

PANZERS OF KASSERINE

THE AFRIKA KORPS IN TUNISIA

CAMPAIGN SERIES





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Authors' Note

The author wishes to thank the staff of the Factory Publishing for their good advice and quick reaction. His thanks also go to the many authors of published books and contributors to Internet threads written with commendable knowledge of this much forgotten subject. The illustrations in this book were all created using on contemporary photographs as a reference, unless otherwise noted, and we have attempted to create as faithful a reproduction as possible, including the shape and position of any camouflage patterns or schemes, markings and the type of lettering used.

The Panzers of Kasserine

**The Afrika Korps in Tunisia
Campaign Series**

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Readers should note that I have endeavoured to use unit designations and formation titles in their original German. Where these terms are either obscure or overly complicated I have supplied an English translation or equivalent. However, abbreviations which are well known or obvious - such as PzD for Panzer Division - should require no further elaboration. In official Wehrmacht correspondence, a battalion - usually referred to as an *Abteilung* and in some cases a *bataillon* - was described using roman numerals, while companies and regiments used arabic numbers. Thus, II/PzRegt 7, refers to the 2nd Battalion of Panzer Regiment 7, while 2/PzRegt 7 refers to the regiment's 2nd Company. This system is used here.

Any attempt to construct a true and complete order of battle for this long and arduous campaign ranging from 14 November 1942, when the first panzers rolled into Tunisia, to 12 May 1943 and the surrender of Axis forces in North Africa, would at best be illusory and is in any case beyond the scope of this short photographic essay.

For the greater part of the campaign, the German and Italian armoured units that fought in Tunisia were divided between 5.Panzer Armee (or more correctly, Panzer Armee Oberkommando 5 - usually abbreviated to Pz AOK 5 - created on 8 December 1942) in northern Tunisia and the Deutsches Italienische Panzer Armee in the south. The southern force was renamed 1. Italienische Armee on 30 January 1943 and contained the famous Deutsches Afrika Korps (DAK) which had retreated into Tunisia from Libya on 13 February 1943. On 23 February Heeres Gruppe Afrika (Army Group Africa) was created and commanded all Axis ground forces in North Africa.

Most units serving in Tunisia were frequently transferred between commands and often fought in improvised Kampfgruppen, which regularly mixed elements from different formations. For that reason, this study is limited to the AFVs sent to North Africa from November 1942 to the end of the campaign. For obvious reasons most of these arrived at Tunisian harbours.

The Panzer divisions in the bridgehead were the newly arrived 10.PzD with the veteran 21.PzD and 15.PzD. The 21.PzD was sent to North Africa as the 5. Leichte Division, becoming 21. PzD late in 1941(1). This was quickly followed by the 15. PzD (2). As a reaction to the Operation Torch landings on 8 November 1942, 10. PzD was immediately sent to Tunisia to bolster the bridgehead and counter the 'second front' which the landings had created, threatening Rommel in full retreat from El Alamein (3).

There were reorganisations in theatre such as that of 17 January 1943 when II/PzReg 5 of 21.PzD was removed from its parent formation, attached to 15.PzD and renamed II /PzReg 8. A new I/PzReg 5 was created from surplus assets already in Tunis (13 Pzkw III lang, 6 Pzkw III Ausf N and 17 Pzkw IV lang) and a new II/Pz Reg 5 obtained by simply renaming PzAbt 190 whose 2.Kompanie with 6 Pzkw IIIs had been diverted to the DAK in early November 1942.

The last major change in organisation was ordered on 26 February 1943 when it was planned that each division should be made up of two medium battalions, each of four companies with 22 Pzkw IVs each (obviously the lang version by this time). In reality this could only be implemented with the material on hand in Tunisia and thus remained largely theoretical.

Another, perhaps more important modification carried out at this time affected the most potent armoured units within Pz AOK 5 at this time - the Tiger battalions.

The Wehrmacht's heavy tank units deployed to North Africa were schwere Panzer Abteilung 501 (sPzAbt) and sPzAbt 504. Each comprised at the time a headquarters (Stab) company and 2 tank companies, the third company was only authorised sometime later. Insufficient production of the new heavy tank and doubts about the materiel needed in this kind of unit led to the deployment of a large number of Pzkw III Ausf Ns within the heavy battalions. As part of the 26 February 1943 reorganisation, the remaining tanks of both units were to be consolidated and become the third battalion of the panzer regiments of 10.PzD and 15. PzD. In actuality, only 10. PzD benefited from the order when 1 and 2/sPzAbt 501 became 7 and 8/PzRegt 7. The increasing losses and the late arrival of sPzAbt 504 meant that 15.PzD never received its Tigers and 11 surviving

tanks from sPzAbt501 were allocated to sPzAbt 504 - which retained its independent status - on 17 March 1943 (4).

Although a complex and often difficult subject, the system of vehicle markings should receive some brief mention here. Examples are also shown in the illustrations and photographs. Markings typically consisted of a national marking - the well known *Balkenkreuze* - a divisional insignia (and/or sub-unit insignia) plus a three digit tactical number whose meaning usually conformed to an established system. The first digit signified the company - 1 to 4 in the first battalion and 5 to 8 in the second. The second digit identified the platoon, with each company containing 3 or 4 platoons, and the last denoted the individual tank within the platoon or Zug. There were 5 tanks to a platoon.

Regarding equipment, the *leichte* (light) companies of a battalion differed from the *mittlere* (medium) only in the main tank used - Pzkw IIIs and Pzkw IVs respectively. The Befehlspanzer or command tanks were suitably modified Pzkw IIIs, a smaller version - referred to as *klein* - based on the obsolete Pzkw I having by this time been phased out.

But the 'true' Panzers were not the only AFVs in use in Tunisia. Apart from the many captured vehicles - exact numbers do not seem to have been kept or survived - Sd.Kfz.139 Marder IIIs armed with the Soviet 7.62cm Pak 39 on the chassis of the Czech Pzkw 38 (t) arrived with 10. PzD, a total of nine being used by 3/Panzerjäger Abteilung 90 in addition to at least another 27 which served with 15.PzD and 21. PzD plus 15 replacements received since 1942. Also Sd.Kfz. 138 Marder IIIs with the 7.5cm Pak 40 on the Pzkw 38 (t) chassis were also used in the bridgehead with nine sent to 21. PzD up to March 1943 and at least five received as replacements by 3.schnelle Abt 334 of 334. Infanterie Division. This division had arrived in North Africa with nine Sd.Kfz.135 Marder I - the 7.5cm Pak 40 on the Lorraine Tractor chassis - in early January 1943. The Sturmgeschützen were not forgotten and the six Stug III Ausf F/8s sent to Africa (two being lost at sea) had a complicated and fascinating history which unfortunately cannot be covered in detail here. The 1.Batterie/ Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 242 was quickly subordinated to 10.PzD as its 13. Batterie /Panzer Artillery Regt 90 (5). It was reorganised and renamed Stug Batterie 90 on 30/04/43.

Italy was not absent from this last phase of the fighting in North Africa. Its armoured elements were now limited, principally found in the Centauro Armoured Division (numbered 131st, with its 31 Reggimento Carri). It was a division only in name as theoretical organisation had no real meaning in Tunisia at the time with mounting losses and little hope of either replacements or reinforcements. The Regiment's main armoured vehicles were M14/41 medium tanks and the much more powerful Semovente da 75/18s SP assault guns (a short 75mm gun in a fixed superstructure utilising the same chassis as the M14/41 tank). The lighter Semovente da 47/32 was also present in numbers. This latter vehicle was armed with a 47mm AT gun in an open-topped superstructure on the L6/40 light tank chassis)

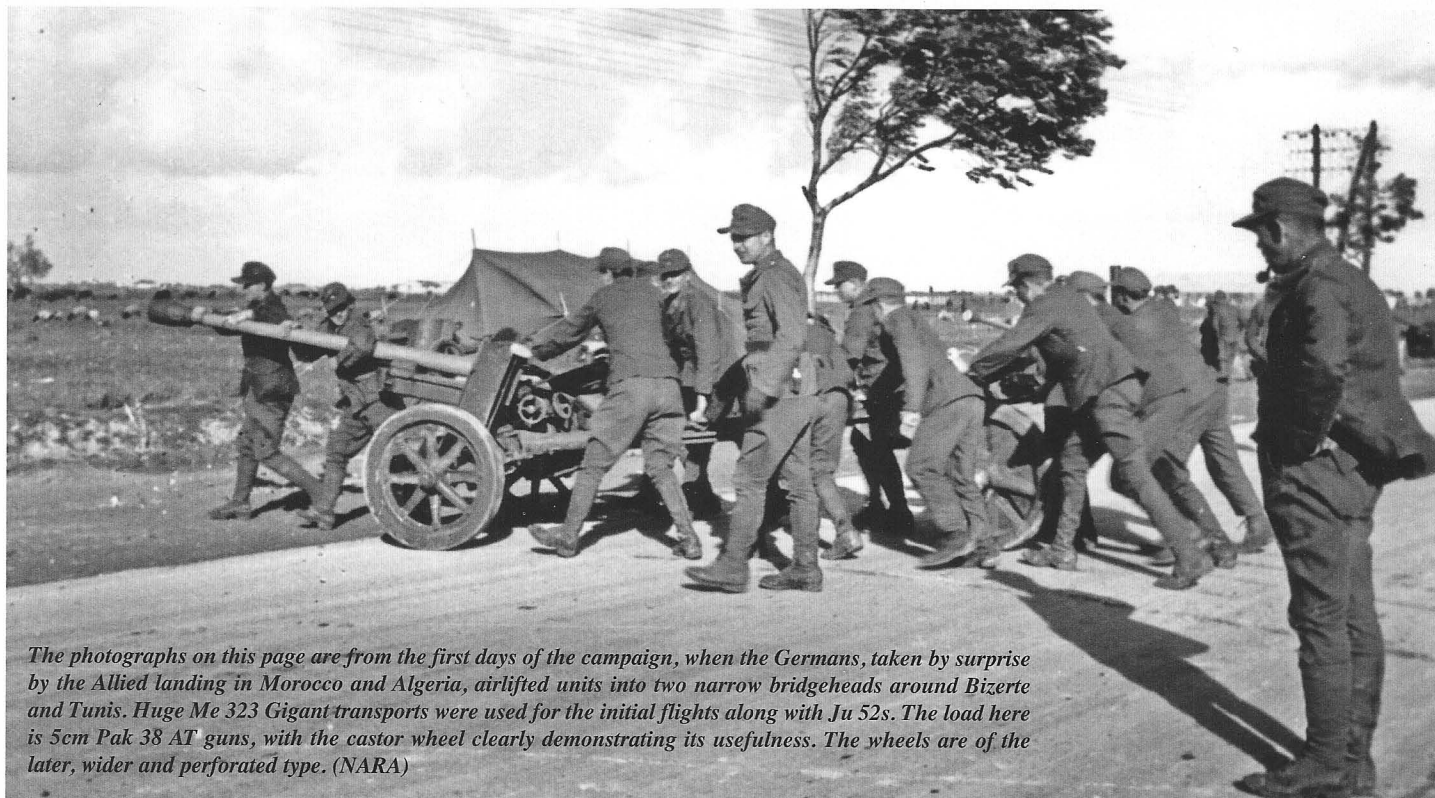
1. The 5. Leichte Division was formed as an emergency measure from elements of 3.Panzer Division to aid the collapsing Italian forces in North Africa. Its first important action as 21.Panzer Division was during operation Crusader in November 1941.

2. The 15.Panzer Division was from 33.Infanterie Division and Panzer Regiment 8 of 10.Panzer Division and arrived in North Africa in May 1941.

3. Lest it be thought inexperienced and untried, in its short life 10.Panzer Division had taken part in the invasion of Poland in 1939, France in 1940, fought in Russia in 1941 and 1942.

4. Only the Stab and 1/sPzAbt 504 crossed into Tunisia, the rest of the battalion remaining in Sicily.

5. The German Army's Sturmgeschütz, or assault gun, units were controlled at that time by the Inspector General of Artillery and therefore used the terminology of that arm - in this case Batterie instead of Kompanie.





