

# The “King Tiger”

## Vol. II

• Development • Units • Operations •

SCHIFFER  
MILITARY  
HISTORY

Wolfgang Schneider

HELMUS





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**Cover:**

A Tiger II during a hard fight northeast of Aachen, late November 1944.

**Inside Cover:**

Of the six existing King Tigers still in Europe (Bovington, la Gleize, Munster, Saumur, Shrivenham, Thun), the one in the French Tank Museum (Saumur) is the only one still in driveable condition. The paint is not completely accurate, the cross is too wide, the number 233 (Heavy Panzer Battalion 506) is some 20% too big.

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**SCHIFFER MILITARY HISTORY**

West Chester, PA

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We are interested in hearing from authors with  
book ideas on German military history.

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## FOREWORD

With the help of former members of troop units equipped with King Tiger tanks it has been possible to gather a series of particularly interesting photos. This volume was ultimately assembled from approximately 400 Tiger II photos. Almost exclusively, photos rarely published before or published for the first time here were used. For the first time, a complete listing of all King Tiger tanks delivered to the troops is provided (page 27). The presentation is completed by cutaway line drawings and a list of the heavy tank units. The editors and the author would be very grateful for any further contacts with former "Tiger" men (for example, sPz.Abt. (Fkl. 301) that might result from this book.

## Technical Evaluation

Ever since the war, the controversial question has been debated as to which Wehrmacht tank was the most refined, the most powerful of all. In this context the Panther and the Tiger II are always named. As so often, no absolute decision clearly favoring the one or the other type can be made here.

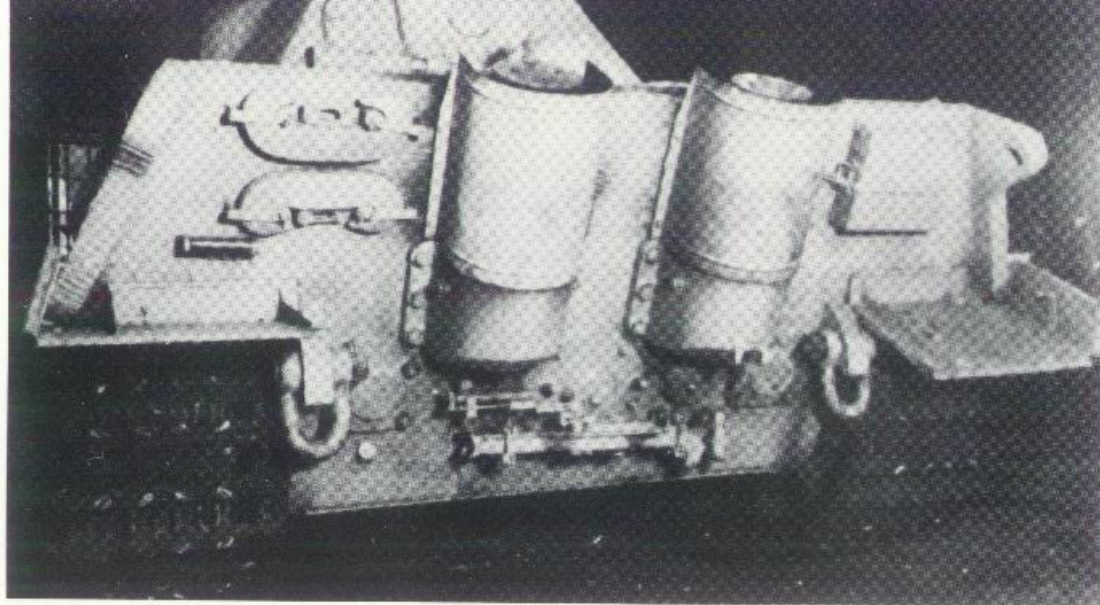
The Panther presented a particularly successful combination of all three fighting-value parameters: firepower, mobility and armor protection. For the conditions of those times it was very mobile, well-armored (designed to deflect shots), and armed with a high-performance 7.5-cm tank gun.

As for the Tiger II, the superior firepower of the 8.8-cm L/71 tank gun and the heavier armor protection can be cited. Naturally, these were paid for by a great increase in overall weight with the same engine power. This high weight caused serious problems in combat, especially for the components of the running gear, which caused many break-downs and greater stress. As with the Panther, the side panels of the Tiger II were weak points and were redesigned in the process of manufacturing, and the existing tanks were reequipped accordingly. In addition, the swing arms tended to bend. These and the lack of firmness of the rubber-mounted road wheels caused their angled positions or axial displacement. This in turn influenced the course of the track links. The links themselves were under a considerably higher internal pressure, which caused the link bolts to bend.



The first fifty King Tigers were equipped with the so-called Porsche turret (above). This was more sharply sloped and had a very rounded front. Its manufacture was very expensive, and it also turned out that the shape essentially trapped shots and caused a particularly great danger to the turret turning circle. Thus Krupp produced a turret that offered greater armor strength and eliminated these problems, as well as being much simpler to produce. With this so-called production turret all subsequent Tiger II tanks were equipped. The two photos offer a comparison of the two types.





During series production, a number of improvements and armament changes were introduced. One example is the exhaust system. Originally the exhaust pipes were jacketed (above) for sound damping and better heat conduction; later vehicles had open tailpipes.



A great number of technical breakdowns resulted. All in all, the performance weight of the Tiger II was too low. The tactical mobility was also diminished decisively because of the high fuel consumption caused by the heavy weight of the vehicle.

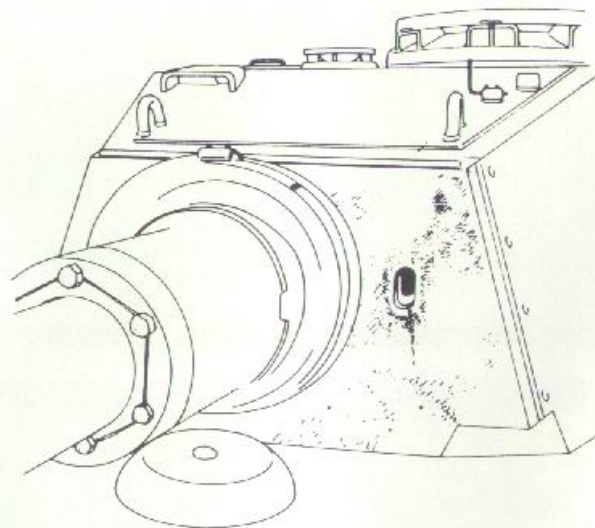
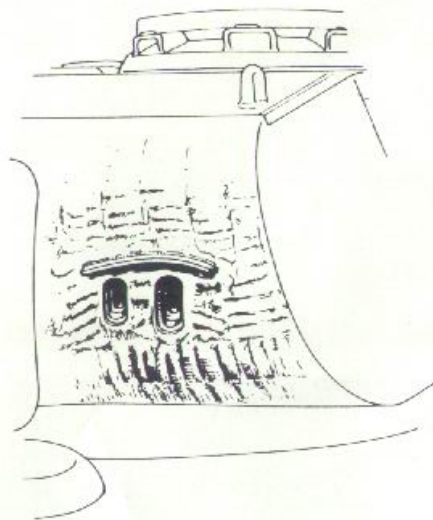
Thus the great strength of the King Tiger was its armor plate, which made it "immune" to the greater part of the shells that hit it. In fact, only a small number of the Tiger II tanks fell victim to direct enemy action. The overwhelming majority of them had to be abandoned and/or blown up by their crews — because they were immobile. The Tiger II brought its strength directly to bear in tactical situations in which superior numbers of enemy tanks had to be driven off, or when a decision had to be forced quickly at a focal point. The Panther was better suited to large-scale or fast-moving operations.

