars had been relentlessly probing the German lines for a weakness. The Third Troop of A Squadron of the 8th Hussars eventually found it, but lost two Cromwells in the process, including the troop leader, Lt. Talbot-Harvey, who was posted as missing.

Then at 8 p.m., during the approach to Livry, a German anti-tank gun knocked out a Cromwell from the Kings Royal Irish Hussars (KRIH), killing two of the crew, including Lieutenant Rampf. A Stuart light tank from same unit was also knocked out by a panzerfaust. Further advances by the Hussars were repelled with additional losses in tanks. The delay was temporary, however, and the division smashed up the road with the full strength of the 22nd Armoured Brigade. Livry fell, and with darkness closing, the British set up camp for the night.

The bright red hue of fires from Caumont in the west, ablaze with American shelling, illuminated the night. But on the other side, to the east was the strange ethereal darkness that was the German lines. The "Rats" too observed this darkness. From their forward positions, a mere six miles separated Villers-Bocage and an engagement with history.

² At this point, 2nd Company had lost four Tigers, which after being damaged during the air attacks were left behind with battalion's workshop company, temporarily commanded by Lt. Fritz Stamm.

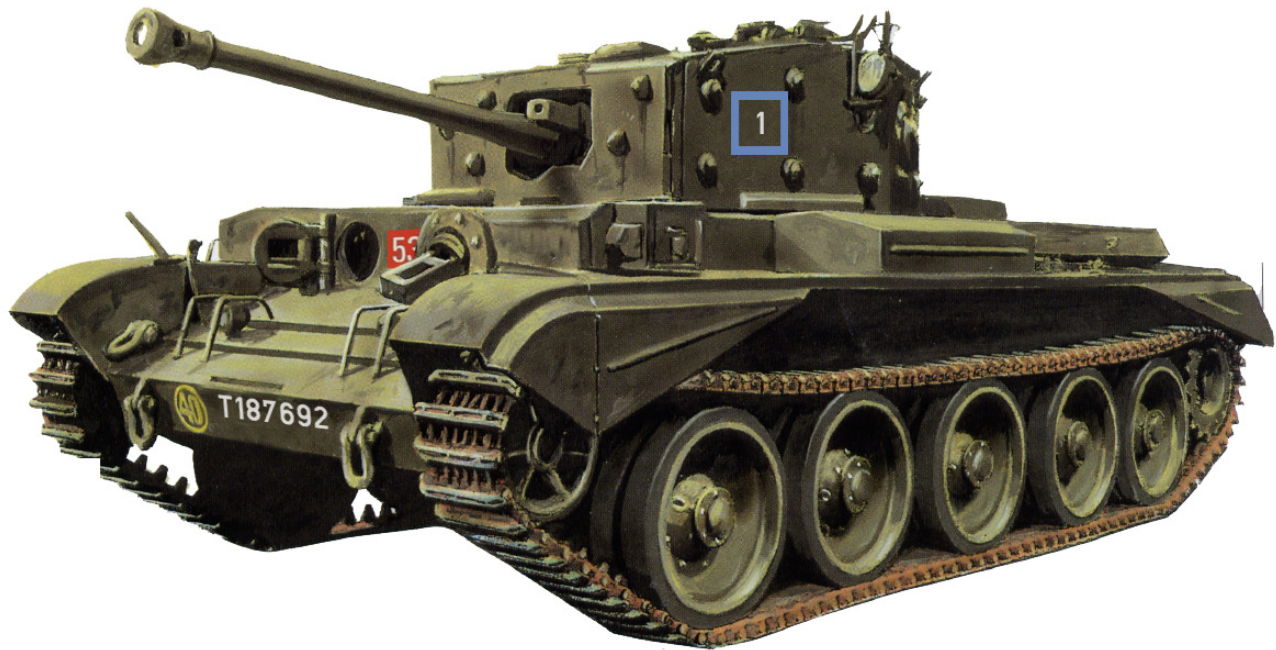
FATEFUL ENCOUNTER

Early, at 4:30 on the morning of the 13th, Brigadier Hinde started up the brigade again. There had been some light rain the night before and everything was wet. A rifleman, Lt. Bruce Campbell of A Company's 2nd Platoon went up to a Cromwell which had occupied a crossroads outside Livry and asked the commander if he had seen anything. The commander replied that there had been quite a lot of firing during the early hours but that it had died down since then. Campbell walked back bewildered, wondering if the Germans had re-occupied Livry during the night. Sending a patrol back into the town, Campbell reported that the town was still clear and concluded that the tanker must have referred to all that American firing at Caumont the night before.

So the division started off again, the unison of engines making a tremendous racket. Although the "Desert Rats" could boast of an armoured strength of 210 Cromwells, 44 Stuarts and 36 Shermans, only the armour of the 4th CLY (the so-called "Sharpshooters") accompanied by the vehicles from the Rifle Brigade and the 5th Royal Horse Artillery comprised the lead.

But more aggressive patrolling was needed. The 4th CLY's commanding officer, Lt-Colonel Arthur, the Viscount Cranleigh, MC, wanted to reconnoiter the paths as German scout cars had been spotted watching the routes south from Tilly. But Hinde wanted to push on without delay and told Cranley that it was imperative to keep moving, to keep the German armour away from the Americans at Caumont. Lt. Charles Pearce, the liaison officer of the 4th CLY's Regimental Headquarters Troop (RHQ) drove in a Humber scout car behind leading Cromwell of the troop.

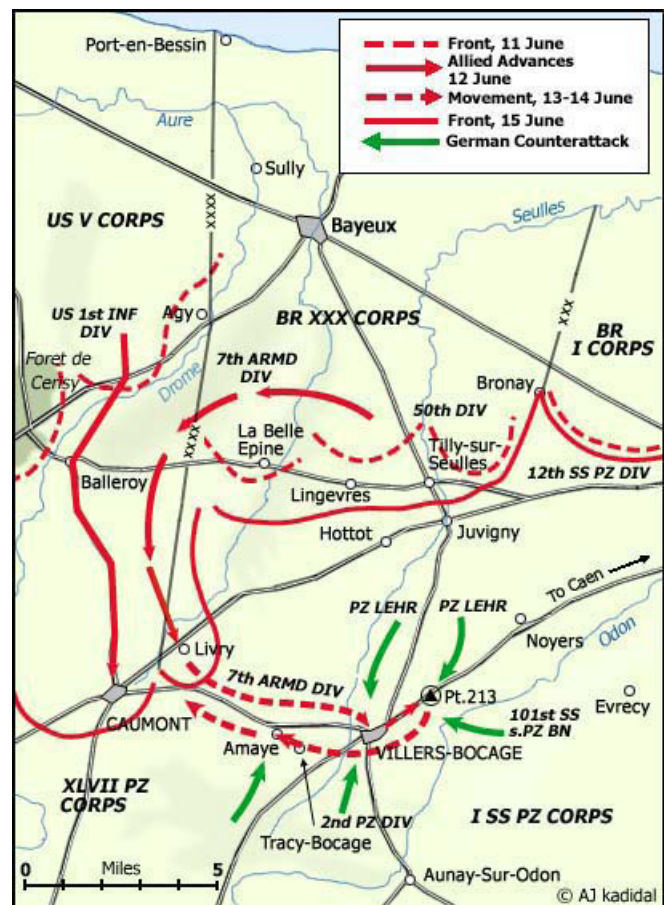
Abruptly, to the left, he spotted an eight-wheeled German Sdkfz armoured



NEW TANK The Cromwell had a lower profile than the Sherman and was fast and maneuverable, but remained unpopular with the 7th Armoured Division. The tank was also mechanically unreliable in comparison to the Sherman, had an atrociously slow reverse gear and possessed thinner armour. This tank belongs the 4th CLY's B Squadron as indicated by the blue box on the turret.

car shadowing the convoy from an orchard. He quickly moved to warn the RHQ leader, Major Arthur Carr, only to see that Carr's Cromwell had been overburdened by kit to such a degree that it could not even turn its turret onto the enemy. Pearce then warned the next tank, commanded by Lt. John Cloudsley-Thompson to take out their quarry, but by the time Cloudsley-Thompson could get into position, the German had vanished.

Jarred by these encounters, the regiment continued on. As they clattered up the great winding road, flanked by Chestnut trees, nerves were on high alert. But at the many farms and hamlets along the way, locals appeared by the side to road to offer presents of fruit and wine. Several British officers took this opportunity to gain some raw intelligence from the locals on where the Germans were. But rumors made their way into actual details, particularly one that recounted that a German tank had been stranded without fuel at the Chateau de Villers-Bocage.



The British had little time to investigate this and moved on. Abruptly at 8 a.m., the British found themselves in the town, surrounded by jubilant locals. Several cafes opened for business and the leading British troops had the good fortune to trade their rations for fresh produce before they were ordered to move on. But by the time Lt. Campbell arrived with the Rifle Brigade, many of the French had disappeared and the shops closed up.

An hour passed before Cranley received instructions to push on towards a high ground about a mile east of town marked on maps as Point 213. Cranley was reluctant, protesting that the area had not been reconnoitered and that his men might be out "on a limb." The exposed N175 highway leading to the point was particularly worrisome but Hinde was insistent. After he had made his point, the brigadier departed Villers-Bocage for his headquarters in the rear. Cranley, meantime, left four Regimental HQ tanks at the top of the main street and took up A Squadron¹ of the CLY (eleven Cromwells, four Fireflies and one command car) with A Company of the Rifle Brigade. They reached the place easily enough and set up a rudimentary bivouac along the length of the arrow-straight stretch of the N175. Caen was just twelve miles away. Wittmann's Tiger Company was 200 yards away.

Back at headquarters, Montgomery was signaling the news to his deputy, Major-General Freddie de Guingand in England: "So my pincer movements to get Caen in taking good shape, and there are distinct possibilities that the enemy divisions may not find it too

1 One source states that that composition of this unit at the time amounted to: 1 Daimler Dingo, two Cromwells and two Cromwell CS tanks in the HQ Troop, seven Cromwell IVs, and four Sherman Fireflies in the regular troops.



UNLUCKY COMMANDER

Arthur, The Viscount, Cranley was an old regular. He joined the 4th CLY from the Life Guards Regiment in 1941. Something of a flamboyant character, he even had the regiment train at his family home, Clandon Park near Guildford. By 1944, at the age of 31, he commanded the 4th CLY and worked to ensure that it was well-equipped for its part in the invasion. At Villers-Bocage, cut-off and on the run, he evaded capture until the following day. He spent the rest of the war in the POW camp, *Oflag 79* with many of his men, but returned to home with honor after the war. Post-war accounts have cleared Cranley of incompetence at Villers-Bocage.

easy to escape, especially Panzer Lehr...”

Meantime at Pt. 213, the Rifle Brigade officers were summoned for new orders by Major James Wright, the CO of the Rifle Brigade's A Company. A half track was sent to collect them, but someone had the presence of mind to point out that concentrating all of the officers in one vehicle was a mistake and so three halftracks went. While this conference was going on, the rest of troops went on standby. Suddenly Lt. Bill Garnett, one of the A Squadron troop leaders at the head of the column spotted a German staff car on the highway and opened up with his Besa machinegun. The car went spinning away from the road where it crashed in a field and caught fire. After this short excitement, the column parked itself on the highway shoulder and a general atmosphere of insouciance overtook the men. Nine Rifle Brigade² halftracks that had not been used by the officers waited in a neat column by the right-hand side of the road as an artillery observation post (OP) Cromwell, commanded by Captain Roy Dunlop from the 5th RHA clattered up the road to join A Squadron. At the tail end of the Rifle Brigade, a Six-Pounder anti-tank cannon section under the command of Lt. Roger Butler halted by the side of the road. Near the Tilly junction where a Calvary stood and deployed their arms. This force had four Lloyd carriers and about three guns. Despite the fact that the area was not secure, many of the crews emerged from their tanks and vehicles. They started to brew up their morning tea, lounged around smoking, or engaged in easy chatter. Although the riflemen posted sentries, none of them could see more than 250 yards on either side of the road.

By now, a long column of traffic had developed behind the vehicles of the Rifle Brigade. Immediately behind were three Stuarts of the 4CLY's reconnaissance (recce) troop, and behind that in the town itself was the regimental headquarters (RHQ)

² At this point of events, when I mean the Rifle Brigade, the reference is actually to Major James Wright's A Company of the 1st Rifle Brigade.

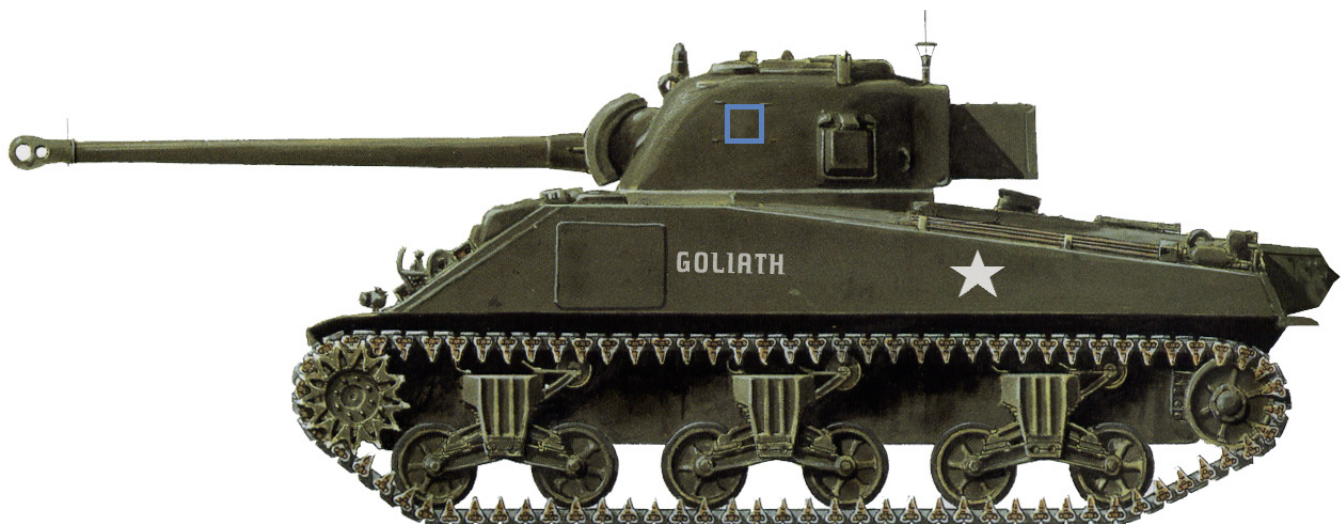
troop on the Rue Georges Clemenceau main street. The regiment's B Squadron near the Jean d'Arc intersection at the western proximity of the town, with C Squadron on the outer western edge of Villers-Bocage. The remainder of the "Desert Rats" were still further behind, near Tilly or Livry.

