III. Pz. Korps at KURSK

Didier Lodieu

Histoire & Collections
THE FOURTH DAY
OF OPERATION CITADEL:
8 JULY 1943

Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Breith could well congratulate himself on the success of his concentric attack because his three armoured divisions had clearly progressed on the previous day. However, the danger arising from the breach in his left flank and that of II. SS-Pz. Korps was getting bigger and bigger. It now was some 20 miles wide and what Generalfeldmarschall von Manstein had feared from the beginning of the offensive would happen was actually taking place.

In order to remove this danger, 19. Pz. Div. would have to succeed in crossing the North Donets and appear suddenly in the rear of the 81st Guards Regiment which was busy fighting the 168 I.D. which itself was defending Belgorod and Staryzh Gorod. Generalmajor Chales de Beaulieu's infantry division took on the role of shock unit with the six assault guns of StuG. Abt. 228.

When he was faced with this situation, Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Breith wondered why the Russians did not take advantage of the breach separating his corps from II. SS-Pz. Korps.

Indeed General Watutin, Commander-in-Chief of the Voronezh Front and a great

**STURMGESCHÜTZ ABTEILUNG 228**

This battalion of assault guns formed up at Luckenwalde at the end of 1942. It consisted of three batteries and was created for use in North Africa, but at the last minute it was ordered to Russia. It got to Ostrov for Christmas where it was attached to the 8. Armee. It took part in the operations to break through the Russian lines and rescue the soldiers trapped inside Stalingrad.

StuG. Abt. 228 took part afterwards in the capture of Karkhov and the Battle of Kursk which were followed by several engagements when the Germans started to withdraw, the most noteworthy being those at Krementschug and Pollava. Its last great fight in Russia was for the Tchekassy pocket. As of 14 February 1944, StuG Abt. 228 became StuG. Brigade 228. It then fought in Romania and in Hungary where it suffered heavy losses. It played a determining role in the Gran Szolnok bridgehead then finally took part in rearguard action alongside the 15. I.D. in Austria. Its successive COs were: November 1942 to March 1944: Hauptmann von Malachowski, then Friedrich Moraw for the next two months then Hauptmann Rupert Knuppel until June 1944 then Hauptmann Kurt Teschke until the end of the war.
The composition of a Sturmgeschütz Abteilung during Operation Citadel

Issued with Abteilung HQ
- 2 motorbikes
- 1 mot. Vehicle

HQ company
- Radio reconnaissance platoon
  - 1 Veh., 3 Pz. III
- Engineer platoon
  - 1 motorbike
  - 3 veh.
- 4 reconnaissance sections
  - 2 motorbikes
  - 1 veh.
  - 1 platoon
- 3 Engineer sections
  - 1 SPW, 1 veh.
  - 1 platoon
- 1 Anti-Aircraft platoon
  - 1 motorbike, 4 veh.
  - 3 SPWs
  - 3 20-mm AA guns

Three companies of Sturmgeschütze
Each company comprised:

Company HQ
- 3 motorbikes, 1 veh.
- 3 StuG III
- 3 platoons of Sturmgeschütze
- 4 StuG III

Total
- StuG III 42
- Pz. III 3
- 20-mm flak guns 3
- SPW 6
- Infantry platoons 4
- Engineer platoons 3
- Motorbikes 21
- Vehicles 19

THE 6. PZ. DIV. SECTOR

This division progressed in quite a fantastic way even though it started badly during the first hour of the day.

Indeed, at 2 a.m., Panzerkampfgruppe von Oppeln Bronikowski crossed the 24-tonne bridge built the previous day by the Pioniere of Pz. Pl. Btl. 57 to join Kampfgruppe Unein.

When the Panzergruppe was up in the line ready to rush against Melikhovo at 6 o’clock, Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski was given a last-minute counter-order.

The attack was put back by one hour because the mortar battalion which should have been in place for the start of operations was still being moved up.

At 7 o’clock, Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski started cursing: there was still no news of the support battalion. He waited for another thirty minutes or so. Dawn was already breaking. Fearing that the Russians might take the initiative, he ordered his officers to attack.

Once again, 7./Pz. Rgt. 11 was the first to attack Melikhovo. It led the way
for the 5., 8. and 6./Pz. Rgt. 11 with Pz. Art. Regt. Jahn close on its heels. StuG. Abt. 226’s assault guns brought up the rear. All these units were placed on the left wing and advanced together with 19. Pz. Div.

