

130 Panzer Lehr



Brief History

The Panzerlehrdivision (also called Panzer-Lehr-Division), commonly known as *Panzer Lehr*, was a German armored division during World War II, one of the most élite units in the entire German army. It was formed in 1943 from various units of élite training and demonstration troops stationed in Germany, to provide additional armored strength for resisting the anticipated Allied invasion of western Europe. It's great weakness was that it concentrated the cream of Germany's tank commanders/instructors in a single unit thus making it a primary target for destruction in terms of Allied strategy. Due to its élite status it was lavishly equipped in comparison to the ordinary Panzer divisions, though on several occasions it fought almost to destruction. In particular at the time of the Battle of St. Lo when an entire bomb group of B-17's had the division boxed into a single map grid and pulverized that grid continuously for 2 days with 500 pound bombs, annihilating virtually all of Germany's master tank instructors in one blow.

Panzer Lehr is occasionally referred to as the 130. Panzerlehrdivision or 130 Panzer-Lehr-Division, since a number of its constituent units were numbered 130, and in most other Panzer divisions those units were numbered to match the division's number.

St. Lo Battles

On July 2 Panzer Lehr was ordered to pull out of Tilly-sur-Seules and head west to provide support to the divisions resisting the American advance near St. Lô. The area around St. Lô is covered with a grid of ancient hedgerows known as *bocage*. The bocage made it extremely difficult for armor to maneuver and provided superb defensive positions to the infantry on either side of the battle. Upon reaching this location the division found itself up against the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division. After several holding battles, Panzer Lehr attacked towards Pont-Herbert, which it captured and held against several American counter-attacks.

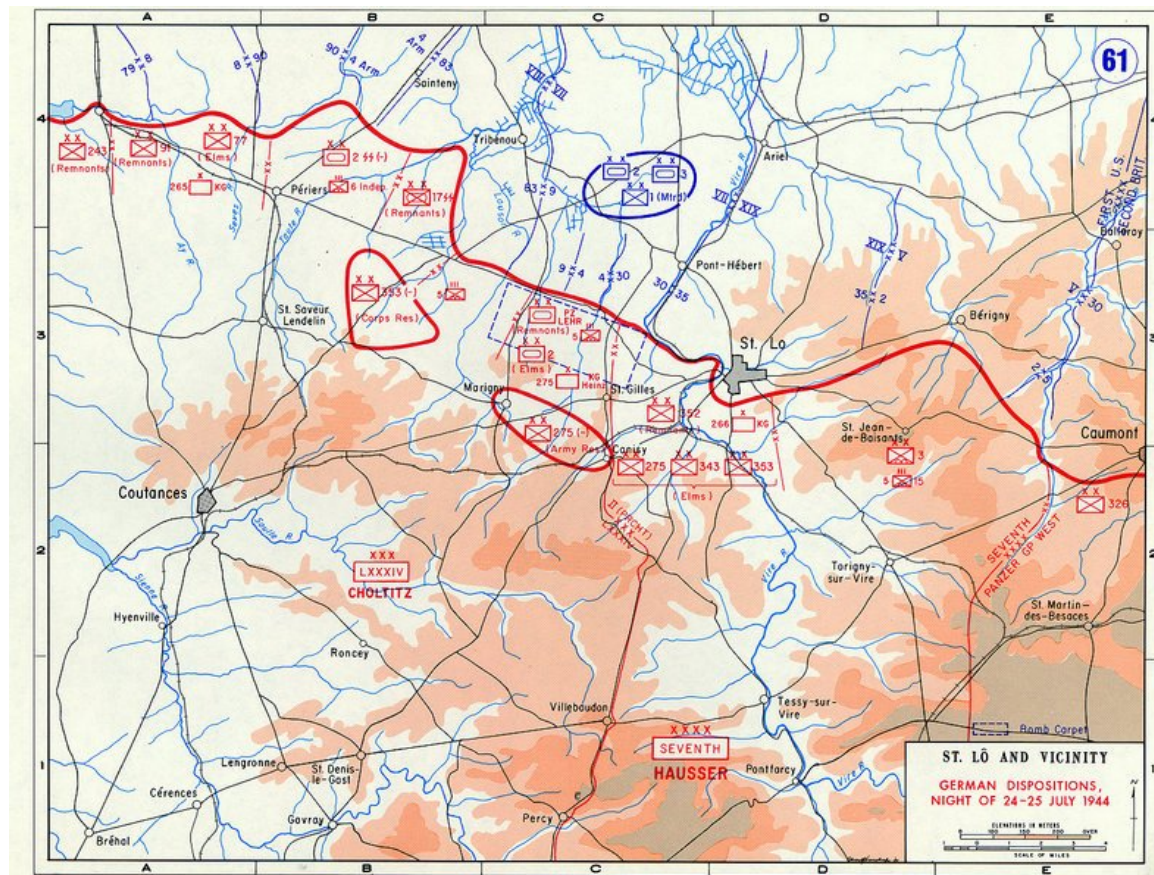
On 11 July Panzer Lehr attacked towards the village of Le Desert, deep in the bocage. An allied air attack halted the assault, destroying 20 tanks, and the division's remaining tanks withdrew over the Vire Canal to relative safety.

Over the next few weeks the division fought a defensive battle of attrition against the numerically superior allied forces. On July 19, St. Lô fell to the Americans. Six days later the Americans launched Operation Cobra, their breakout from the Normandy lodgement. The operation was

preceded by a massive aerial bombardment by over 2,000 allied bombers. Panzer Lehr was directly in the path of attack, and the division suffered heavily during this bombardment.

The seriously depleted Panzer Lehr could not hope to halt the 140,000 man assault, so on August 5, after a fighting withdrawal, it was ordered back to Alençon for rest and refitting. A battle group dubbed *Kampfgruppe von Hauser* was formed from the remaining battle-ready men and tanks, and this unit remained in combat. Later, when *Kampfgruppe Hauser* pulled back towards Fontainebleau to rest and refit, division commander Bayerlein ordered the rest of the division to follow.

Within 7 months of its formation the division was reduced from one of the most powerful divisions fielded during the war to a shattered, combat-ineffective unit with only 20 remaining tanks. After spending a month refitting in the Saar, the division was moved to Paderborn.



Spayd, P.A., Wilkins, Gary ed. Bayerlein – After Action Reports of the Panzer Lehr Division Commander – From D-Day to the Ruhr. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Various internet resources.