

Michael Wittmann - Tank Ace

The greatest Tank Ace in history was Michael Wittmann. Born 1914 in Bavaria, he was the second son of a local farmer. In 1934, he joined the Germany Army and in 1936, at age 22, he joined the Waffen SS.

Action

He participated in the occupation of Austria in the Sudetenland with an armoured car platoon. Wittmann's first experience of action came in the Polish Campaign of 1939.

France

In the Battle of France he was a commander of a self-propelled assault gun, the Sturmgeschutz 111.

Greece

During the Greek campaign of April 1941, he helped capture Athens as part of the 9th Panzer Division.

Russia

His unit participated in Operation Barbarossa and he served as a Commander of a Stug113 Assault Gun. During the winter of 1942 ♦ 1943, he was assigned for training and returned to the Eastern Front as a newly commissioned officer with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

Kursk

At the Battle of Kursk (Operation Citadel), he was commanding a Tiger tank. During the battle he survived a collision with a T-34 which was destroyed when its ammunition exploded. During the battle of Kursk, Wittmann destroyed at least 30 Soviet tanks. On one day, 21 November 1943, he destroyed 13 T-34s.

Tank Destroyer

By January 1944, he had destroyed 88 enemy tanks and was awarded the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak leaves.

Normandy

In April 1944, his Tiger company was transferred to the Western Front. Following the Allied Invasion of Normandy, he was ordered to move up from Beauvais to Normandy. This took 5 days to complete. By this time a 12 km gap had opened up in the German lines, under relentless Allied bombardment.

Villers-Bocage

Anticipating its importance, the British were reassigned to the high

ground near Villers-Bocage. Wittmann positioned his company near the town. The British 7th Armoured division was ordered to exploit the gap in the German lines and capture Villers-Bocage. Wittmann at this stage, had only 5 tanks, of which 2 were damaged.

As Wittmann's Tiger emerged from cover, it engaged the rearmost British tanks on the ridge and destroyed them. Wittmann then moved his Tiger towards Villers-Bocage, destroying several transport vehicles and then engaged a number of light tanks followed by several medium tanks.

Devastating Under continuous fire, Wittmann destroyed another British tank, a self-propelled gun, a scout car and a half-track. He then duelled against a Sherman firefly. In less than 15 minutes, Wittmann's Tiger tank destroyed 14 Allied tanks, 2 anti-tank guns and 15 transport vehicles.

Awards For his actions during this incredible battle, Wittmann was promoted to Captain and awarded Swords to his Knights Cross of the Iron Cross.

Facts Are Stranger than Fiction There are literally thousands of other examples of extraordinary heroism and achievements of German forces during WWII, but one wouldn't tend to know that from Hollywood films and the average history textbook.

The facts are always stranger than fiction.

Dr. Peter Hammond The Reformation Society
P.O. Box 74 Newlands 7725
Cape Town South Africa
Tel: 021-689-4480
Fax: 021-685-5884
Email: mission@frontline.org.za
Website: www.ReformationSA.org

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