The flame-thrower tanks and the lighter vehicles remained in reserve for the time being.

As soon as the Panzers left, Kampfgruppe von Bieberstein, placed on the right wing, followed a river that led to Melikhovo. Kampfgruppe Unrein was in the centre of the attack.

At 8.45, 6. Pz. Div. found its progress blocked by a huge minefield from behind which Russian artillery thundered. Then anti-tank guns tried to take out the Panzers in von Oppeln Bronikowski’s Panzergroupe.

7./Pz. Rgt. 11 was stopped in its stride and very shortly afterwards a storm of fire fell on the Panzers. They found themselves the target of a bombardment according to all the rules by the artillery and Stalin’s organs set up near Postnikoff and Kalinina.

The Pioniere had to intervene to get them out of this predicament. They traced a safe passage through the minefield and the tanks were able to resume their mad charge. Towards 10 o’clock, they ran into an anti-tank ditch which blocked their approach to the town, only 2 miles away.

As usual it was the Pioniere who got them over the obstacle by blowing up the edges of the ditch in order to flatten it out. This operation lasted three hours. Hardly had they recovered from this dangerous job than the Panzers rushed up to make use of the way through.

Two minefields halted their advance again. Operation Citadel was developing with dramatic intensity. The Panzer Schützen were beginning to feel that they were never going to get the better of these defences.

Major Båke’s men took part in a sort of nightmare show. With all the concentration needed for such a task the Pioniere were crouching over the mines they were defusing. From time to time one of them dropped dead, with a bullet through his head. These shots came in particular from the trenches situated behind the minefields where Russian infantry were hiding in ambush.

Suddenly the sappers spotted SPWs coming in their direction crossing the open ground without even seeking shelter. The rubber tank tracks dug ruts in the sandy soil and threw up very heavy clouds of dust. This convoy was none other than Kampfgruppe von Bieberstein.
Moving up. When they were at the right
distance, the Panzergrenadiere opened
fire with their heavy machine guns. They
overtook the sappers and the sector that
had just been cleared, then jumped
down from their half-tracks and rushed
the enemy positions.

Needless to say all this slowed the
Panzers down considerably and in spite
of the sappers’ care, several of them ran
over mines, thus reducing the armoured
Abteilung’s strength.

Given Kampfgruppe von Oppeln
Bronikowski’s delicate situation, Generalmajor von
He wanted his tactical group (probably
Richter’s Kampfgruppe) to be attached
to him so that he could get hold of
Melikhovo with the support of Pz. Rgt.
27. However they had to take into
consideration the fact that they only had 15
tanks including the recently arrived
replacements.

Towards 5 p.m., Pz. Rgt. 27 and 2./s.
Pz. Abt. 503 rejoined von Oppeln
Bronikowski’s armoured group. Generalmajor von Hünersdorf insisted on
commanding personally the reconnaissance units going off to report on the
state of the Melikhovo defences. When
he returned with enough information,
this indefatigable General launched 5.
And 8./Pz. Rgt. 11 at the western part
of the village. As for the Tigers of 1./s.
Pz. Abt. 503, they opened the way for
Pz. Gren. Rgt. 4 in the central sector.
Hünersdorf then asked Oberst von
Bieberstein to join him as quickly as possible
with his unit. But the unit was trapped in front of Kalinina by the
artillery barrage from the Russians sit-
tuated on the heights at Miassoyedovo
and was not exactly in a position to cap-
ture that village. The regiment had suf-
f ered so many casualties that it was
going to have to be reorganised.

The armoured assault started under
the cover of divisional artillery with two
successive barrages. Flak Abteilung 34’s
cannon had a field day taking out the
swarms of Russian fighters which
attacked the advancing Panzers.

Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski evo-
kles this engagement which lasted two
and a half hours: “The attack started
with Major Doctor Bäke’s armoured bat-
talion placed in the centre. But it wasn’t
long before he came across enemy
infantry blocking his path. Fortunately
they were swept aside by our explosive
shells. Then Russian tanks approached.

“Once again Major Bäke led his tanks
with great skill. The battle started and
already the enemy was already retrea-
ing. The Panzers destroyed two Rus-
sian tanks. In all, the two armoured
groups destroyed 26 Russian tanks and
the day’s objective was reached.”