Units of 10.PzD made good use of the vehicles of 3 Battalion, 6 Armoured Infantry Regiment (US 1st Armoured Division) captured during the first phase of the Kasserine Pass fighting on 20 February. Most still carry their original US markings. Some of these M3 Half-tracks already have the mine racks on the sides adopted in August 1942. The vehicle in the background of the first photo is a Dodge 1/2 Ton, either a WC 21 (or 22 when fitted with a front mounted winch). (NARA)

More photographs of the column seen on page 4 taken by German war correspondents. This half-track, COMMANDO YANK aka GRENADIER, carries an MG tripod on the mudguard. The date is 21 February 1943 and the prospect of victory for the Germans was still high - the idea was to turn the Allied front and capture or destroy their supply bases. (NARA)



The name **LOADED - LOCKED** (the full nickname is visible on another photo) is a rather appropriate for a half-track carrying unfortunate GIs bagged by 10.PzD. (NARA)



This is probably an ambulance half-track with Red Cross markings judging by the tarpaulin in place and lack of armament. (NARA)



M3 half-tracks towing US made M3A1 Anti-tank guns. These were still effective against most of the German and Italian tanks they faced when properly used - that is for flank shots. But the Commonwealth units were better equipped with the 6 Pounder (57mm), available since mid-1942. (NARA)



The German correspondents - or more correctly PK for Propaganda Kompanie - continued their photo report and crossed the path of the DAK Kampfgruppe (mainly elements from 15.PzD). Here, are seen two SdKfz 233s - out of the 126 made from July 1942 to October 1943. These vehicles carried short 7.5cm L/24 guns left over from the Pzkw IV program after it shifted to the longer L/43 gun. (NARA)



A rare bird was also captured on film, an SdKfz 251 Ausf B with a 5cm Pak 38 - minus its wheels - fixed above the driver's position. The DAK insignia is clearly visible on the rear access door. The shield for the AA MG at the rear of the hull is also uncommon - it was probably moved from the front. (NARA)



A total of 80 of these T28E1 AA half-tracks were built and 78 sent to Tunisia with the US Army's 443rd AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion. They carried a 37mm AA gun with two water cooled .50 MGs, and usually towed a 1-Ton trailer loaded with ammunition. As can be seen here, the Germans managed to capture at least one intact example. (NARA)



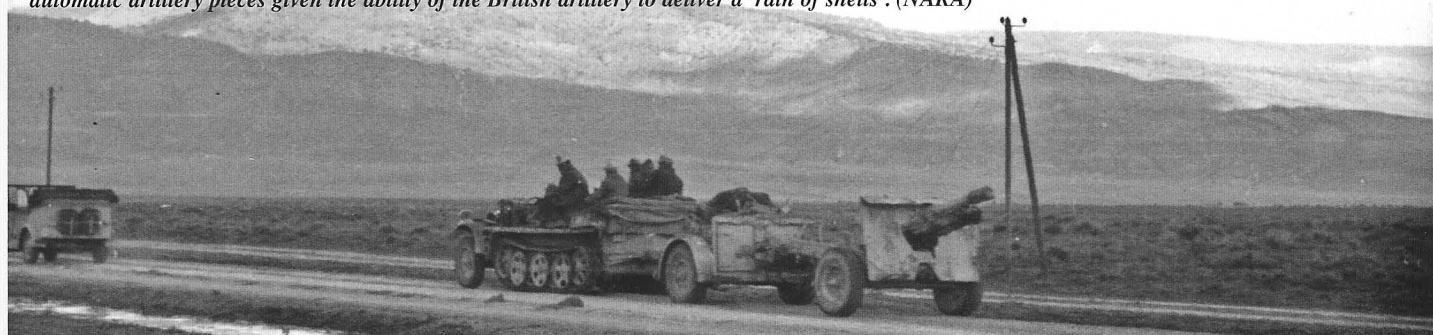
The heavier anti-tank guns used by DAK units at this time were often modified 7.62cm Soviet guns - here a Model 1936 - that were captured in huge numbers during Operation Barbarossa and sent to Africa in early 1942 in an effort to combat newer Allied tanks. The 7.5cm Pak 40 was still rare in Tunisia as priority was given to the Eastern Front, however 10.PzD did have a number on hand. (NARA)



An SdKfz 10 towing what is probably a 5cm Pak 38. This half-track was the smallest in the German inventory - with a 1 tonne pulling capacity. (NARA)



The British 25 Pounder was also captured in large numbers by the DAK and they were immediately put to use by their new owners. Although not as powerful as the 105mm howitzers - particularly its HE shell - ammunition was plentiful. The Germans often thought the guns were some kind of automatic artillery pieces given the ability of the British artillery to deliver a 'rain of shells'. (NARA)



In this photo and that at left below, the PK cameramen have moved to a tank unit, here 15.PzD or more exactly the DAK Kampfgruppe that took part in the Kasserine Battle. Shown here is a Pzkw III Ausf N with an ace of spade insignia on the turret side and on the back of the Rommelkiste - the term in German meaning stowage bin and having no real link to Rommel. Long-barrelled Pzkw IVs can be seen in the background. (NARA)



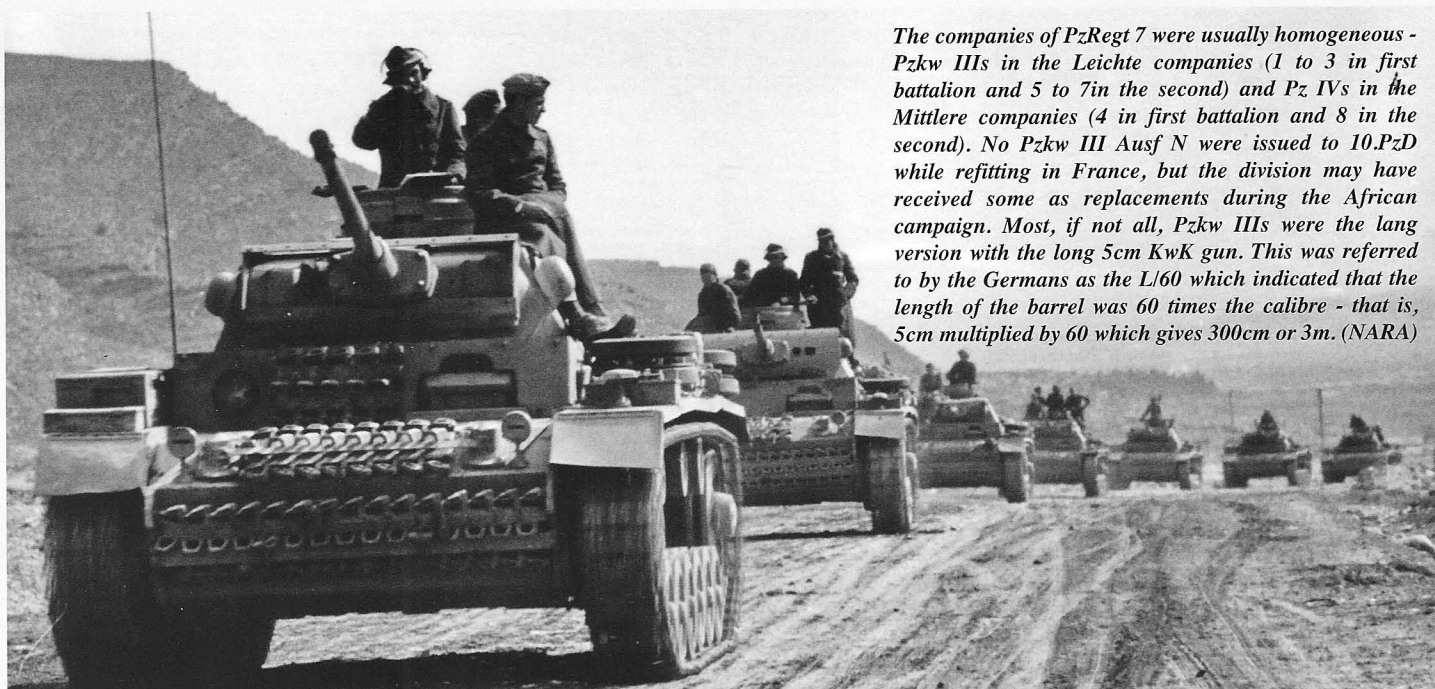
In this photograph and that at above right can be seen two views of a Pzkw III Ausf J with track shoes applied as additional armour. The long serving, veteran tank crews of the DAK usually carried more stowage on their tanks than the newly arrived 10.PzD. (NARA)

In its next move, the PK camera team photographed a column of 10.PzD tanks, most probably from 4/PzRegt7. Tracks were also used as supplementary armour around the hull front. Stowage was less prominent but a large box on the right mudguard was added while refitting in France in 1942 and is quite characteristic of this regiment in Tunisia. The muzzle brakes are still covered indicating that combat is not imminent - though the gun could still be fired in an emergency without adverse results. (NARA)

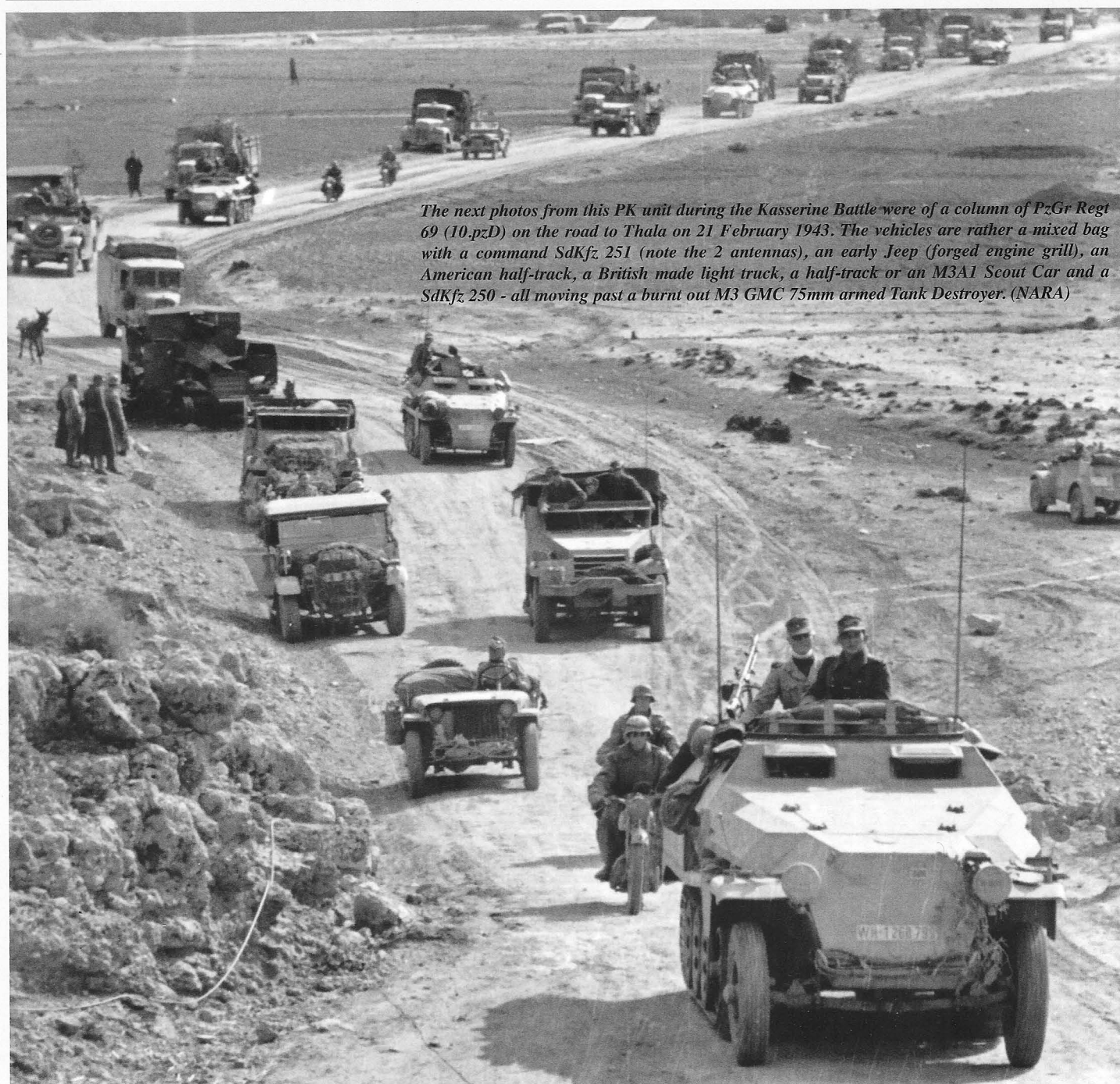


Behind the last Pzkw IV of 4th company were the Pzkw IIIs of 2/PzRegt 7. The unit usually painted the company number in white on the Rommelkiste and the regiment's 'Bison' unofficial insignia can be seen next to that. The platoon and tank number were painted in a smaller size and in a dark colour on the turret sides and rear engine plate. The lang versions are by this time very prominent, the shorter gun having lost much of its usefulness. (NARA)



