



Wehrmacht Markings

1939-45

GUIDE FOR MODELLERS

by W. J. K. Davies

Part 1: Panzer Division emblems

PPETER HODGES, in his article on British Armoured Division Markings (AIRFIX magazine, December 1988) found it necessary to give some description of the organisation of a division; I find it even more necessary since German tactical markings were completely dependent on what part of a division the vehicle concerned belonged to.

Unit nomenclature: The first thing to note is that German unit designations were different from the British and was sometimes by confusing. The basic organic unit within a division was the Regiment (pronounced with a hard 'g') which was roughly the equivalent of a British Brigade. It was normally composed of units designated *abteilung*—singular *abteilung*—which were roughly the equivalent of a British infantry battalion or tank regiment. An *abteilung* could, however, be a much smaller unit if it was semi-autonomous—eg, the Artillery Regiment of a division had *abteilungen* of no more than two gun in its make-up.

Below the *abteilung* in infantry and armour formations was the *Kompanie* (British company or squadron) and below that again the *Zug* or platoon. The artillery equivalent to the *zug* was the *batterie*, of four or six guns depending on the type of weapon. It will be noted that German divisional nomenclature did not follow the peculiarly British tradition of keeping assize names for so-cavalry units. Indeed the terms used indicated the German idea of self-sufficiency for all units. Infantry units were self-contained right down to *Kompanie* level, with their own allocation of heavy support weapons. To avoid confusion, however, British equivalent designations will be used in the article whenever possible.

Organisation of the Panzer Divisions

Like the British, the German Panzer¹ Divisions started the war with a big preponderance of tanks—two armoured 'regiments' totalling some 400 tanks in all. These, however, were largely the lightly armoured PzKpfw I and II and when the main mainline PzKpfw III and IV became available in quantity late in 1940 the divisional allocation was reduced to one three-battalion regiment, each battalion having a company of PzKpfw IV for close-support work, and two fighting companies of PzKpfw III. Since the Wehrmacht had always included in the division at least two motorised infantry regiments of two battalions each, together with a battalionised armoured recon unit and strong divisional services, the Panzer division was then a well-balanced force.

In effectiveness was increased by the fact that the recon unit included a strong infantry component, the Engineer battalion was considered as a combatant force and equipped as a strong infantry battalion, and the artillery regiment had a proportion of its guns mounted on armoured SP chassis! Even so the OKW apparently considered from this organisation deficient in infantry, some Wehrmacht armoured divisions having no less than six—in some cases nine—infantry battalions attached besides their recon unit. An infantry battalion, incidentally, was normally an integral part of its regiment, but the regiment was by no means permanently allocated to a particular division.

For most of the war, therefore, the Wehrmacht armoured division was, at full establishment, a formidable and very flexible fighting



Above: A PzKpfw III armoured car of von Kleist's Panzer Group displays the white G covered by all the divisions within the group. It has the standard Wehrmacht road number plate (black on white) carried by all wheeled vehicles and displays an obscured symbol on its left wing-panel, possibly the pre-1941 marking of 1st Pz Div. Its low stance is a device, as was the circular sign of an individual unit—these are featured in a later instalment. Vehicle is dark grey overall, shown during the final occupation of France, June 1940 (Imperial War Museum).

force, consisting of the organic units shown in Table 1. As the war progressed, of course, it was often the case that divisions were at less than full establishment. This was one of the inevitable consequences of being a defending army but was also partly accounted for by the German habit of forming battle groups out of various units for special tasks; their 'plague' unit organisation made this a much simpler task than it was for the British.

As far as I know, very few of these battle-groups had their own insignia with the exception of the ones under Guderian and von Kleist which sported big white G's or K's respectively. These, however, were really army corps composed of two or more complete divisions with attached units. A look at Table 2 which shows the composition of typical Panzer divisions in early 1943 will show how units could be exchanged and re-allocated; even the services units—nominally permanent—could be switched between divisions.

The tactical markings of the panzer divisions were laid down by OKW orders and fall into four categories: divisional emblems; national insignia; APV numbers; and tactical signs applied, at least in theory, to all motor vehicles without APV numbering. Bridge plates were occasionally carried but were not universal by any means.