Although Oberst von Oppeln Broni-
kowski’s narrative is all to the credit of
his regiment and in particular of Major
Dr Bäke, he does leave out certain
details like the virulent defence by a T-34 unit dug in up to the turret which suddenly revealed itself; or an infantry regiment, sheltering in trenches protected by barbed wire which kept up sustained fire at Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski's armour and broke their charge.

Nevertheless Panzergruppe Becker, situated on Major Bäke's flanks, reacted efficiently since it destroyed 18 tanks and three half-tracks (afterwards claimed by Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski). Hauptmann Burmester's Tigers destroyed the other tanks.

Dr Lochmann, a veteran of 1./s. Pz. Abt. 503, recalls: "Although we destroyed all sorts of targets, we had to face those anti-tank guns which were set up in terrible defensive belts. There were so many of them that they gave me permanent diarrhoea. I had to get out every thirty minutes to satisfy my needs. Hiding behind the muzzle cover, I squatted down at the rear of the tank without the enemy noticing me. As well, it was dreadfully hot inside the Tiger and this made us constantly thirsty."

A second armoured assault was launched. In thirty minutes, the infantry regiment was swept aside and 26 Russian tanks were knocked out all across the tortured landscape. Major Bäke's leading Panzers entered Melikhovo at exactly 4 p.m.

They took the town with the invaluable help of Pz. Rgt. 27 from 19. Pz. Div. attacking from the southwest but this was not without heavy casualties and clearing up operations were finally completed at about 6 o'clock the following day. 6. Pz. Div. set up a defensive line in a semi-circle to the north and the east of the town.

Capturing Melikhovo was not as simple as Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski maintained. His regiment claimed some hits which belonged strictly speaking to 1. and 2./s. Pz. Abt. 503 which destroyed six T-34s inside the town. The number of Russian tanks destroyed by Pz. Rgt. 27 is unfortunately not known.

Meanwhile the Pioniere from 6. Pz. Div. fought off the Russian tanks attacking along the Belgorod - Korotscha axis with determination.

It is worth noting how important Pz. Art. Rgt. 76 was in its covering role. When the divisional artillery's CO, Oberstleutnant Grunherr, made a tally of enemy guns destroyed, he got the surprising total of 15 batteries.

Except for 6. Kp., all Major Bäke's II./Pz. Rgt. 11 was ordered to keep up its effort by attacking Schlachovozhe from the west and on the way, to weaken Russian resistance in the northwest part of Melikhovo; they were then to take the Delnazhaya Yigumenka – Schlachovozhe road and go to point 220. 5./Pz. Rgt. 11 would cover the Abteilung's left wing.

Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski waited for news of his unit in his headquarters command post hidden in the woods to the west of Melikhovo. The Panzergruppe's progress was stopped by the unexpected presence of a new Russian infantry regiment: Colonel A.F. Vasilyev's 305th from the 69th Army reserve. This division was deployed along a defensive line including Shliakovo.

The 6. Pz. Div. campaign log stipulated that "On 8 July, 6. Pz. Div. destroyed six tanks, 19 anti-tank guns and two trucks. About a hundred soldiers were killed and 130 taken prisoner". After taking part in the capture of Melikhovo, Pfz. Rgt. 27 under Oberst Decker positioned itself to the northeast of Delnazhaya Yigumenka for the night, thus covering 6. Pz. Div.'s left wing. The Russians set up new positions to the northeast of Yuroshaya, not very far from Becker's Panzers.
THE FIFTH DAY
OF THE OFFENSIVE: 9 JULY 1943

Generalfeldmarschall von Manstein was well aware of the breach caused by III. Pz.Korps separating from II.SS-Pz.Korps which itself was continuing to advance and he asked Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Breith to get his 19. Pz.Div. to pivot towards the west. This move would thus surprise the Russians who were too busy trying to break the advance of the three Waffen-SS armoured divisions.

For Heeresgruppe South, Operation Citadel now entered its second phase. Von Manstein and Watuin now got down to the real struggle.

Von Manstein knew that he could still hope for a favourable outcome since the Russian reserves on the Voronezh front were beginning to dwindle. He therefore staked everything on breaking the Russian defences in the very centre of the Voronezh front, at Proshorovka to be precise; this objective was allocated to II SS-Pz.Korps.

But before sending this armoured corps alone in that direction, he protected its rear by launching an offensive using III. Pz.Korps. Von Manstein thus hoped that the respective wings of each of his armoured army corps would be able to close in on those Russian units which had managed to separate them by more than almost 20 miles. Moreover, he asked Breith to widen his front which he considered too narrow and too much out on a limb into enemy territory.

Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Breith decided not to go over to the offensive immediately and to wait until he had reduced the forces situated between Razumnoe and Severni Zh.

With this in mind, he formed two tactical groups – Angriffsgruppe Nord and Angriffsgruppe Sud. The former, under von Hünersdorf, had to be ready in the sector between Melikhovo and Delnazhay Vygumenka, and the latter under Generalleutnant Schmidt had to hold itself ready near Blishnaya Yigumenka.

ANGRIFFSGRUPPE NORD - 6. PZ.DIV.

General von Hünersdorf’s mission was to reach the heights between Melikhovo and Delnazhay Yigumenka (situated near the Donets), and then to push on in the direction of Shishino. The first stage was to get hold of Schlachovozhe. As a precaution he placed his 35 operational tanks from Panzergruppe Westoven - Pz.Rgt. 27 – in the north-western and western sectors of Melikhovo.

After remaining in the woods to the west of Melikhovo, the Panzers in Panzergruppe von Oppeln Bronikowski started to advance again. However the Russian observers spotted the supply trucks belonging to Staffel Müller meeting up with the tanks from 6. and 8./Pz.Rgt. 11. They radioed the positions to the artillery batteries which did not waste any time getting the Panzers square in their sights, firing their shells and hitting several of them. Those that did not get hit tried to escape by moving around. The situation got worse when Russian anti-tank guns also started to have a go at them. It was right in the middle of this atmosphere of crisis and panic that the Panzerschützen met up Major Bäke. There were a great number of casualties.

Following this setback, Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski decided to break off, leaving behind him an armoured section as rearguard under the command of Leutnant Arzbruster with two SPW companies from II./Pz.Gren.Rgt. 114. The remnants of the other companies headed for another wood where they re-organised.

Hill 230.5, located at less than _ mile from the Panzers led by a Leutnant from II./Pz.Rgt. 11 (Huchtmann or Arzbruster?), was too tempting a target for a young officer straight from tank school who was after promotion.

"Panzer Marsch!", he yelled to the tank commanders in his section. The Panzer-
fährer stepped on the pedals and went all out. Under a deluge of fire thrown at them by the Russian artillery, the Panzer­schützen trembled with fear and excitement as they got nearer the hill. They slipped forward with skill using the dips in the terrain for temporary cover. But Russian anti-tank guns, camouflaged and hidden a little further on, spat fire and steel at the Pz. Ills and IVs which split up. Without thinking of themselves, Major Bake's men rushed straight forwards without worrying about the anti-tank guns. The terrible flashes which spouted from the muzzles of their 75-mms conscientiously picked off and destroyed the enemy positions which had been set up on hill 230.5. It took Major Bake's men only a few moments to conquer the heights. This victory sparked off a reaction from the Russians: all of a sudden their front seemed to catch fire. Artillery pieces, anti-tank guns, Stalin's organs all went into action. The earth sprung up in showers; grass, trees and brushwood shrivelled up in the intense heat from the explosions and twirled around in the air. It was only a question of time before the Panzer­schützen were victims of these shells.

"What can I do?" the young Leutnant asked his superior from inside his Pz. IV. All his crews had the feeling that they were condemned men, without hope. The explosions followed on each other at a hellish rate.

"There's only one thing to do: get yourself on the other side of the hill where the Russians can't see you and then wait until it all dies down," grumbled Major Bake.

"As for the foxholes you left behind you when you attacked the hill, the infantry will clean them out."

Angriffsgruppe Nord continued its advance without encountering any opposition. It captured Delnazhaya Yigumen­ka in spite of determined resistance from a group of tanks, and then it continued its attack westwards from the station at Postnikov. The Russians launched tanks and infantry into the battle in order to stop these armoured elements which were fighting with such impressive firepower.

No counter-attack was in any way up to stopping Angriffsgruppe Nord's progress.

**The situation of the armour in II./Pz.Rgt. 11 at the end of the day was as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pz. II</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pz. III (lg)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pz. III (K)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pz. IV</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pz. IV (Bef.)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fl.Pz.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANGRIFFSGRUPPE SUD - 19. PZ.DIV.**

The second tactical group taken in hand by Generalleutnant Schmidt had to deal with the southern sector. He had get the Russians out of the town of Blishnaya Yigumen­ka once and for all, clear out the woods nearby of all enemy defences and then push on to Shishino.