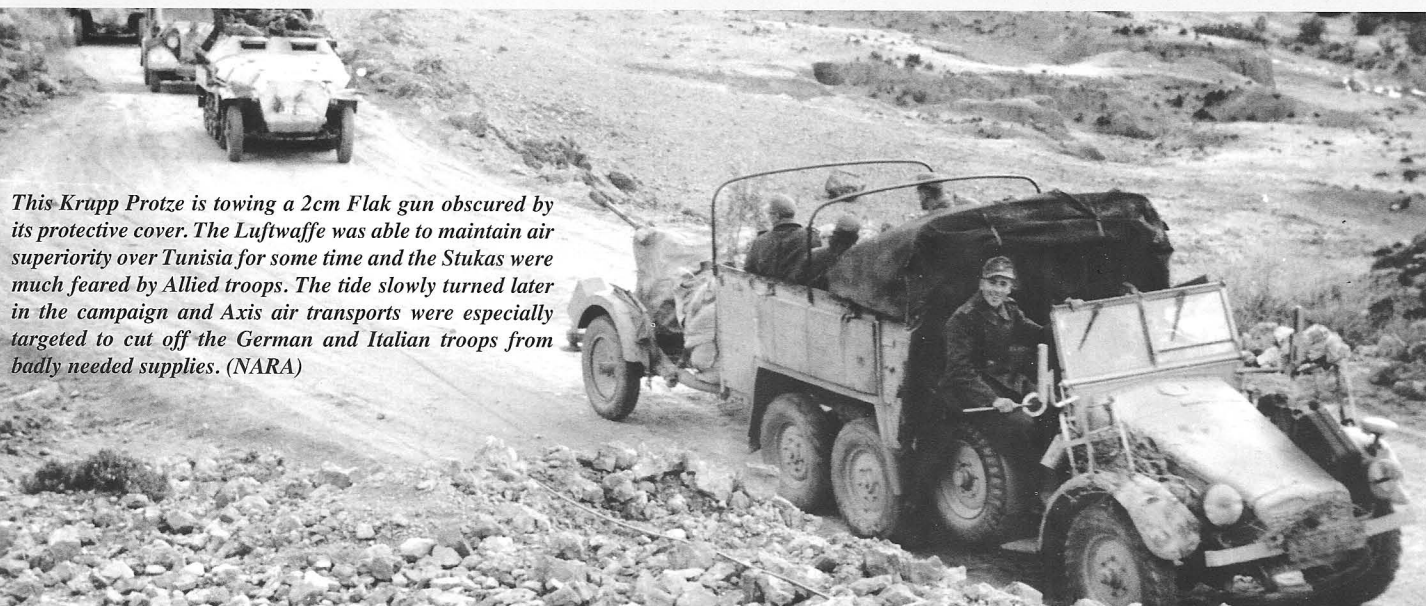
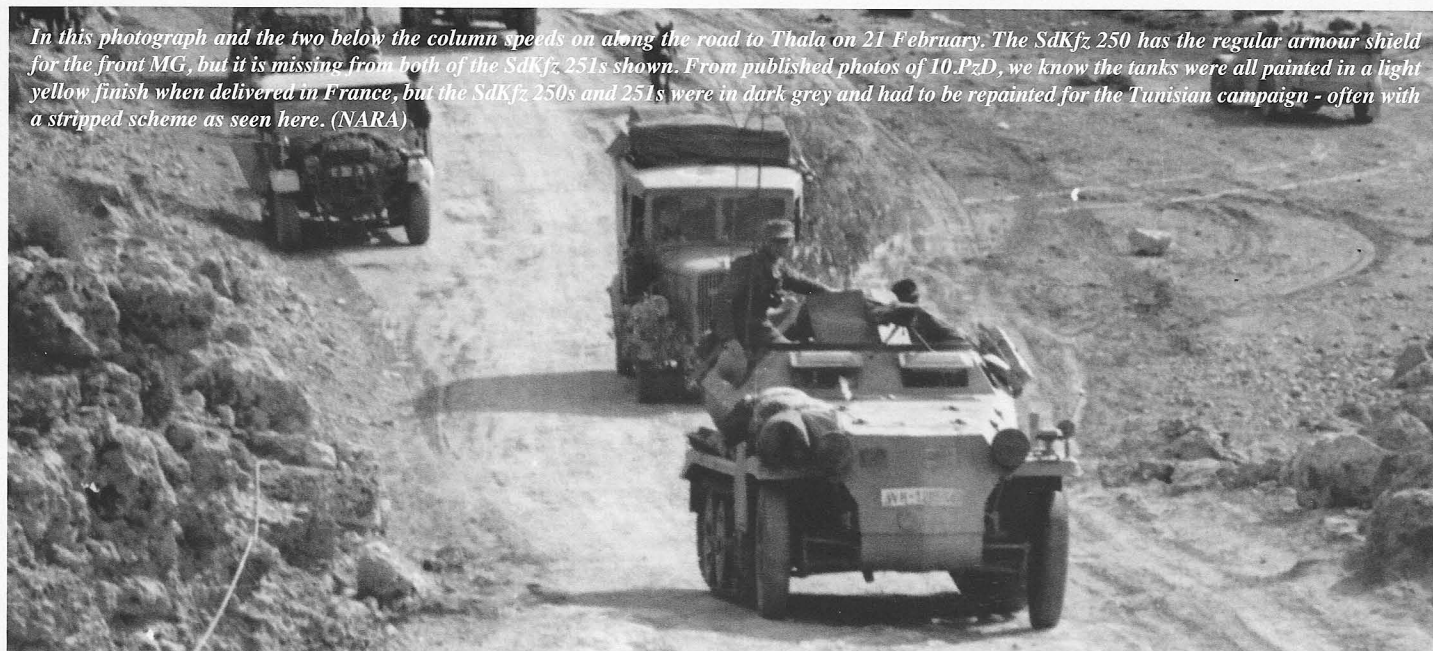


The companies of PzRegt 7 were usually homogeneous - Pzkw IIIs in the Leichte companies (1 to 3 in first battalion and 5 to 7 in the second) and Pz IVs in the Mittlere companies (4 in first battalion and 8 in the second). No Pzkw III Ausf N were issued to 10.PzD while refitting in France, but the division may have received some as replacements during the African campaign. Most, if not all, Pzkw IIIs were the lang version with the long 5cm KwK gun. This was referred to by the Germans as the L/60 which indicated that the length of the barrel was 60 times the calibre - that is, 5cm multiplied by 60 which gives 300cm or 3m. (NARA)



The next photos from this PK unit during the Kasserine Battle were of a column of PzGr Regt 69 (10.pzD) on the road to Thala on 21 February 1943. The vehicles are rather a mixed bag with a command SdKfz 251 (note the 2 antennas), an early Jeep (forged engine grill), an American half-track, a British made light truck, a half-track or an M3A1 Scout Car and a SdKfz 250 - all moving past a burnt out M3 GMC 75mm armed Tank Destroyer. (NARA)

In this photograph and the two below the column speeds on along the road to Thala on 21 February. The SdKfz 250 has the regular armour shield for the front MG, but it is missing from both of the SdKfz 251s shown. From published photos of 10.PzD, we know the tanks were all painted in a light yellow finish when delivered in France, but the SdKfz 250s and 251s were in dark grey and had to be repainted for the Tunisian campaign - often with a stripped scheme as seen here. (NARA)



This Krupp Protze is towing a 2cm Flak gun obscured by its protective cover. The Luftwaffe was able to maintain air superiority over Tunisia for some time and the Stukas were much feared by Allied troops. The tide slowly turned later in the campaign and Axis air transports were especially targeted to cut off the German and Italian troops from badly needed supplies. (NARA)



More vehicles of Pz Grenadier Regt 69 (10.PzD) are seen on the road to Thala, 21 February 1943. By this time the end of the battle is now only days away. (NARA)



The M3A1 Scout Car has now moved on and is better seen, with an MG 34 on an AA tripod installed in the fighting compartment. The glass windscreen is in full view as the armoured flaps are raised. (NARA)

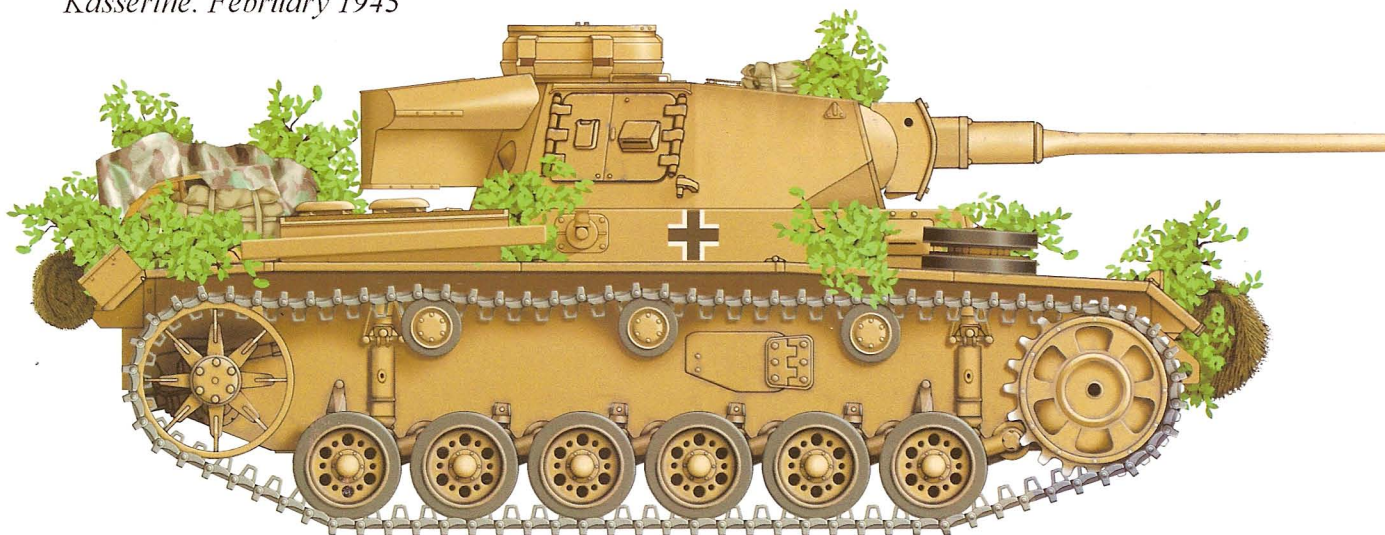


This M3 Half-track was probably an earlier prize of war as it is clearly marked with the Balkenkreuz. The overtaking SdKfz 263 (8 rad) was one of the 207 made to January 1943. It was more an armoured communication vehicle than a true armoured car, armed with a single 7.92mm MG 34. (NARA)

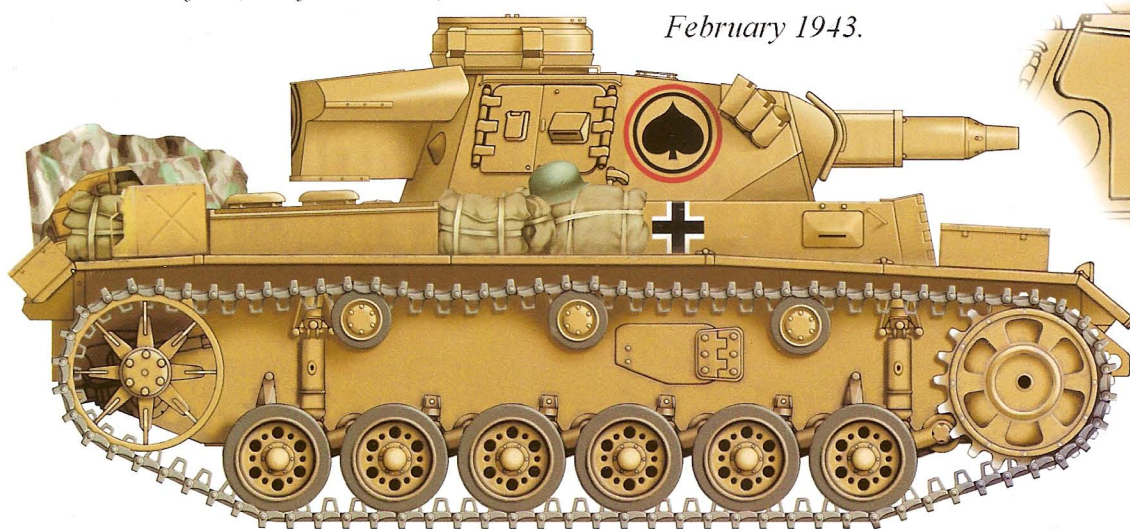
The same half-track passed by an SdKfz 251 which is clearly marked as a vehicle from 5/PzGr Regiment 69. The 10.PzD insignia is clearly visible on the front plate. The elaborate Bison marking was only found on the Panzers of PzRegt 7. (NARA)



*Pzkw III Ausf J (L/60). 21.Panzer Division.
Kasserine. February 1943*

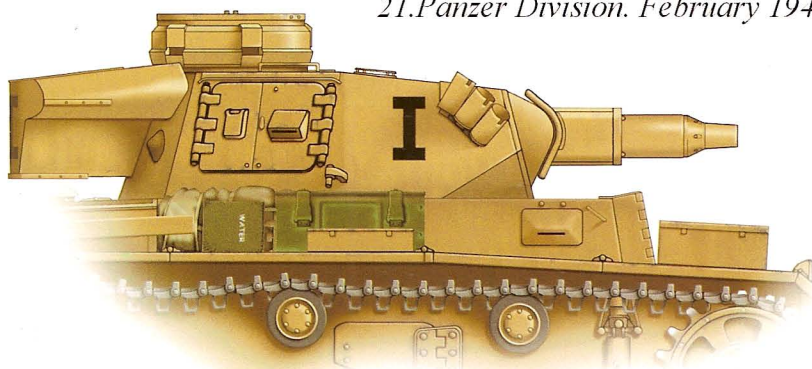


*Pzkw III Ausf N (Ausf J chassis). 15.Panzer Division. Kasserine.
February 1943.*

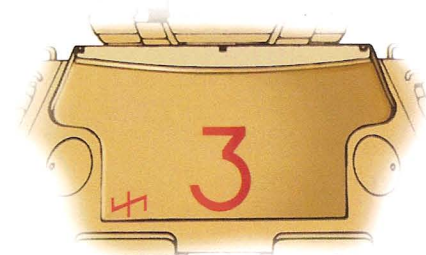


15.Panzer Division.

