



1st Polish Armoured Division

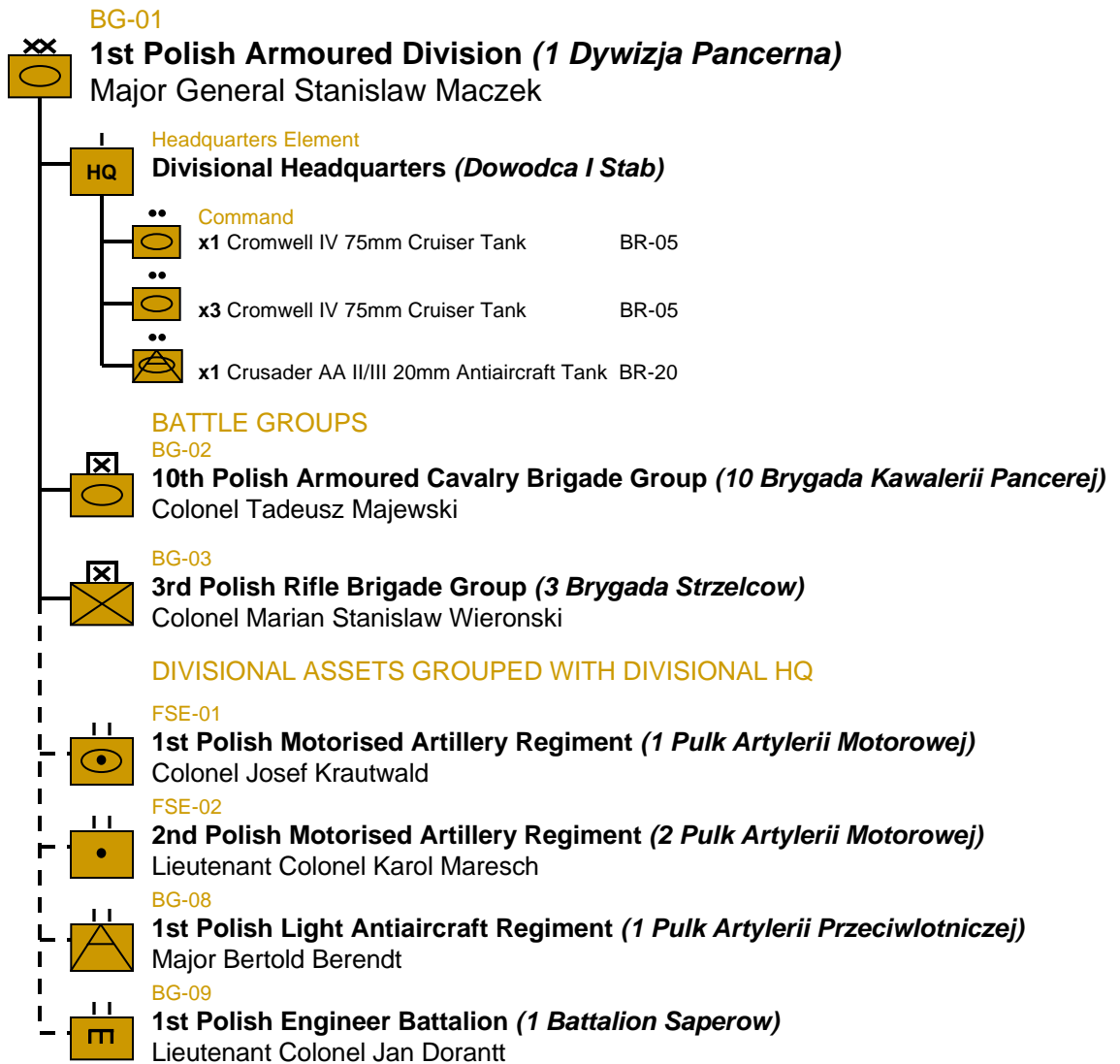
(The Falaise Pocket – 17 to 22 August 1944)