At the frontal tip was a Firefly from 2 Troop, commanded by Sgt. Stan Lockwood. One of his comrades, Sgt. Wally Allen, a Cromwell commander from 1 Troop parked his tank nearby and walked over to Lockwood to have a chat. As the smells of a pastoral French village swam in the air, Allen commented that that there as the smell of baking bread coming from one of the nearby shops. Up above them, the sky was wonderfully blue.

But near the point, Wittmann, standing atop his turret, studied the panoramic view of the sight. Both the town and the rising highway were packed with British vehicles of all types: Sherman Fireflies, Cromwells, Stuart tanks, halftracks and towed anti-tank guns. The Germans were well inside Cranley's forward screen, and Wittmann realized that his company was the sole opposition to the British drive eastwards. Yet he was hardly ready to attack. The bulk of the 101st SS Panzers had not arrived. Ten Tigers from SS Captain Rolf Möbius's 1st Company had camped for the night, ten miles to the east and had suffered irritating mechanical problems with their tanks. The battalion's 3rd Company, meantime, was even further off, near Falaise and would not reach the Villers-Bocage front for two days.

Wittmann's company was still trying to recover from the trials of the journey from the north. To exacerbate his problems, the Tiger, although a formidable tank, had teething mechanical problems. Despite an official establishment strength of 15 Tigers in 2nd Company, only six of Wittmann's Tigers had not broken down and had reached the battlefield.³ But upon arrival, Wittmann's own tank (No. 205) had broken down because of transmission troubles, and then Lt. Wessel had gone to Panzer Lehr headquarters to establish contact with that division. To compound matters, Sgt. Löttsch's Tiger had a

³ These were Wittmann's own No. 205, Lt Hantusch's No. 221, Sgt. Stief's No. 234, Sgt. Sowa's No. 212, First Sgt. Brandt's No. 233, Sgt. Löttsch's No. 233 and Lt. Wessel's No. 211.

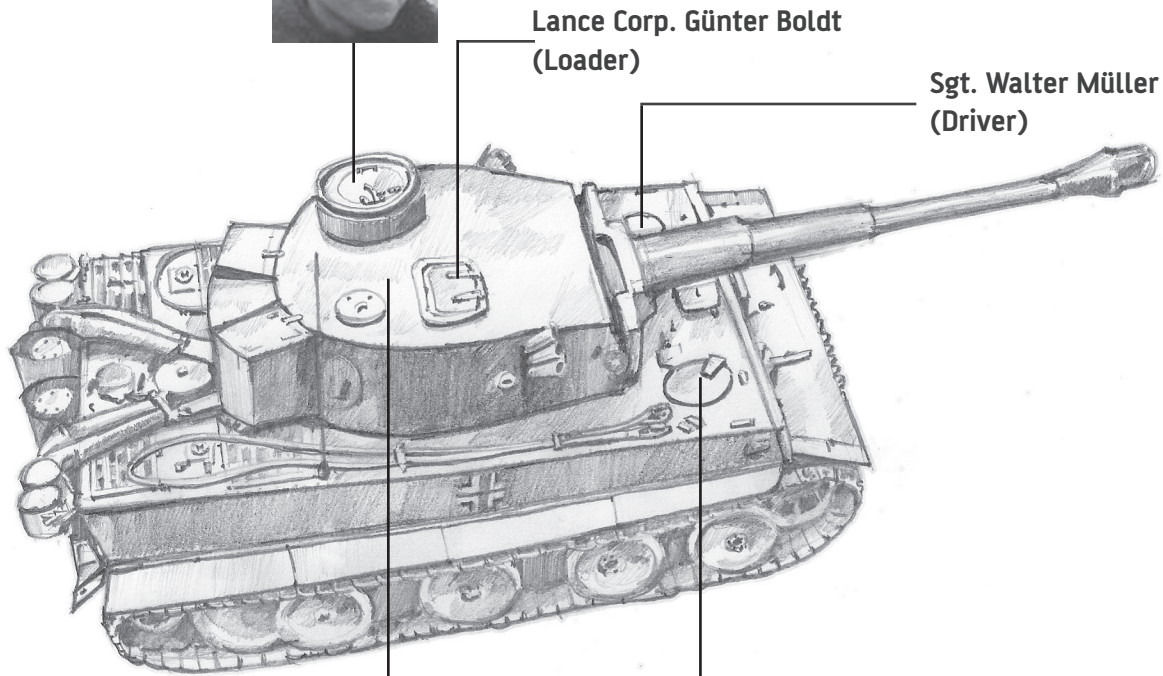


SHERMAN FIREFLY

THE KILLING MACHINE Wittmann's official tank was Tiger No. 205 (depicted below), although for the attack, he used First Sgt. Kurt Sowa's Tiger No. 212. He also used Sowa's crew aside from the gunner, for which role he chose his old friend, "Bobby" Woll, a fellow panzer ace from the Russian front.



**Lt. Michael Wittmann
(Commander)**



**Lance Corp. Günter Boldt
(Loader)**

**Sgt. Walter Müller
(Driver)**



**Sgt. Balthasar Woll
(Gunner)**

**Lance Corp. Günther Jonas
(Radio Operator)**



TIGER Mark I

damaged a track and the Sgt. Stief's engine had started to overheat.

Borrowing Tiger No. 212 commanded by First Sergeant Kurt Sowa and taking on one of his Tiger commanders, Sgt. Bobby Woll, an old comrade from the Eastern front, as his gunner, Wittmann decided to attack with what he had.

"I had no time to assemble my company," he later said. "...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, having given the others orders not to retreat but to stay where they were and hold their positions."

At 9:05, he burst out of his hiding place and clattered towards the N175. Up until this point, the British had been oblivious to the presence of the Germans but when Wittmann turned into the highway, Sergeant O'Conner of the Rifle Brigade, who was travelling towards Pt. 213 in a halftrack, spotted him. Instantly breaking radio silence, O'Conner would give the British the only warning that they received of the attack. But it was already too late.

The first 88mm shell had already struck a nearby Cromwell which was attempting to position itself. A second tank, a formidable Sherman Firefly, the only tank which could have defeated Wittmann's ambitions at this critical stage, rumbled on to the center of the highway and began to turn its turret. Wittmann's gunner, Bobby Woll opened fire. The shell punched through the Firefly with a deafening crack, blowing up the unfortunate British machine whose blazing wreck now blocked the highway to Pt.213.

At this moment, Lt. Campbell and two of his subordinates, Lt. Coop and Sgt. Gale had been driving towards the point when O'Conner's message came on the air: "For Christ's sake get a move on! There's a Tiger running alongside us 50 yards away." One of the officer, Lt Alfred "Alfie" de Passe, the commander of the 4th Platoon, who had no idea of the danger looming calmly radioed O'Conner back, telling him: "Don't worry it's one of ours."

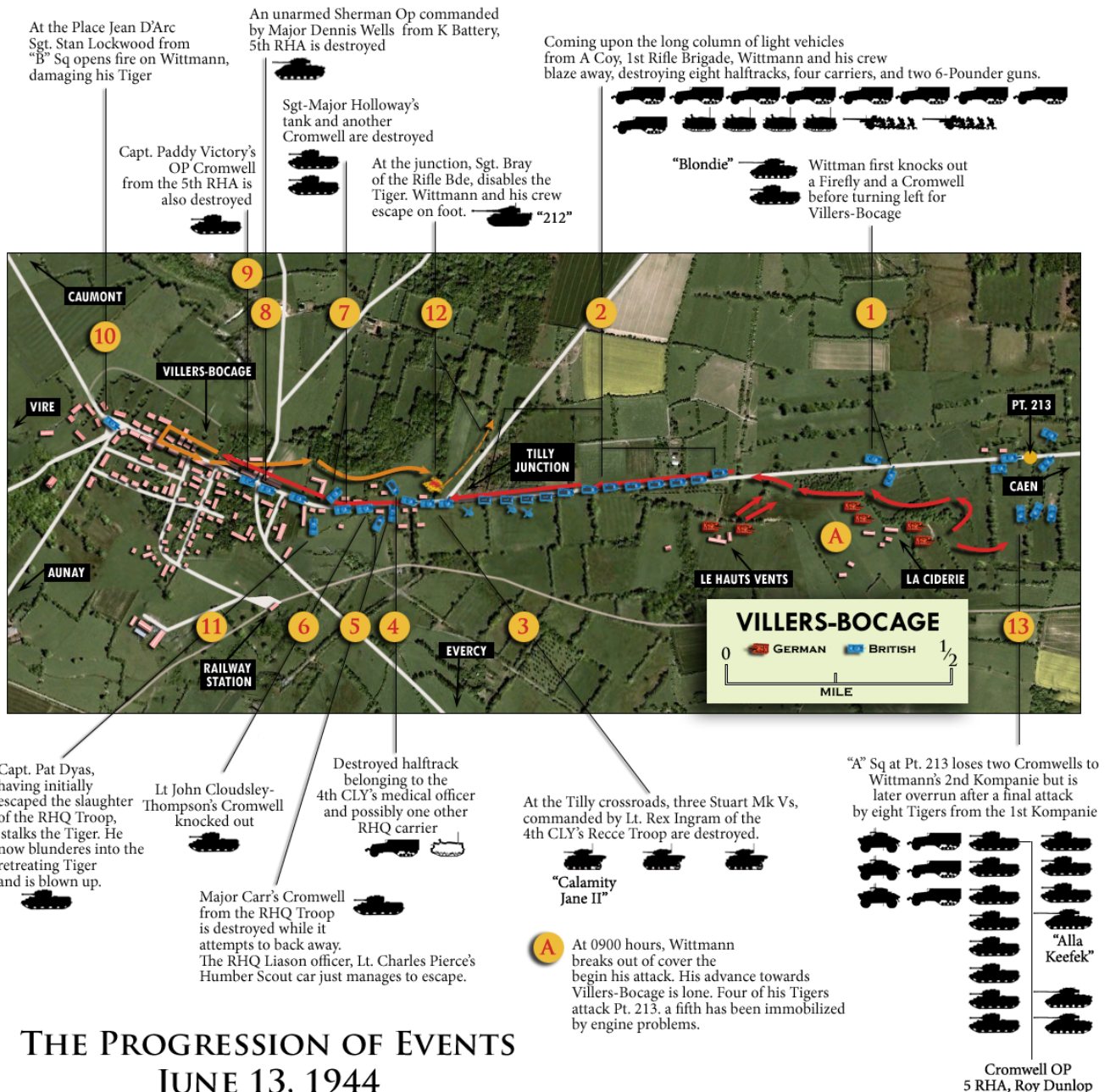
But as a shell passed over his head, towards another Cromwell deployed on the bank by the side of the road, Campbell begged to differ. O'Conner had been in another halftrack some distance down the road when he had made his report, which meant the German had broken onto the road behind them. Another Rifle Brigade officer, Captain Christopher Milner, the company second-in-command, was passing A Squadron's rearmost Cromwell when the tank was hit and blew up (this Cromwell had been Wittmann's first kill). Almost immediately, Milner seemed to be seeing Tigers all over the area. A second Tiger had appeared from beyond the trees, near the town and started to fire. To the north, a third was spotted.

Wittmann, now on the road, raked the Rifle Brigade vehicles with machine gun and cannon fire. A horrified rifleman attempted call up Major Wright to warn about what happening. Wright responded by telling him that knew he that "they were all around us." Complacency with the knowledge of the threat would not help the British though, and the light-skinned carriers and half-tracks take a beating, even as rifleman clambered for cover. Lt. de Passe, who had earlier so cavalierly dismissed the warning, was now killed when he scrambled onto his halftrack to get a PIAT (a British weapon that threw a hollow-charge anti-tank round).

Wittmann recalled that "there was unbelievable confusion among the enemy." Yet for the tumult of war and explosions there were surprisingly little casualties. To be certain, nearly all of the Rifle Brigade's vehicles were on fire. Milner later recalled

that, "the enemy attended first of all to the three motor platoons by...trundling back towards Villers, shooting up vehicles and riflemen section by section, with only the company's two 6-pdr anti-tank guns able to offer even a measure of resistance, which I learned afterwards they did with considerable bravery but with little effect." True, a few riflemen attempted to destroy the Tiger with their six-pounder (57mm) anti-tank guns, but they were pinned down as they tried to do so and two were destroyed by the Tiger as it rumbled by. Others ran desperately for the refuge of the woods, with gunfire ripping all around them.

Reaching the Tilly crossroads, Wittmann then came upon the three Stuart from the recce troop. Woll turned the massive 88mm gun on them. To his surprise, the leading Stuart, commanded by Lt. Rex Ingram, instead of fleeing, bravely attempted to block the road. Woll sent a shell hurtling through it, although some of



the crew survived and bailed out. Ingram himself might have survived the initial hit and was reportedly in the process of pulling out his trapped driver when he was killed by fire from the Tiger's coaxial machinegun.⁴ Another shell turned the second Stuart into an inferno, and the third was also blown up.⁵

As the long black plumes of smoke spiraled upwards into the sky, Wittman nudged Ingram's destroyed Stuart aside and pushed on. Aware of the growing danger of anti-tank weapons and the need to wrap up his attack, he came upon a halftrack belonging to Captain Maclean, the 4th CLY's medical officer and blasted it with a round before turning his attention to a line of Cromwells on George Clemeanceau Road. Unknown to him, these were the RHQ tanks. Lt. Charles Pearce, the liaison officer who was nearby in his Humber scout car, saw the last Stuart go up in flames and attempted to warn the others only to find that the radio net had been swamped by A Squadron signals at the point, fighting their own battle. Some of the RHQ men were blissfully unaware of the immediate danger. John Cloudsley-Thompson thought that the Stuart blowing up was a tank from A Squadron. Behind him, however, Captain Paddy Victory, a 5th RHA officer down the street had been listening to the battle closely, and was in communication with Captain Roy Dunlop, his man at the point who was desperately calling for a smoke screen. But despite this confusion, some of the RHQ tankers instinctively knew that something was terribly wrong and

4 This information is from a relative of the Ingram family, Paul Carpenter, but additional corroboration is necessary to ascertain the complete story.

