



# 21<sup>ST</sup> PANZER DIVISION



The unit was originally created as 5th Light Division or 5th Light *Afrika* Division in Africa in early 1941, from an *ad hoc* collection of smaller units rushed to support the collapsing Italian forces in [Cyrenaica](#), [Libya](#). It comprised elements of the [3rd Panzer Division](#), the unit initially earmarked for North Africa in the summer of 1940. The formation was officially named on 18 February 1941, and its first divisional commander was [Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross](#) winner [Generalmajor Johannes Streich](#), who had commanded the 15th Panzer regiment during the successful [French Campaign](#) in 1940. By this time most of the units had arrived in [Tripoli](#), but the last tank elements were not deployed until after 11 March, missing the first battles of [Rommel's](#) Cyrenaica offensive.

The 5th Light did not have a full establishment of [tanks](#) immediately following its deployment. Having only 150 tanks of all types of which 130 were actually combat worthy, and the rest being an assortment of command and unarmed observer vehicles. Despite the slow build-up, largely due to most Wehrmacht reinforcements being directed to the [Eastern Front](#) to support [Operation Barbarossa](#), by September 1941 the 5th Light Division achieved [Panzer Division](#) strength. It was then renamed the 21st Panzer Division. Throughout its war in the Desert, the [Afrika Korps's](#) (DAK) units were nearly always understrength, made up of any men and equipment that were available. <sup>1</sup>