Divisional Insignia: As with the British, all German divisions had an identifying sign—and one might say with some truth that the less efficient the division the more elaborate its sign! Thus in the Wehrmacht it was the infantry divisions which produced colourful heraldic or pseudo-heraldic patterns; The Panzer divisions had the simple and strictly logical signs as shown in Fig. 1. They no doubt spread painting and identification but are depressingly prosaic. The few exceptions belong to divisions 'converted' at a late date from infantry to *panzer grenadier* (armoured infantry) divisions which occasionally clung to their old emblems. The notable ones are: Von Senger a Droll's 24 Panzer, formerly 1st Cavalry Division, which kept its jumping horse symbol; 114 Panzer formed in 1944 from 15 Panzer Grenadier, which retained its running greyhound; and the elite Grossdeutschland division which was officially a panzer

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Table 2. Unit allocations to typical Panzer Divisions, 1940

Organic Unit	Panzer Olive No				
	1	2	15	20	24
Official Arm Unit No	01	02	16	20	24
Recon Co	1	2	16	20	24
Panzer Sign Co	27	28	17	21	25
Panzer Sign Co	27	28	17	21	25
Pz (Arm Regt)	1	10	24	17	24
Pz (Arm Regt) (Mot)	11	11	79	20	28
Panzer Art Regt	27	28	17	20	25
Panzer Art Bn	27	28	17	20	25
Panzer Sign Bn	27	28	17	20	25

¹ An ordinary infantry regt, comprising a complete regiment 'lost' during the Battle of Britain.

¹ This is simply the German for 'armour', the correct past tense being 'gekennzeichnet'.



(Note: Earlier divisional signs prior to 1943 re-organization and Russian invasion will appear in a later installment)



Drawings by Gordon Riddle



Fig 1: Panzer Division symbols from late 1943—early 1944

Painted in yellow, white, or sometimes black depending on background

Table 1.

Theoretical Organization of a 1944-pattern Wehrmacht Panzer Division at Full Establishment. (NB: in practice some units were likely to be under-strength and equipment varied widely, often including captured and adapted vehicles.)

Organic Unit	Fighting Components (incl. incl. HQs and support organizations)	Main Equipment
Armored Recon Bn	Armoured Car Coy Heavy Arm'd Inf Coy Light Arm'd Inf Coy Heavy Weapons Coy	15 5-6 or 4 track armoured cars 120 mm catapault C 25 SDRG 221 SPW C 25 SDRG 220 SPW (or VWs) C 27 SDRG 221 SPW (1st equip) Included 12 SP 75 mm guns in SPWs
Arm'd Sign Bn Panzer Regt	Non-combatant AA Coy PzPz IV Bn PzPz V Bn	8 x 5.7 cm SP AA guns 26 PzPz IV (IC, G or J) 26 PzPz V (Flamm)
Panzer Grenadier Regt (mechanized)	Armoured Inf Bn Motorized Inf Bn Infantry Sign Coy Engineer Coy	75 SDRG 221 SPW 12 75 mm SP guns C 25 SPW/Cat C 27 SPW; 8 x 150 mm SP inf guns 28 SDRG 221 SPW
Panzer Grenadier Regt (motorized)	As above but with all inf units motorized, not armoured	
Anti-Tank Bn	Two Companies SP A/T One Coy tracked A/T	28 75 mm SP A/T guns 14 15 mm A/T guns
AA Bn	Two Heavy AA Batteries Two Light AA Batteries	8 x 88 mm AA guns 18 x 20 mm AA guns
Arm'd Artillery Regt	Mixed SP Battery Light Battery Medium Battery	4 x 150 mm SP howz (Hummel) 12 x 105 mm SP gun/howz (Wespe) 12 x 105 mm gun/howz (swast) 4 x 150 mm heavy howz (swast) 4 x 150 mm heavy howz (swast) 4 x 150 mm heavy howz (swast)
Arm'd Engineer Bn	Organized as Infantry Bn with one arm'd Engineer Coy (28 SPW); two motorized Engineer Coys; Bridging Column Non-combatant	



Panzer Markings—continued

presenter unit but had a full tank regiment and an armoured recon battalion.

The signs should be consulted with the chart in Table 3 showing origin and date of formation of all regular panzer divisions. The signs shown are those used after the 1940 expansion; originally the ten panzer divisions had different signs (eg. 1 Panzer had the V right-way up) but these appear to have been changed before the Russian campaign, perhaps to confuse enemy intelligence. The same design probably accounts for the later variants shown in Fig. 1.