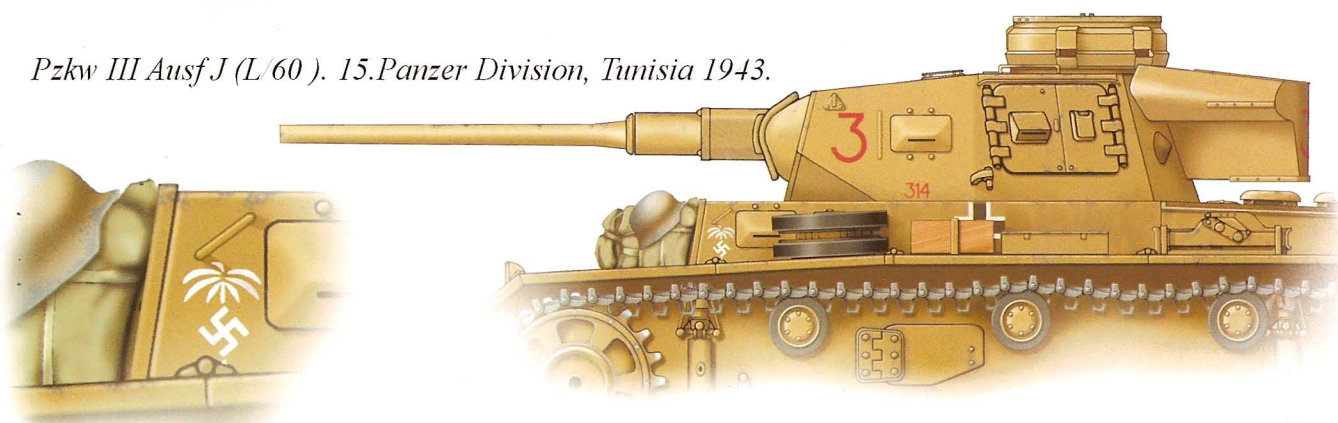
*Pzkw III Ausf N (Ausf J chassis). I/Panzer Regiment 5,
21.Panzer Division. February 1943.*



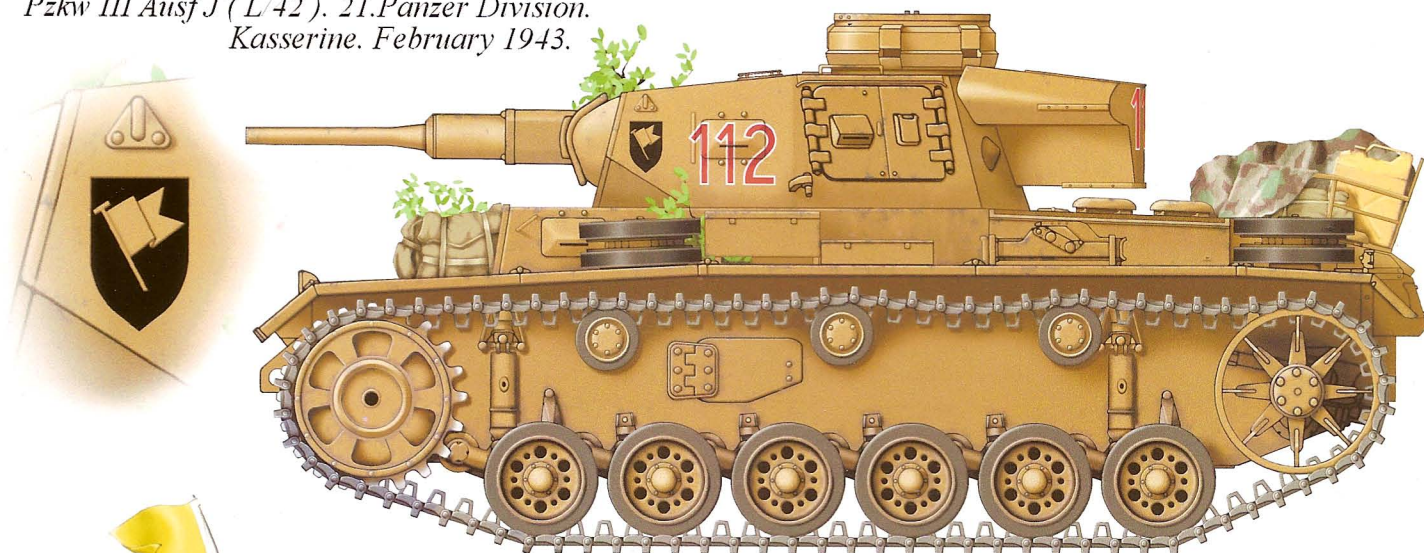
Panzer Regiment 8.



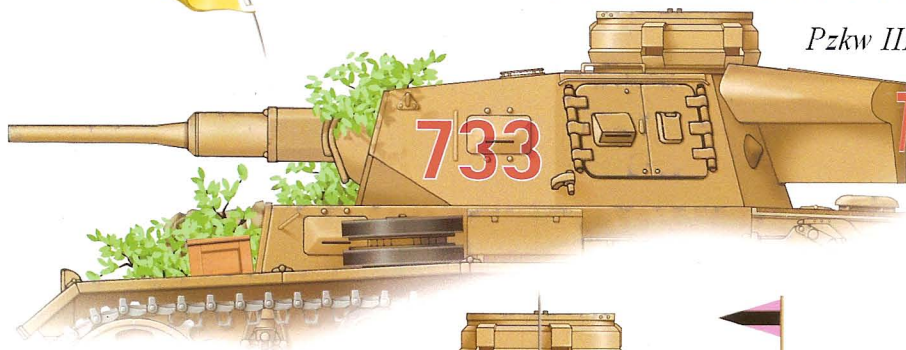
Pzkw III Ausf J (L/60). 15.Panzer Division, Tunisia 1943.



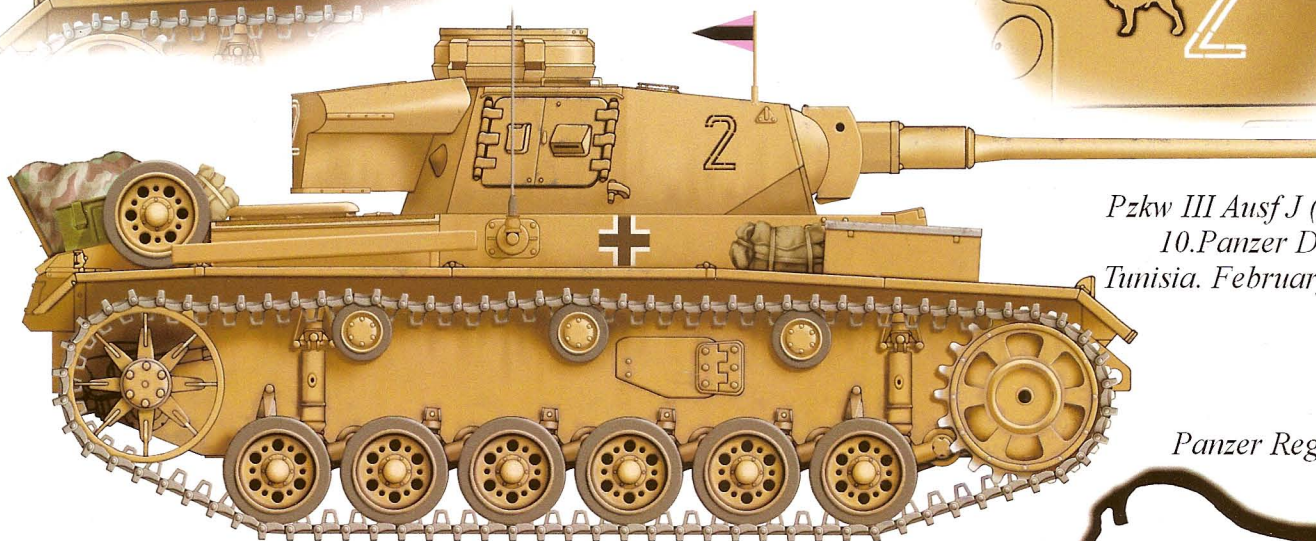
*Pzkw III Ausf J (L/42). 21. Panzer Division.
Kasserine. February 1943.*



*Pzkw III Ausf J (L/42). 21. Panzer Division.
Kasserine. February 1943.*

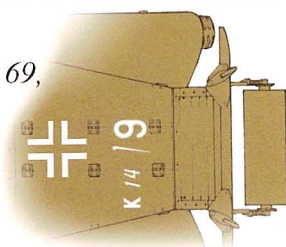


*Pzkw III Ausf J (L/60).
10. Panzer Division.
Tunisia. February 1943.*

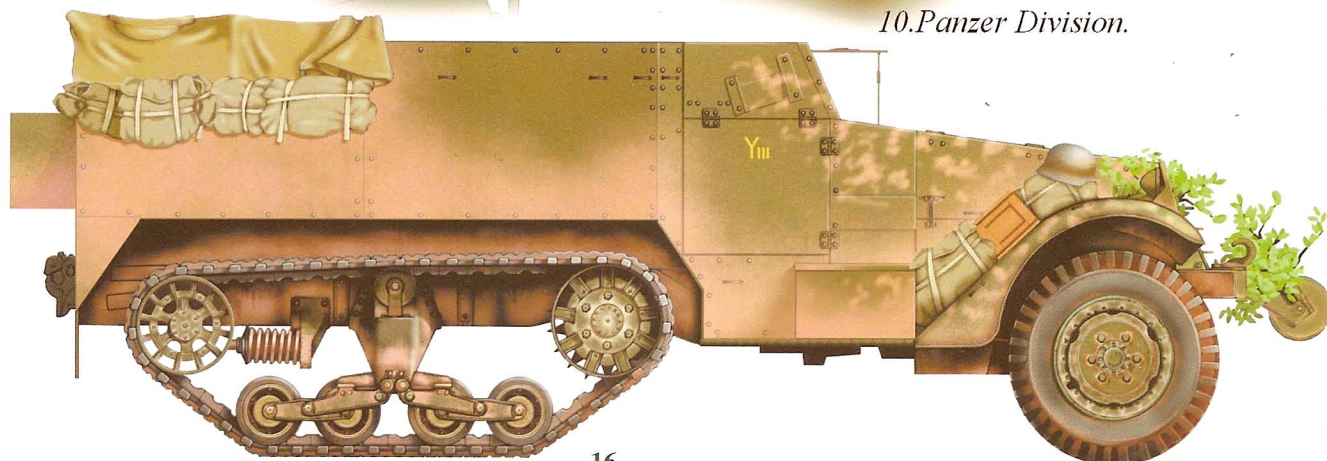


Panzer Regiment 7.