In terms of its design concept, the firepower of the Tiger could have been utilized better if independent units had not been formed (which were then divided all too often); a better solution would have been combining the heavy tanks in units with the more mobile light tanks (for example, a heavy company in a tank regiment).

Because many more of them existed, the Panther was of particular value to the Panzer troops; the Tiger excelled particularly in tank-against-tank duels and in the numerous crisis situations of the last year of the war.



A series of tanks served for testing. This photo shows V8 in a rescue maneuver at Kummersdorf. Notice the number plate — not used in combat — on the bow plate.



The two drawings make clear the different turret front design and show in detail the ports of the turret aiming telescope to the left of the gun mount. The wire pin located between the ring and the commander's cupola on the production turret was a makeshift aiming aid for the commander during observation from the opened hatch; with it he could take rough aim at an enemy target, and the gunner could recognize it in his optic's field of vision.

Thus the tactical significance of both tanks was very great, but the legendary reputation of the King Tiger was originated mainly by the tank troops of the Allies or the crews of the antitank weapons, who had to recognize their own inferiority or take a chance against this Colossus from short range.

One should also not neglect to consider the fact that the manufacture of the Tiger was considerably more costly in terms of both labor and materials, and that the aim was to go beyond the Panther II to establish a single main battle tank. As is well known, the end of the war put a stop to the prevailing "tank dualism." It should also be mentioned that the carrying abilities of most roads and cross-country areas, and in particular the greater part of the bridges at that time, were hopelessly overburdened (and by the Panther too).

Thus the technological role of the Tiger II can be evaluated more highly in the end than its actual value in combat.



Left:

This photo shows the first production tank (note number 001 on the left towing eye). It is clear to see that the commander's hatch required a bulge on the left side of the turret wall.



Right:

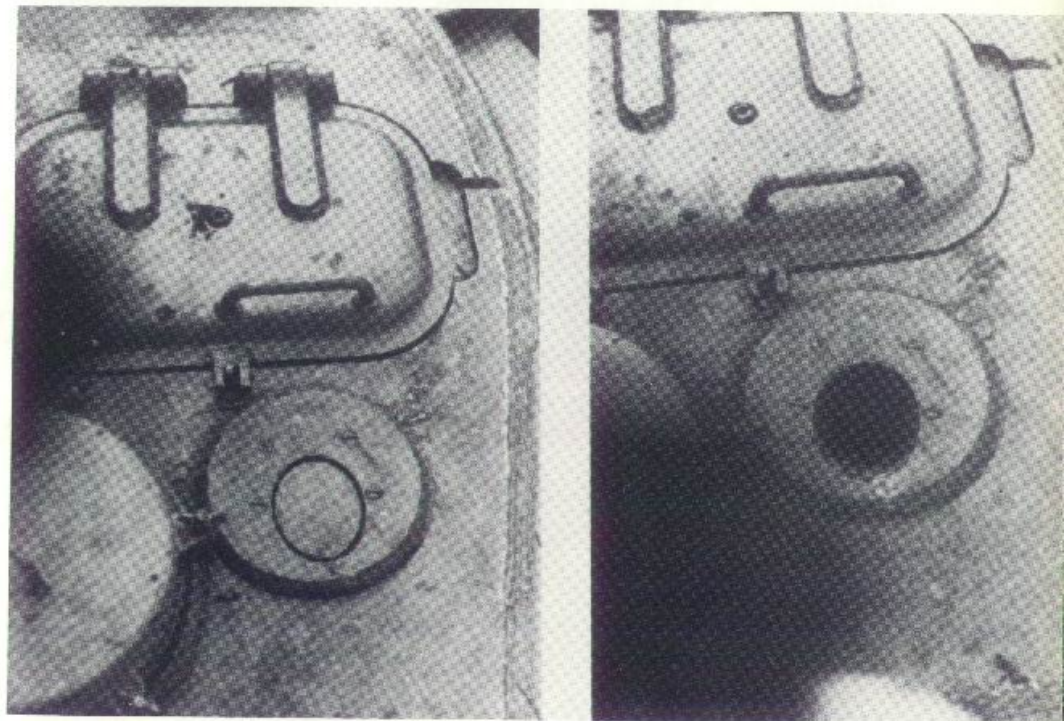
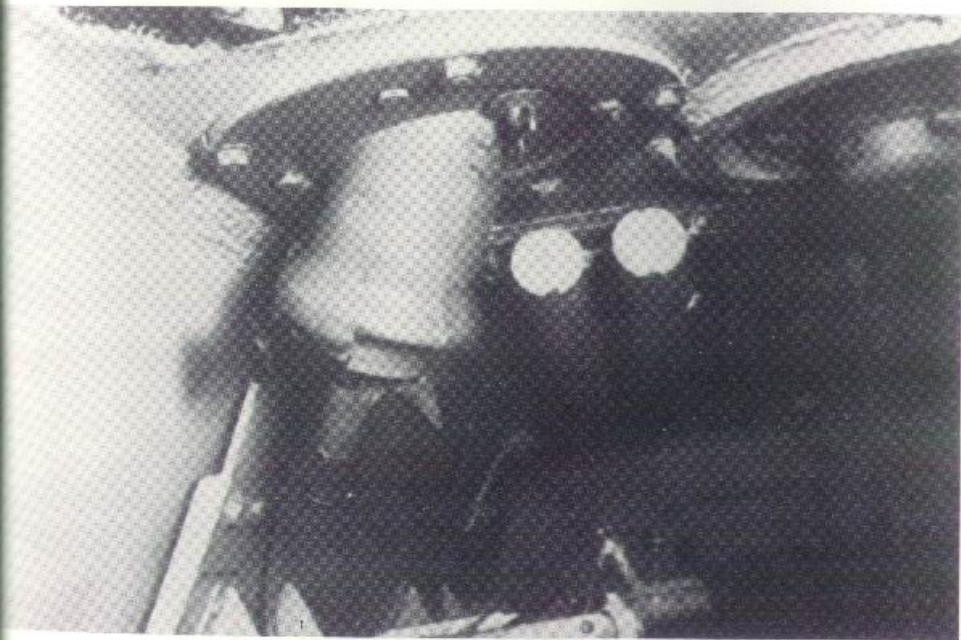
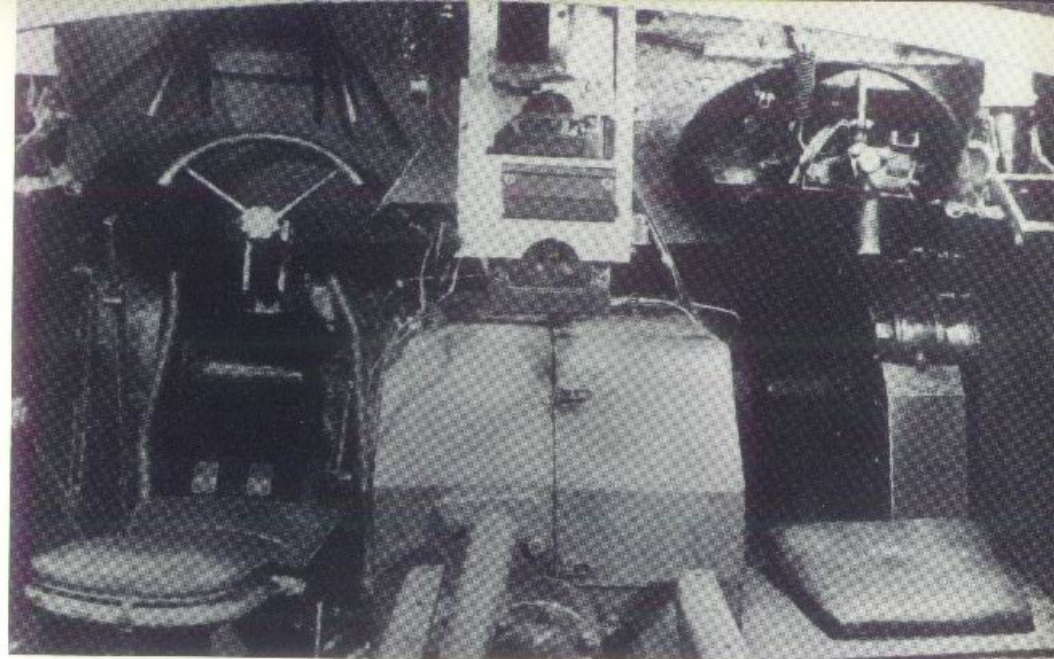
Inside view of the front of the hull, with the driver's seat and the radioman's seat to the right beside it. In between is the gearbox. Note the quarter-circle steering wheel.

