

Achtung Panzer! - Johannes Kümmel

Introduction - What's New - Site Map
Panzer Profiles - Additional Information
Vehicles of the Wehrmacht - Military Links
Bron Pancerna - Forum

Johannes Kümmel
Der Löwe von Capuzzo / The Lion of Capuzzo
(July 21, 1909 - February 26, 1944)

Johannes Kümmel was born in Coswig, Saxony on July 21st of 1909. He joined the Reichswehr in 1928 and quickly obtained a rank of Unteroffizier (Junior NCO). Kümmel remained in the military as the Reichswehr became the new Wehrmacht and in 1938 was transferred to the newly formed 8th Panzer Regiment of the 10th Panzer Division at Boblingen near Stuttgart, southwestern Germany. In 1939, he was promoted to the rank of Oberfeldwebel (First Sergeant) and received the command of panzer platoon in the 1st Company. He commanded the unit during the Polish Campaign and was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class on September 27th of 1939. Johannes Kümmel received the award as a recognition for taking part in numerous operation including knocking out three Polish light tanks (or probably tankettes). On October 20th of 1939, after the conclusion of the Polish Campaign, Kümmel was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class for knocking out four more enemy tanks during the campaign. Soon after, he was promoted to the rank of Oberleutnant (First Lieutenant).

On April 1st of 1940, Johannes Kümmel was promoted to the rank of Hauptmann (Captain) and received the command of the 1st Company of 8th Panzer Regiment. During the German offensive in the West of 1940, 10th Panzer Division was part of Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps, which broke through at Sedan, fought in the Low Countries and France, finally reaching the English Channel. Kümmel as the commander of the company remained at the frontlines and on June 5th of 1940, was slightly wounded when a mine blew up his tank.

After the defeat of France on June 25th of 1940, Germany was forced to help Italian ally in their unsuccessful struggle against the British in North Africa. On January 18th of 1941, 8th Panzer Regiment was transferred to the 15th Panzer Division (formed on February 1st of 1940). The division along with 5th Leichte (Panzer) Division formed new Deutsches Afrika Korps (German Africa Corps) commanded by Erwin Rommel, destined for Tripoli. On February 14th of 1941, leading elements 5th Leichte (Panzer) Division along with their commander Erwin Rommel landed in Tripoli and were joined in early May by 15th Panzer Division. Germans found Italians to be demoralized by the defeats inflicted upon them by British from May of 1940 during fighting in Cyrenaica (Operation Compass). The 8th Panzer Regiment had 20 Panzerkampfwagen IV, 71 Panzerkampfwagen III and 55 Panzerkampfwagen I, Panzerkampfwagen II and command tanks.

On June 15th of 1941, British under General Wavell launched Operation Battleaxe and again fighting took place in Cyrenaica. At Halfaya Pass, which has been converted to defensive strongpoint, Hauptmann Wilhelm Bach and his group held his position, while Italian Division Trento held area Sollum-Capuzzo-Bardia under the command of 15th Panzer Division. Johannes Kümmel and 8th Panzer Regiment with some 80 tanks were in reserve between Bardia and Capuzzo. British moved towards Capuzzo and Sollum, while attacking Bardia with 50 tanks from 7th Armored Division. The attack was temporarily halted by a single 88mm gun, which destroyed three leading enemy tanks. The rest of British tanks halted their attack to regroup and attack again under cover of smoke. This delay allowed the 8th Panzer Regiment to reach the area of Capuzzo and attack the enemy with the 1st Panzer Battalion including Kümmel's company with two short-barrel Panzerkampfwagen IV tanks. They soon knocked-out one British Matilda II and reinforced by company's Panzerkampfwagen III tanks continued to fire at the enemy armor. Fierce tank battle resulted and Johannes Kümmel found himself in the center of it all. During the battle, panzer commanded by Oberleutnant Peters was hit and he called Kümmel to ask for covering fire, while leaving their panzer. Johannes Kümmel soon found himself firing at two enemy tanks, which kept firing to finish off Peters' panzer. He soon knocked them out and regrouped his company to attack British anti-tank positions. German panzer destroyed the enemy positions and the battle soon involved the entire 8th Panzer Regiment. Then, another group of 20 British Matilda IIs were spotted on the flank and regiment's commander Hans Cramer ordered Johannes Kümmel to attack the enemy and protect the flank. With half of his company including two Panzerkampfwagen IV tanks, Kümmel soon knocked out eight enemy tanks, putting an end to the British attack. British advance was halted but both sides suffered heavy losses. Following the action, on June 18th, Kümmel received his nickname - Der Löwe von Capuzzo (The Lion of Capuzzo) and his tank was decorated with the "roaring lion" by his fellow soldiers. On July 9th of 1941, Kümmel was awarded the Knight's Cross following the recommendation by the commander of the 15th Panzer Division Generalleutnant Neumann-Silkow himself for his heroic action.

In May of 1942, Johannes Kümmel was given the command of 1st Panzer Battalion in time of the German offensive in Cyrenaica and into Egypt - Operation Theseus, which was launched on May 26th of 1942. On June 15th, Kümmel tanks reached the coast and by the evening took Port Piastrino. On June 21st of 1942, Tobruk garrison surrenders to Rommel's forces. Following the fall of Tobruk, three more offensive took place, two launched by the British to drive the Axis out of Egypt and Cyrenaica and one by the Germans to drive into Egypt. Before the last British offensive, on October 11th of 1942, Kümmel was awarded the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross. In November of 1942, he was given the command of Panzer Battalion and on December 1st, received a promotion to the rank of Major. Following his promotion, Kümmel was transferred to Southern Italy.

Back, in Europe, Kümmel was promoted to the rank of Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) and was assigned at the Headquarters of XIV Panzer Corps under General Hans Valentin Hube in Southern Italy. In October of 1943, he received command of 26th Panzer Regiment of the 26th Panzer Division, which fought at Salerno and Cassino areas. On January 30th, Kümmel's regiment was part of the attacking force, which was to destroy the enemy landing at Anzio-Nettuno but failed. Second attack on the enemy forces was to take place on February 27th of 1944, but Kümmel didn't take

part in as the day earlier he was killed in a road accident near Cisterna. On May 20th of 1944, Johannes Kümmel was posthumously promoted to the rank of Oberst (Colonel). In his memory, there was a plate erected in his hometown of Boblingen on April 7th of 1943, honoring Johannes Kümmel as the holder of Knight's Cross with Oakleaves.

George Parada
Copyright@1996-2003