

Carius at Malinava

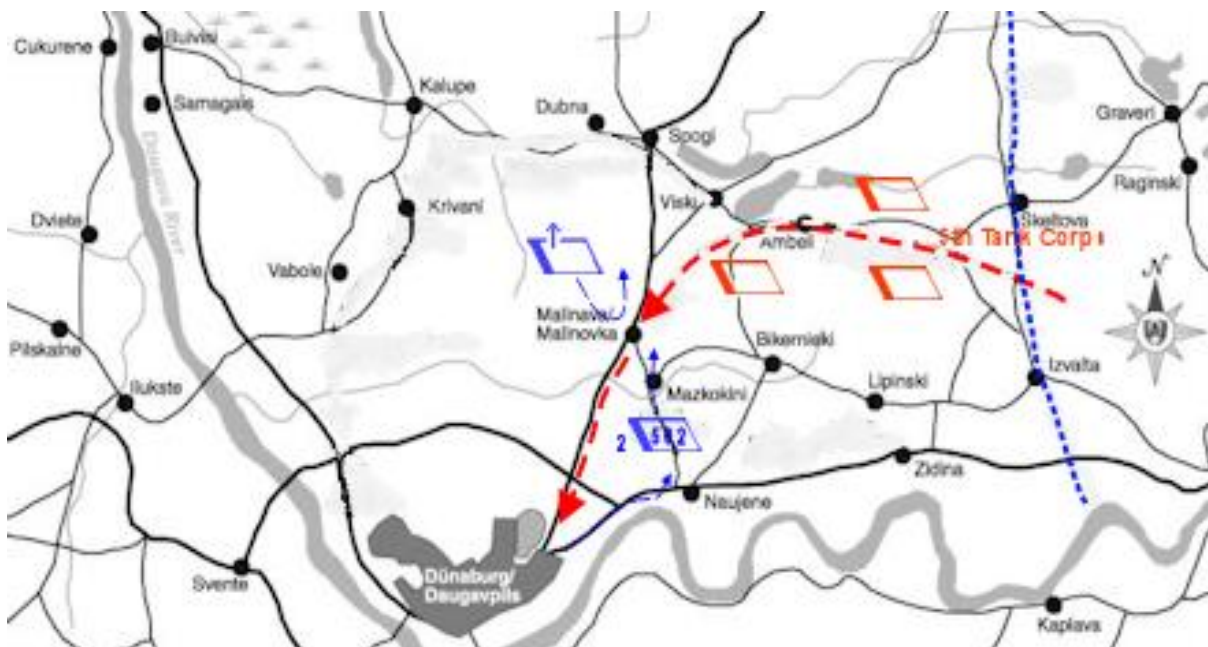


1st Lieutenant Otto Carius, 2nd Company 502nd Heavy Tank Battalion

Historical Background

On 22 July 1944, 1st Lieutenant Otto Carius with his company of eight Tigers from sPzAbt (Heavy Tank Battalion) 502 advanced towards the village of Malinava. They had been tasked with halting the spearhead of the Soviet 5th Tank Corps, the tip of 4th Shock Army's spear, which had cleanly broken through Army Group North's defences.

The Soviet 5th Tank Corps during their drive towards Dunaburg/Daugavpils were intercepted by a German assault gun battery (on probability most likely elements from Assault Gun Brigade 912 – although it's difficult to pin this down with any certainty) around 1200Hrs.



Situation 22nd July 1944

After a short sharp firefight the Soviet armour brushed aside an attack by the assault guns destroying 7 of the assault guns in the process.

The Soviet tanks went on to cut the main highway, from Daugavpils to Rossiten in Latvia, at Malinava. Their next objective was the city of Daugavpils to the south.

As panic stricken German troops fled the area, 2nd Company from the sPzAbt 502 under the command of 1st Lieutenant Otto Carius were tasked with intercepting this Soviet armoured spearhead. After refuelling and re-arming they headed out. On their approach to Malinava they heard the sounds of an armoured battle – the firefight between the Soviet armour and



Sergeant Albert Kerscher

the hapless Stug unit. The Tiger unit stopped behind a slight rise to investigate. 1st Lieutenant Carius, along with Sergeant Albert Kerscher (one of the most decorated commanders of sPzAbt 502) took a Kubelwagen and went on ahead to identify the source of the gunfire.