5 There are conflicting reports that this last Stuart escaped the carnage only to be blown up by mortar fire later in the battle. I believe that this is erroneous and that it was in fact destroyed by Wittmann.



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TOTAL DESTRUCTION The remains of the Rifle Brigade as seen from Villers-Bocage. The riflemen received much criticism for parking their vehicles so closely together. In reality there was a healthy distance between each machine.

attempted to back away from the street.

The Cromwell had a notoriously slow reverse gear, with a ratio of only about 0.2 mph, and these attempts at reversal were in the words of one surviving man, "Painfully slow." Then, before they knew it, the Tiger was among them. The first Cromwell to go up in flames was that of Major Carr, which was hit at nearly point-blank range. Lt. Pearce, who had parked almost next to the Cromwell remembers the strike. "The flash from the 88 was terrific with a very loud bang." A thick shock of black smoke filled the street.

Realizing that he was next on the list, Pearce ordered his driver to get them out of there. Immediately backing away, they sped on a side road back towards the intersection to get help from B Squadron. On the way, he encountered Captain John Philip-Smith with the other half of the recce troop, who demanded to know what all the shooting was about. When Pearce told him, Philip-Smith deftly moved his surviving Stuarts out of harm's way.

Meanwhile, Wittmann was still blasting the RHQ Troops. In the second Cromwell, Captain Cloudsley-Thompson watched the horror approach. "Through the smoke I could make out the shape of a huge Tiger and I was not more than 25 yards away."

Cloudsley-Thompson opened fire, but the shells bounced off the German tank. In desperation, he fired a smoke canister which flew past the Tiger and landed behind it. Woll methodically turned the 88mm gun on the Englishman and the next moment Cloudsley-Thompson heard a whoosh pass through the tank. They had been hit. A burning sensation broke out between his legs and a



WRECK This is Captain John Cloudsley-Thompson's Cromwell. Considering its condition, it is remarkable that all five members of the crew survived. Much of the debris piled on the machine is the result of looting by German soldiers who investigated every hold and box. (Inset: Cloudsley-Thompson.)

WRECK This is the unarmed Sherman OP commanded by Major Wells of the 5th RHA. Note the wooden dummy cannon lying in front of the tank, and a dead crew-member, machine-gunned as he bailed out.



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jet of blue flame swept through the turret. He opened his mouth to shout and found it abruptly covered with sand and burned paint.

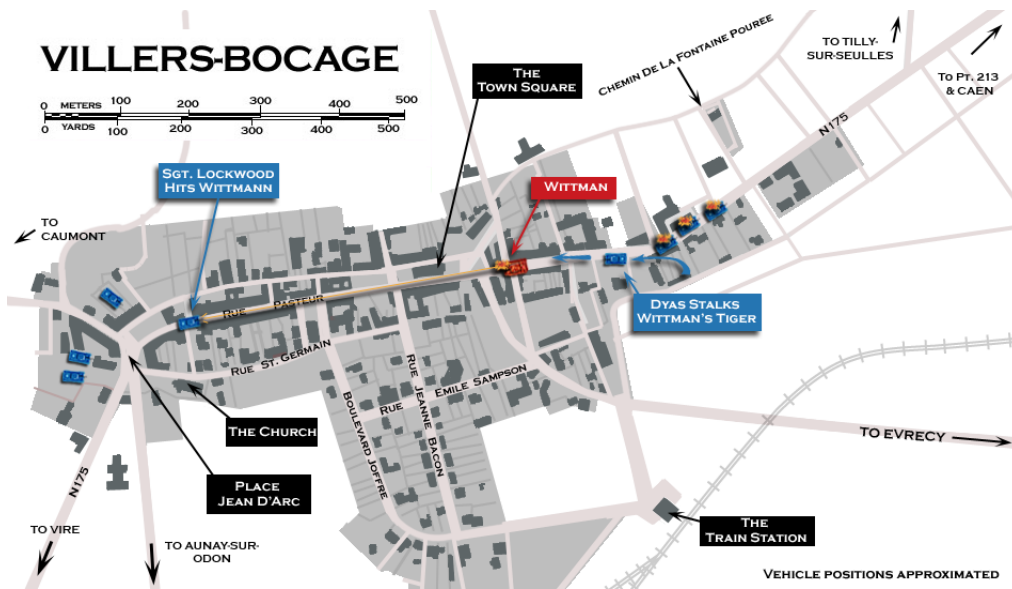
He managed to yell, “bail out,” and climbed out. Hitting the ground hard, rendered half deaf by the concussion, he gasped for air. As the rest of his crew piled out of the broken Cromwell, the Tiger’s machinegun opened up on them. Cloudsley-Thompson tried to make himself a small a target as possible. The Tiger trundled past his wrecked Cromwell, blasting two more RHQ tanks⁶ in the next few moments. But a third, commanded by Captain Pat Dyas, the 4th CLY adjutant, escaped by deftly backing into the sheltered garden of the Ferme Lemonnier. Miraculously, Wittmann had failed to see him and drove by. Then Cloudsley-Thompson watched as Dyas, who had been already wounded in the head by ricochet shrapnel hitting his turret hatch, emerged from the garden and crept after the Tiger, apparently unable to fire initially because its gunner had dismounted to urinate in the garden.

Two Observation Post (OP) tank from the 5th Royal Horse Artillery now had the misfortune of coming under the Tiger’s attention. One was a Sherman commanded by Major Dennis Wells, who did not even have a main cannon. A piece of lumber had been attached to the turret to give it the impression of being armed. Both this and Captain Victory’s Cromwell went up in flames.

By this point, Lt. Pearce had been racing towards the Jean D’Arc intersection. At first he was unable to find anyone else or even civilians. Despondent and feeling that he had “made an appalling mistake” and come down the wrong street, he pushed on nervously. Attempts to get through to A Squadron and Cranley were frustrated by radio jamming. Unknown to Pearce, A Squadron was already under siege by the rest of Wittmann’s company. Then at last, Pearce spotted a lone B Squadron Firefly.

Its commander, the 30-year old Sgt. Stan Lockwood had been watching the street with foreboding as the sound of shooting and explosions had resounded constantly. Then he saw Pearce’s scout car racing around the corner towards him, its commander waving his arms frantically. Pearce quickly informed Lockwood of the calamity that had started to overtake the regiment. When he had listened, Lockwood told Pearce to get back to B Squadron headquarters and moved his tank forward to take on Wittmann alone. Taking up position on the corner a hundred yards in front,

⁶ One of these was Cranley’s tank, now largely empty as the Lt-Colonel had gone on ahead to Pt. 213 in a scout car.



THE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN LOCKWOOD AND WITTMANN.

Lockwood waited for the Tiger to appear.⁷

As Lockwood slowly nosed the Firefly around the corner, the Tiger was still firing up the street. Quickly, Lockwood and his crew blasted four quick shells at the tank, which caused flames and smoke to emerge from the Tiger's hull. Wittmann, seeing that he was under siege, fired a shell at the corner house that had shielded Lockwood. The building, which had also concealed a German sniper, collapsed over the Firefly. By the time Lockwood had extricated himself from the mess, the Tiger had disappeared.

The Germans beat a hasty retreat back down the rue Pasteur. At this point, in one of those remarkably personal moments of war, Wittmann stumbled upon Dyas who had been stalking him. In a fleeting second and less than a hundred meters (110 yards) from the Tiger, the Cromwell's crew fired a 75 mm round. To their dismay, it ricocheted off the Tiger's thick hull. Dyas was only able to get just one more round off before a single 88mm shell blasted its way through the Cromwell's turret with a terrific noise. Dyas stumbled out of the turret, bleeding. The co-driver (who had been serving as the gunner) too, managed to get out. Machinegun fire erupted around both men as they stumbled away from their burning tank. It is possible that Dyas mistook this for rifle fire for he later reported that he had been shot at by German infantry. With the help of a local French girl, he and the co-driver managed to get to safety. From here, Dyas stumbled towards the signals tank of the RHQ Sergeant-Major wrecked earlier by Wittmann. Fortunately, its radio was still working and he managed to inform Cranley of the disastrous turn of events that had befallen the regiment in town.

Cranley replied that he knew that the situation was desperate, but was powerless to intervene because his own force at Pt.213 was under siege by other Tigers (by now tanks from Rolf Möbius's 1st Company had also joined in the attack). It was the last that Dyas heard of his commander. At mid-morning, the radio at the

⁷ At this point, there is some confusion about who did what. In The Sharpshooter newsletter, another tanker Robert Moore, states that he was the one responsible for forcing Wittmann to pull back, when a shot from his tank dented the Tiger's driver visor. But Pearce, writing for the same newsletter, recalls that Lockwood's Firefly was the one who engaged the German — being that his was the only tank that could seriously damage the German.



**(Left) UNSUCCESSFUL
COMMANDER Major-
General George Erskine,
whose detached leadership
cost the 22nd Brigade dearly.**

**(Right) CROMWELL
LEADER Captain Pat Dyas
hoped to catch Wittmann
in the tail, only to the hs
Cromwell shot out from
under him. Although
wounded in the eyes, Dyas
returned to health and
operational service.**



point went off the air.

In the meantime, Wittmann who was attempting to escape the town found that his luck had started to run thin. Near the Tilly crossroad, as the Tiger passed the long line of burning vehicles of the Rifle Brigade, it came within the sight of a single surviving British Six-Pounder anti-tank gun. As the tank emerged from the dark screen of swirling smoke and dust, the gun crew, commanded by Sergeant Bray, fired. The shot blew off a wheel sprocket, immobilizing the Tiger. Unable to move, Wittman ordered his crew to blast everything on the road and as the British hit the dirt, the Germans grabbed their small arms and bailed out of the Tiger.⁸ Sprinting for the cover of no-man's land nearby, they made it without losing a single man.

The engagement had been a great German success. In the words of the official 7th Armoured Division history: "Their [the Tiger's] first shot destroyed one of the Rifle brigade half-tracks, thus blocking the road; and then at its own convenience, destroyed the remainder of the half-tracks, some Honey [Stuart] tanks of the recce group, four tanks of ...the Regimental HQ troop...[that had been left behind by Cranley, as he moved forward to organize A Squadron at Pt.213 in a scout car] and two OP (artillery observation post) tanks accompanying the squadron. Escape for the tanks, carriers and half-tracks was impossible; the road was embanked, obscured by flames and smoke from the burning vehicles whose crew could only seek what shelter they could from the machine-gun fire, and our own tanks were powerless against the armour of the Tiger, with limitless cover at its disposal."

German propaganda and even post-war Allied historians inflated Wittmann's achievements, but his actual tally would number eight fully-armed medium tanks, three Stuarts, 14 carriers or halftracks, two six-pounder guns and one unarmed Sherman.

Walking back to the Panzer Lehr headquarters at the Château d'Orbois some 3.7 miles (6 km) north of Villers-Bocage, Wittmann and his crew reported to the divisional officers. They requested reinforcements to go back and finish off the British. Astounded by the news, the divisional officers readily agreed.

⁸ By his own account, Wittmann claims that he was immobilized at the center of town and not at the cross-roads.

REGROUPING IN THE RUBBLE

Back in Villers-Bocage, the surviving members of the 4th CLY were determined to repay the Germans with equal measure. But at B Squadron headquarters, when Lt. Pearce met Major I.B. "Ibby" Aird who had inherited command of the regiment (in Cranley's absence), he was received with a frosty silence. Pearce, who was unaware that Wittmann had turned back, tried to explain the gravity of the situation and pressed Aird to alert his squadron for action as there was little between them and A Squadron about a mile and a half away.

Aird, sitting on the turret of his Cromwell, stared blankly at Pearce. Just as Pearce's exasperation ran out, Major Peter McColl, the commander of C Squadron showed up. He demanded to know what was going in the town and why his squadron and the following Queens infantry were still blocked in traffic west of Villers-Bocage. Pearce leapt down from Aird's tank and recounted the debacle to McColl. Astonished, McColl instantly told Aird to get cracking, and to Pearce's surprise, Aird finally stirred and did exactly that.¹ McColl set up a temporary RHQ and at this critical juncture of the battle, dispatched a set of orders that probably saved the regiment from being completely lost. Aird contribution was a suggestion to send a force to relieve the besieged A Squadron at the point.

By now, Cranley's situation was dire. After losing three Cromwells to Tigers commanded by Sergeants Georg Hantusch and Jürgen Brandt, Cranley still had nine operational tanks (including two Fireflies) but some of the tanks did not have all of their crews. Captain Dunlop and his Cromwell OP which had survived initially, was on the road and now attempted to find better cover at the point.

The Riflemen at the point were officer heavy. Major Wright, Captain Milner, Lts. Campbell, Coop and Parker, with a few sergeants now held command over a section of ten enlisted men. All together they had two scout cars, three halftracks, and four motorcycles. Major Wright hoped to get a battalion of Queen's through to them, but this was only fantasy at this stage. In the meantime, the unit riflemen split into two parties. One, commanded by Corporal Nicholson took six men to the southern side of the road, while Lt. Campbell occupied the junction away from Pt.213 with four men. This became "Campbell's Corner." Milner occupied a farm house nearby, as Sergeant Gale watched the farm track on the other side. Lt Butler conducted a one-man patrol along the southern hedgerow of the field and Lt. Coop occupied a position just forward of Campbell's corner.

Cranley, meantime, deployed his tanks as best his could. One Cromwell held the north flank and parked itself near the farmhouse. Three tanks waited by the highway near the house with the rest of the Rifle Brigade vehicles. From here, the decided to hold until reinforcements arrived. He actually preferred to escape on foot after setting the tanks and vehicles on fire, but this was denied by Hinde.

At 10 a.m., the 101st SS Panzer's 4th Company arrived (mostly halftracks and armoured cars) and began to round up most of the



**THE RIFLE BRIGADE
BADGE**

¹ Pearce was convinced that Aird ignored him because the Major had resented being told what to do by a junior officer and also because the rapidly altering situation had genuinely overwhelmed him.

isolated British tank crews and riflemen on the highway. Some thirty Rifle Brigade men evaded the Germans and made their way back to the town. They were the fortunate ones. More bad luck continued to dog the British at the point.