By R Mark Davies

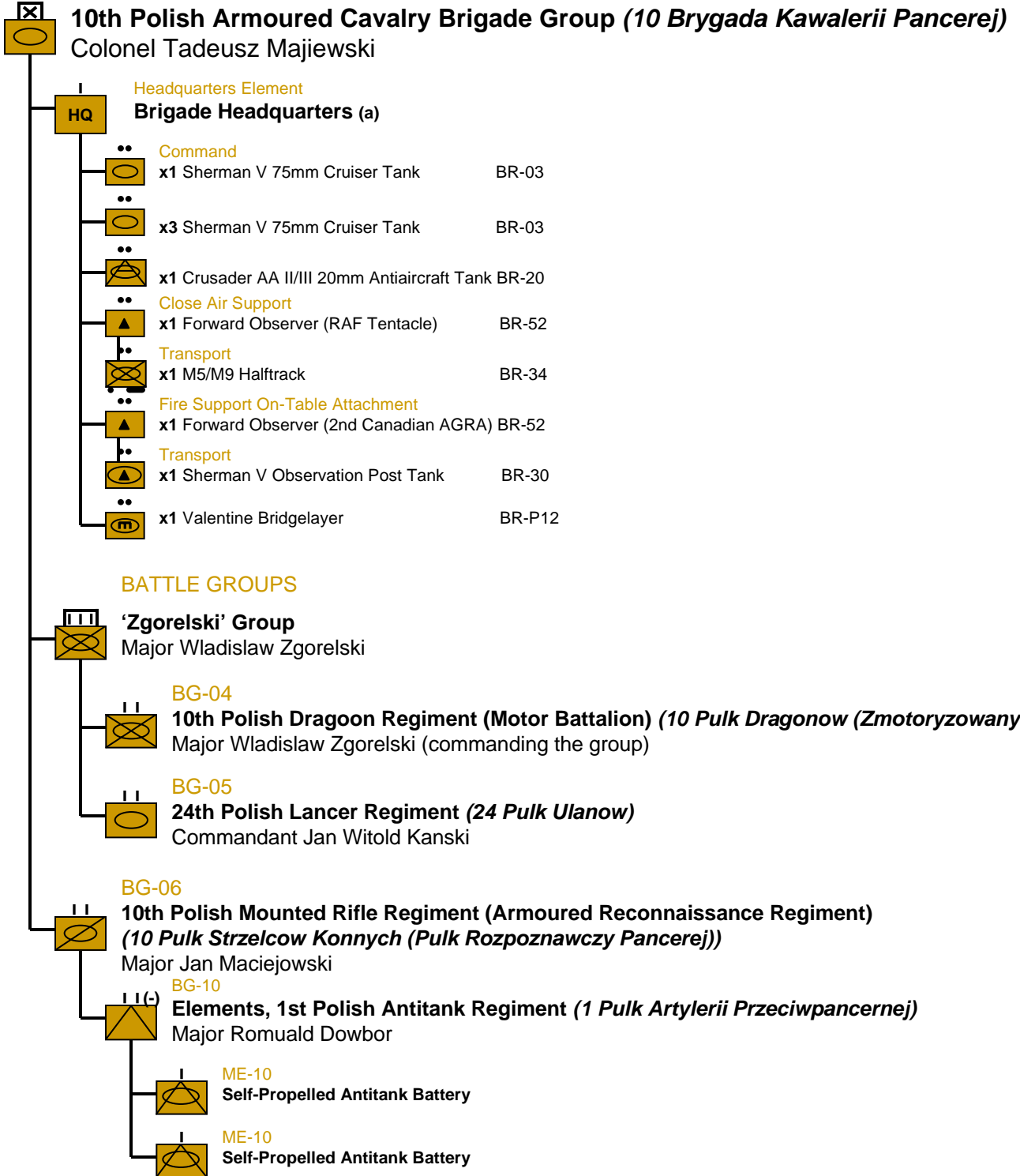


The 1st Polish Armoured Division was first committed to action in Normandy on 8th August, during Operation 'Totalize'. The division had a shaky start during that operation, but was soon to find immortal fame during the twin battles of 'The Mace' or 'Maczuga' (Mont Ormel or Hill 262 North) and Chambois, where they attempted to seal the neck of the Falaise Pocket while under constant attack both from within and from outside the Pocket. The organisation listed below illustrates the ad hoc 'asymmetrical' battlegroup system adopted by General Maczek during the latter part of Operation 'Tractable' and the terrible battles of the 'Corridor Of Death'.

This order of battle is intended for use with the **Battlefront: WWII** wargames system (www.fireandfurygames.com) and may be copied for personal gaming use only. Copyright remains that of the author and of Fire & Fury Games.

