



Wittmann's Demise

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First, it marked the death of Nazi Germany's most famous tank commander, SS Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann, holder of the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and Swords.

Second, the battle was a pivotal moment in the next to last great British offensive in Normandy, Operation "Totalize."

Background and Design Notes for the CMBN Scenario Wittmann's Demise by George McEwan and Charlie Meconis



WITTMANN'S DEMISE



SCENARIO PLAY NOTES

1. **Play German Attacker Vs Allied AI Defender**
2. **Play H2H**
3. **Play Allied Defender against German AI Attacker**



PLAYING AGAINST THE AI

This scenario was primarily designed for play as German attacker Vs Allied AI Defender and all third party testing has been done this way.

There is an AI Plan for the German side but the AI does not do attacking as well as a human would. Still it'll give you some fun – especially if you like KOing Tigers!

If playing against the Allies/Germans there are multiple AI Plans. German AI Plan 1 and Allied AI Plan 1 are the ones that best recreate the actual order and pathway of the attack. You can switch off the other AI Plans in the scenario editor.



PLAYING H2H

Given the tactical challenges in this scenario it'll also do for H2H.

However, this is a historical scenario and the forces are not balanced.

It's a very tough call for the Germans (as it was in the actual event) so I'd suggest the better/more experienced/gung ho player takes the Germans.

Wittmann's Demise

These notes provide some historical background to the CMBN scenario 'Wittmann's Demise'

The images on the left show (clockwise from left to right) Trooper Joe Ekins, the gunner of Sergeant Gordon's Sherman Firefly (called Veliky Luki - A Squadron's 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry's tanks were named after towns in the Soviet Union) who has been credited with knocking out Wittmann's Tiger; Michael Wittmann, who rose to the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer (captain) and was a Knight's Cross of the Iron Crossholder; Wittmann's KO'd Tiger 007 near Gaumesnil; Background photo shows the area around Gaumesnil in June 1944.



Historical Background

The small but fierce battle that took place some 50 kilometers south of Caen in the fields and woods between the small Normandy villages of St. Aignan and Cintheaux on August 8, 1944 has become famous for two reasons.

First, it marked the death of Nazi Germany's most famous tank commander, SS Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann, holder of the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and Swords. Dubbed "the Black Baron" by the Nazi propaganda machine, Wittmann and his crews had claimed over 135 tanks destroyed during his 3 year career first as a StuG commander and then a Tiger commander. Although most of these victories had taken place on the Russian front, Wittmann's stunning performance against the British 7th Armored Division in Normandy at Villers Bocage on June 13 had brought him fame in the West as well.

Second, the battle was a pivotal moment in the next to last great British offensive in Normandy, Operation "Totalize."

Operation Totalize was meant to be the final breakthrough battle in the British sector of the Normandy front. After 2 months of bitter fighting first in Caen and then in the mostly open fields south of it, new forces—the First Canadian Army—and new tactics—saturation bombing and an innovative night assault were employed in the hope of finally smashing the German defenses once and for all in this sector.

During the night of August 7/8, with the help of saturation bombing, the First Canadian Army succeeded via a daring night march in breaking through the shattered German 89th Infantry Division and penetrated some 4 miles into the German defensive front.

By dawn, the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry, an armored cavalry regiment of the 33rd Independent Brigade attached to the 51st Highland Division, had occupied St. Aignan on the left flank of the breakthrough. Elements of the Canadian 2nd Armored Brigade had occupied the village of Gausmenil on the right flank. The main Caen-Falaise road (RN 158) ran through the heart of the battleground and was the divisional boundary between 51st Highland Division on the east side and 2nd Canadian Infantry Division on the west.

The German command immediately recognized the seriousness of the situation. They no longer had a defense in depth, and they had no armored reserves. On this same day, for the first time in the Normandy campaign the bulk of German armor was committed far to the west in the American sector in a major counterattack around Mortain dubbed Operation Lüttich.