Major Werncke of the Panzer Lehr was conducting a patrol of the area when he heard tank engines beyond a tall line of hedgerows and trees. Dismounting from his scout car, he continued on foot and discovered a column of Cromwell tanks whose crews and officers were studying a map at the head of the column. Werncke apparently sprinted to one of the empty Cromwells, jumped in the driver's seat and took off before the British could react. Roaring through the eastern end of the town, he encountered a scene of "burning tanks and Bren gun carries and dead tommies." Werncke drove his prize back to headquarters.²

Aird and McColl wanted to send in infantry to root out enemy forces within Villers-Bocage before sending in B Squadron to conduct a breakthrough, but using radio, Cranley vetoed the idea. Instead, he requested a smoke screen so that they could run for the cover of the town. The attempt was a remarkable failure. Sometime later, Cranley was reporting that his position had become untenable — that more Tigers were attacking and that withdrawal had become impossible. Then at 10:35, Cranley's radio abruptly went dead. Presumably some terrible fate had overtaken A Squadron.

Actually, Cranley had planned on a breakout, with or without orders. The Cromwells near the farmhouse attempted a probe to the north to see if there was a way

² Although this story appears vaguely spurious, possibly a concoction of German propaganda, one historian apparently believes it. See Robin Neillands's *The Desert Rats: 7th Armoured Division, 1940-1945*. London: Aurum Press, 2005.



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SPOILS OF WAR British tanks captured on the highway at Point 213. The Germans are busy examining their new prizes.

out when a swift German shell from a panzer down the lane knocked it out. The driver was killed but the rest of the crew bailed out and ran back to Milner's farmhouse where the captain urged them on to "Campbell's Corner."

Campbell had seen the flash of the Cromwell's demise and realized that he had better move the surviving Rifle Brigade vehicles if they were to be saved. He sprinted towards Major Wright's scout car and told the driver to get moving to another location. The car zipped across 20 yards of vulnerable open ground without being hit and parked near a ditch where the wounded men were being treated. Another Cromwell here decided to move on and nearly ran over some of the wounded in the process. Campbell now dashed to another ditch where Majors Wright and Peter Scott, MC, the CO of the 4th CLY's A Squadron were trying to fire at the enemy from two Cromwells.

The Germans soon began to bombard the point with cannon and artillery fire, hitting the trees to create airbursts of shrapnel. For four minutes, the British held on, but then Cranley's command simply disintegrated. The surviving tanks and infantry bolted in all directions for cover. Major Scott and several other officers were killed and the British started to come out with hands up. Many of the tankers attempted to burn their tanks to prevent them from falling into enemy hands but the German put a quick stop to this. About thirty men from the 4th CLY were captured along with several Royal Horse Artillery crews.

Captain Milner, who was oblivious of all this, wondered at the sudden lack of gunfire. Leaving the farmhouse he walked along the lane to investigate and made his

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CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER MILNER, MC, (RIGHT) successful evader. Milner was luckier than the men above, who fell into the bag.



way back to the main position where he found men in black headgear casually talking to men from his own unit. Thinking that they had been relieved by men from the British Royal Tank Regiment (who wore black berets), Milner hurried towards them. Abruptly it dawned on him that the black-garbed men were Germans. Halting, he dived into a garden on the left and waited for the Germans to come crashing through the underbrush. No one ever did. Miraculously, no one seemed to have noticed him at all.

The Germans rounded up some fifty members of the Rifle Brigade in total. Cranley himself avoided capture by hiding out. Milner was still in the garden when a German officer curiously began yelling: “Englishman surrender,” again and again. Afraid that he had been spotted, Milner started to move away along the hedgerow but the German seemed to be following him. Then the German stopped on the other side of the hedgerow and started to speak with another officer by a Küblewagen. Convinced that his time was up, Milner stood up with his Sten gun, determined to mow down both Germans before he was killed himself. Aiming at them at point-blank range, he squeezed the trigger. The gun jammed. Sobering, Milner ducked back down, and after a moment’s wait, realized that the Germans still had not seen him. Crawling away from the place, he returned to the farmhouse only to discover that the Germans were now in possession of it. He slipped back into the field and went east, towards Villers-Bocage.

A little later, while wading through tall grass, smoke shells from the British lines (presumably to aid the now captured A Squadron) began to land all around him. He hit the dirt again. Dispirited and exhausted beyond means he eventually fell asleep, waking up later to hunger and thirst. As night fell, he waited until midnight to make a break for it. In the dark, he nearly stumbled into a party of Germans snoring in a broad shallow trench, and after several scares, including running into an unidentified sentry, he stumbled into a 4th CLY cookhouse where he was deftly served a can of bacon and a mug of tea before reporting to the Rifle Brigade commander. The CO, Lt-Colonel Victor “Nuf-nuf” Paley was none too impressed to see him and demanded to know, “What the bloody hell have you done with A Company?” After this brief harassment, Milner was released to recuperate and slipped out of the Villers-Bocage story.

In the meantime, back in Villers-Bocage, Major Aird had ordered Lt. William “Bill” Cotton, MM of the 4th Troop to break through to Cranley. Cotton, a popular, seasoned officer was skeptical that anything could be achieved, but he took his troop of four tanks (including one Firefly and one CS Cromwell) through the town only to stop at a steep railway embankment near the train station. Deciding that it was pointless to carry on, they returned to the Maire, a square with a World War I memorial, and set up an ambush to catch any Tigers that returned. The 1/7th Queen’s Regiment had started to arrive at this point and a single Six-Pounder from this unit set up their gun in the alleyway, near Cotton’s tanks, at a point-blank enfilading position.

At 1 p.m., more infantry from the 1/7th Queens filtered through the town. Their commander, Lt-Colonel Desmond Gordon, ordered A Company to secure the train station while B and C Companies took up positions in the center and in the east. As the Queen’s hastily deployed, positioning their PIATs and the anti-tank guns in the houses for an ambush – they were just in time. A scouting party of three Germans from the 2nd Panzer Division were captured and these men relayed that their division was now entering the fray south of the town. In the matter of a few hours, the entire tactical situation had altered from that of a victorious British advance up the road to Caen to that of the 22nd Brigade facing off against two Panzer Divisions and a Tiger Battalion.

THE AFTERNOON SORTIE

Suspicious of the fate that had befallen A Squadron, Brigadier Hinde now prepared to hold the town with B Squadron and the now-arriving infantry of the 1/7th Queen's Regiment against the inevitable German counter-push to take it. The 4th Yeomanry's C Squadron was still bivouacked at Tracy-Bocage, a small village 1.25 miles east where it would stay for the remainder of the battle. It was joined here by the Cromwells of the 5th RTR and a company of the 1st Rifle Brigade. Inexplicable, when Hinde could have taken the initiative by unleashing this "battle-group" in a flanking maneuver to cut the enemy's counterattack at its roots, he failed to do so.

Back at Chateau d'Orbois, Wittman had been deliberating with Major Kurt Kauffman, the Panzer Lehr Chief of Operations, about their next course of action. After warning Lt-General Sepp Deitrich of I SS Panzer Korps that the 12th SS Panzer Division was blocking reinforcements from moving on down to Villers-Bocage, Wittman took a Schwimmwagen back to Villers-Bocage, returning just in time to find Captain Rolf Möbius 1st Company reducing the British pocket at Pt. 213. Although Wittman did not want it, his part on the Villers-Bocage battle was now effectively over. Back at Panzer Lehr headquarters, Kauffman ordered Captain Helmut Ritgen of the Panzer Lehr to assemble a force of armor and infantry to go back to Villers-Bocage and plug the northern exit.

Ritgen managed to scrape together a force of fifteen Panzer IVs (mostly from the 6th Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Regiment) and collected ten more tanks from a workshop south of the N175 highway, before trundling off for the town square. En-route they blundered into a screen of Six-Pounders. One Panzer IV burst into flames and Ritgen pulled back. A smaller force of four Panzer IVs that had breached the British perimeter from the south also ran into opposition and two tanks were knocked out.

Although the tank pincers were repulsed, German Panzergrenadiers from the 901st Regiment infiltrated the town and scattered house-to-house fighting broke out. Lt-Colonel Gordon of the Queen's realized that he was losing control over his scattered command and ordered his men to fall back and regroup. His A Company returned to the train station, but C Company now went to the northeastern edge of the town. D Company occupied the southeastern flank while B Company went into reserve. All around them resounded the noise of shooting. To the west, in the direction of what most of the British considered secured territory, the Germans attacked the 1/5th Queen's Regiment at Livery, losing one panzer.

In the meantime, by noon, Möbius had cleared up Pt.213, and

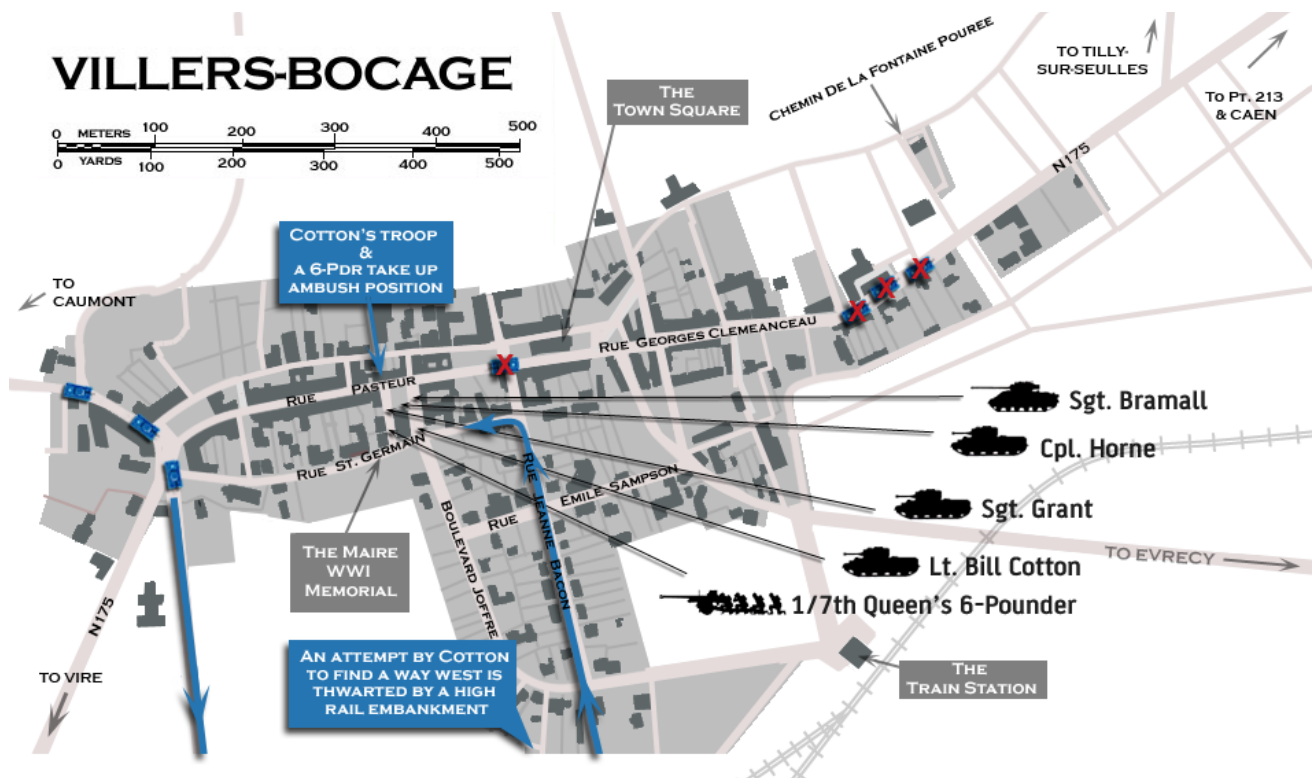


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**HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER
ROLF MÖBIUS**



**THE BADGE OF THE QUEEN'S
OWN ROYAL REGIMENT**

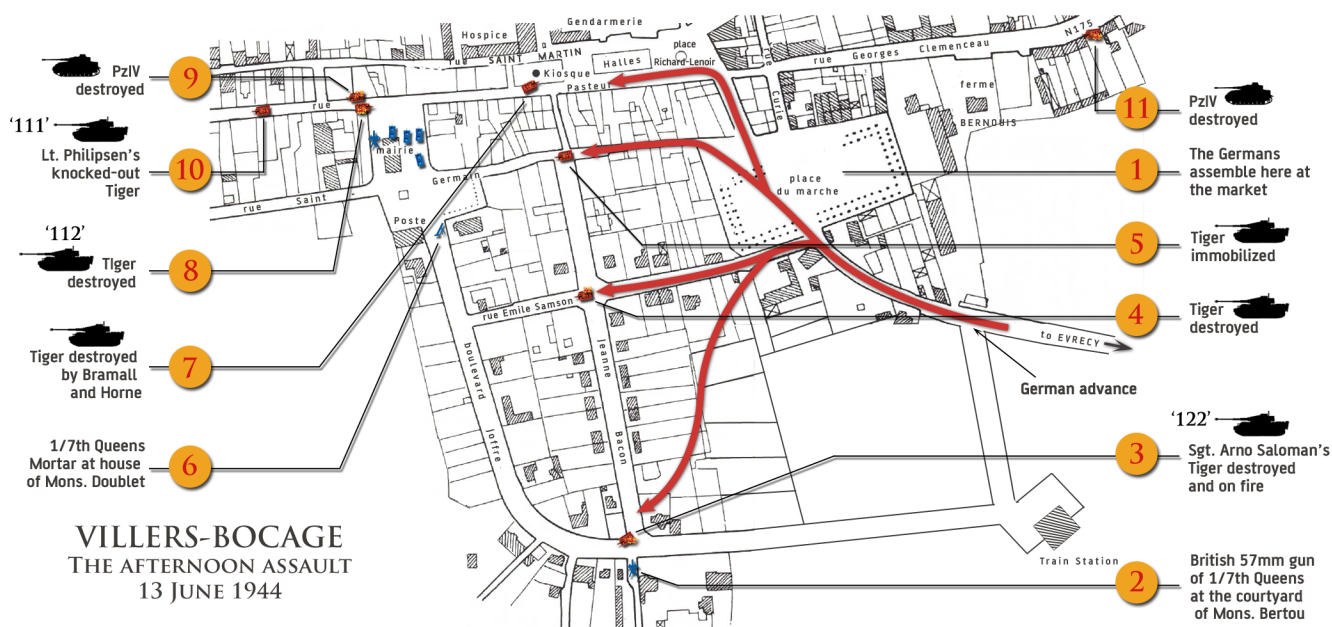


now received orders to investigate British activity in the town. All together, he had nine Tigers available¹ for the counter-attack. In addition, fourteen 14 Panzer IVs from 2nd Battalion of the 130 Panzer Lehr Regiment joined in and at least a dozen took part in the attack.