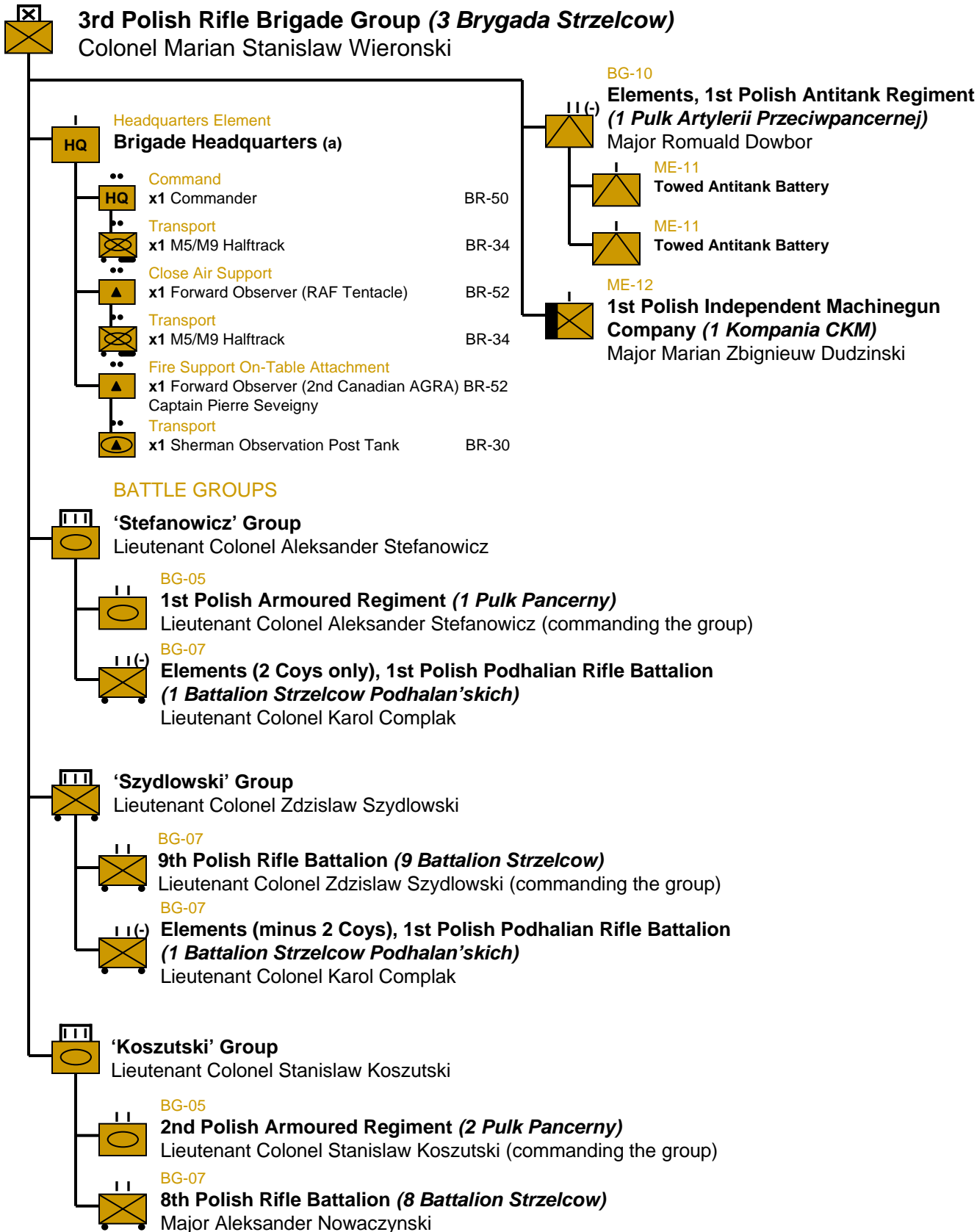


10th Polish Armoured Cavalry Brigade Group