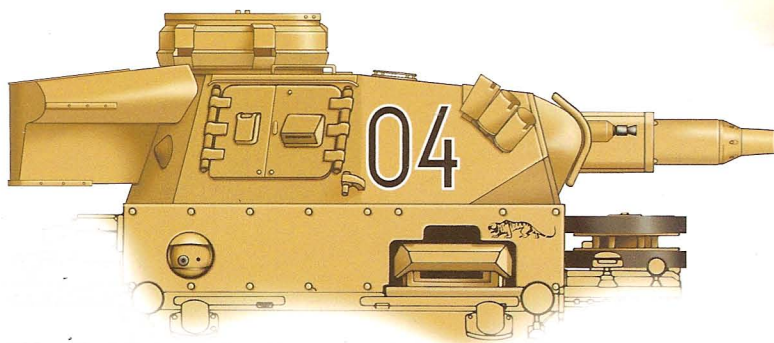
*Beute M3 Half-track.
5 Panzer Grenadier Regiment 69,
10. Panzer Division.
Tunisia. February 1943.*



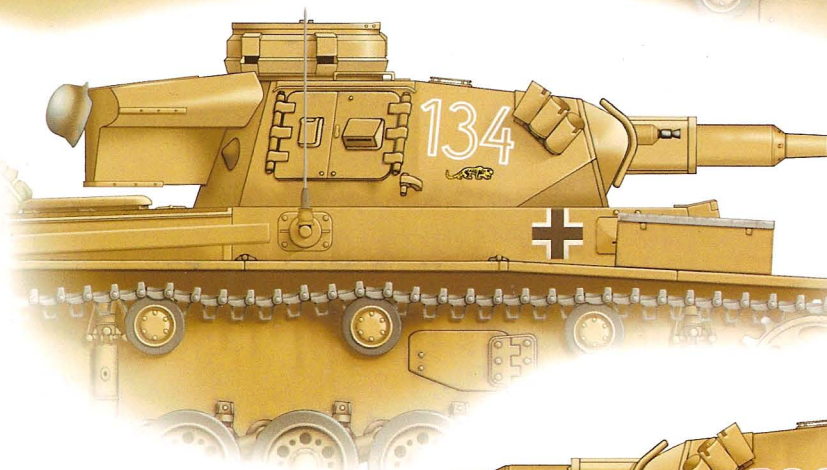
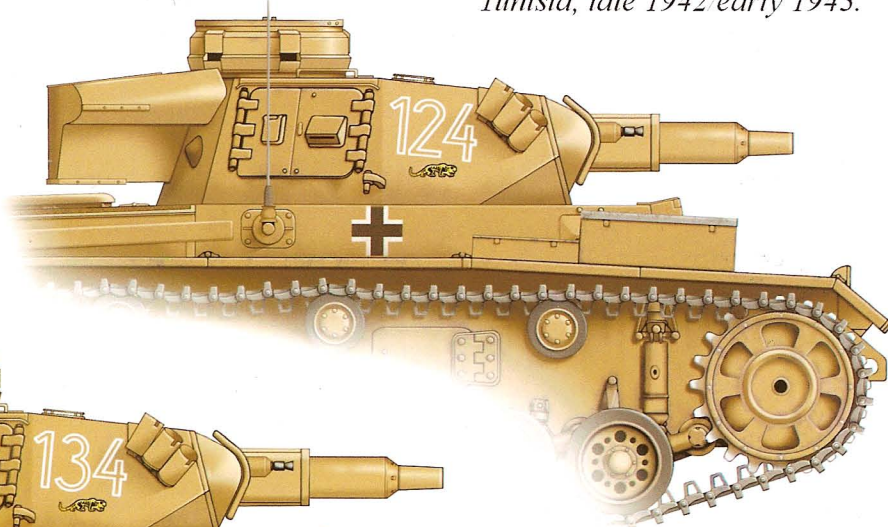
10. Panzer Division.



*Pzkw III Ausf N. Stab /schwere Panzer Abteilung 501.
Tunisia, late 1942/early 1943.*

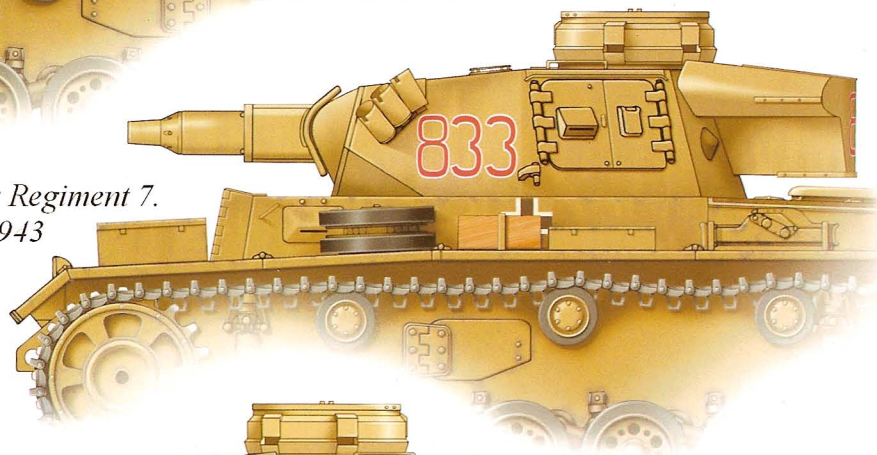


*Pzkw III Ausf N. I/schwere Panzer Abteilung 501.
Tunisia, late 1942/early 1943.*

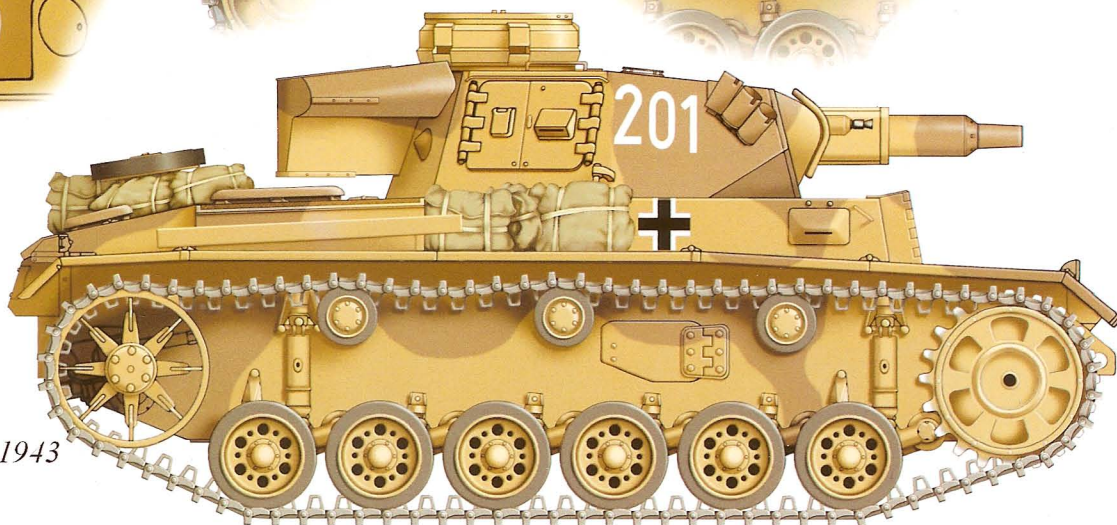


*Pzkw III Ausf N.
I/schwere Panzer Abteilung 501.
Tunisia, late 1942/early 1943.*

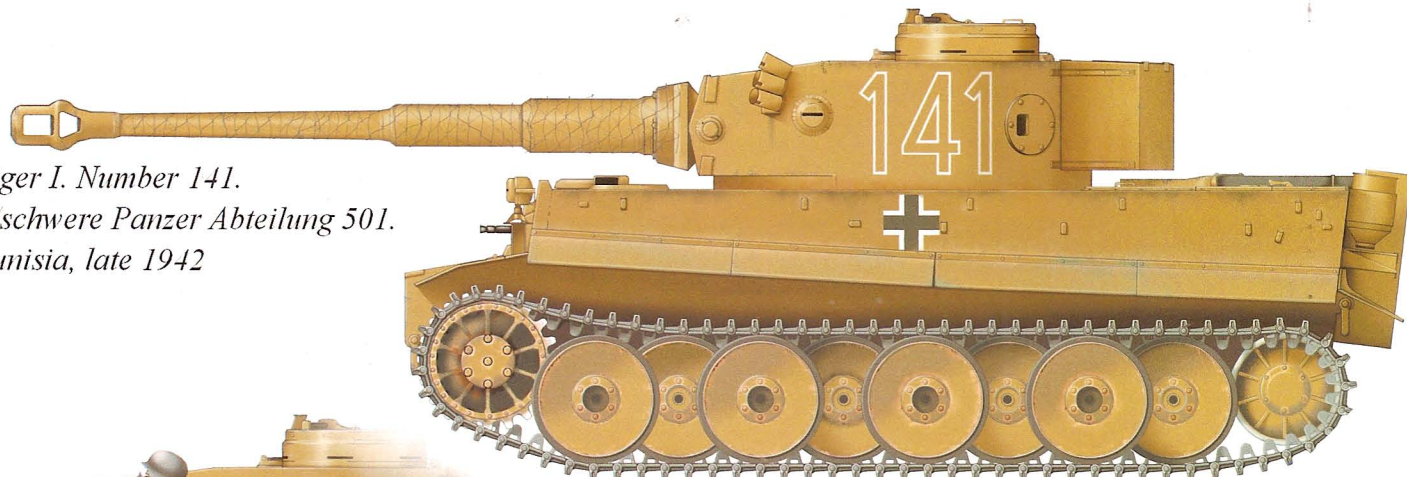
*Pzkw III Ausf N. Possibly of 8/Panzer Regiment 7.
Tunisia 1943*



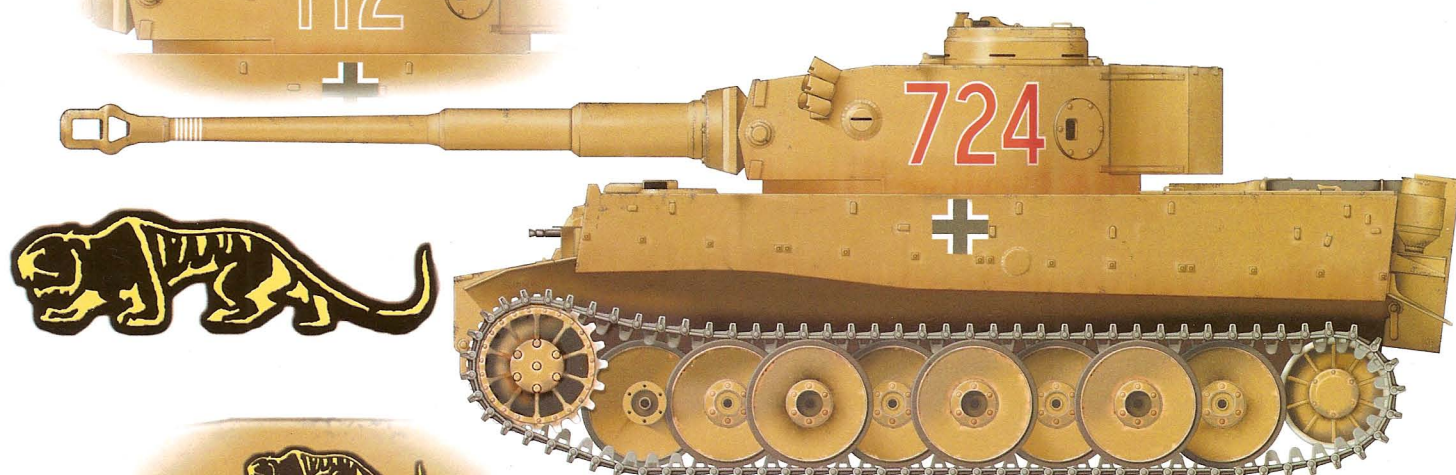
*Pzkw III Ausf N.
Unknown, but possibly
21.Panzer Division.
Italy en route to Tunisia, 1943*