Somewhere south of Malinava they bumped into a fleeing army Sergeant who warned them of the presence of Soviet tanks up ahead in the village. He was invited into their kubelwagen and the little group carried on. Just before the village, on a reverse slope they parked and proceeded on foot till about a kilometre from the village. Here Carius observed the Soviets moving into position in Malinava and noticed that several T34s were standing sentry on the southern approach into the village. As Carius watched the Soviet tanks begin to 'circle the wagons' a motorcycle approached the south. In it was the adjutant from the ill-fated German assault gun battalion. He confirmed that the firefight Carius had heard was the contact between the assault gun unit and the Soviet tanks now taking up position in Malinava.

Carius recognized that the Russian tanks in the village were only advance troops waiting for the main force to arrive. He decided to recapture the village with a daring 'coup de main' before reinforcements arrived. He decided to attack the village using only two tanks.



His reasoning for this approach (as he describes in his book "Tigers in the Mud") was because the situation was so unclear and, in his judgement, would be too risky for the unit to attack on line. Therefore to avoid risking his other vehicles and crews - six Tigers (under the command of 1st Lieutenant Nienstedt who was new to the unit) remained in reserve while Carius and Kerscher's Tigers moved towards the village of Malinava. Speed was the essence of Carius' strategy, as was his desire to avoid unnecessary casualties.



As the Tigers enter the village Kerscher knocks out the first two T34s

Entering the village, two T-34/85 tanks were observed rotating their turrets. At that moment, Kerscher's Tiger No.213, trailing Carius, opened fire and knocked them out. Both Carius and Kerscher's Tigers penetrated into the village where they engaged the other Soviet tanks at close range. Carius recalled that the entire battle lasted no more than 20 minutes - Carius and Kerscher's Tigers knocked out 17 Russian tanks (as claimed by Carius in his account in 'Tigers in the Mud') during this brief but violent action. His quick and accurate recognition of the situation and the excellent tactics used were the main factors in the decisive outcome.

Controversy and Discussion

These are the key facts. However this action (and the following one Carius describes in his book – Tigers in the Mud') have gathered some critical views – did this really happen? This link provides some background detail regarding the discussion including some very interesting Russian research by S.Morozov about the action simulated in this scenario and the second event described by Carius in his book:

<http://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?t=163515>

The discussion and links provided in this forum were crucial for working out what happened where – especially the detail provided by S.Morozov.

There are a few points regarding Carius' account (bearing in mind it was written from memory a long time after the actual events) that the evidence available now to researchers doesn't corroborate. They are:

The mysterious heavy tank brigade ('Josef Stalin') as described by Carius and engaged by the Tigers never existed. In fact the company commanded by Carius was in action against the 41st Tank brigade (T-34 and M3 medium tanks) and the 48th Guards Heavy Tank Regiment, both from the 5th Tank Corps. The first lost some 10 T-34 destroyed at Malinovo/Malinava on 22.07, the latter - 5 IS-2 (sources http://zhurnal.lib.ru/m/marchenko_r_a/poteri5tk.shtml).

The Soviet brigade commander killed by Carius is a pure fantasy. The most high-ranking Soviet tank officer killed at Malinava on this day was Captain Orlovskiy, CO of the 1st battalion, 41st Tank Brigade (Same source as above).

The subsequent ambush east of Malinava, in which Carius allegedly destroyed 28 Soviet tanks seems to be a fantasy as well. There are no recorded Soviet tank losses for that day that corroborate the story (or subsequently in the area). However the evidence tallies for the action at Malinava and for it happening reasonably close to Carius' account of events.