Lower right:

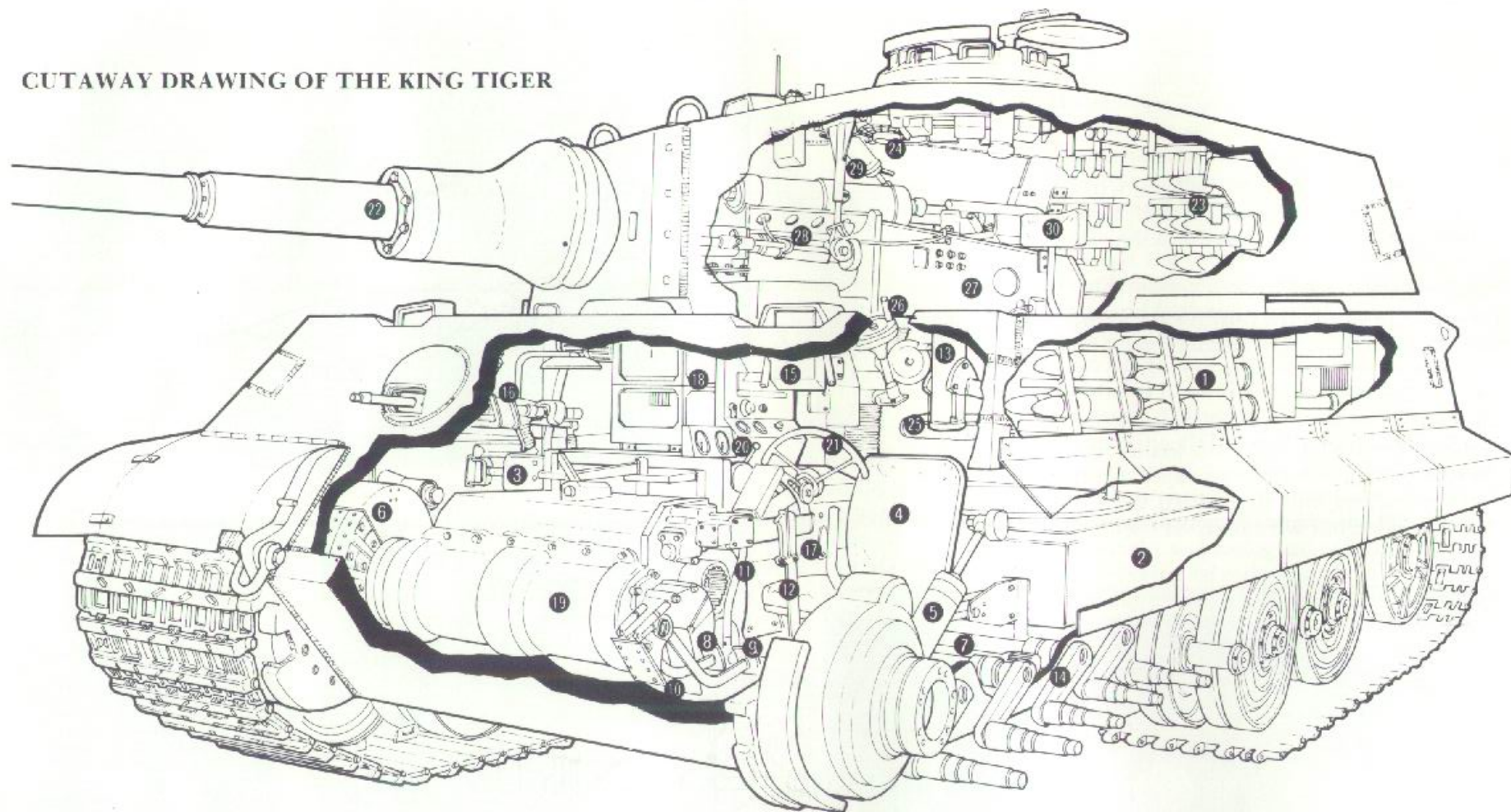
This picture shows the port for the short-range defensive weapon from outside, in both closed and opened (right) conditions.

Below:

In the turret roof ahead of the loader was the short-range defensive weapon, which was operated from inside. Fog cartridges were generally utilized; explosive shells were also developed but were used very seldom.