Operations were placed under the command of Oberst von Bieberstein, Kdr. of Pz.Gren.Rgt. 114 which for the time being was still at Delnazhaya Yigumenka. He only had his first battalion and a few tanks from Panzergruppe von Oppeln Bronikowski at his disposal.

When his units moved up to the front, Oberst von Bieberstein reported to Generalmajor Schmidt that his scouts had spotted several Russian tanks dug in. Their cannon were pointing at the northern exit out of Delnazhaya Yigumen­ka. The area between the anti-tank ditch and the village was littered with mines which the Sappers could not remove because there was no cover. The sector was now dangerously invested by the Russians who had been reinforced since the previous evening's attack on Belogo Kolodeszha. Some troops had headed east shortly afterwards. According to radio surveillance, the German observers understood that the Russians were soon going to reach Hill 211.1.

Oberst von Bieberstein told 19. Pz.Div's Kdr. that his armoured infantry companies could at best check the enemy's advance, but not repel it. During the morning, Haupt­mann von Kageneck, Kdr. of s. Pz.Abt. 503 learnt that he was to reinforce Kampfgruppe von Bieberstein. Once he got the message, he leapt into his Kübelwagen with his driver and went to Delnazhaya Yigumenka. The weather was very trying and the temperature was increasing. An hour and a half later, the Tiger captain managed to reach Generalleutnant Schmidt's command post, set up in a kolkhoz. Maps recovered from a T-34 were...
spread out on a table. Several officers were present.

19. Pz.Div.'s CO seemed to be very worried. And yet his high awards - Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, German Gold Cross - and his long military career would seem to indicate that he had been through worse than this on the front.

Hauptmann von Kageneck just had time to salute "the Old Man" before he started giving out orders to his subordinates before they left for their combat positions.

"Bring me one of your companies immediately, Kageneck. It's got to be in place in an hour. Objective: Hill 211.1", thundered the General. "A company of SPW will help you reach that hill. See Oberst von Bieberstein for the details."

A short time later Oberst von Bieberstein's Panzergrenadiere saw several Tigers approaching with a deafening rumbling of engines. They were the last remaining tanks in 1./s. Pz.Abteilung. 503. The previous day, their CO could only scrape together four of them.

Hauptmann Burmester reviewed the situation with his Kommandeur then engaged his Tigers, passing behind a long hillock which protected the Russians. These Tigers were the vanguard of Angriffgruppe Nord. Not finding any established positions, they progressed fairly quickly, at the same time staying in contact with the SPW companies who were holding back on their flanks.

Presently the Tigers reached the main front. Burmester suddenly issued a message to all his commanders. "Watch out for anti-tank defences. Head straight for your objective!" The Tigers attacked the hill using the most practicable flank and managed to open up a breach in the Russian disposition. After a few direct hits from the 88-mms and a few bursts from the on-board machine guns, one Russian company was reduced to a couple of dozen men. The survivors were scared stiff of the powerful 58-tonne monsters. It was barely midday when Hauptmann Burmester announced that Hill 211.1 was theirs. This victory reassured Generalleutnant Schmidt's headquarters. The situation however was not very enviable for Gren. Rgt. 442's and at any moment this risked putting the division in danger.

Although they were holding Blishnaya Yigumenka very firmly, the Grenadiers in this regiment from 168. I.D. were constantly under attack although they did manage to repel the enemy each time. Faced with such determined resistance, the Russians had got together some reinforcements during the night and since their arrival, the German infantry was slowly giving way under the weight of numbers.

Towards 12 o'clock, the Kdr. of Gren. Rgt. 442 was obliged to abandon part of the town. The regiment was reduced to a series of individual groups fighting mainly under the command of NCOs who had replaced their officers, wounded or killed in combat. There were a lot of casualties who would have to be cared for, but there were no doctors with them, only a few medics with no medical equipment or stretchers.

A despatch from 19. Pz.Div. HQ reached III. Pz.Korps. It contained these significant words: 'Gren. Rgt. 442 can no longer hold'.

There wasn't a moment to lose. Generalleutnant Schmidt decided to take the initiative. He sent all his forces towards the forest situated to the south of Andreyevsky where there was a large Russian defensive perimeter. Two groups from Art.Rgt. 248 (168. I.D.) were there to back them up.

In the night of 8-9 July 1943, two Russian infantry companies attacked Staryzh Gorod which was still in the hands of Major Vollmey. He outnumbered the enemy and got the better of them. Gren. Rgt. 429 held onto its positions without weakening.