In Carius' account there is no mention of the German assault guns being involved in supporting his attack. However there is evidence that indicates that the surviving assault guns from the unit previously engaged by the Soviet tanks, joined in attacking by fire from the north west when the Carius attack went in. It's also likely they KO'd some of the Soviet tanks claimed by Carius in his book. The evidence of this comes from the German AAR and ironically a German newspaper article about this very action (It can be found as document 18 in "Tigers in the Mud"). Dated 28 July '44, "Review of the War Correspondent Reports - The Bronze Shield". It was written by Herbert Steinert, and it provides some interesting snippets of information. It writes that most Russian tanks were destroyed outside the village (which corroborates well with Morozov's account above and his locations of KO'd Soviet armour in and around Malinava), and here is the interesting part - "Leutnant Carius can chalk up 10 kills for himself, the second "Tiger" had four. Three of the fleeing bolshevist tanks were destroyed by assault guns which had followed the penetration of the tanks."

A key factor in the success of Carius' unit attack can be attributed to fact that the tank crews of the Soviet 3/41st Tank Brigade were mainly inexperienced reinforcements. The battalion has come up to brigade on the evening of the 21st June 1944. It appears the tank drivers had experience of only 3 hours driving their tanks, whilst many of the officers were inexperienced and not ready for a fast and dynamic close range armoured fight.



It can also be speculated that after their victory over the German assault guns that they'd relaxed, or had become overconfident or had perhaps most likely (either because they simply forgot or due to their inexperience) that a vital part of mechanised combat is attentive and alert observation of all arcs that a possible enemy could approach from. Whatever the reasons the young inexperienced Soviet tank crews paid a heavy price – 20 officers and other ranks were killed in the fight. Many were buried by the wrecks of their destroyed tanks on the battlefield. Note: A full list of the Soviet tankers killed at Malinava can be found at

http://zhurnal.lib.ru/m/marchenko_r_a/karius1.shtml

These discrepancies aside the bold and decisive attack made by Carius and Kerscher was successful and inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing Soviet armour. When playing this scenario I hope you'll appreciate how much luck played a part in the success of this attack and in both Carius and Kerscher's survival. It's an indication of the odds they gave at surviving this fight that after the fighting was over they'd jumped down of their tanks and hugged each other – relief and thanks?

As Napoleon once said "I know he's a good general, but is he lucky?" On a tactical scale it was a superb display of AFV technology, skill, training and luck by the German Tiger commanders and their crews – notably Carius and Kerscher. Several days later – on the 24th July 1944 Nienstedt went on to display his own prowess in armoured combat commanding Tiger tanks when outside Dunaburg his command of six Tigers knocked 17 out of 20 attacking Soviet tanks, including 2 assault guns. His Tiger alone accounted for 10 enemy tanks.

Soviet Casualty List for Malinava

This is the casualty list for the Soviet armoured units engaged at Malinava. Unfortunately the information concerning the detail of the Soviet units is very scarce. However these young men died fighting against Nazi Germany so it's only fitting their sacrifice is remembered.

Source: http://zhurnal.lib.ru/m/marchenko_r_a/karius1.shtml

Casualty list for 41 Armoured Brigade July 22 1944

KIA

Officers

Captain I.Moroz;

Captain K.Orlovsky;

Lieutenant P.Prokopen;

Lieutenant N.Ravvinsky;

ml. Lieutenant A. Knorpel;

ml. Lieutenant S. Polozov;

ml. Lieutenant F. Bozhenov. He died in hospital from wounds

ml. Lieutenant A.Egorov.

Sergeants.

St.serzhant M. Cherepanov;

Sergeant M. Averyanov;

Sergeant A. Maslov;

Sergeant S. Melnikov;

Sergeant Efimov;

Sergeant E. Krylov;

Sergeant S.Nemirov,

Loskutnikov ;

mL. Sergeant A. Vinyukov;

ml. Sergeant F. Sokolov .

Casualty list for the 48 Guards Tank Regiment July 22 1944

KIA

Officers

Guard Lieutenant G. Romazanov.

Sergeants

St.serzhant A.Mikhailov



sPzAbt 502's emblem

Schwere Panzer-Abteilung 502

During the 502nd battalions' deployment (22-26th July 1944) on the north side of the Duna River they destroyed 73 Soviet tanks and 24 anti-tank guns for the loss of only four Tigers.

The mobile operations the unit undertook severely stressed the Tigers mechanical reliability resulting in a 44.5% operational readiness rate for it's Tigers. Despite this the penetrative qualities of the Tiger's 88 allowed

small numbers of Tigers to destroy large numbers of Soviet tanks, thereby helping delay the Soviet capture of Dunaburg.