CUTAWAY DRAWING OF THE KING TIGER



**BATTLE TANK TIGER II**  
(Special Motor Vehicle 182)

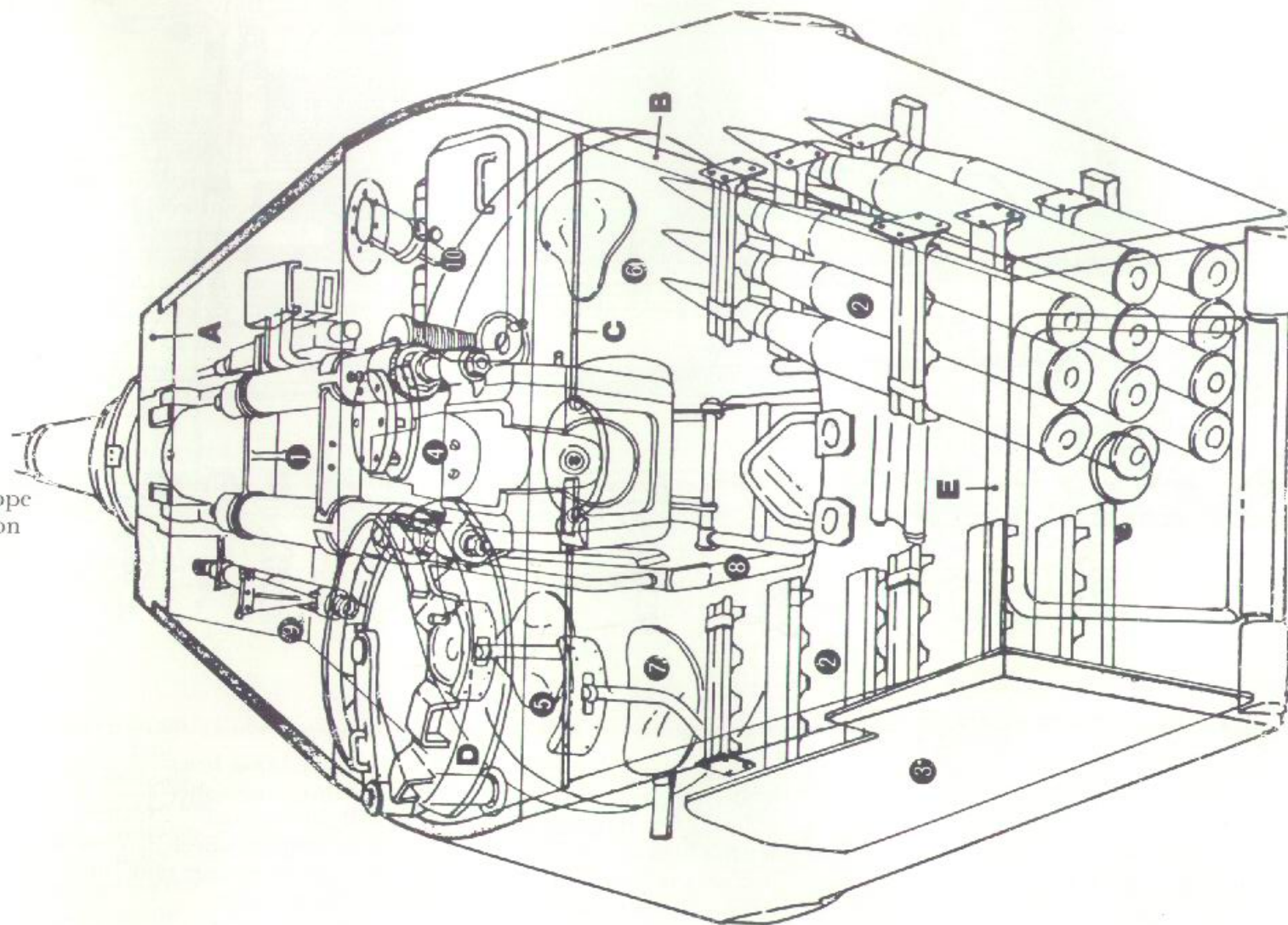
**DETAILS SHOWN**

- |                           |                        |                                 |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Left ammunition rack   | 7. Torsion bars        | 19. Gearbox                     |
| 2. Turntable              | 8. Right brake pedal   | 20. Gearshift lever             |
| 3. Radioman's seat        | 9. Left brake pedal    | 21. Steering wheel              |
| 4. Driver's seat          | 10. Drive pedal        | 22. Tank gun                    |
| 5. Track tension cylinder | 11. Lateral gearing    | 23. Rear turret ammunition rack |
| 6. Disc brakes            | 12. Hand brake lever   | 24. Ventilator                  |
|                           | 13. Elevation crank    | 25. Gunner's seat               |
|                           | 14. Swing arms         | 26. Traverse aiming wheel       |
|                           | 15. Driver's periscope | 27. Gun mount with baffle       |
|                           | 16. Bow machine gun    | 28. Turret aiming telescope     |
|                           | 17. Gearshift drive    | 29. Close-combat weapon         |
|                           | 18. Radio set          | 30. Commander's seat            |

## CUTAWAY DRAWING OF THE TURRET

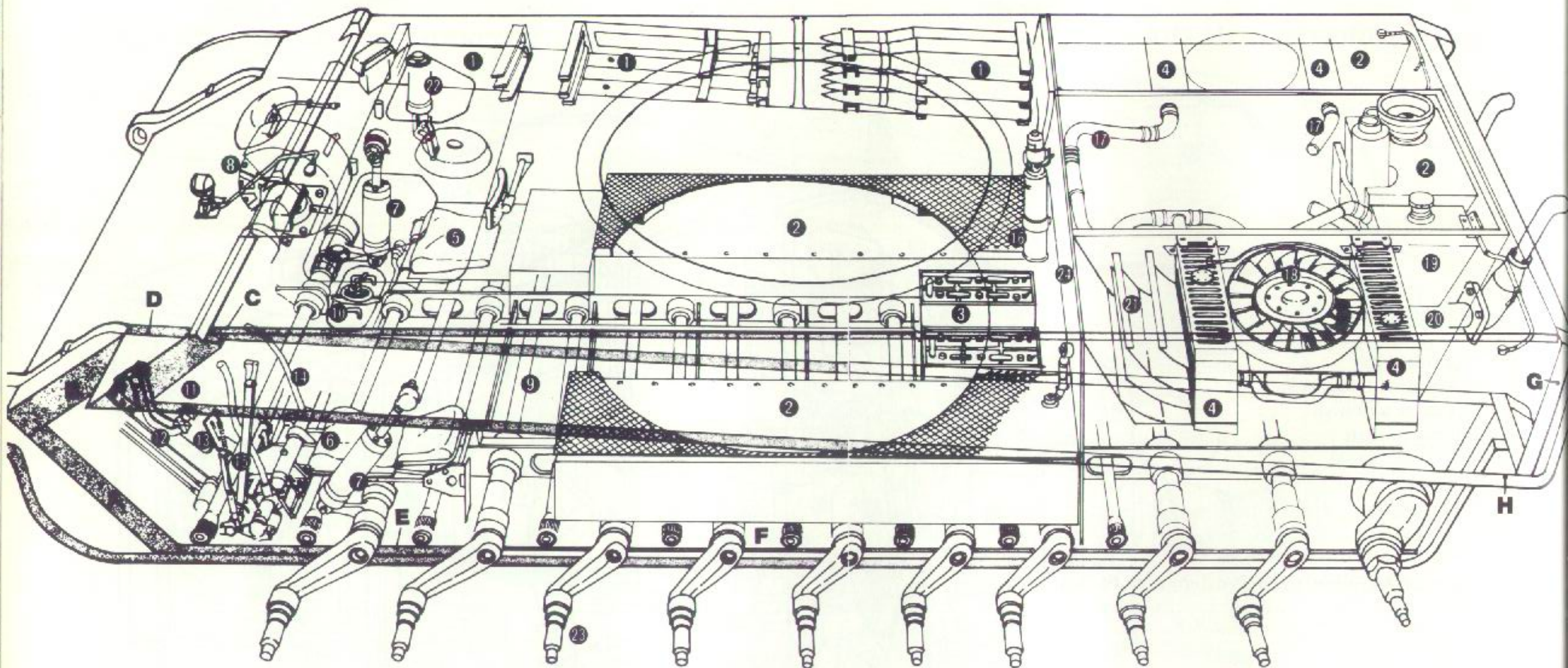
### DETAILS SHOWN

1. Tank gun
2. Ammunition racks
3. Turret sidewall
4. Gun mount
5. Gunner's seat
6. Loader's seat
7. Commander's seat
8. Arm guard
9. Turret aiming telescope
10. Close-combat weapon



### ARMOR PLATE

- A = 180 mm, 80 degrees  
B = 80 mm, 70 degrees  
C = 40 mm, 12 degrees  
D = 150 mm, 90 degrees  
E = 80 mm, 70 degrees



**CUTAWAY DRAWING OF THE  
RUNNING GEAR AND HULL**

**DETAILS SHOWN**

- 1. Hull ammunition racks
- 2. Turntable
- 3. Batteries
- 4. Radiator

- 5. Radioman's seat
- 6. Driver's seat
- 7. Track tension cylinder
- 8. Disc brakes
- 9. Torsion bars
- 10. Emergency exit hatch
- 11. Right brake pedal
- 12. Left brake pedal
- 13. Drive pedal
- 14. Emergency control lever
- 15. Hand brake lever
- 16. Fire extinguisher
- 17. Radiator duct
- 18. Ventilator wheel
- 19. Coolant storage tank
- 20. Exhaust pipe
- 21. Radiator baffles
- 22. Radioman's hatch
- 23. Swing arms
- 24. Engine room bulkhead

**ARMOR PLATE**

- A = 100 mm, 40 degrees
- B = 150 mm, 40 degrees
- C = 40 mm, 0 degrees
- D = 80 mm, 65 degrees
- E = 40 mm, 0 degrees
- F = 25 mm, 0 degrees
- G = 80 mm, 60 degrees
- H = 80 mm, 65 degrees

## Heavy Panzer Battalion 503/ Feldherrnhalle

The First Company of this unit was the first troop unit to be supplied, on June 6-11, 1944, with the Tiger II and transferred to France. They were unloaded 80 kilometers west of Paris (in Dreux), so that about 200 kilometers had to be covered (in four nights) to the area east of Caen, which put extraordinary strains on the vehicles and induced a number of technical breakdowns. Only on July 18 was an attack made in the direction of Cagny, and enemy attempts to break through were turned back.

At the beginning of August, the 3rd Company was also rearmed with the Tiger II at Mailly-le-Camp and went into action north of the Seine; in the Amiens area the last tank had to be blown up in the tangle of retreat fighting.