*Tiger I. Number 141.
I/schwere Panzer Abteilung 501.
Tunisia, late 1942*



Tiger I. Number 112. I/schwere Panzer Abteilung 501. Tunisia 1943



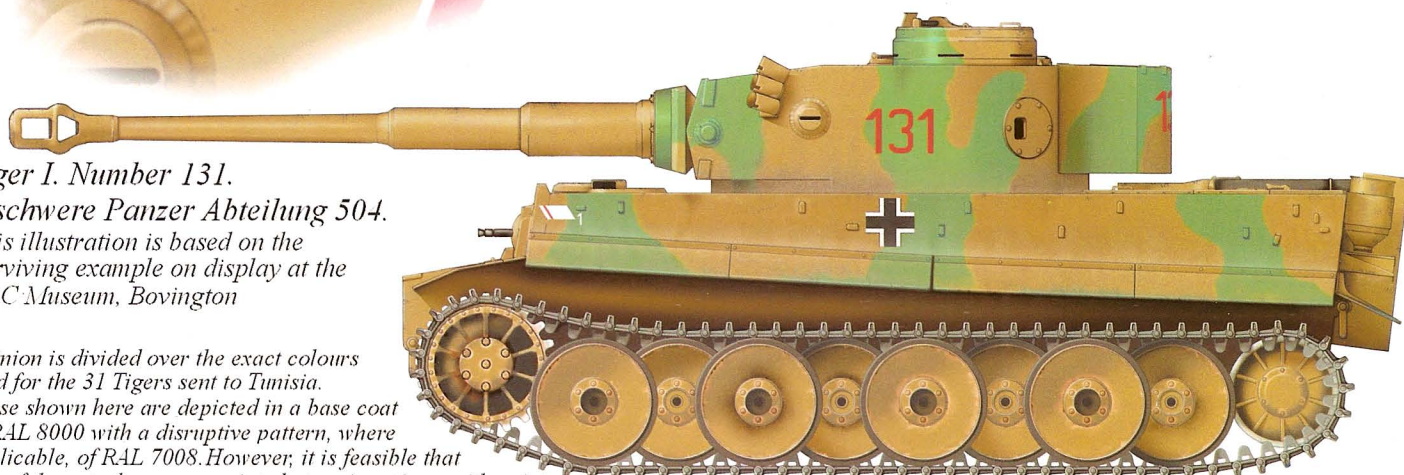
*Tiger I. Number 724. 7/Panzer Regiment 7. Tunisia, March 1943.
In late February the tanks of sPzAbt 501 were transferred to the 7th and 8th
Companies of PzRegt 7 and re-numbered accordingly. This tank was formerly
No 112 as shown above*



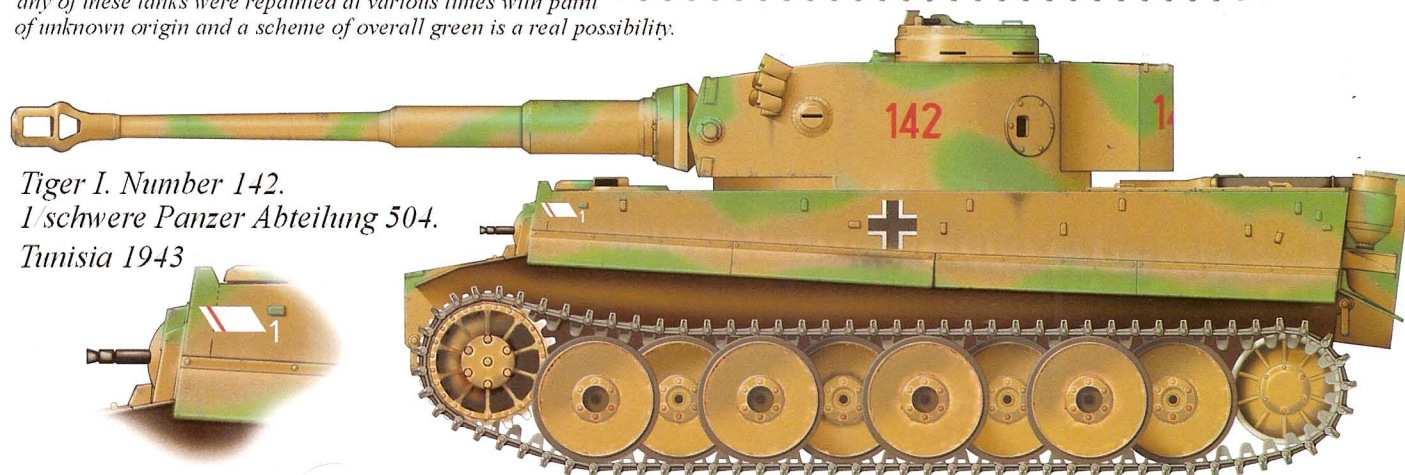
Norbert

*Tiger I. Number 131.
I/schwere Panzer Abteilung 504.
This illustration is based on the
surviving example on display at the
RAC Museum, Bovington*

*Opinion is divided over the exact colours
used for the 31 Tigers sent to Tunisia.
Those shown here are depicted in a base coat
of RAL 8000 with a disruptive pattern, where
applicable, of RAL 7008. However, it is feasible that
any of these tanks were repainted at various times with paint
of unknown origin and a scheme of overall green is a real possibility.*

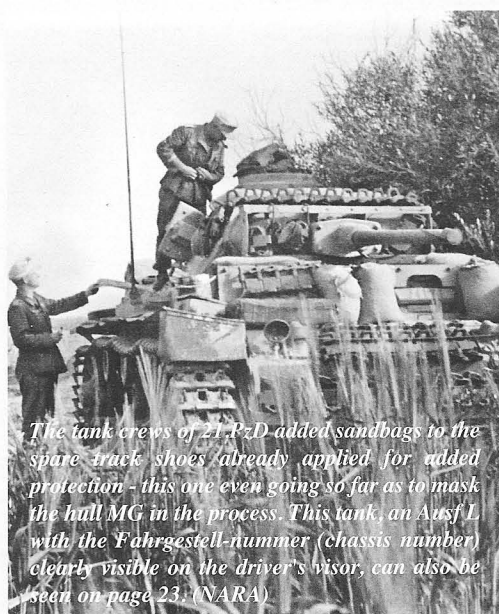


*Tiger I. Number 142.
I/schwere Panzer Abteilung 504.
Tunisia 1943*

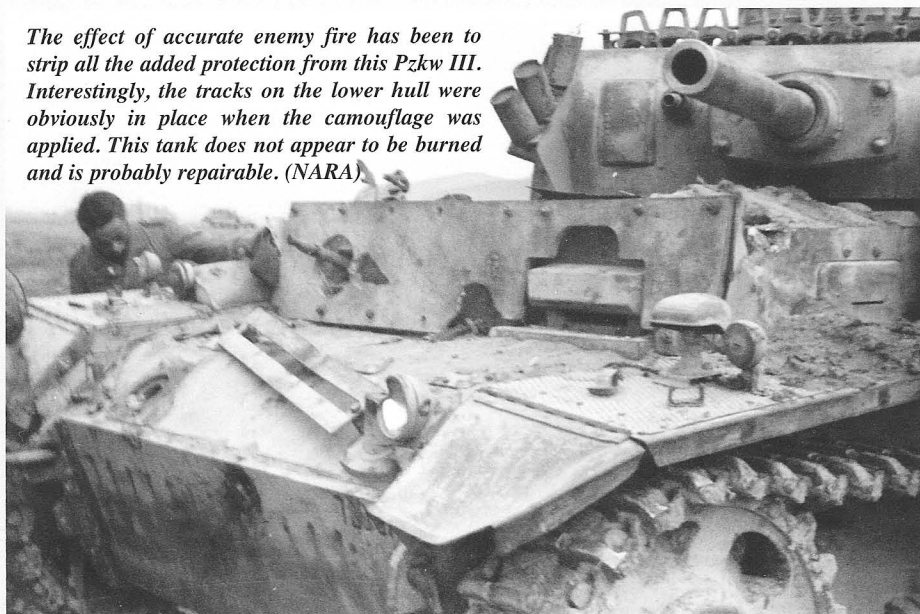




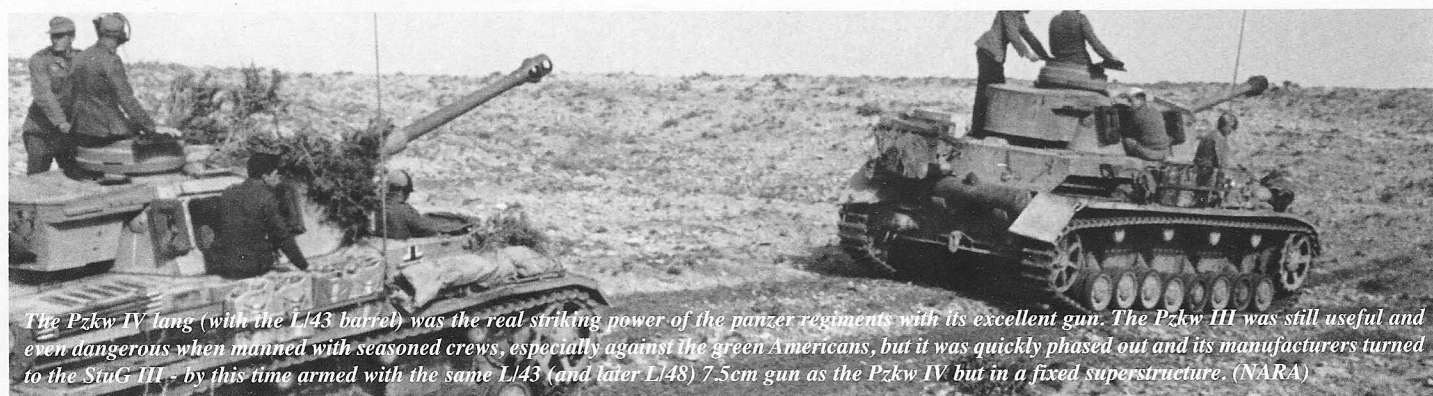
The PK cameramen also found columns from 21.PzD during their tour of the battlefield. Here the crew of a Pz III Ausf N of the staff of the first Abteilung (indicated by the roman numeral on the turret) take a break. (NARA)



The tank crews of 21.PzD added sandbags to the spare track shoes (already applied for added protection - this one even going so far as to mask the hull MG in the process. This tank, an Ausf L with the Fahrgestell-nummer (chassis number) clearly visible on the driver's visor, can also be seen on page 23.) (NARA)



The effect of accurate enemy fire has been to strip all the added protection from this Pzkw III. Interestingly, the tracks on the lower hull were obviously in place when the camouflage was applied. This tank does not appear to be burned and is probably repairable. (NARA)



The Pzkw IV lang (with the L/43 barrel) was the real striking power of the panzer regiments with its excellent gun. The Pzkw III was still useful and even dangerous when manned with seasoned crews, especially against the green Americans, but it was quickly phased out and its manufacturers turned to the StuG III - by this time armed with the same L/43 (and later L/48) 7.5cm gun as the Pzkw IV but in a fixed superstructure. (NARA)

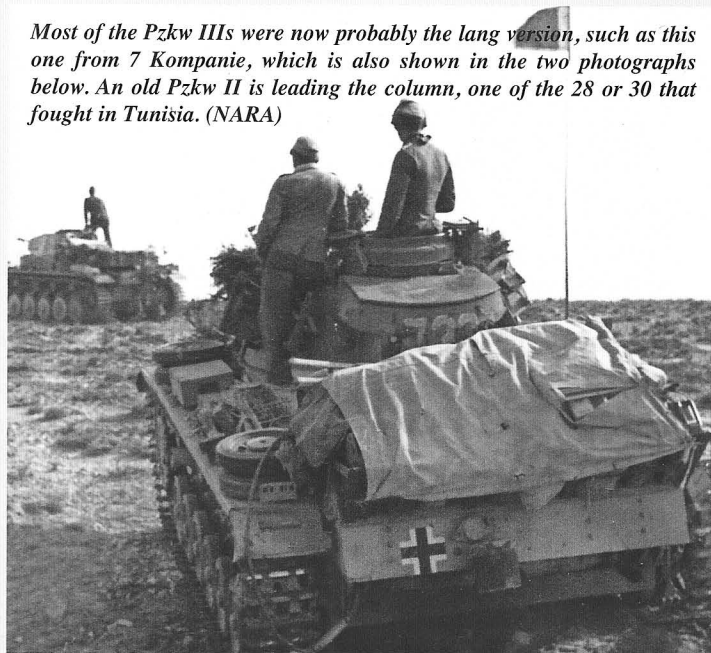
In this photograph and that at centre left can be seen one of the division's Pzkw IIIs with the short barrelled 5cm gun. This is an Ausf J judging by the round hull MG mount. Of note is the shield insignia on the turret side towards the front, partly obscured by the spare tracks. A possible reconstruction is shown in the illustration section. (NARA)



This photo gives a view - but unfortunately incomplete - of the unknown regimental insignia. The tactical number is also masked but probably 112. (NARA)



Most of the Pzkw IIIs were now probably the lang version, such as this one from 7 Kompanie, which is also shown in the two photographs below. An old Pzkw II is leading the column, one of the 28 or 30 that fought in Tunisia. (NARA)