Notable 'aces' that served with 502

Johannes Bolter (usually credited with 139 destroyed tanks but the exact number is unknown)

Otto Carius (usually credited with 150+ destroyed tanks but the exact number is unknown)

Alfredo Carpaneto (usually credited with 50+ destroyed tanks but the exact number is unknown)

Albert Kerscher (usually credited with 100+ destroyed tanks but the exact number is unknown)

Heinz Kramer (usually credited with 50+ destroyed tanks but the exact number is unknown)

Johann Muller (usually credited with 50 destroyed tanks but the exact number is unknown)



Carius and vehicle commanders of 2/502 planning an operation. From L to R Gefreiter. Wagner; Obergefr. Lönneker; Stabagefr. Henning; Lt. Carius; Feldwebel Kerscher; Unteroffizier Kramer. 18th July 1944 south of Dunaburg

Designers and Research:

Charlie Meconis and 'George MC' McEwan.

References and Sources

"Tigers in the Mud: The Combat Career of German Panzer Commander Otto Carius"

Personal account of his combat career – it includes a detailed personal account of this action plus an appendix that has original German sources.

"Otto Carius Meine Dienstzeit"

Photos and stories chronicle Otto Carius entrance into the Wehrmacht as a volunteer, his life as a soldier, and his victories as a Panzer commander for three and a half years on the Eastern Front. Detailed photos and illustrations of his numerous medals, decorations and documents as well as an interview with Otto Carius about his time in the military.

"Sledgehammers: Strengths and Flaws of Tiger Tank Battalions in World War II"

Useful overview of Tigers in action operationally and tactically. Has a detailed overview of the 'big picture' in which Carius' 502nd Heavy Panzer Battalion were deployed post Operation Bagration.

Overview of 502nd's Combat history covering vehicle losses in combat

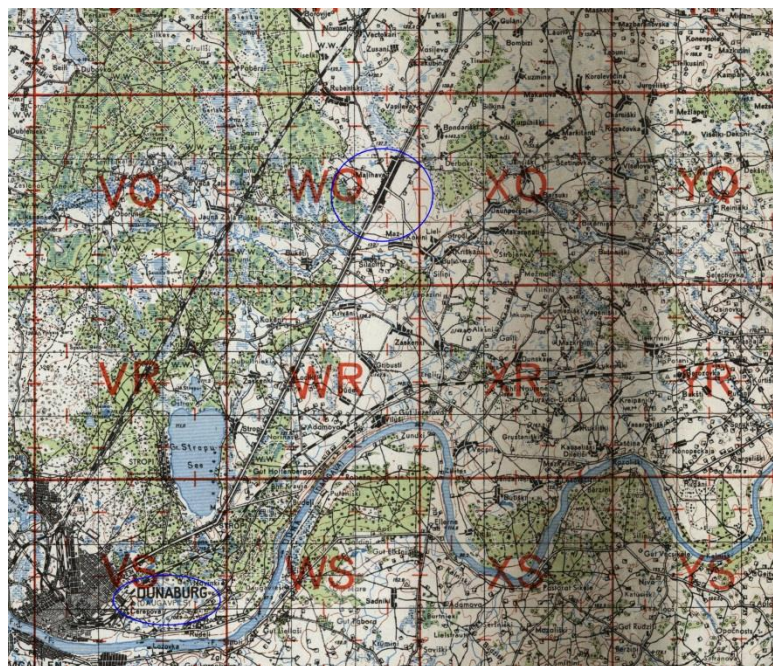
<http://www.alanhamby.com/unithist.shtml#502>

Interesting discussion, with numerous views and conjecture plus some new evidence regarding the actions described by Carius in 'The Ambush' chapter of his book 'Tigers in the Mud':

<http://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?t=163515>

Detailed stats and accounts from the Soviet side of the hill. However it's in Russian and google translate struggles with an easily understandable translation plus brevity is not one of it's merits

http://zhurnal.lib.ru/m/marchenko_r_a/poteri5tk.shtml



Contemporary 1944 German map of
the Dunaburg/Malinava area