At 1 p.m., the raiders went into action, diesel engines roaring as the armada of Tigers and Panzer IV's rumbled out of their positions and towards the town. Corporal Leo Enderle of the regiment's 6th Company later recounted: "Before the counterattack started we followed the road along which lay the wrecks of tanks and transport vehicles. When I stuck my head out of the tank I could also see dead bodies."

A British dispatch rider suddenly came upon the scene and seeing the lumbering Tigers and Panzer IVs bearing down the road towards him, braked violently in horror and crashed onto the side of the road. Two of the leading Panzer IV's rumbled over the southern train crossroad and were speeding forward towards the town when they were hit by anti-tank guns and destroyed. Both had been warned not to go beyond the crossroads yet, and the second Panzer, although hit had continued to reverse until a British shell punched through it from the left to the right. The rest of the Germans waited, certain the crew had been killed instantly, but then the loader's hatch opened and one man emerged, tumbling out head-first, bleeding badly. He stumbled down the field in a daze and collapsed in an adjoining side street where he bled to death. Finally, a

¹ These were Mobius (No. 105), Lt. Hannes Philipsen (No. 111), Sgt. Arno Saloman (No. 122), 2Lt. Walter Hahn (No. 131), First Sgt Heinrich Ernst (No. 113), Sgt. Werner Wendt (No. 132), First Sgts Fritz Zahner (No. 133), Hans Swoboda and Hein Bode, and Lt. Winfried Lukasius, who was temporarily commanding 1st Company's second platoon after its regular commander, Lt. Stamm, was seconded to the workshop company.



few Tigers appeared and blasted the British anti-tank barricade to oblivion.

Möbius's intention was to take the town square and he ordered the main counterattack down two prongs: the first down the main highway through Villers-Bocage and the second, through the southern section, parallel to the main road. Certain that this massive fleet of armour would be enough to deter British ambitions, he pushed forward.

But as they reached the town square, the first prong ran into Lt. Cotton's ambush. The British let the first Tiger (commanded by SS Lt. Philipsen) to pass, but the following tanks took the full brunt of the ambush. The Firefly, commanded Sergeant Bramall, fired at a passing Tiger, and missed, hitting a building across the street. But his second shot was dead-on tearing into the Tiger's flanks to set it ablaze. Its commander, Sergeant Heinrich Ernst was killed.

Seconds later, Philipsen's Tiger fell. It had ranged so far down the Rue Pasteur that it became an isolated target. Hit multiple times by PIATs and anti-tank shells, the Tiger brewed up in flames. Philipsen managed to get out and leapt onto another passing panzer to make his escape. A following Mark IV was equally unlucky. Commanded by Sergeant-Major Dobrowski of the Panzer Lehr, it was caught off guard by the sudden destruction of its two companions and amidst showers of PIAT bombs fired by nearby British infantry, attempted to retreat. It turned tail and sped full speed up the main street, firing on houses to keep the infantry down. Unfortunately the German crew had failed to reckon with the presence of the Firefly. Bramall swiftly pulled his machine out its ambush position at the square, aimed squarely down at the panzer and fired. The high-velocity shell struck the Panzer IV in a tremendous shower of sparks and the tank blew up. The German crew emerged from flame-blown hatches and attempted to find cover in the ruined street. Cotton wanted them captured but the Germans were able to get away in the confusion of battle.

By now alerted to the ambush, a group of three Tigers split up. They

attempted to flank the British and go south but one came across a Queen's anti-tank gun that stopped it cold. The battalion commander, Lt-Colonel Gordon later wrote:

A report was received that several Mark VI Tiger tanks were moving down the main street towards the square. Major 'Tiny' French of C Company immediately ordered his Company to disperse into the houses in the side streets which overlooked the main road and to be prepared to take aggressive action. He then personally took a PIAT and together with a small party armed with 'sticky bombs,' went off further into the town in the direction from which the enemy tanks were approaching. He found four Tiger tanks and one Mark IV in the main street and approached the leading one with from a side street to within 20 yards. He fired two rounds with his PIAT while his party threw their sticky bombs. The results of this attack could not be observed but it caused one tank to move forward where it was driven onto waiting 6-pdr anti-tank guns [of the battalion] and completely destroyed. During this attack one of the enemy tanks blew down a house near which Major French was standing and he was wounded in the leg, but, in spite of this, returned to collect his company and take them into their allotted positions.

On the receiving end, SS Sergeant Werner Wendt recounted the terrific fire that his force encountered: "There was fire from all corners. Even today I



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KNOCKED-OUT MONSTER This was Lt. Philipsen's Tiger which was likely destroyed by infantry fielding PIATs and Gammon bombs. Although the Tiger was heavily armed, its roof armour was weak, amounting to only 25mm thick — leaving it vulnerable to attack from above. Note the pair of a Tiger and Mk IV also knocked out further down the street.

can still picture, Second Lt. Winfried Lukasius as he was knocked out by the close range weapons. He bailed out. His burns looked frightening.” But Lukasius survived and rejoined the unit later in the year. In all, the infantrymen of the Queen’s alone accounted for at least three Tigers (one of which was immobilized) and a Mark IV with PIATs and Gammon (sticky) bombs. But as all this was going on, a last Tiger remained on the main street, waiting patiently for the Cotton’s troop to emerge from cover. Bramall decided to give it a go through a shop window. He fired twice, damaging the Tiger’s gun mantlet. Alarmed, the Germans pulled back slightly and then attempted to race out of town. Determined to stop it, one of the Cromwells commanded by Corporal Horne pulled out of its position and blasted the monster square in the tail, blowing it up. The blazing hulk rolled for 30 yards before crashing into a building. A cheer of victory went up as a strange peace befell the streets. The Germans were retreating.

Möbius later declared that he was forced to withdraw after losing three tanks to close range weapons. In reality, the British had knocked-out six Tigers and two Mark IVs within the town (not counting four Panzer IV’s destroyed on the outskirts). To prevent the enemy from salvaging some of the wrecks, Cotton and Sergeant Bramall went out with petrol and blankets to set the tanks on fire. They almost certainly succeeded in setting three Tigers ablaze, including Philpsen’s far-off machine. For their feats during the battle, Cotton



THE MILITARY CROSS



THE MILITARY MEDAL



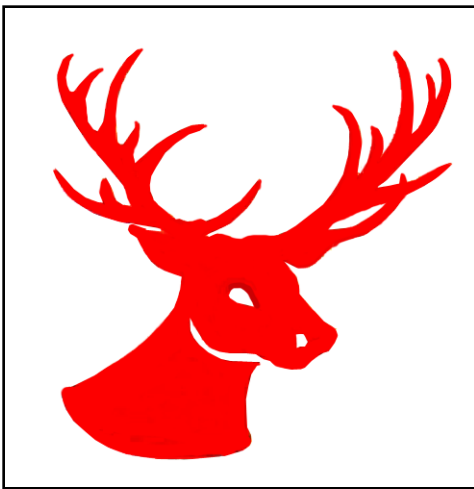
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VICTORIOUS TROOPERS Lt. Cotton (on the left) in a captured Italian aviator’s jacket complete with German Iron Cross, shares a moment with his men. From left they are: L/C Hodgson, Trooper H. Jones, L/C Payne and Trooper Humphreys. Painted on the hull is Bruce Bairnsfather’s “Old Bill”, a curmudgeonly fictitious caricature who experienced a satirical World War I in the trenches.

was to get the Military Cross and Bramall, the Military Medal.

As the battle eased at 2:30 p.m., Brigadier Ekins of the 131st (Queen's) Brigade visited Villers-Bocage to see just what had happened. When Gordon informed him that enemy infantry was infiltrating his forward positions relentlessly, Ekins responded darkly that the situation was hopeless and left. He was not missed. Then at 3:25, Gordon drove to the 22nd Brigade forward headquarters at Amaye-sur-Seulles to discuss the battle with Hinde. There found the normally firebrand Hinde, reclusive and ill-prepared to discuss the situation. Gordon stressed that unless his battalion was reinforced, the battle would be lost. Hinde, a veteran officer who had earned the nickname "Looney" in North Africa for his courage and quirkiness, refused to listen. As Gordon later wrote: "I don't think 'Looney' quite appreciated that I was rapidly losing control of my companies because of the many tank hunting parties that were dispersed in the nearby houses — a situation not helped by the scarcity of radios in an infantry battalion at that time."

Hinde, however, did radio Major Aird to hold Villers-Bocage at all costs. It was an absurd order.



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

ECCENTRIC BRIGADIER Brigadier "Loony" Hinde, the commander of the 22nd Armoured Brigade had been a brigade commander since the campaign in the Western Desert. He earned his nickname through his sometimes bewildering interest in the local flora and fauna, and because of a somewhat reckless disregard for his own safety. During battle of the Brigade Box, while conducting 'O' Group (Orders Group), he suddenly paused to examine a caterpillar. "Anybody got a matchbox?" he asked, excited. When Lt-Col. R.M.P. Carver, DSO, MC of the 1st RTR became irritated with his chief's distraction and suggested that this might not be the best time to go bug hunting, Hinde exploded: "Don't be such a bloody fool, Mike. You can fight a battle every day or your life, but you might not see a caterpillar like that in fifteen years."

Christopher Milner, who had been G3 at brigade before Normandy campaign, also tells of the numerous occasions in which he had to warn forward units not to automatically open up on vehicles beyond their leading vehicle as the brigadier was ahead of them. Despite his obvious personal bravery, Hinde was sacked for incompetence by Montgomery in July. (ABOVE LEFT: The 22nd Brigade badge)

BITTER FIGHTING UNTIL THE END

“Sepp” Dietrich was determined to finish off the British and organized a mixed bag of two 88mm self-propelled guns, three field artillery cannons and infantry to infiltrate the town and recapture it in bloody street-by-street fighting.¹ Supporting them would be a concerted attempt by the recently-arrived 2nd Panzer Division to circle around and isolate Villers-Bocage from the bulk of the 7th Armoured in the west. By now, the “Desert Rats” Divisional column snaked back to Amaye-sur-Suelles and this vital link started to come under attack.

Infuriated by the constant harassing raids along his flanks, the divisional commander, Erskine decided that the time had come to take a more active participation in the battle. At 3 o’clock that afternoon, he ordered the 1/5th Queen’s Regiment to advance on Livry in fifteen minutes. This battalion was intended to support the 1/7th Queen’s should the time come. Instead it became embroiled in its own battle against the advancing spearheads of the 2nd Panzer Division.

At 4 o’clock, in Villers-Bocage, the lead elements of the 1/7th Queens reported enemy infantry approaching again from the southwest. The battle was fierce. Backed by artillery and mortars, the Germans threw themselves against Queen’s A Company. One platoon was cut off and captured, but the Queens maintained a stoic defense, inflicting severe losses to the enemy and destroying nine panzers. In return, eight officers and 120 men had been killed or wounded. Of greater concern, the Germans had punched several holes in their lines.

In the east, the 2nd Panzer Division (two battalions of panzergrenadiers and several troops of tanks) had run into the 1/5th Queen’s at Tracy-Bocage which was being supported by self-propelled 25-pdr Sexton artillery tanks of the 5th Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) and some Rifle Brigade platoons, who were themselves in charge of protecting the artillery gunners. The Germans were so close that the RHA gunners, especially those in CC Battery took on the enemy battlegroup over open sights. Even the Rifle Brigade held strong with its Bren machine guns, but the attack was so virulent and the British reserves so low that rear area troops were thrust into battle. British Cooks, linesmen, signalers and storekeepers were given a weapon and pushed towards the line. Together they held back the German tide, killing or wounding hundreds of determined panzergrenadiers and knocking-out eight Mark IVs.

At Villers-Bocage, two battalions of German grenadiers attacked from the south and attacked 4th CLY’s B Squadron. The British tankers, whose sense of civility had completely run out, routed the Germans, inflicting heavy casualties to the infantry. On the main street, a Panzer IV appeared and began to shoot up the British positions. The Queen’s infantry held on, destroying the tank. As the dusky sunlight started, the 1/7th clung on desperately, its numbers sorely depleted. Gordon radioed that the town was in danger of falling if reinforcements were not dispatched on the double. But no reinforcements were forthcoming. By now artillery fire from both sides was falling incessantly and several British mortars and a carrier were wiped out. At 4:50, Hinde informed Erskine that the situation had become difficult and that the 22nd Brigade had to be pulled out. Erskine rejected the idea.

By 6, with German reinforcements continuing to swirl around the town, and with 1/7th Queen’s headquarters pinned by artillery, Hinde reluctantly ordered the brigade

1 There are reports that Major Kauffman personally led this attack.

to withdraw. Under the cover of a smoke screen, and an artillery barrage by the 5th RHA and the American V Corps shelling the town, the remnants of the 4th CLY, the Rifle Brigade and the 1/7th Queen's prepared to pull out. The withdrawals took place as rumors of a tremendous catastrophe filtered back to the other units of the 7th Armoured, infusing jittery nerves along its length. Most of the men in the rear had no inkling of what had really happened in Villers-Bocage. Corporal Peter Roach, a British scout car commander remembered hearing that evening that, "the leading regiment...had run into real trouble... Regiment two was sitting dangerously tight while Jerry was making his way down the flanks. Someone was reporting a man moving towards him. Was it a civilian? Perhaps! No it wasn't. It must be a German infantryman. Suddenly the colonel's voice, with a touch of weariness and exasperation, "Besa the bugger then."

The withdrawals continued from 6 p.m. to 8 o'clock that night, with the survivors retreating towards a defensive "Brigade Box" at Tracey-Bocage. The last to leave were tanks of the 4th CLY. Just as the Allied bombardment was cover their exit, Sergeant Lockwood's Firefly stalled.

"I can't start the bloody thing," Lockwood's driver shouted frantically.

