



Platz der Leibstandarte: A Photo Study of the SS- Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" and the Battle for Kharkov January- March 1943

George Nipe

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In the first months of 1943, the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" was involved in all phases of the series of operations in the complex Kharkov campaign. During the initial defensive fighting, the division held its sector for two weeks against the full weight of the Soviet 3rd Tank Army, a remarkable feat in itself. After the city fell, "Leibstandarte" withdrew to a new defensive position and protected the important supply rail center at Krasnograd while the "Das Reich" and "Totenkopf" divisions executed the first phase of the counterattack. When the 3rd Tank Army began its move south to block the advance of these two SS divisions "Leibstandarte" carried out raids and interdiction strikes that disrupted the Soviet realignment and weakened the army's fighting power.

Once having rejoined the SS-Panzerkorps, after taking part in the destruction of the Kegitschevka pocket, "Leibstandarte" led the way back to the city of Kharkov. Dynamic young officers such as Kurt Meyer, Max Wünsche and Jochen Peiper personally led attack columns that struck deep into the city, eventually forcing the Russian troops to abandon Kharkov.

When "Leibstandarte's" role in each phase of Manstein's Kharkov counterattack is taken into consideration it is clear why its men, after enduring the losses necessary to retake the city's blood stained streets and ruined buildings, renamed the enormous Red Square as "Platz der Leibstandarte." Beautifully reproduced wartime photos, and compelling captions by author George Nipe illustrate in incredible detail the men, equipment, weapons, and vehicles used in this decisive Eastern Front battle.

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