In this photograph and that shown below at the left, two Pzkw IVs lang of the same column seen on page 23, advance towards the front. The second tank has an unusual portrait of a woman, applied in chalk, on the mudguard flap. (NARA)



The Pzkw IVs were closely followed by two Pzkw III Ausf Ns. The second seems to have been painted in a two colour camouflage scheme. The prescribed colours at this time were of a base coat of RAL 8020 with disruptive pattern of RAL 7027. The latter colour was to be applied with a spray gun - the edges to be feathered - and was to cover approximately 1/3 of the surface area. (NARA)

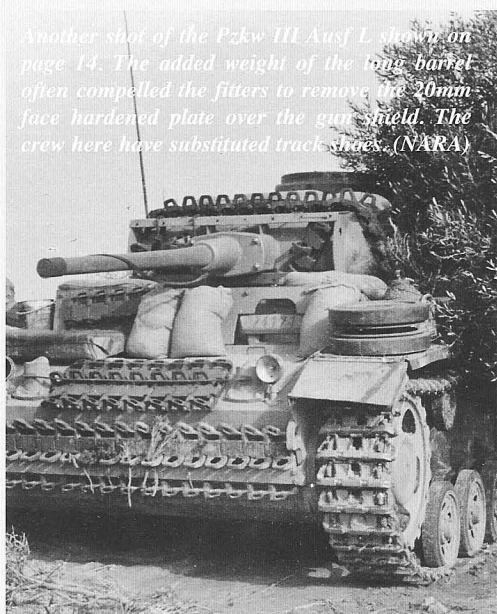




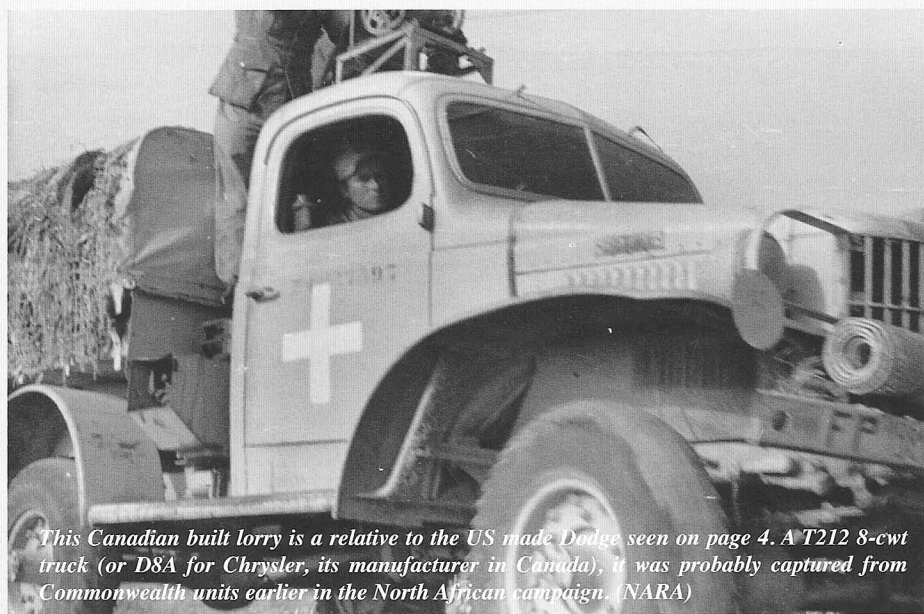
Top left: That 21.PzD employed mixed companies with both Pzkw IIIs and Pzkw IVs can be seen by this sequence of photos which are taken from the same roll. Top right: Correct track tension was an important consideration - even during short moves. Here two crewmen adjust the tracks on a Pzkw IV Ausf G or F. Note the short muffler introduced on these models. Bottom left: the high level of morale and confidence of the Panzerwaffe is evident in the faces of this Pzkw III crew. The tank commander wears his headphones in the usual way - one ear with a headphone on and the other uncovered to listen to the surrounding sounds. Bottom right: The terrain encountered in Tunisia was far more green and lush than that of the Western Desert and camouflage in the shape of nets - as seen here on this Pzkw III lang - or local foliage is commonly encountered in contemporary photographs. Note that the spare road wheels are already worn, indicative perhaps of the supply problems faced in North Africa. (NARA)



A rare variant of a Pzkw III Ausf J. A 20mm face hardened plate has been added to the hull front which was in itself uncommon on these short barreled variants. When this type of up-armouring is seen however it is usually applied to the turret front as well. It is possible that this tank had the plate retrofitted during an overhaul. Again, spare tracks and sandbags are used as additional protection. (NARA)



Another shot of the Pzkw III Ausf L shown on page 14. The added weight of the long barrel often compelled the fitters to remove the 20mm face hardened plate over the gun shield. The crew here have substituted track shoes. (NARA)



This Canadian built lorry is a relative to the US made Dodge seen on page 4. A T212 8-cwt truck (or D8A for Chrysler, its manufacturer in Canada), it was probably captured from Commonwealth units earlier in the North African campaign. (NARA)



Pzkw II Ausf Fs were still to be found fulfilling ancillary duties, such as this one from the II Abteilung Stab (HQ). (NARA)



Above and left: Two views of the same Pzkw III lang. Sandbags have been fitted in front of the gun shield to replace the missing 20mm plate. The face hardened plates were particularly effective against earlier types of Allied anti-tank shells, breaking their tips before they could penetrate the main armour plates. Bottom left: A rear view of the same 8-cwt lorry seen on page 23. The letters FP probably stand for Feld Post - the number was allocated to a unit for security reasons allowing the mail to be forwarded without disclosing the unit location. Bottom right: A short barrelled Pzkw III. Markings were either few or covered by stowage. (NARA)



A Pzkw III of 21.PzD - a command vehicle judging by the rectangular pennant. (NARA)

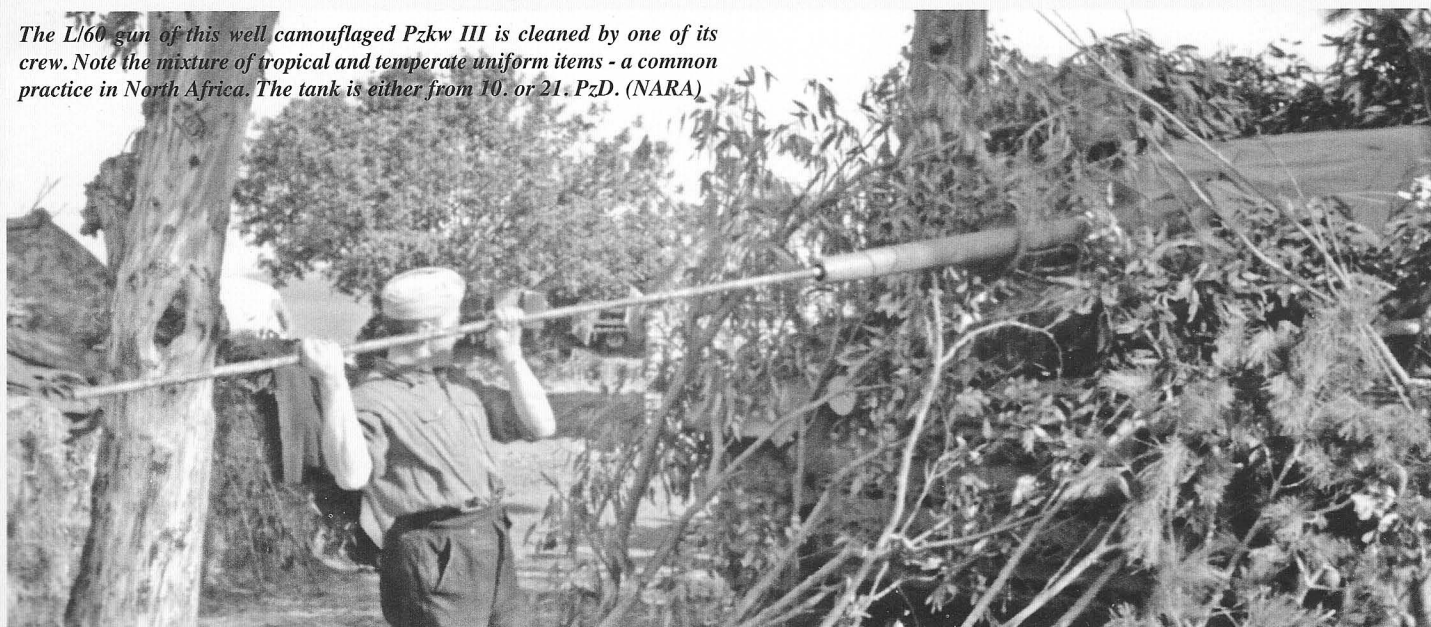


A Pzkw IV Ausf G (the Ausf F2 denomination was only used for a short time in 1942, Ausf G was the correct designation after that time. The suspension and power train were reaching their limits and designers could not up armour the turret front to the same level as the front hull (80mm), so it remained 50 mm thick to the end of production in 1945. (NARA)



Almost all the tanks of 21.PzD seen in these photographs are camouflaged with local foliage - this one somewhat more comprehensively than the others. (NARA)

The L/60 gun of this well camouflaged Pzkw III is cleaned by one of its crew. Note the mixture of tropical and temperate uniform items - a common practice in North Africa. The tank is either from 10. or 21. PzD. (NARA)





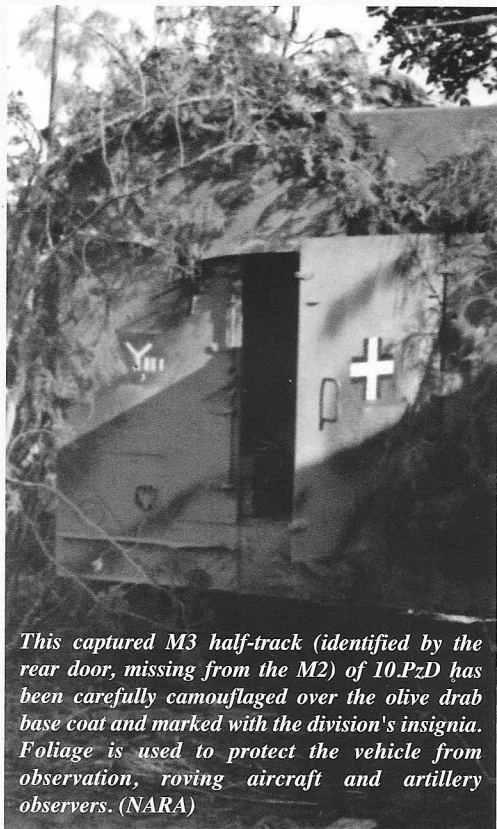
Top: Tiger battalions in Tunisia were mostly employed in small Kampfgruppe in an effort to support larger units. The Pzkw III Ausf Ns were particularly useful for infantry support with their low velocity but powerful 7.5cm HE shells. Centre: a Pz III Ausf N from s Pz Abt 501 with a Tiger in the background. A frequent sight because the Pz IIIs had reconnaissance and support roles in the Tiger units up to 1943. The flap over the gunner's vision port is opened, revealing the armoured glass. Bottom: Two views of the same SdKfz 251 Ausf C from 21.PzD, probably seen later in the campaign. The divisional insignia is of the more geometric pattern, often seen towards the end of the war in North Africa. (NARA)





This Pzkw III Ausf N, No 124, is still brand new and in perfect shape. The desert bound-panzers were ordered to be painted in a two colour camouflage scheme of RAL 8020 with a disruptive pattern of RAL7027. This was to be factory applied with the latter colour covering about 1/3 of the surface area. The two Pzkw III Ausf Ns seen here however appear to carry a plain, one colour scheme, probably RAL 8020.