The bombardment was supposed to begin at any moment and Lockwood considered abandoning the Firefly. To his relief, Sergeant Bill Moore leapt down from the turret of his following tank and despite the sniping and machine-gun fire, drew a cable link from his tank to the Firefly. They got out just in time. As they departed, Lockwood stared



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PRISONERS A column of British prisoners are marched off to the German rear. The tall officer in the center is Major James Wright of A Company, 1st Rifle Brigade. The man behind him, with the moustache, is Captain Bernard Rose, a 4th CLY adjutant. He was slightly injured during the duel between Wittmann and Pat Dyas. Interestingly, the man beside Wright is wearing German boots. Likely he was outfitted by the Germans after his capture.

back the town. “We felt bad about getting out,” he said later. “It made it seem as if it had been such a waste.”

The Germans harried some of the retreating British all the way back to Tracey-Bocage and another battle raged for the next two and a half hours. The irritating German infantry were finally suppressed at 10:30 that night and when they were gone, the troopers of the 22nd Brigade settled in the “box,” angry and exhausted.

Losses were high for the “Desert Rats,” although there is some confusion on the actual figures. The 22nd Armoured Brigade lost 217 men killed, wounded and missing, most of whom were taken prisoner after the Germans cut off and captured the point.² The Rifle Brigade lost about 80 men, of which nine had been killed and the rest captured. The 4th CLY lost 85 men, with about 4 to 12 killed, five wounded and the rest missing or captured. The 1/7th Queen’s had suffered 37 men gravely wounded and seven men killed in combat — a remarkably small number. Two men from the 5th RHA had also died.

Beside the human casualties, the loss of material was staggering. The 22nd Armoured Brigade had lost 21 Cromwell tanks, 4 Sherman Fireflies and 3 Stuarts. The list of other vehicles lost included 14 halftracks, six to 14 universal carriers, three Humber scout cars, three OP artillery-control tanks, nine Daimler Dingo armoured cars and two Six-Pounder guns.

The bulk of the armoured casualties were from the 4th Country of London Yeomanry, which ceased to exist as a fighting formation. In fact, A Squadron lost all 15 tanks it had begun the battle with. The regiment was disbanded on July 29 at a ceremony at Carpiquet airfield and its remnants constituted into the 3rd Country of London Yeomanry to become the only and only “Sharpshooters,” the 3rd/4th CLY.

German losses were another matter. The Panzer Lehr and the 2nd Panzer did not record losses at Villers-Bocage separately from other actions along their wide fronts that day. What is decisively known are the 101st SS Panzer’s losses as this unit was exclusively used at Villers-Bocage. Nine men had been killed with 10 to 12 men wounded in the 1st Company while Wittmann’s 2nd Company suffered three wounded. Thirteen to fifteen German tanks had been lost, including seven Tiger tanks. But even this small number was devastating as the Germans had only 36 Tiger tanks in Normandy.

According to local Villers-Bocage historian, Henri Marie, nine French civilians died on 13 June. Six died in cross-fires or shrapnel during the battle and the remaining three by artillery fire just before midnight. Marie also states that three people might have been executed. But the civilian population suffered further losses over the next few days of bombing and fighting. After the British pulled out, the Germans re-occupied the town and scoured the cellars and rooms for stalwart Englishmen hiding out. Cranley was caught in a basement on the following day and joined the long list of prisoners. German reprisals were heavy. In their rough searches for prisoners, the Germans torched homes, shops and even the town hall.



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MORBID REMINDERS British dead around the point.

² This figure includes five riflemen who had been captured but who were subsequently shot by their guards. According to Henri Marie, the guards thought that the British were trying to escape when they rushed for cover in a ditch as the American shelling broke out that evening.

BATTLE OF THE “BOX”

Although “Perch” was finished, the battles continued around Villers-Bocage. On June 14, the British XXX Corps launched a fresh set of attacks against the 901st Panzergrenadier Regiment at Tilly. Infantry from the British 50th Division, supported by eleven squadrons of RAF fighter-bombers attempted to push back Panzer Lehr's units and generate enough pressure to enable the 7th Armoured Division to renew its offensive towards Caen. But the two infantry brigades attacking on a 4,000 yards front failed to gain ground and the supporting armour was badly mauled by the German infantry using panzerfausts. Meanwhile in the south, the 22nd Armoured Brigade was fighting for its life at the “Brigade Box,” located at Le Mesnil and north-east of Tracy-Bocage.

Concentrated in this area amounting to 1,200 yards by 1,500 yards, were the two surviving squadrons of the 4th CLY, the 8th KRIH, the 11th Hussars, the 5th Royal Tank Regiment, the 1/5th and the 1/7th Queens, the 1st Rifle Brigade and the 5th RHA. Behind the box, on the road to Livry were the 1st Royal Tank Regiment and 1/6th Queens. The box was based in a low-lying area, surrounded by hills or high ground on three sides. Visibility was minimal, ranging from a mere fifty yards to a hundred. The enemy held the element of surprise as it could attack unseen from any angle. Artillery proved a key factor in the defense of the box with the British relying heavily on the 50th Division's artillery near Tilly, an American howitzer battalion in



SANDBOX RAF Aerial shot of the Villers-Bocage area. (Inset: The Brigade Box)



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

ROCKETS AWAY Two Hawker Typhoons unleash their 60lb rockets on an enemy-controlled railway. Although the rocket was largely inaccurate, good strikes could be achieved in a dive.

the west and the heavy caliber guns of the 21st Army Group Royal Artillery (AGRA). Then there was the British 2nd Tactical Air Force, whose dozen or so squadrons of fighter-bombers would prove instrumental in throwing back the imminent German assault.

But already the German edge had started to turn blunt. The British might have missed an important opportunity at Villers-Bocage, but on the night of the 13th, it was the Germans who missed theirs. A two battalion attack supported by as many as 30 tanks assaulted the “Desert Rats” northwest of Villers-Bocage. If they had succeeded in their mission they could have dealt the British a second round of grievous losses that might have knocked the 7th Armoured out of the campaign for a time. Instead the Germans came across the “small, high-banked fields” and experienced the same frustrations with the terrain that the Allies had felt. For the first time, the advantage shifted to the “Desert rats,” who using their dug positions, inflicted heavy losses to the enemy.

The Panzer Lehr moved to occupy the ground facing the 50th Northumbrians, primarily to stifle the “box.” The Tigers were supposed to join them but few did. By the 16th, the 101st SS Panzers had only 15 operational Tigers left. To offset this, the 2nd Panzer Division’s reconnaissance battalion with other small units, were sent in. But the British had some formidable weapons on hand. The air support and the artillery quickly proved their worth. The Royal Air Force’s Typhoon fighter-bombers carried out a softening-attack on forward German dispositions that morning. A little later, when the Rifle Brigade, holding positions north of the “box” spotted some movement in a nearby forest, they called down artillery fire from the AGRA. The resulting bombardment destroyed most of the forest and its suspected inhabitants. At 9 a.m., the 1/7th Queens identified incoming German infantry from the east and gave the coordinates to the 5th RHA and mortar teams under Lt-Colonel Gordon’s

command. The light bombardment succeed in being little more than harassing fire against the advancing German troops, but the sudden arrival of the 5th RTR Cromwells caused havoc, as panzergrenadiers fell in droves to the chattering tank machine-guns. American artillery contributed by breaking up an attack by the 2nd Panzer Division but for the remainder of the day, the Germans made constant assaults on the box. By nightfall, the British were completely encircled. The 5th Royal Horse Artillery had fought a long-running battle to keep the attackers at bay but by dusk ammunition was running low.

The British plan was to have the 131st Brigade with both infantry armour move up to Livry and keep the vital link with the 7th Armoured open. All that morning, the brigade attempted to do just that by occupying the road from the Livry to the Tracy-Bocage. Overhead, Hawker Typhoons repeatedly assaulted the Germans around the road. But at several instances, link was broken and the road captured by the Germans. After 9, the fighting intensified to that a degree that even the artillery failed to quell it. A Queen's platoon on the box's left flank was overrun but the "Rats" retaliated by counter-attacking with tanks and infantry. Sniper fire and mortar strikes took over, dominating the field and lingering until 2 in the afternoon when a heavy artillery fire took over.

Montgomery and Dempsey had been watching the developments closely. At 4 o'clock that evening, Hinde told Erskine that they to pull out because the 50th Northumbrians were proving unable to secure the road. Dempsey ultimately decided to that the brigade was too strung out of the line to survive any longer and ordered it to withdraw to Caumont, 4 miles northwest.

Codenamed "Aniseed," the controlled retreat was to begin at 11:15 that night. Under the cover of an RAF bombing raid on nearby Aunay-sur-Odon and Evrecy that destroyed one Tiger and disabled another three, the British began to pull out. Despite the noise of the bombing, the Germans realized what was happening and mounted a double pincer counterattack. In the south, two battalions of panzergrenadiers from the 2nd Panzer Division appeared and at midnight, they fell upon the 1/5th Queen's. German artillery began to blast the dugouts of the nearby 1/7th Queen's and in concert a small force from the Panzer Lehr struck the northern flank of the Rifle Brigade.

Even as the "Desert Rats" struggled to hold on, the Germans almost reached the brigade headquarters. Rear-echelon personnel, staff officers, signalers and typists took up guns to repel the attackers. The fighting was ferocious. The 5th RHA's G, C and K Battery fired 1,400 shells in three hours.¹ One unit, G battery, on the southern perimeter, engaged the Germans over open sights as the enemy advanced to within 400 yards of the guns. American heavy 155mm guns at Caumont also opened up on the attackers. Three entire German companies of infantry had gone into the attack with support of several tanks, including three Tigers, and had lost heavily. Finally, at 1:30 that night, the Germans retreated.

In all, the "Battle of the Box" as it had become christened, had inflicted an



**BRITISH TANK
CREWMAN**

¹ During the day, G Battery alone had fired 244 HE and 89 smoke shells.

estimated 700 to 800 German casualties² and between eight and twenty destroyed, including several Tigers. British losses amounted to three tanks, all Cromwells from the 5th RTR. But there is some doubt if German losses had been really that high. “Looney” Hinde himself wondered in an after-action report whether “the expenditure of artillery and small-arms ammunition was justified by the scale of the enemy’s efforts.”

Over the next few, combat continued between the 50th Northumbrians and the Panzer Lehr. The effects of Villers-Bocage had started to affect the British troops. Any German tanks spotted were invariably reported as being Tigers but very few, if any, were. In fact, the 101st SS Panzers saw limited engagement in the days following Villers-Bocage. Just one Tiger was encountered and lost on the 15th, knocked out by an Allied anti-tank gun at Cahagnes. This was commanded by Lt. Hannes Philipsen, who had led a charmed life at Villers-Bocage. Philipsen had bailed out of his machine with two crew members, but was struck in the abdomen by a shell burst and died.

By June 15, XXX Corps claimed to have destroyed at least 70 tanks. Tilly-sur-Seulles finally fell for the last time on June 18, having changed hands 23 times. The “Desert rats” reconstructed their lines in the Livry area two miles away, holding it with for the next two days with the Queen’s Brigade. After this, the division retired from the front to reinforce with the 33rd Armoured Brigade which had started to arrive on the beachhead. Senior commanders planned to send the division back into action once it had taken on the reinforcements but on June 19, a major storm almost derailed the cross-channel supply line and all hopes for further offensives were halted. In fact, the unit would not see action again until Operation “Goodwood” in July.

At the end of June, the Erskine posted his official divisional loss sheet: 1,149 casualties and 38 tanks lost during “Perch.” During the same period, the Panzer Lehr had lost 2,972 men and 51 tanks and assault guns. The 101st SS Panzer Battalion had lost 27 men. A further nine Tigers were lost by June 16 and a further 21 were undergoing repairs at workshops.

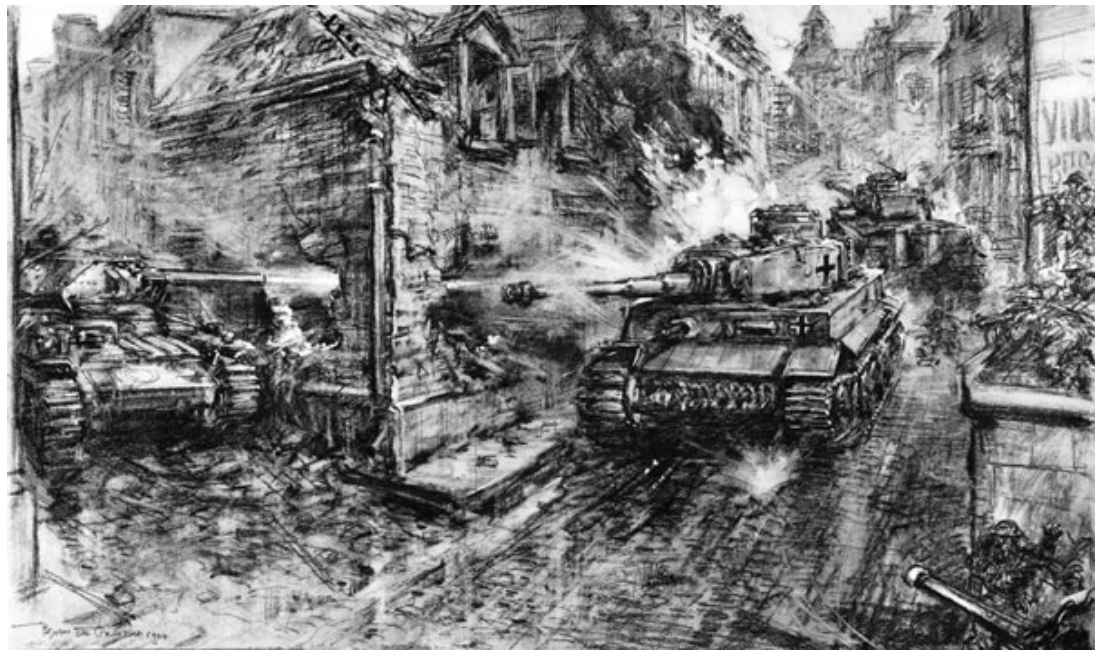
What was the end result of all this energy and sacrifice?