The insignia were normally painted in thick yellow lines and could be found almost anywhere on the front or back of vehicles. The sign (four) side or the off (left) side at the front and rear were favoured spots, but they were also painted above or beside tactical signs on occasion. The signs could be in white if camouflage—eg. sand-based—made it desirable, and most of the variants shown were normally in white. On occasion units painted their signs in yellow on a black rectangular background for greater clarity, but this appears to have been a strictly local and unofficial procedure.

Divisional signs of some of the more competent Panzer grenadier divisions have been included as a contrast, together with the Afrika Korps insignia seen by all vehicles of that organisation. The details varied slightly from unit to unit.

Table 5. Origin and Dates of Formation of Regular Wehrmacht Panzer Divisions, with Indications of their main battleships.

(W=Western Front, E=Eastern Front, I=Italy, A=Africa)

Div.	Formed from	Year	Main Theatres of Operations	Remarks
1	motor	By 1939	W (1940)	
2	motor	By 1939	W (1940)	
3	motor	By 1939	W (1940)	
4	motor	By 1939	W (1940)	
5	motor	By 1939	W (1940)	
6	1 Light Div	1940	W to 1942, E	
7	2 Light Div	1940	W (1940)	
8	3 Light Div	1940	W (1940)	
9	4 Light Div	1940	W to W, 1941	
10	motor	1940	W (1940), E to A, 1942	Destroyed Tunisia 1942. Not reformed.
11	Schulzeinf. 11	Late 1940	E to W, 1942	
12	1st Mot Inf Div	Late 1940	E	
13	2nd Mot Inf Div	Late 1940	E	Destroyed at Budapest early 1945
14	4th Inf Div	Late 1940	E to W	Destroyed at Stalingrad, 1942. Reformed late 1943
15	88 Inf Div	Late 1940	A	Destroyed Tunisia, later reformed as Pz Gren Div for 6 Gen. Reformed but not reformed
16	90 Inf Div	Late 1940	E	
17	91 Inf Div	Late 1940	E	
18	474 Inf Div	Late 1940	E	Disbanded 1942
19	10 Inf Div	Late 1940	E	
20	11 Inf Div	Late 1940	E	
21	12 Light Div	Mid 1941	A to W, 1944	Destroyed Tunisia, reformed 1944
22	motor	Mid 1941	W to E	Destroyed Spring 1945
23	motor	Mid 1941	W to E	Visually wiped out 1942 but reformed immediately
24	1 Cavalry Div	Mid 1941	E, I, E	
25	Pz Grenadier	Mid 1942	W to E (1942), I	
26	20 Inf Div	Mid 1942	W to I (1942)	
27	Pz Gren Regt	Late 1942	E	An operational unit lost early in 1942
118	18 Mot Inf Div	Spring 1944	W	
PL1	Lehrtruppen	Late 1942	W	

Notes:

1 Light Divisions were formed as highly mobile, high quality infantry divisions—the mechanical equivalent of cavalry. The bulk of armour was soon lost and they were soon converted with the exception of 90th Light which became a Panzer Grenadier Division.

2 Panzer Lehr, formed as a strong reserve from demonstration units.



(Below Fig 2: Typical Pz Gr Div signs



Paderbornville



20th Pz Gr



20th Pz Gr



90th Pz Gr



20th PANZERPIONIERBATTALION



Key to pictures: (1) Afrika Korps emblem seen in various styles; this differs from that shown for example. Typical positioning is shown on this PzW IV but it could also be seen on the superstructure frame. This example shows a contrasting background which in this case appears to be the original dark grey of the vehicle before it was repainted for desert service. (2) The SK (crest) of 1st Pz Div painted adherent to the German cross on a PzW IV, a typical position for the divisional sign. (The EW2200 number should be ignored; this is an issue called to this captured vehicle for British records—AW: away weapon). (3) PzW IV of 8th Pz Div with the divisional sign painted in the most common position on the extreme left of the superstructure frame (arrowed). (4) Position of divisional sign (arrowed) on rear end (arrow) of PzW IV of 10th Pz Div, late 1942. Divisional signs were less frequently seen on turret than on hull positions shown in these pictures. (All Imperial War Museum).