Immediately after the Allied invasion on the Normandy coast of France, the 1st Company of Heavy Panzer Battalion 503 was supplied with the King Tiger. The two photos show one of the tanks from the early production lot with the simple aiming telescope port (later two) at left beside the tank gun, which is still extended in one piece. At the left side of the turret the welded opening of the original ammunition hatch can be seen.





In the woods near Canteloup the tanks of the unit prepare for their combat; in the foreground is the tank with turret number 114.

Right:  
During the bitter fighting east of Caen, all the tanks were lost one by one. The picture shows one on the road to Vimoutiers.



Below and lower right:  
Both photos show a disabled Tiger II in Plessis-Grimoult. In a later attempt to tow it away, the turret fell off to the side (right).



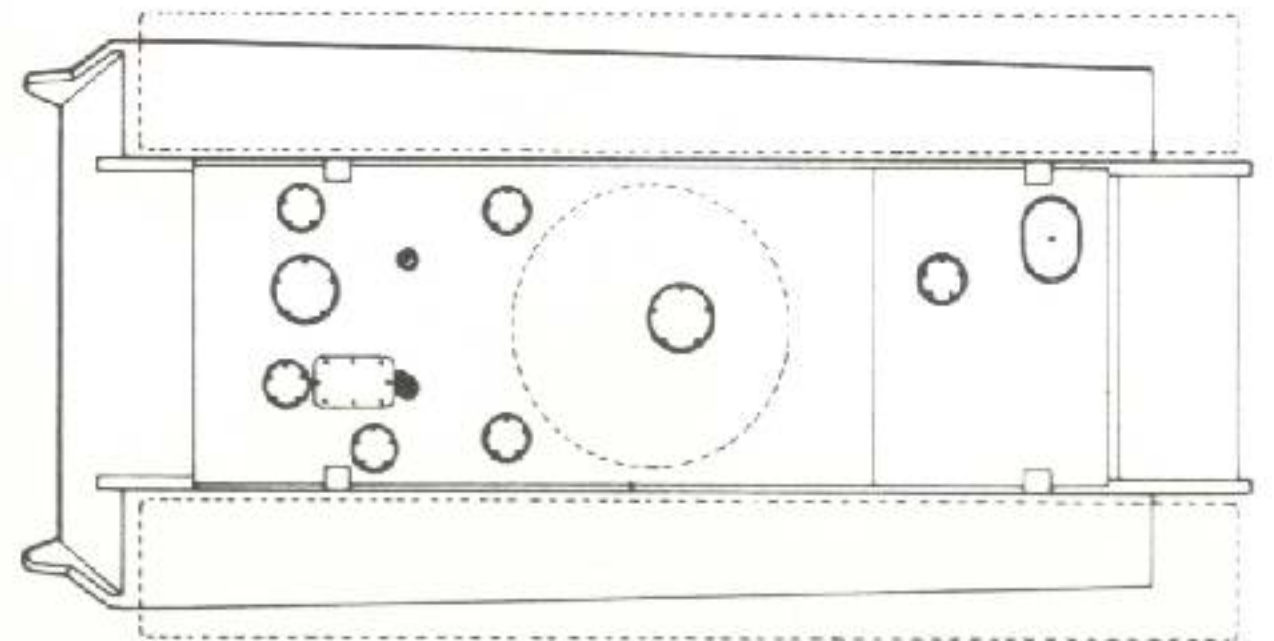


Left:  
Another tank was abandoned while still on a towline from a Panther recovery tank, and is being passed by Canadian troops (in the foreground is a "Staghound" armored scout car).



Lower left:  
General Eisenhower examines a capsized "Royal Tiger." The floor of the fighting compartment was bent by an explosion. The arrangement of the servicing openings and the emergency exit hatch at the left front can be seen.

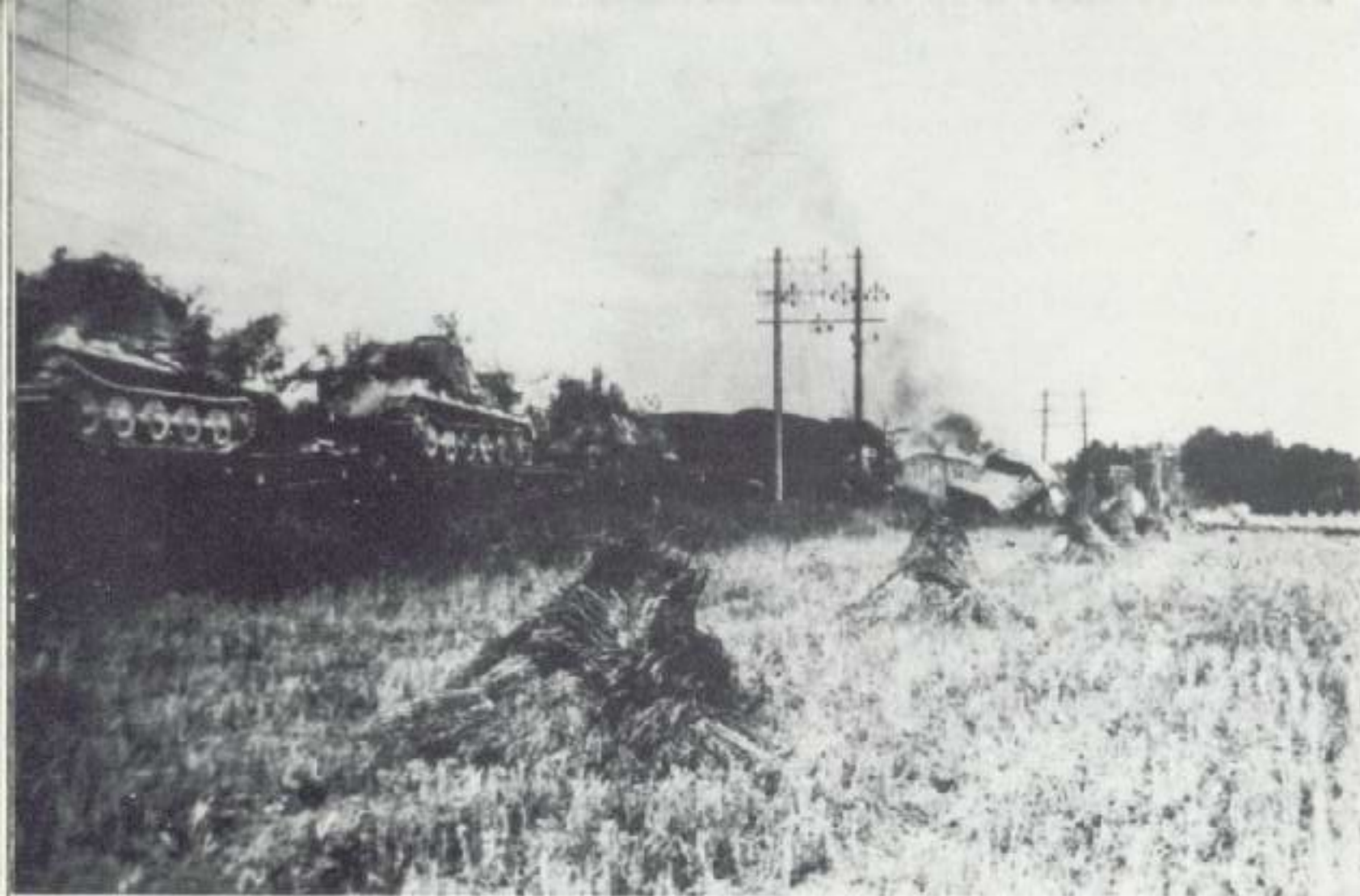
Below:  
This drawing shows all the openings in the base of the Tiger II.