Certainly both strategically and tactically, the battle for Villers-Bocage had been a disappointment for the British. They had let slip an important tactical advantage while the Germans had exhibited their superior equipment with deadly effect. Montgomery and the 21st Army Group headquarters began to voice grave misgivings about the 7th Armoured’s capabilities, believing that the unit had shot its bolt in almost three years of continuous operations in the Mediterranean. In stark contrast, as far as the 101st SS Panzers and Wittmann were concerned, their aggressive tactics had won the day.

Panzer Lehr’s flanks had been secured and what was more Caen was still in their hands. Wittmann was elevated into a national hero. *Signal* magazine, the wartime propaganda publication, released several glowing articles on the young panzer commander’s story and achievement. They blurred the achievements of the entire 101st SS Battalion into one man — Wittmann — a misconception that is still sustained by some contemporary writing. True, Wittmann’s exploits were remarkable. His tactics were undeniably bold and his kill tally, the most impressive among the 101st SS, but he was also lucky. Undoubtedly, much of his stardom came from the fact that of the many British vehicles lost at Villers-Bocage, at least 27 fell

2 The historian Michael Reynolds disputes this figure, calling them “exaggerated.” See *Steel Inferno: I SS Panzer Corps in Normandy*. Da Capo Press, 2001.

PROPAGANDA
Artist Bryan de Grineau's impression of Sergeant Bramall's Firefly engaging German tanks. This was printed extensively in the *London Illustrated News*. The scene took some liberties.



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to his Tiger. Fritz Bayerlein immediately recommended swords to go with Wittmann's Knight's Cross, won in Russia half a year ago. The request was readily granted, as was a promotion to captain. But Wittmann refused a profitable position as an instructor in an officer's tactical school and for this he would pay the ultimate price. On 8 August 1944 during the Anglo-Canadian drive on Falaise, his Tiger (No. 007) would be blown to eternity whilst engaged a squadron of British Fireflies from the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry near Cintheaux. A single shell 17-Pounder penetrated the Tiger's right flank from over 850 yards. Black smoke began to rise from the Tiger. Then, twenty seconds later, the tank exploded, propelling the massive turret away. There were no survivors. Bobby Woll had fortuitous luck of being in treatment for earlier wounds at a military hospital at the time. As it transpired, Woll not only survived Normandy but also the war. He died in 1996. The bodies of Wittmann and his crew were unearthed forty years after the war and moved from an unmarked field grave to the La Gambe cemetery in 1983.

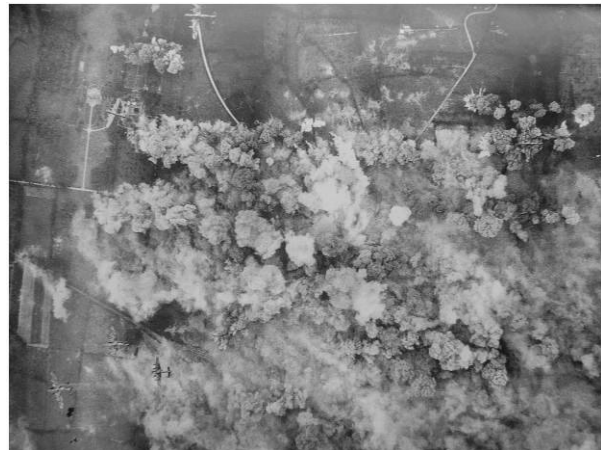
The British too attempted to propagandize the engagement, but a veritable fog of war had clogged their understanding of the battle especially as so many of their men had gone missing. When the German elevated Wittmann to the spotlight, crediting him for having destroyed an entire armoured regiment and infantry battalion, there were doctored images to go along with the story. For one, *Signal* magazine displayed dubious shots magnifying the scale of the destruction. With this evidence, the British were compelled to treat the battle as a hopeless disaster.

To save face they attempted to turn the survivors of the battle into national heroes themselves. Captain Cloudsley-Thompson and his crew, having escaped their stricken Cromwell, had hid in the cellar of a house for most of the 13th. Waiting for nightfall before they could make an escape, they feasted on Calvados which restored some of their nerves. When night came, heavy fire in the area reduced the cloak of darkness and the men remained in their hiding spot. The following morning, the town had shook under an RAF rocket attack, but at 9:30, a local butcher and his wife accidentally came across the five men in the cellar and offered them a few scraps of

food. That night, the British tried again and got away, eventually striking the 50th Northumbrian's lines. Returned to England, the Cloudsley-Thompson and his crew found themselves turned into reluctant celebrities. During his debriefing the British captain had adamantly stated that he "never wished to see another tank as long as [he] lived." This was translated in the British Press as "The first thing the...tank men asked for was another tank." The engagement was also extensively transcribed in the press, including the *London Illustrated News*, which treated it with lavishly-decorated articles paying homage to the gallantry of British tankers.

But reality runs along a different vein. Even though the British undeniably lost heavily in the town, the battle can be classified as a draw by taking German losses during the afternoon sorties into account, followed by their later defeats around the Brigade "Box." Even strategically, both sides failed to accomplish their objectives: the British to carry through with "Perch," the Germans to stabilize the Villers-Bocage front. The town only fell after the British abandoned it and the frontline actually favored the British after the Northumbrians took Tilly. Still, the "Desert Rats" considered the whole affair a humiliating episode. Their hard won reputation had been virtually squandered in a few miles of hedgerow-lined fields in Normandy. Dempsey was not dithering in his criticism. "This attack by 7th Armoured Division should have succeeded," he said angrily. "Early on the morning of 12 June I went down to see Erskine (the divisional commander) — gave him his orders and told him to get moving...if he had carried out my orders he would not have been kicked out of Villers-Bocage...the whole handling of the battle was a disgrace."

The idea that a single armoured brigade (the 23rd) with limited infantry and support could effectively capture all that it was supposed to now appeared as optimism bordering on the ludicrous. For this Dempsey put the blame squarely on Erskine and Hinde. But "Looney" Hinde pointed out that operating in the restricted terrain of Normandy against first-class enemy troops was the real folly. He also criticized British tanks as being wholly inadequate against the Tiger and



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BOMB TARGET Avro Lancasters carpet bomb Villers Bocage and a nearby road junction which was expected to be used by the 2nd and 9th SS Panzer Divisions moving troops against Allied troops.

(BELOW) The result, as pictured by an aircraft from 168 Squadron.



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

even Panthers.

But deficiency of armor was not the only issue. The lack of reconnaissance, poor coordination between the infantry, the scouts and the armour had dealt a severe blow to the English, for which they had no excuse. The behavior of two 4th CLY officers, Majors Carr and Aird were particularly useless. Neither man had proved capable of grasping the rapidly altering situation at Villers-Bocage. It is doubtful that Carr even had the proper tank combat experience as he had been seconded to the regiment only in the summer 1943. Incompetence from Bucknall, Erskine and Hinde, who failed to support the fighting men with reinforcements and leadership were other contributing factors. To Montgomery, the debacle was worse than a disgrace. His leading man, the corps commander, Bucknall had seemingly frittered a singular golden opportunity to capture Caen, that crucible of Normandy. Montgomery himself had appointed Bucknall to his post. Now he declared that Bucknall was incapable of managing a corps “once the battle became mobile.”

But the war continued. Ahead lay a long grueling campaign. There were no shortcuts or great luck, just match after match of slogging, murderous combat spanning seven major Anglo-Canadian offensives for the future of Caen and the campaign. The British alone would lose 11,000 dead and 54,000 wounded or missing by the end of the campaign. The Canadians lost 5,000 killed and 13,000 wounded or missing. This was the costly by-product of defeat at Villers-Bocage.

The town itself ultimately fell to British troops in the first week of August, during Operation “Bluecoat,” a massive six-division advance on the key towns of Vire, Le Beny-Bocage, Aunay-sur-Odon and the towering promontory of Mont Pinçon. The 7th Armoured was once again at the spearhead, minus Erskine³, who had been

3 Bucknall and Hinde too, went their way soon after.

**THE
REMAINS**
The knocked-out pair of a Tiger and Panzer IV on Rue Pasteur, remain where they were destroyed, although the bombs have jostled them apart slightly.



sacked for further mishaps since that first calamity in June. The division's objective was to capture the ruined town of Aunay-sur-odon, but certain elements, namely the 1/5th Queens, 8th Kings Royal Hussars and the 11th Hussars advanced through the near derelict Villers-Bocage. They found the town in complete ruins, the unfortunate victim of countless American, British and German artillery bombardments and a British bombing raid on June 30, that simply flattened the place under 1,100 tons of bombs.⁴

As the Stuarts and the infantry skirted over the mountains of rubble, some taller than the rest smothering destroyed German tanks, they could smell the lost hopes from all those days ago, fresh now as it was then. The hulking empty walls of shattered buildings stood upright, some standing alone as others attempted to resemble some structure of human habitation. As the British troops passed on, traversing the crater-filled fields beyond, they came across the Tilley crossroads where the gutted remains of the Rifle Brigade transport still remained, now derelict, rusted and torn to oblivion. They waited a moment and stared the hulks with idle fascination, the destruction so similar to all of war they had seen thus far. Some of the new recruits gaped and wondered what had happened here.

Then they blew up all the German material that could not be salvaged and moved on, to fresh ground. □

4 The official reason for the bombing was to prevent “tanks of two German Panzer divisions, the 2nd and 9th, would have to pass in order to carry out a planned attack on the junction of the British and American armies in Normandy that night. The raid was controlled with great care by the Master Bomber, who ordered the bombing force to come down to 4,000ft in order to be sure of seeing the markers in the smoke and dust of the exploding bombs. 1,100 tons of bombs were dropped with great accuracy and the planned German attack did not take place.” Some 266 aircraft took part in the attack with one Halifax and one Lancaster lost. (Martin Middlebrook, *Bomber Command War Diaries*)



MINING British troops place mines on a derelict Tiger at Villers-Bocage to blow it up.

APPENDIX

ORDERS OF BATTLE

BRITISH

The 7th “Desert Rats” Armoured Division

Major-General George Erskine
24 January 1943 to 4 August 1944



8th King’s Royal Irish Hussars (Armoured Recce Regiment, HQ — 4 Cromwells, 6 Crusader AA & 11 Stuarts)
A, B & C Squadrons (Each with 19 Cromwells)

22nd Armoured Brigade – Brig. W.N. “Looney” Hinde
1st Bn, The Royal Tank Regiment – Lt-Col R.M.P. Carver, DSO, MC
(RHQ — 4 Cromwells, 6 Crusader AA & 11 Stuarts)
A, B & C Squadrons (Each with 16 Cromwells and 4 Fireflies)

5th Bn, The Royal Tank Regiment
(RHQ — 4 Cromwells, 6 Crusader AA & 11 Stuarts)
A, B & C Squadrons (Each with 16 Cromwells and 4 Fireflies)

4th County of London Yeomanry – Lt-Col Arthur, the Viscount Cranley, MC
(RHQ — 4 Cromwells, 1 Halftrack, 2 Scout cars, 6 Crusader AA & 11 Stuarts)
A Squadron (16 Cromwells and 4 Fireflies) Major Arthur Carr
B Squadron (16 Cromwells and 4 Fireflies) Major “Ibby” Aird
C Squadrons (16 Cromwells and 4 Fireflies) Major Peter McColl
Recce Troop (11 Stuarts and 1 Scout car) Captain John Philip-Smith

1st (Motorized) Bn The Rifle Brigade – Lt-Col. Victor Paley
(HQ — 12 Six-Pdr guns & 8 MMG Carriers)
(Each regular coy had 12 M5 Halftracks, 4 White Scout cars, 11 Universal Carriers, 2x3” Mortars, 3x2” Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)

A Coy — Major James Wright
C Coy — Major B.W. Jepson-Turner
I Coy — Major W.J. Apsey
S Coy (11 Lloyd carriers, 6 Six-Pdrs, 8 Univ. Carrier) Major J.C. Witt

NOTE - Units in Blue
involved in or near
Villers-Bocage action.

131st (Queen's) Highland Brigade – Brig. Michael Ekins

1st/5th Bn Queen's Royal Regiment

A, B, C & D Coys (Each with 3x2" Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)
S Coy (6x3" Mortars, 6 Six-Pdr guns & 13 Universal Carriers)

1st/6th Bn Queen's Royal Regiment

A, B, C & D Coys (Each with 3x2" Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)
S Coy (6x3" Mortars, 6 Six-Pdr guns & 13 Universal Carriers)

1st/7th Bn Queen's Royal Regiment - Lt-Col. Desmond Gordon, MC

A Coy (3x2" Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)

B Coy (3x2" Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)

C Coy (3x2" Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)

D Coy (3x2" Mortars, 9 MGs, 3 PIATs)

S Coy (6x3" Mortars, 6 Six-Pdr guns & 13 Universal Carriers)

3rd Coy, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (12 MMG Carriers & 4x4.2" Mortars)

Royal Artillery

3rd Royal Horse Artillery Regiment (24x25-Pdr Guns)

5th Royal Horse Artillery Regiment (24xSexton SP guns)

65th Anti-Tank Regiment (24 M10 Achilles & 24 17-Pdr cannons)

15th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (36 Bofors 40mm AA, 18 Bofors SP 40mm guns)

Divisional Troops

Divisional Signals

Royal Engineers

Royal Army Service Corps

Royal Army Medical Corps

Royal Army Ordnance Corps

Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

Royal Corps of Military Police

Divisional Admin Troops



BOGGED A Stuart from the 5th RTR lays bogged down on the beach, although it was likely salvaged later.

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The 101st SS Panzer Abteilung

SS Lt-Colonel Heinz Westernhagen

Each Panzer company had fourteen Tiger Mk I's. Each company possessed three platoons (Zugs).