Consequently, all that stood in the way of the "Totalize" juggernaut near St.Aignan was what was left of 3rd Company of the SS Schwere Panzer Abteilung 101 under Wittmann's command, and Kampfgruppe Waldmüller of the SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend" under the command of SS Oberführer Kurt "Panzer" Meyer.

Bitter experience on the Russian Front had only reinforced German doctrine calling for rapid counterattacks against an enemy advance. Meyer realized that "An enemy armored division stands ready to attack down both sides of the road. This attack must not start, we must take the initiative." After a late morning meeting with Waldmüller and Wittman, Meyer issues this order: "Battle Group Waldmüller, reinforced by II Panzer Battalion and remains of the Corps' 101st SS Tiger Battalion (Wittman's), to seize the high ground south of St. Aignan in a counter-attack."

When the command group spotted an Allied pathfinder bomber circling the battlefield, they feared another carpet bombing raid, and Meyer moved up the attack to 12:30 hours. As Battalion Commander, Wittmann would normally have stayed behind to direct the attack. But the 3rd Company's commander, SS Hauptsturmführer Heinz Heurich, had never led a Tiger company before, and Wittmann felt compelled to lead the attack himself, in a command Tiger, number 007. At 12:30 hours, the 8 Tigers under Wittman's command began to move out of their cover positions near Cintheaux.

But Kampfgruppe Waldmüller, farther to the east, was not yet ready to attack, and so the Tigers advanced alone, on both sides of the highway.

The battlefield portrayed in this scenario accurately depicts the actual one, with only a few concessions to the constraints of CM mapmaking. Resources employed included period aerial photos, maps and hand-drawn layouts, views from video documentaries, and Google earth and street view.

PLEASE NOTE THE NEXT SECTION MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

Spoiler Alert

Although Wittmann radioed a caution about the woods and orchards to his right (where unknown to the Germans 1NY were located), his main concern apparently was the Canadian forces in Gausmenil, and during his line advance all turrets were traversed to the left.

At about 1240Hrs Wittmann radios "MOVE! ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ANTI-TANK GUNS TO THE RIGHT! - BACK-UP!..." Suddenly, a storm of fire broke against the Tigers, and in a scant 12 minutes five Tigers, including Wittmann's, had been knocked out. The turret of Wittmann's tank had been blown clear off, probably due to internal ammo explosion. Wittmann and his crew were eventually declared MIA, and their remains were not discovered until 1983.

Despite a great deal of research, controversy over who destroyed Wittmann's tank persists to this day. The account that Wittmann's Tiger was KO'd by Typhoon firing aircraft is largely discredited due to there being no record of Allied aircraft attacking any enemy armour in that area on that date. Trooper Ekins from 1NY is generally credited with having KO'd three Tigers, including Wittmann's, in less than 15 minutes. Recently however new evidence has been produced that argues the kill shot on Wittmann's Tiger was more likely to have come from a Sherbrooke Fusilier Regiment Sherman firing from Gaumesnil (A Squadron commanded by Major Sydney Radley-Walters.

Wittmann was gone, but the battle was far from over. At 12:55 hours Kampfgruppe Waldemüller's attack finally went in, with 15-20 Mark IVs advancing to the north. Fire from the tanks of the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry knocked some of them out, but others

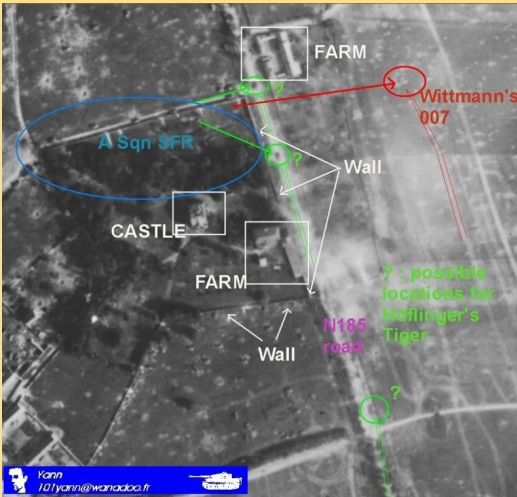
reached the cover of the densely wooded hedgerow and gully known as "Le Petit Ravin." Here the Germans' superior knowledge of the terrain came into play—Meyer had been stationed nearby in the autumn of 1943. Le Petit Ravin featured a decent track running into it—thus creating a formidable fighting position easy to reinforce. It could also serve as the base for further advance and a flanking attack on the Canadians.