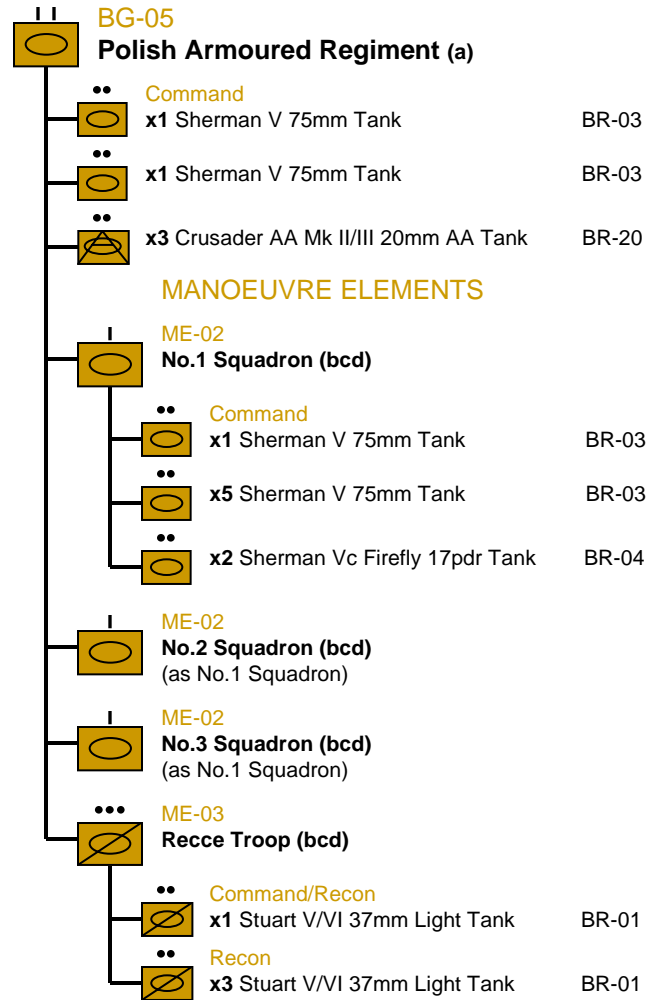
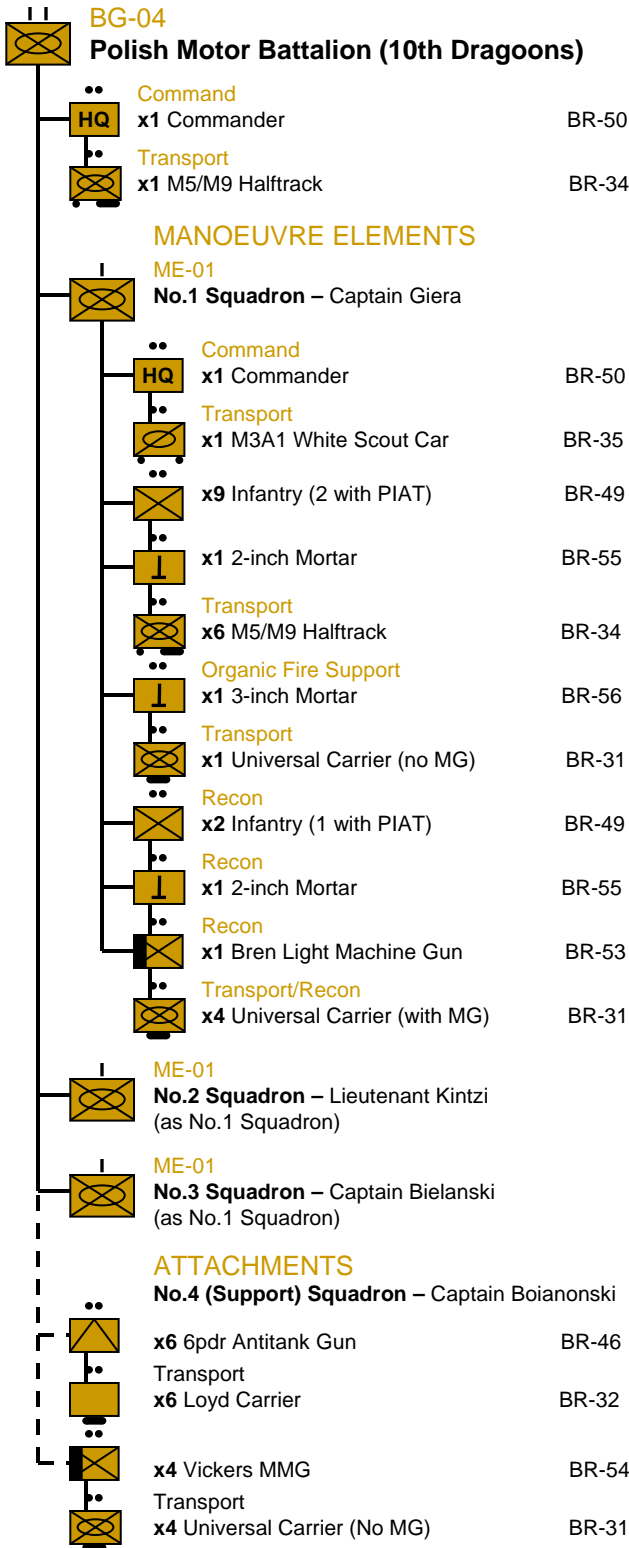