This captured M3 half-track (identified by the rear door, missing from the M2) of 10.PzD has been carefully camouflaged over the olive drab base coat and marked with the division's insignia. Foliage is used to protect the vehicle from observation, roving aircraft and artillery observers. (NARA)



This photograph and that at left above show the first two images from a report depicting Tiger No 141 during an engine overhaul in the open. The trailer in the background is a US made 1 ton version, an early type judging by the pneumatic dolly wheel - the later model having a metallic one. The crane used to lift the Tiger's engine is mounted on a 4.5 ton truck, here a Büssing-NAG. The Tigers from 1/sPzAbt 501 had peculiar features, such as the relocated headlights which were moved to avoid the barrel when the turret traversed and the early front mudguards. Note that the Rommelkiste varies slightly from the approved version. (NARA)



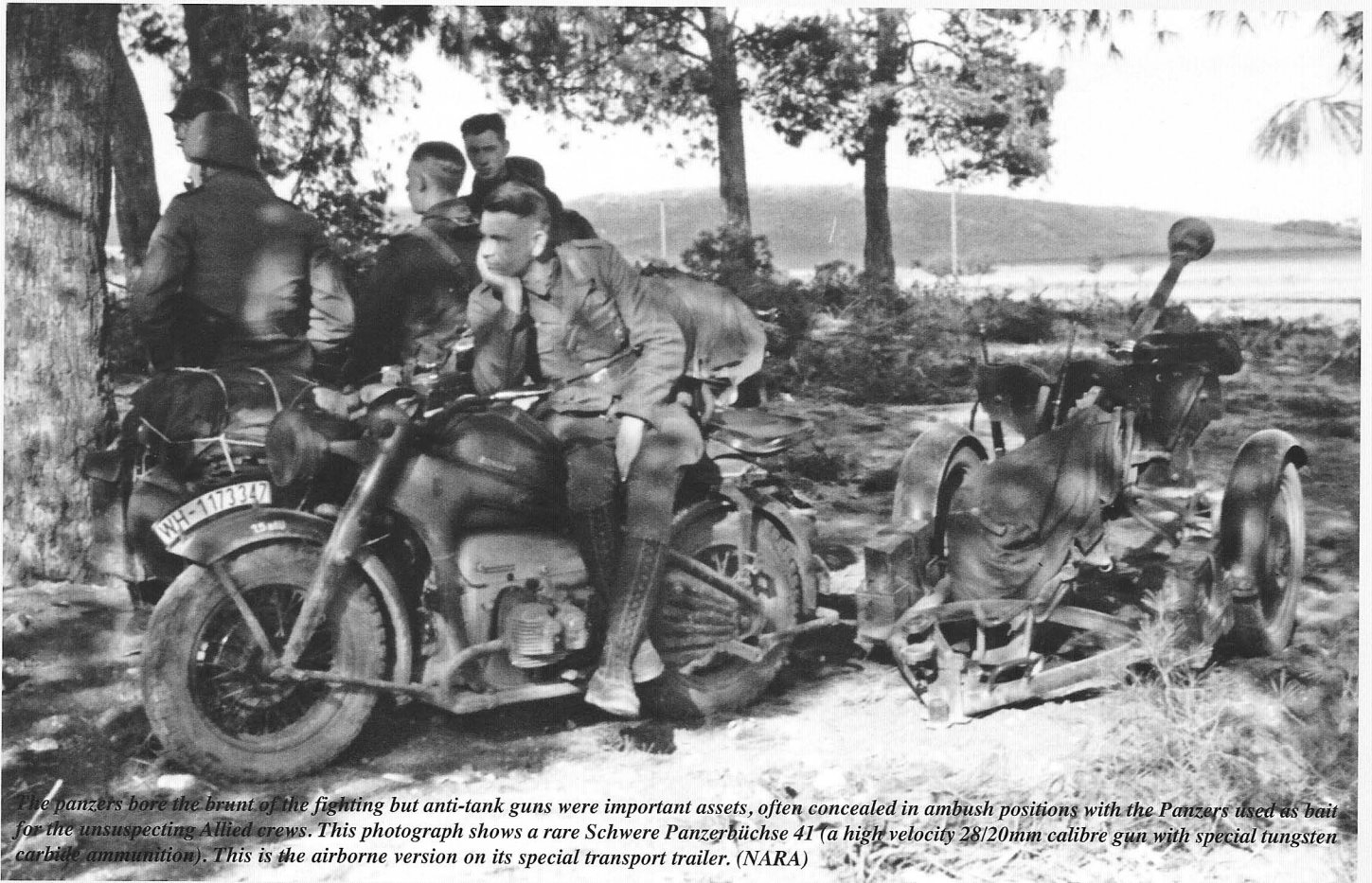


Additional details of the Rommelkiste are visible here. The company used an asymmetrical Balkenkreuz on the hull sides as can be seen here. The early tanks had 2 pistol ports but from December 1942 (tank number 046) the right one was replaced by an escape hatch. (NARA)



The Feifel pre-filters, seen here disconnected in the centre, were installed beginning in October 1942. These are of the first type with a simplified model appearing in March 1943. The slotted shrouds over the exhaust silencers are also characteristic of the 1 Kompanie. In the background is a Dodge 4x4 – Ton truck, the direct successor of the Dodge - 3/4 Ton depicted on page 4. (NARA)

An almost pristine Pzkw IV Ausf G of 7/PzRegt 5, 21.PzD. Of note is the number 722 seen here on the turret side access doors and repeated on the stowage bin. The latter has been painted over another number, suggesting that this may be an ex- Panzer Abteilung 190 vehicle. Note also the wooden box - heavily stained with exhaust - mounted on the hull rear. (NARA)



The panzers bore the brunt of the fighting but anti-tank guns were important assets, often concealed in ambush positions with the Panzers used as bait for the unsuspecting Allied crews. This photograph shows a rare Schwere Panzerhüchse 41 (a high velocity 28/20mm calibre gun with special tungsten carbide ammunition). This is the airborne version on its special transport trailer. (NARA)



Often neglected is the part played by the Italians in the North African campaign. Their best armoured vehicles there were Semovente da 75/18 SP guns but M14/41s were the medium tank used by Centauro Armoured Division - by this time a division in name only. This one is taking part in a parade in a Tunisian town early in the campaign. (NARA)



The most numerous anti-tank gun was still the 5cm Pak 38, potent guns for their size but quickly phased out with the appearance of the Russian T-34. These guns were still capable of stopping the heavier allied tanks with Tungsten shot however this expensive ammunition was always in short supply. (NARA)

The ultimate fate of nearly all the Panzers in Tunisia. Here a Pzkw III - from 10.PzD - at the end of the Kasserine Battle. (NARA)



This Tiger I was much more thoroughly damaged to deny it the Allies. Several of these huge and powerful tanks had already been captured however and they were studied with great interest. (NARA)

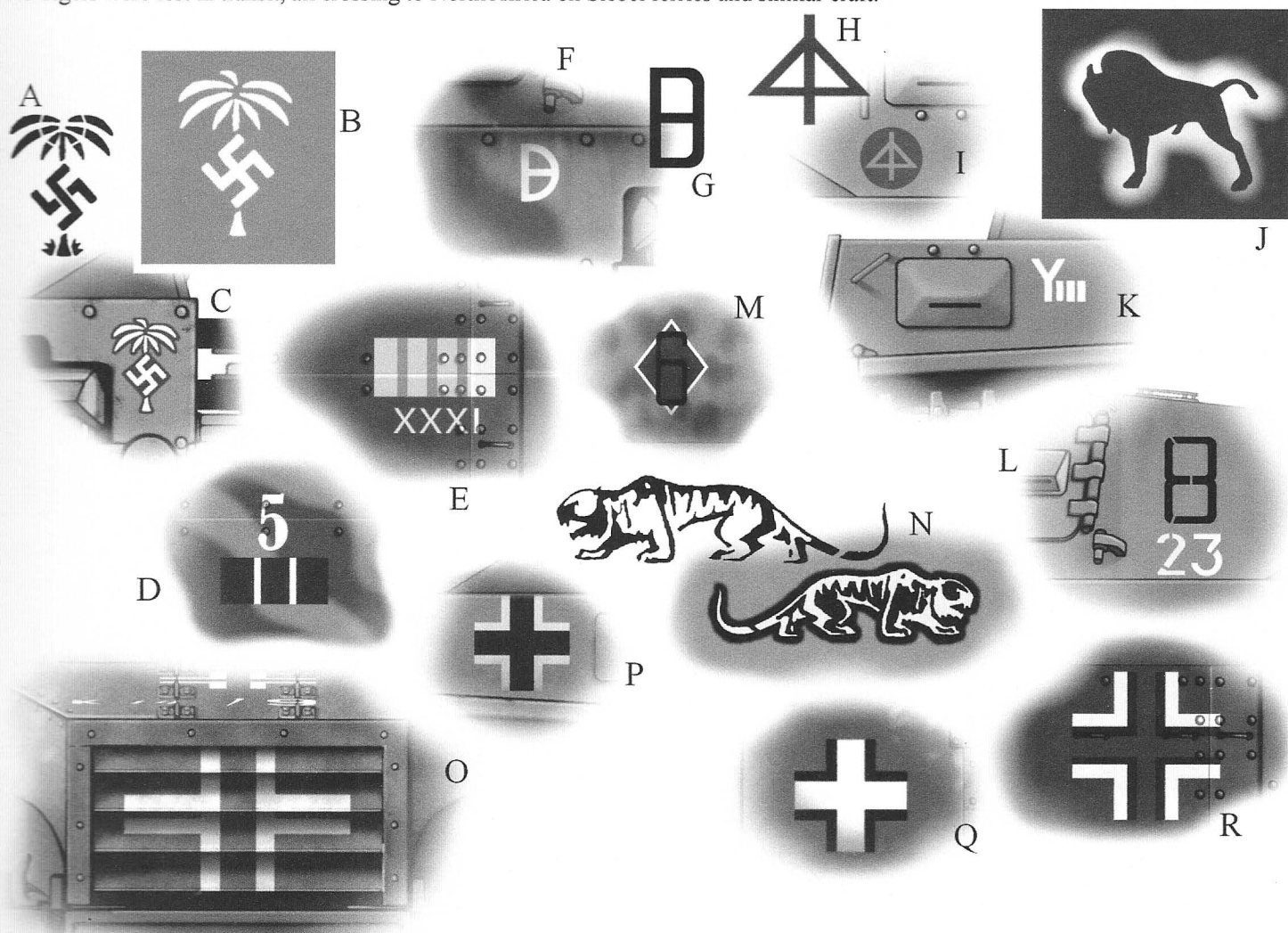


	Pzkw II	Pzkw III	Pzkw IV	Befehlspanzer Pzkw III	Tiger I	Notes
In North Africa 2 February 1942	4	46 in total comprising - 8 <i>kurz</i> (5cm L/42 gun) - 22 <i>lang</i> (5cm L/60 gun) - 16 Ausf N (7.5cm L/24 gun)	14 in total comprising - 2 <i>kurz</i> (7.5cm L/24 gun) - 12 <i>lang</i> (7.5cm L/43)	Unknown	4	Of these 64 tanks, 11 were unserviceable. 22 Pzkw IV <i>lang</i> were in transit to North Africa*
Pz Abt 190 (90. Leichte Div)	5 or 7	52 (approximately half of these were Ausf N)	10	2	-	Arriving in Nov 1942
sPzAbt 501	-	25 Ausf N	-	-	20	23 November 1942 to January 1943
sPzAbt 504	-	16 <i>lang</i>	-	-	11	March and April 1943
10. PzD	19	89 (no Ausf N)	8	6	-	27 November to 5 December 1942, heavy losses at sea by 5. and 8. Kompanien
3. (Mittlere) Komp forming a KG from PzD Hermann Goering	-	2 <i>lang</i>	8 <i>lang</i>	-	-	
Reinforcements	-	52	114			1 Nov 1942 to 1 May 1943
Total in Tunisia	28 or 30	282	154	At least 8	31	

*11 each were allocated to 21. PzD and 15 PzD.

Not included in the above totals are 2 Pzkw II, 32 Pzkw III, 40 Pzkw IV and 3 Befehlspanzer III lost at sea.

No Tigers were lost in transit, all crossing to North Africa on Siebel ferries and similar craft.



Samples of Axis Insignia used in North Afrika

A, B and C: Variations of the Afrika Korps Palm symbol. A border of the original Panzergrau colour was often left as in C. D. Italian, fifth tank of the 2nd Platoon, 1st Company of an armoured regiment (red and white). E. Italian, 3rd Platoon, 2nd Company, 31 Reggimento Carri (blue and white). F and G. Variations of 21. Panzer Division. H and I. Variations of 15. Panzer Division, unusually this division used red markings. J and K. 10. Panzer Division. L. Panzer Regiment 7, 10. Panzer Division. M. Unknown, but possibly 15 Panzer Division. Red diamond with white border and black number. N. Variations of sc where Panzer Abteilung 501. The Stalking Tiger symbol was depicted in black and black and yellow in at least two different variants. O, P, Q and R. Variations of the German national insignia, the Balkenkreuz. The style shown in Q was often applied to captured vehicles.



In the first months of 1943 Axis forces in North Africa were caught between two advancing Allied armies in the Tunisian bridgehead. Short of men, weapons and supplies the veterans of the Afrika Korps were still able to pack a formidable punch.

Using many previously unpublished photographs and full colour illustrations respected French writer and researcher Claude Gillono examines the final months of some of Germany's most famous soldiers. Claude is well known as the author of *Tiger I* and *French Shermans of the Liberation* as well as numerous magazine articles.



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