A vicious "stalking, hunting and killing contest" then took place in and around Le Petit Ravin between the forces of the Yeomanry and Kampfgruppe Waldmüller. By 14:00 hours German infantry reinforcements with panzerfausts reached the area, although some of them were mowed down in the open fields to the left of the ravine. Both sides threw in reinforcements as the toll mounted.

By 15:00 hours, a stalemate had been reached and an eerie silence finally descended. Both sides claimed victory: the Germans felt they had stalled "Totalize", the Allies that they had defeated a dangerous counterattack. The toll in armored vehicles knocked out was nearly even, 20 German tanks and SPs, including the five Tigers, and 16 British tanks (some reports give German losses as closer to 25 AFVs). The 1NY lost 2 Officers and 10 NCOs/ORs KIA and 11 officers and 40 NCOs/ORs WIA. The Allies could replace these material losses; the Germans could not. The Allies finally reached Falaise on 16 August.

ABOUT THE ACTION

The aerial image above shows the scene after the action. The KO'd Tigers including Wittmann's can be seen in the image.



Major Sydney Radley-Walters

The left hand image shows Radley-Walters and his tank crew in Normandy 1944

<http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol10/no1/09-mantle%20aporzan-eng.asp>



Wittmann's KO'd Tiger 007

Left: The turret of Wittmann's Tiger. The missing section of turret floor plate can be seen in the Canadian documentary 'Michael Wittmann's Last Battle'



Aftermath

Michael Wittmann's crew are buried together at La Cambe cemetery in Normandy. The Top left hand image shows items recovered from Wittmann and his crews' unmarked temporary grave in 1983.

The soldiers of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers who were killed in this engagement were buried in the Canadian cemetery just across the road from where Wittmann's crew were found (Top right photo).

A monument to the men of the 1NY who lost their lives liberating St Aignan-de-Crasmesnil was erected in the village (Bottom left photo).



Acknowledgements

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Sources

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Wolfgang Schneider

Grenadiers

Kurt Meyer

1/25000 map 16130 Series Bleue "Bretteville zur Laize" IGN

Wittmann's Last Battle <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uCKHlkAgec> outlines evidence for Canadian Sherman(s) KOing Wittmann's Tiger.

<http://www.network54.com/Forum/47207/thread/1098460135/Cintheaux+s-SS-Pz-Abt-+101+wrecks+identification> Interesting discussion (with pics) of the various locations of the wrecked Tigers.

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SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

WITTMANN'S DEMISE 8TH AUGUST 1944



1230Hrs Tigers move out in column - Dollinger's Tiger leading; Wittmann on the front left.



Höflinger follows driving parallel to Wittmann's Tigers along the RN158



Dollinger's Tiger is in the lead as the unit advances.



Gordon's Sherman (Ekins was the gunner) concealed in an orchard had a good field of fire across the route of Wittmann's advance.



Radley-Walters A Squadron (Sherbrooke Fusiliers) had taken up position in the the ground of the walled chateau of Gaumensil.



At about 1240Hrs the Tigers come under fire and Ekins bags the first kill - the rear-most Tiger. Which brews up.

Wittmann radios "MOVE! ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ANTI-TANK GUNS TO THE RIGHT! - BACK-UP!..."



At about the same moment it appears Wittmann's Tiger is hit and he goes 'off the net'.



At the same moment Höflinger's Tiger is hit and brews up with all the crew managing to bail out. He estimated this was around 1255Hrs.