The Scouts from Pz. AA 19 and the Panzergrenadiere from Pz.Gren Rgt. 73 took two long hours to reduce the machine gun posts and the other positions with the help of the five tanks from 6. Pz.Div. Everybody was impressed by these Pz. IIs equipped with flamethrowers on the turrets and built especially for close-quarter combat. When the Germans counted the dead at the end, they noted that not many Russians had survived.

Hauptmann von Kageneck also took part. According to a perfectly conceived plan, his Tigers attacked the enemy positions from the northeast. These were very quickly encircled. As soon as the attack was launched, 19. Pz.Div. and Kampfgruppe von Bieberstein succeeded in destroying three Russian tanks near Ovotsch. One of the armoured infantry officers, who had placed an observer on
the fourth floor of a building ravaged by artillery fire, noticed that the Russians were moving to the north. He saw lots of columns of smoke rising in the direction of Shishino caused by the artillery pieces belonging to Oberst Proff who had taken on some Stalin's organs, destroying four of them.

The High Command of the Russian 7th Army, which had suffered heavy losses during the day, placed the 92nd Guards Division on the line facing Melikhovo - Blishnya Ygumenka - Delnayaza Ygumenka. There were a lot of casualties in 19. Pz.Div. for the 5-9 July 1943 period: 217 killed, 1 434 wounded and 77 missing, a total of 1 728 casualties. When it engaged its armoured regiment alongside the von Oppeln Bronikowski Panzer-gruppe it lost 23 tanks which left it with only 12.

THE 7. PZ. DIV. SECTOR

This division remained in position in order to head off the Russians who were advancing in the direction of Shishino. It repelled several attacks on the Solovtchev kolkhoz.

Pz.Gren.Rgt. 7 (from 7. Pz.Div.) was relieved by the I. and II. Battalions of Gren. Rgt. 326 (from 198. I.D.) between Batrakazha Datscha and the huge forest situated to the south of Massoyedo-vo. Their right flank was protected by elements from 106. I.D. The regiment's reserve consisted of III./Gren. Rgt.

The journey for these infantrymen started by train but they almost finished it on foot. All the troop transports belonging to III. Pz.Korps were in use and lorries were finally provided by KW Transport Regiment 605 from the Army Corps. Unfortunately only Oberst Keiser's Gren. Rgt. 326 was able to reach the front.

The rest of the division with its horses waited to entrain. After they detrained south of Belgorod, the Landsers from Gren. Rgt. 326 had to get across the Donets even though this was under attack from the Russian Air Force. Several soldiers were killed before even being engaged. At two o'clock in the morning the exhausted Grenadiere were at last able to relieve the soldiers in Pz.Gren.Rgt. 7.

Two heavy groups from Art.Rgt.106 in 106.I.D., "lent" by XI.A.K., were en route to relieve 7. Pz.Div.'s artillery regiment.

Feldwebel Weigl with Tiger 324 scored an impressive tally of hits. On his black tunic, he is wearing the tank combat insignia and silver medal awarded to the wounded. The aluminium gunner's cord, apparently the 5th level and reserved for the tank units, is hanging from his right shoulder flap and is fixed to the first button on the tunic flap.

Two others had just joined the 326th Grenadiere who were in need of support. Leutnant von Rosen, the veteran, evokes that day: "9 July started calmly enough. I had slept well as had many of the men. Pz.Rgt. 25 was covering the division's flank.

"There were no changes planned for today. I was ordered to go and see the Kdr. who asked me to reconnoitre the position. Both our Tigers were hit again superficially. But this time a sprocket wheel was damaged. The Russians knew that this was the Tiger's weak spot. My two Tigers which had stayed further back to cover us opened fire on the two elf-propelled guns which had appeared on the edge of the forest. The two of them cleared off quickly. I called up the Kdr. to report.

"In the evening, Feldwebel Grohmann appeared. His job was to note down everything that happened to the 3. Kp. I learnt that Oberleutnant Scherf was engaged with the company at Massoyedovo. That was also where Gefreiter Schmidt fell, on 8 July.

"Grohmann also brought mail and parcels for the soldiers. A letter was always welcome. There was chocolate for everybody. I learnt that Leutnant Jammerath, my friend from the officer tank school at Wünsdorf had been killed on the first day of the attack.

"A letter from home! All's well, thank God!"