The 3rd Company turned its remaining tanks over to the 2nd and was likewise supplied with Tiger II tanks in Mailly-le-Camp. This photo shows part of the company there during firing drill.



On August 11, 1944 the first five railroad cars were loaded and rolled down the tracks to the front. The next day the train was attacked by five Thunderbolts near Esterney. The platoon leader's tank of Leutnant Freiherr von Rosen (311) caught fire, fell onto the tracks during emergency unloading and tipped over.

Below: The company was unloaded in Paris, drove along the Champs Elysees and stopped briefly at a rest area in the Bois de Vincennes.



The unit was completely reorganized that September in Paderborn-Sennelager, and on October 12 it was loaded on a train for transport to Hungary. There they first undertook the disarming of the renegade Hungarian troops.

Next the unit was subordinated to the 24th Panzer Division for an attack east of Szolnok. An important partial success was the prevention of an advance into the back of the Wöhler Army Group. In the time that followed, the unit saw action repeatedly in the area east of Budapest, then south of it.

In December the unit was transferred to the Stuhlweissenburg area and played an important part in stabilizing the threatening situation there. On December 21 it was renamed "Feldherrnhalle." The bitter fighting in the Stuhlweissenburg area lasted until early February 1945. Almost all the unit's tanks were lost, so that six replacement tanks had to be delivered in February. Fighting began around the Gran bridgehead, the removal of which delayed the Russian preparations to attack in the direction of Pressburg and Vienna. Despite another delivery of tanks, though, the unit only had a strength of 21 tanks (21 companies).

Heavy fighting on the east side of the Little Carpathians and in the Zistersdorf oil fields pushed the unit back in the direction of Budweis. The last two Tiger II tanks were blown up on May 10. The majority of the unit fought its way through to the Americans but was turned over to the Russians.



After its reconstitution, the unit was sent to Hungary and first used to put down renegade Hungarian troops in Budapest. The 3rd Company (below) took up a position below the castle.





This photo shows a tank of the 2nd Company (231) in the upper city. A Hungarian "Nimrod" anti-aircraft tank is in position.



The number one tank of the 2nd Company (200) rolls over one of the makeshift barricades.



This unique series of photos shows the development of a battle for the 1st Company on December 23, 1944 at Polgardi (east of Stuhlweissenburg, Hungary). At first the tanks pick up ammunition for their guns (left), then the attack moves through the village (lower left) with one tank on each side of the street (here on the right). Below: The King Tiger in the left foreground burns after taking a direct hit.



Right:

An antitank gun on the left flank that had not been silenced hit Tank 124 at the shortest range. The following tanks guard the crew as they abandon the tank.



Below:

After the village has been taken, the extent of the loss becomes clear. The close-up photo shows the burning tank which suffered a hull penetration at the left front. The driver and radioman lost their lives.





Left: Amazing but true: the unit was reissued the same two Tiger II tanks (with Porsche turrets) that they had left behind at Mailly-le-Camp.

Above and below: The other photos show additional tanks of the unit in the Stuhlweissenburg area. Above is the chief tank of the 1st Company (100), at the lower left another 1st Company tank, below No. 314.







Left:  
Tank 333 tows a damaged comrade; 311 goes ahead.



Lower left:  
Numerous damaged tanks were taken to Vienna by train and sent back in January and February after being repaired.

Below: A King Tiger and its crew at the burial of a comrade.





The Heavy Panzer Battalion 501 unloading its tanks at Kielce, Poland. Tank 313 is being pushed by a second Tiger onto the right-side combat track laid out ahead of it. The narrow shipping track is still on the left side. Then the track aprons will be screwed on.

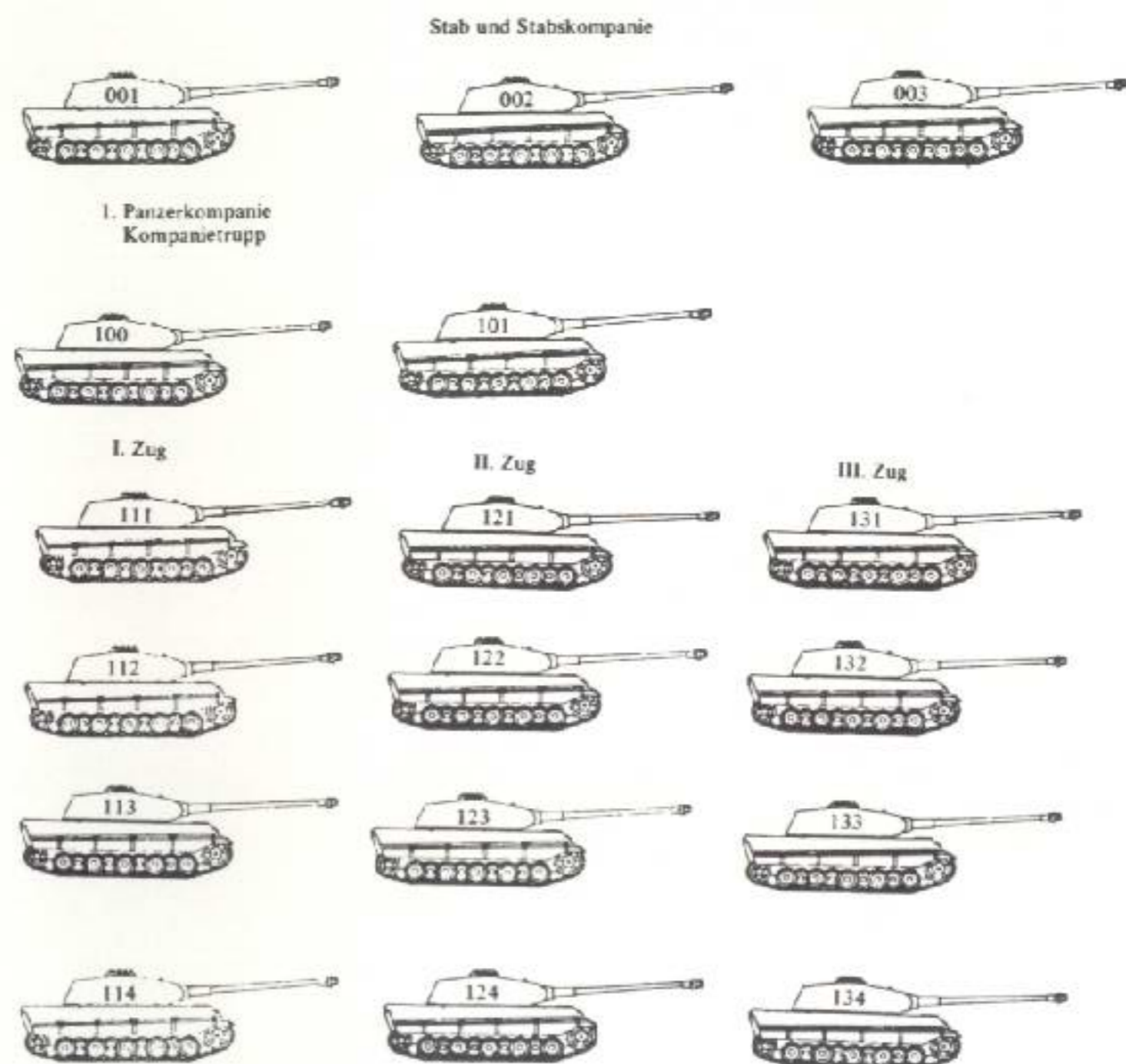


The platoon leader's crew of the 1st Platoon of the 2nd Company (211) cleaning and servicing the tank.