(a) Note that as the battlegroups of 10th Cavalry Brigade surged ahead to seize Chambois, the Brigade Headquarters itself was left well behind and was grouped with the Divisional Headquarters' defensive 'Box' near Jort, along with the 3rd Rifle Brigade HQ and the divisional artillery and engineer groups.

3rd Polish Infantry Brigade Group



(a) Note that as the battlegroups of 3rd Rifle Brigade surged ahead to seize Chambois, the Brigade Headquarters itself was left well behind and was grouped with the Divisional Headquarters' defensive 'Box' near Jort, along with the 10th Cavalry Brigade HQ and the divisional artillery and engineer groups.

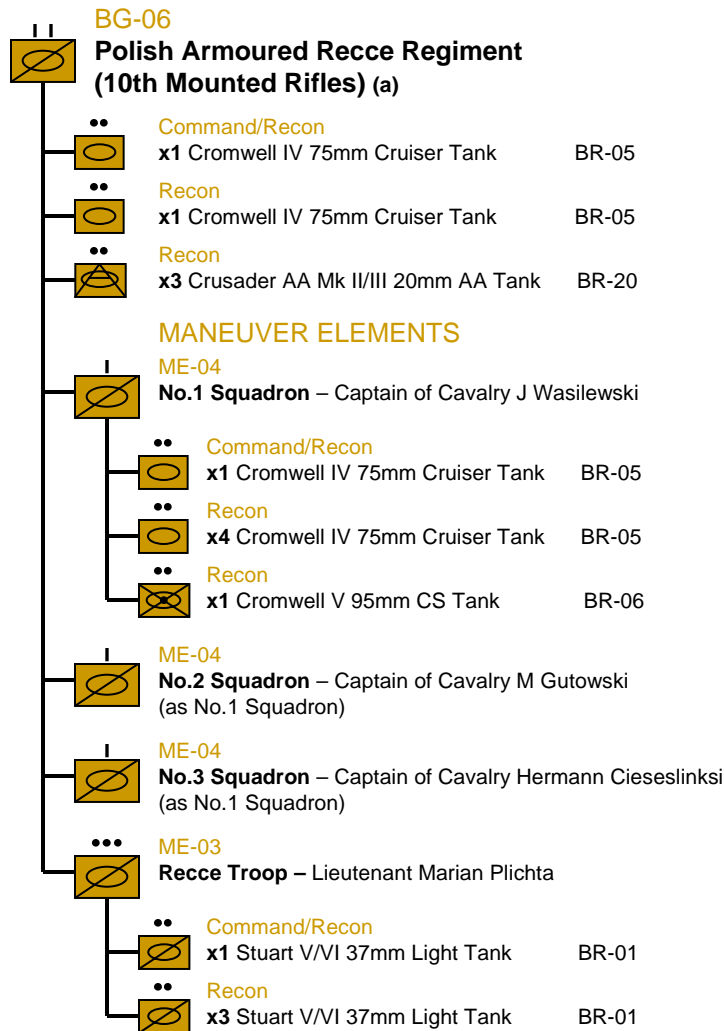


(a) The division, in common with all Polish formations in the summer of 1944, was suffering a serious manning shortage. Consequently, almost all units in 1st Polish Armoured Division were weaker than their British colleagues. Each Armoured Squadron in the division had three Troops (each of four tanks) rather than the usual four Troops, though a Firefly was added as an extra tank to each Squadron HQ. Thus a Polish squadron numbered 16 tanks (including 4 Fireflies), compared to 19 tanks in a British squadron (including 4 fireflies). In BF: WWII terms, this translates to **x8** tanks per Squadron, rather than **x9**.