Right:

This exceptional picture shows 3./s. Pz.Abt. 503 moving through Kharkov for the 5 July offensive. Tiger 314 is in the foreground with Feldwebel Weigl up in the turret.

The famous SU 76 self-propelled gun was equipped with the excellent ZIS 3 76.2-mm cannon but did not have enough protective armour. Its open-top gunnery compartment was not liked by its crews who nicknamed it "Suka", i.e. the bloody b---.

[DR Caption by M. Chaubiron]

THE SIXTH DAY OF THE OPERATION CITADEL: 10 JULY 1943

Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Breith’s forces, now facing due north had to bring their advance to a halt. They had been severely weakened by the fighting on the flanks of the army corps. Only 6. Pz.Div. still had some punch left in it, but it was under-strength and had to be reinforced.

In order to bring up extra firepower, the three Tiger companies were at last reunited, to the great satisfaction of Hauptmann Graf von Kageneck.

III. Pz.Korps now had to establish a solid base from which to carry out the definitive breakthrough, cutting the route that the Russian 5th Armoured Guards Army was taking to reinforce the 6th Guards Army.

168. I.D. was given the task of preparing the terrain. But to do this, the Kdr. had to bring back and assemble all the units which had been detached during the previous days, in particular its Gren. Rgt. 442 which was struggling to capture Blishnaya Yigumenka and which ought to have taken the road to Belgorod... the same could be said of the 2nd and 3rd Artillery groups. In order to support his Grenadiere to the north of Belgorod, Generalmajor de Beaulieu had obtained air cover consisting of two Gruppen of Stukas.

THE 6. PZ.DIV. SECTOR

Under cover of night in a forest to the southwest of Melikhovo, Oberst von Oppeln Bronikowski reorganised his Abteilung into two simple companies. The first was assigned to Oberleutnant Spiekermann and the second to Oberleutnant Reutemann (who commanded 1./S. Pz.Abt. 503 in March 1944). The regiment still had 5 Panzer IIs, 17 Pz. IIs (long), 5 Pz. IIs (short), 10 Pz. IVs,

Left:

This Sd Kfz. 251/8 is equipped with a FuG5 antenna and its antenna structure. This ambulance half-track had a crew of three. It could transport six casualties: four sitting and two stretcher cases. It belonged to either the 1. or the 2. San. Kp. S7 of 6. Pz.Div, as indicated by the divisional insignia painted on the front of the vehicle. Above the armoured units' tactical insignia, there is the white cross which helped identify the medical units, as well as the letters SA painted on the left.

(© ECPAD DAT 1940-L10)
2 Befehlspanzers, three flamethrower tanks and 4 T-34s, in all 46 tanks.

As for the unit's other divisions, they were relieved by elements of 7. Pz.Div. in their former positions and they were now fighting in the Korotska sector hoping to head for Komintern.

6. Pz.Div. had to deal with several counter-attacks, especially the ones against Hill 203.3 where the Panzerjäger had relieved von Oppeln Bronikowski's Panzers. Even the T-34s could not break their resistance.

Panzergruppe von Oppeln Bronikowski and Kampfgruppe Unrein defended Melikhovo for several hours with the Russian artillery bombarding the town relentlessly; they did not manage to break the German's resistance however.

Towards the beginning of the afternoon, with a certain feeling of bitterness, the Russians came to the conclusion that their attacks were just not successful. A message received by radio ordered them to cease their attacks and to fall back and reinforce their lines of defence.

Closely following the way events were developing, Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Breith sent 6. Pz.Div. north in such a way as to enable 7. Pz.Div. to keep a hold on the right wing of III. Pz.Korps. Oberst Unrein was ordered to take Shliakovo with his Kampfgruppe (Pz.Gren.Rgt.4). The tanks in Panzergruppe von Oppeln Bronikowski would support him up to the crossroads situated a mile from Melikhovo; then they would set off in pursuit of any Russian elements fleeing in disorder. The Luftwaffe would cover both units.

But this was not a simple affair. The bad weather conditions made any flying operations impossible and a minefield placed near Melikhovo delayed Bronikowski's Panzers. Oberst Unrein's Panzergrenadiere however finally made it to the village where the Russians fought with even more determination than before. The Germans were hounded relentlessly by Stalin's organs with their strident whistle. Taking no notice of this stubborn resistance, Oberst Unrein launched his men straight into an assault on the enemy positions. Several of them fell under fire. Shliakovo