## DELIVERIES OF THE PANZER VI B "KING TIGER" TANK

Datum	Bedarfsträger	Zahl
Ende 1943	Versuchsbetrieb	3
1. 4. 1944	ErprStelle Kummersdorf	1
9. 5. 1944	"	3
2. 6. 1944	"	3
23. 2. 1945	"	3
1. 4. 1944	PzErsatz- u. AushAht 500	2
30. 6. 1944	"	4
9. 7. 1944	"	1
10. 8. 1944	"	2
6. 1. 1945	"	1
14. 4. 1944	PzKp (Fkl) 316	5
25. 8. – 21. 10. 1944	* PzAbt (Fkl) 301	31
25. 6. – 7. 8. 1944	PzAbt 501	45
12. 6. 1944	* PzAbt 503 (1. Kp)	12
27./29. 6. 1944	" (3. Kp und Stab)	14
19. – 22. 9. 1944	"	45
11. 3. 1945	PzAbt FHH	5
26. 7. – 29. 8. 1944	PzAbt 505	45
20. 8. – 12. 9. 1944	PzAbt 506	45
8. 12. 1944	"	6
13. 12. 1944	"	6
(30. 3. 1945	" von SS-PzAbt 501	13)
9. 3. 1945	PzAbt 507	4
22. 3. 1945	"	11
28. 9. – 3. 10. 1944	PzAbt 509	11
5. 12. 1944 – 1. 1. 1945	"	45
30. 1. 1945	PzAbt 511	3
28. 7. – 1. 8. 1944	SS-PzAbt 101	14
17. 10. 1944 – 22. 1. 1945	SS-PzAbt 501 (101)	40
27. 12. 1944 – 6. 3. 1945	SS-PzAbt 502	37
19. 10. 1944 – 16. 1. 1945	SS-PzAbt 503	33
(20./21. 10. 1944	" von PzAbt 301	10)
	Ausgeliefert	477

## STRUCTURE AND STRENGTH OF A HEAVY 'TIGER' TANK UNIT "TIGER"



### Notes:

At times there were departures from the usual turret numbering system (for example, numbering the three staff tanks I, II and III).

The 2nd and 3rd Tank Companies had the same structure as the 1st Company, with turret numbers beginning with 2.. and 3.. respectively.

Strength	Officers/NCO	Officers/Men = Total
Staff and Staff Company	9/37	180 = 176
Supply Company	5/55	188 = 250
Repair Company	3/37	162 = 207
1st Tank Company	4/46	38 = 88
2nd Tank Company	4/46	38 = 88
3rd Tank Company	4/46	38 = 88

Total strength

29/267/594 = 897



There was daily fighting around the turning point of Stavelot. Tank 222 was hit on the left side of the hull while advancing toward the Ablève Bridge and had to be abandoned.





The lead tank of the 1st Company took several frontal hits on the Rue Haute-Rivage in Stavelot and, while moving backward, collided with house No. 9. The tank was stuck in the falling ruins.



Above:

Of the total of four King Tiger tanks left behind at La Gleize, two were in the Werimont Farm Group; here No. 211 is to be seen.

Upper left:

In the center of La Gleize, at the foot of the Chemin Vieille-Voie, another Tiger II remained after the end of the battle, which was used by soldiers of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division for bazooka practice on January 18, 1945. To their amazement, the hollow charges did not penetrate the front armor.

Left:

A tank of the 3rd Company threw its right track on Route 33 near Intersection K 22 (1200 meters before La Gleize) and could not be made mobile. Several days later, American soldiers inspected the tank and set off a hand grenade in the turret.



The other tank, No. 213, rusted away until July 1945, when at the people's request the Americans towed it to the village square (upper right). From there it was moved by the Belgian Army to its showplace above the church in August of 1951. In 1975 it was given a non-authentic camouflage paint job (right). Only in 1981 was it given a more accurate one.







Tiger 332 was abandoned by its crew near Petit Coe and transported to Spa by rail by the 463rd Ordnance Evacuation Company (upper left). From there on it was taken to Antwerp and shipped to the U.S.A., where it was examined thoroughly at the Aberdeen Proving Ground (left). After the openings were closed, it was displayed (unfortunately with an inaccurate paint job).



Tiger 204 was stranded in a field without fuel. After being refueled, the tank was driven three kilometers in the direction of the Roanne-Coo railroad station by US soldiers. But it gave up the ghost on an upgrade and stayed there for weeks, an obstacle to traffic, before it was pushed down the slope.





North of La Gleize, Tiger 334 was used to secure Route 33 in the direction of Borgoumont. It slowed up the leading American tanks but was hit in its right running gear. At right is the wreck of a destroyed M 4 A 1 (76) tank. To clear the road, it was pushed into the ditch along the road once the tracks were detached.



Above:  
Beyond Stavelot Tank 003, also seen in the Tondorf photos (page 34), was hit in the running gear. Before the crew abandoned it, they blew the muzzle brake so that the cannon would not move forward again after its last shot.

Right:  
Tank 312 was abandoned near Goronne west of Vielsalm and fell into the hands of American troops.





## Heavy SS Panzer Battalion 502

It was formed at Sennelager as of November 1944. Early in March of 1945 it was transported to the eastern front near Stettin and unloaded there on March 11. On March 18 it was taken by train to Müllrose, in the vicinity of Frankfurt an der Oder, and from there it attacked at the Küstrin bridgehead on March 21 and fought near Sachsendorf. The attack came to a stop, since the infantry could not follow.

On March 26 the unit advanced again as a (strengthened) battle group, but this attack also had to be broken off, because of enemy superiority and mines.

Early in April, retreat fighting took place against the Soviets, who attacked from the bridgehead. In mid-April there was fighting in the Lietzen-Marxdorf-Hasenfelde-Arens-dorf area; there the unit was surrounded, but broke free through Wilmersdorf. At the end of April it fought on the north side of the Wolzinger See, and then broke out of the pocket of Halbe, gradually losing all its tanks in the process.



There are, unfortunately, very few pictures of what remained of SS Tank Units 502 (left) and 503 (opposite page), since these units were rushed into action in small groups.

## Heavy SS Panzer Battalion 503

This unit, established as 1944 turned to 1945, was shipped to the eastern front on January 27, 1945, but never went into action as a unit. One part was sent to the Arnswalde area in Pomerania, the other to Landsberg-Küstrin.