Operational Strength: June 6: 37 Tigers

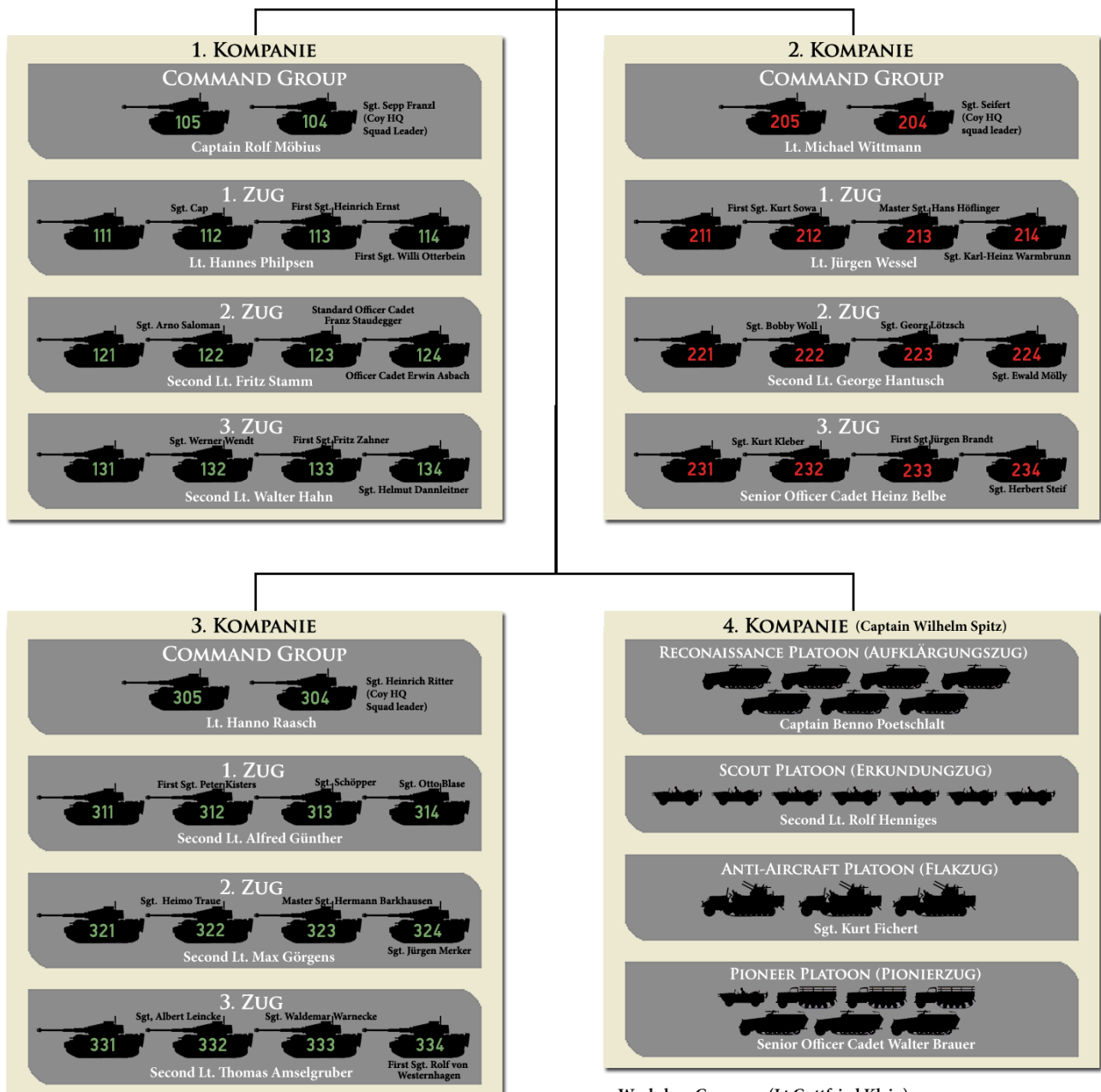
1 July: 11

1 August: 20

25 August: 0



NOTE - This was the makeup of the battalion on June 6, 1944. Some of the men were killed or wounded during the drive to Normandy and were subsequently replaced by new personnel.



Workshop Company (Lt Gottfried Klein)

Supply Company (Lt Paul Vogt)

The Panzer Lehr Division

Lt-General Fritz Bayerlein
Sept 1944 to 15 Jan 1945



130th Panzer Lehr Regiment (8 Panthers)

6th Bn (11 Panzer IV, 6 Flakpanzer 38(t))
Four companies (22 Panzer IV's each)
130th Bn (13 Panther, 6 Flakpanzer 38(t))
Four companies (17 Panthers each)
316th Panzer (Funklenk) Kompanie (10 Stug III, 3 Tigers, 36
Borgward BIV Demolition carriers)

901st Panzergrenadier Regiment (8 Sdkfz 251/1, 6 Sdkfz 251/16, 3 Pak40)

I Battalion (2 Sdkfz 251/1)

1, 2 & 3 Kompanies (Each with 15 Sdkfz 251/1, 2 Sdkfz 251/2, 2 Sdkfz 251/9,
18 MGs, 3 HMGs)
4th Kompanie (6 Sdkfz 251/9, 7 Sdkfz 271/7, 13 Sdkfz 251/1, 3 Pak40, 4
sGW43 mortars)

II Battalion (2 Sdkfz 251/1)

5, 6 & 7 Kompanies (Each with 15 Sdkfz 251/1, 2 Sdkfz 251/2, 2 Sdkfz 251/9,
18 MGs, 3 HMGs)
8th Kompanie (6 Sdkfz 251/9, 7 Sdkfz 271/7, 13 Sdkfz 251/1, 3 Pak40, 4
sGW43 mortars)
9th Kompanie (12 Sdkfz 10/5 20mm AA)
10th Kompanie (6 Grille SP guns, 5 Sdkfz 251/1)
11th Kompanie (22 Sdkfz 251/7)

902nd Panzergrenadier Regiment (8 Sdkfz 251/1, 6 Sdkfz 251/16, 3 Pak40)

1, 2 & 3 Kompanies (Each with 15 Sdkfz 251/1, 2 Sdkfz 251/2, 2 Sdkfz 251/9,
18 MGs, 3 HMGs)
4th Kompanie (6 Sdkfz 251/9, 7 Sdkfz 271/7, 13 Sdkfz 251/1, 3 Pak40, 4
sGW43 mortars)

II Battalion (2 Sdkfz 251/1)

5, 6 & 7 Kompanies (Each with 15 Sdkfz 251/1, 2 Sdkfz 251/2, 2 Sdkfz 251/9,
18 MGs, 3 HMGs)
8th Kompanie (6 Sdkfz 251/9, 7 Sdkfz 271/7, 13 Sdkfz 251/1, 3 Pak40, 4
sGW43 mortars)
9th Kompanie (12 Sdkfz 10/5 20mm AA)
10th Kompanie (6 Grille SP guns, 5 Sdkfz 251/1)
11th Kompanie (22 Sdkfz 251/7)

130th PanzerArtillerie Regiment

I Bn (12 Wespe, 6 Hummels)

II Bn (12 LeFH18 105mm Howitzers)

III Bn (6 KH433/1(r) 152mm guns, 4 K18 100mm guns)

130th PanzerAufklärungs Bn (Six Coys with a total of 233 armoured cars)

311th Flak Bn (3 Batteries with a total of 18 Flak 36 88mm guns & 9 Sdkfz7/2s)

130th Panzerjäger Bn (3 Coys with a total of 31 StuG IVs & 12 Pak 40s)

130th Panzerpionier Bn (3 Coys with a total of 70 Sdkfz 251/7s)

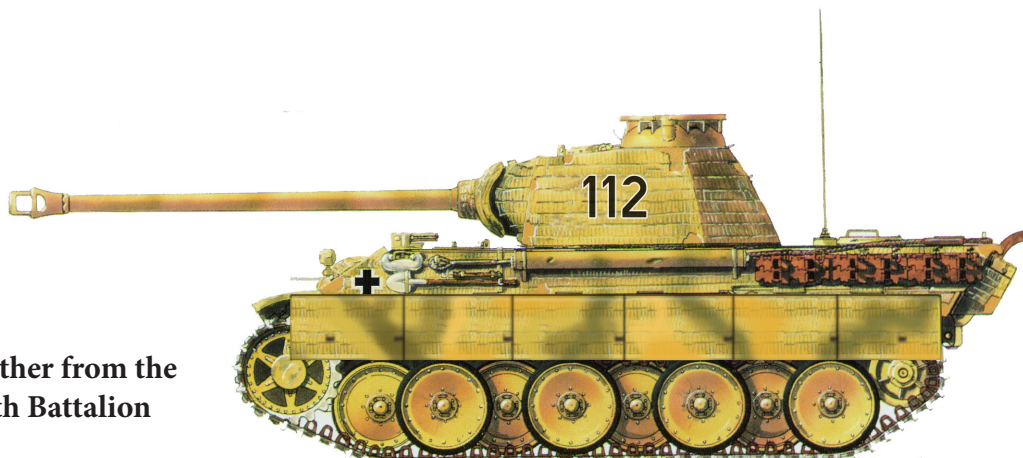
130th Feldersatz Bn (4 Coys)

130th Panzernachrichten Bn (2 Coys)

130th Versorgungstruppen

**A Panzer IVJ No. 634
from 6./Pz Lehr Regiment
130 waits for its turn
to move on the Rue
Georges Clemenceau.**

BUNDESARCHIV BILD
1011-738-0273-01A



**A Panther from the
130th Battalion**

TANK COMPARISON

	M3A3 Stuart	Sherman Mk V Firefly	Cromwell IV	Tiger I	Panzer IVH	Panther G
WEIGHT(tons)	15.3	35.32	27.9	57	25	44.8
DIMENSIONS	15.9 L, 7.51 W, 8.43 H	30.34 L, 8.75 W, 8.98 H	+20.8 L, 9.54 W, 8.16 H	27.72 L, 12.21 W, 7.84 H	22.9 L, 10.8 W, 8.79 H	22.6 L, 10.9 W, 9.10 H
SPEED (mph)	39.7	24.8	30.9	23	23.6	34
MAIN GUN	M6 37mm	ROQF 17pdr Mk IV, VII	ROQF 75mm Mk V	88mm KwK36	75mm KwK 40/L48	75mm KwK 42/L70
MGs	3	1	2	2	2	2
CREW	4	4	5	5	5	5
FRONT ARMOUR	38-64	51	57	100-110	80	60-80
SIDE	29	38	32	80	30	40
REAR	25	38	32	80	20	40
TURRET	44-32	76-57	76-57	100-80	50-30	110-45
Mileage (in miles)	156.6	100	164.6	87.5	130	160

Note:

Weight (in tons)

Dimensions (in feet): Length (including cannon), width, height

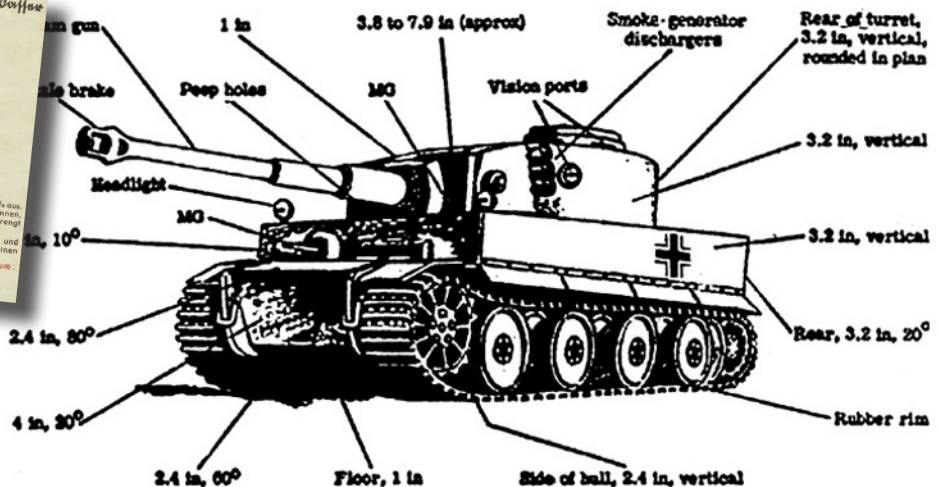
Speed (top speed)

Machine Guns (MGs): Number carried

Armour (mms): Maximum figures for the hull only.



(ABOVE) Pages from the official Tiger Tank manual that attempted to combine easy maintenance instructions with naked women.



RANK COMPARISON

SS Rank	Translation	Wehrmacht Rank	American Rank	British Rank
-	-	General- <u>Feldmarschall</u>	General of the Army	Field Marshall
<u>Oberstgruppenführer</u>	Supreme Group Leader	<u>Generaloberst</u>	General	General
<u>Obergruppenführer</u>	Senior Group Leader	General <u>der</u> (insert service)	Lieutenant-General	Lieutenant-General
<u>Gruppenführer</u>	Group Leader	<u>Generalleutnant</u>	Major-General	Major-General
<u>Brigadeführer</u>	Brigade Leader	<u>Generalmajor</u>	Brigadier General	Brigadier
<u>Oberführer</u>	Senior Leader	-	-	-
<u>Standartenführer</u>	Standard Leader	<u>Oberst</u>	Colonel	Colonel
<u>Obersturmbannführer</u>	Senior Storm Command Leader	<u>Oberstleutnant</u>	Lieutenant-Colonel	Lieutenant-Colonel
<u>Sturmbannführer</u>	Storm Command Leader	Major	Major	Major
<u>Hauptsturmführer</u>	Head Storm Leader	Hauptmann	Captain	Captain
<u>Obersturmführer</u>	Senior Storm Leader	<u>Oberleutnant</u>	1st Lieutenant	Lieutenant
<u>Untersturmführer</u>	Under Storm Leader	<u>Leutnant</u>	2nd Lieutenant	2 nd Lieutenant
<u>Sturmscharführer</u>	Storm Company Leader	<u>Stabsfeldwebel</u>	Sergeant Major	Regimental Sergeant Major
<u>Standarten-Oberjunker</u>	Standard Senior Officer Cadet	<u>Oberfähnrich</u>	-	-
<u>Hauptscharführer</u>	Head Company Leader	<u>Oberfeldwebel</u>	Master Sergeant	Battalion Sergeant Major
<u>Oberscharführer</u>	Senior Company Leader	<u>Feldwebel</u>	First Sergeant	Company Sergeant Major
<u>Standartenjunker</u>	Standard Officer Cadet	<u>Fähnrich</u>	-	-
<u>Scharführer</u>	Company Leader	<u>Unterfeldwebel</u>	Staff Sergeant	Platoon Sergeant Major
<u>Unterscharführer</u>	Under Company Leader	<u>Unteroffizier</u>	Sergeant	Sergeant
<u>Rottenführer</u>	Band Leader	<u>Obergefreiter</u>	Corporal	Corporal
<u>Sturmmann</u>	Storm Man	<u>Gefreiter</u>	None	Lance Corporal
<u>Oberschütze</u>	Head Private	<u>Oberschütze</u>	Private First Class	-
<u>Schütze</u>	Private	<u>Schütze</u>	Private	Private

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