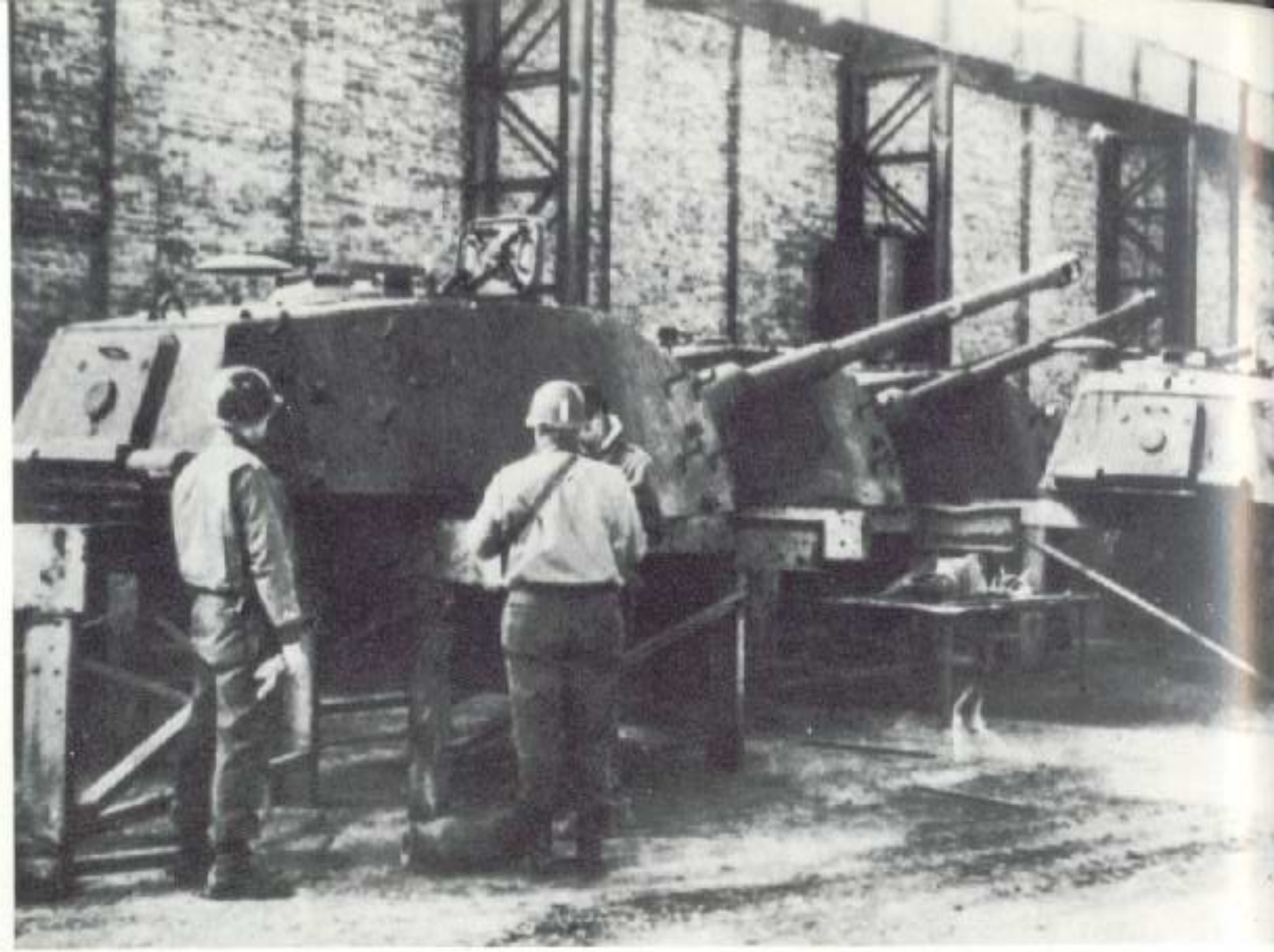
The first group was surrounded at Arnswalde on February 4 and relieved by forces of the III. SS Tank Corps on February 12.

As plans were being made to apply the whole unit at Danzig under the command of the 2nd Army, the Soviet breakthrough toward Stettin took place and divided the unit. Only one half arrived at Danzig and was divided into four groups and subordinated to infantry divisions. The more and more decimated unit fought on until the end of March. A small part was shipped by sea, via Swinemünde, to the Berlin area (six tanks). Here the remainder of the unit, some of it fighting as infantry, was defeated.

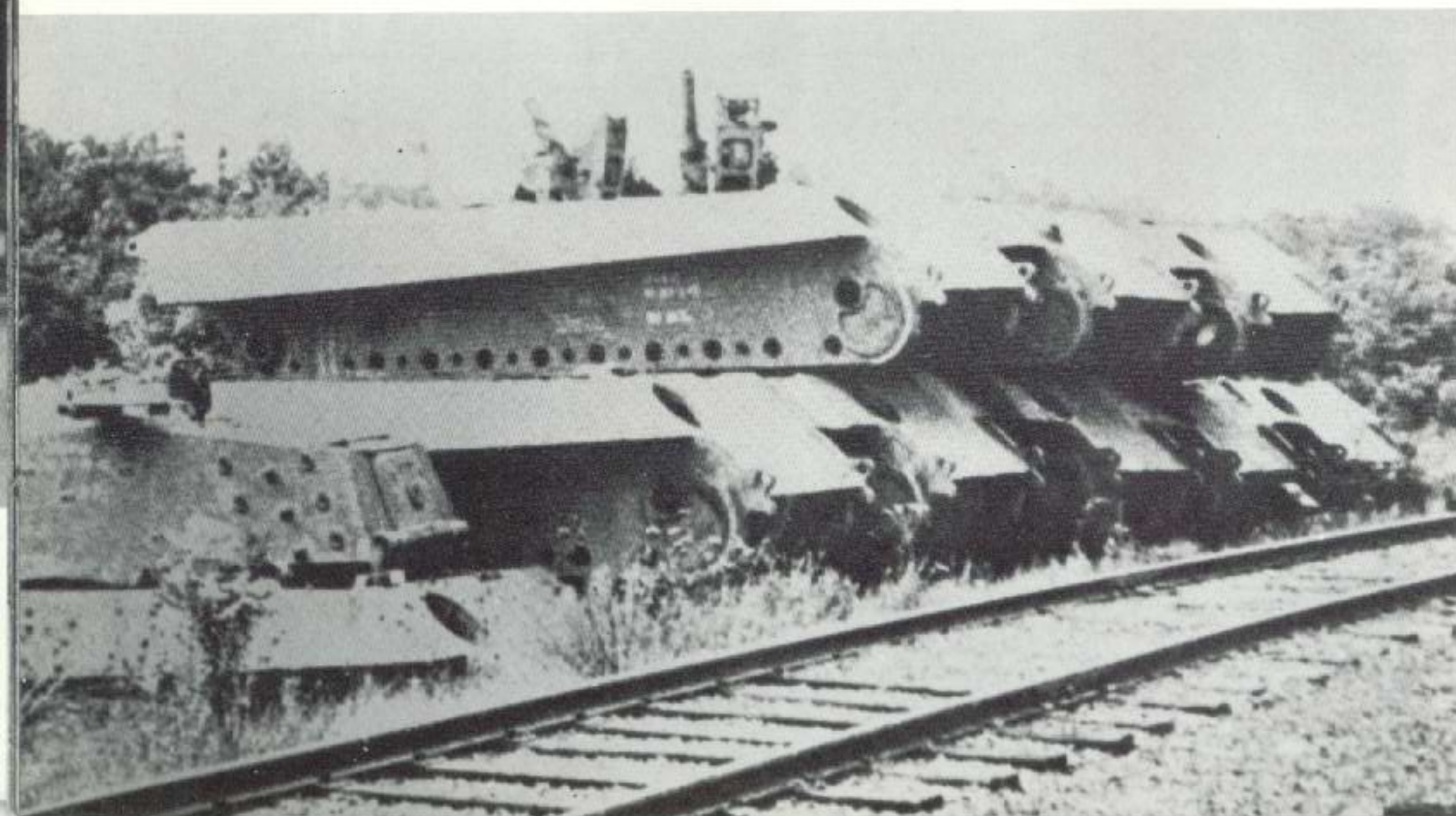
Right:  
The battalion  
commander  
(Sturmbannführer  
Herzig) awarding  
decorations.



Right:  
One of the most successful commanders in  
the unit, Untersturmführer Karl Bromann,  
poses by the gun of his tank. The number  
of score rings speaks for itself.



Above: American officers occupy the works and examine turrets set on blocks.



Upper left:  
Delivery of King Tigers was seriously delayed by a heavy air attack on the Henschel production plant in Kassel on October 7, 1944.

Left:  
This photo shows finished turret and hull units on the Henschel firm's grounds.



The end: Made useless by barrel damage, this abandoned Tiger (with Porsche turret) waits to be scrapped on the grounds of Tank Unit 500 in Paderborn. To the right of the tank is a Panther V tank, and diagonally behind it the turret weight used on the VK 4501 (H) can be seen.





These three rare photos were taken shortly after the war (upper left) or in the early 1950s and show the tanks at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in the United States in their original condition, with blue turret numbers. On the forward hull sides and at left on the bow plate is the emblem of Heavy Panzer Unit 506 (a white cross on a round red background). Later it was painted very incorrectly (below).



**Hobbycraft**

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Ref. B1914



A King Tiger of Heavy Panzer Unit 505. This unit carried its tactical numbers on the cannon and the figure of a knight on the turret sides.



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