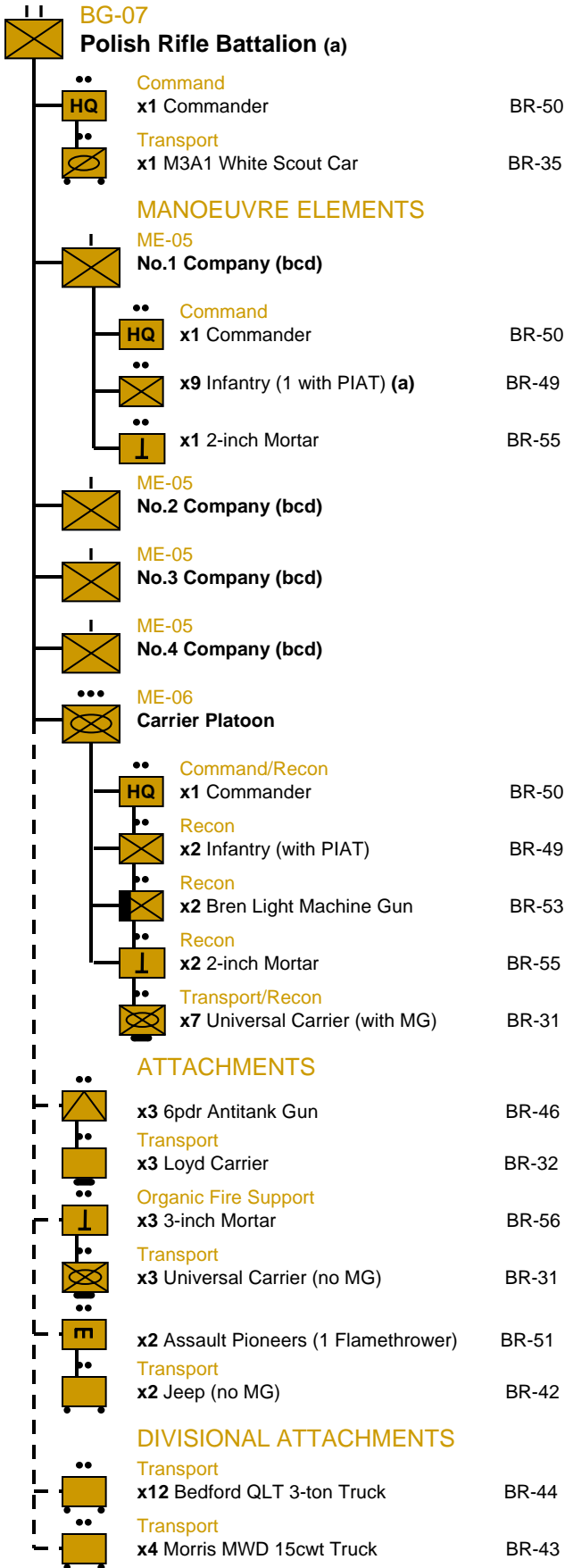
(b) Officers for the 1st Armoured Regiment were:
 No.1 Squadron – Lieutenant Limberger
 No.2 Squadron – Captain Bartosinski
 No.3 Squadron – Captain of Cavalry Proszek
 Recce Troop – Lieutenant Hetz

(c) Officers for the 2nd Armoured Regiment are not known.

(d) Officers for the 24th Lancer Regiment were:
 No.1 Squadron – Captain of Cavalry Jerzy Piwonski
 No.2 Squadron – Captain of Cavalry Zbigniew Szumanski
 No.3 Squadron – Captain of Cavalry Jan Kanty Zbroski
 Recce Troop – 2nd Lieutenant Adam Dzierzek



(a) Due to the division's manning crisis, the 10th Mounted Rifles was slightly weaker than the British equivalent. Each Squadron had only four Troops (each of three tanks) rather than the usual five. Consequently each Squadron numbered sixteen tanks rather than the British standard of nineteen. Note also that they did not have a 17pdr tank: Challengers were already being delivered to British Armoured Recce Regiments at this time, but it was to be late September before the Poles received their first Challenger. As a consequence, the 10th Mounted Rifles were grouped with the division's SP antitank batteries at Chambois.

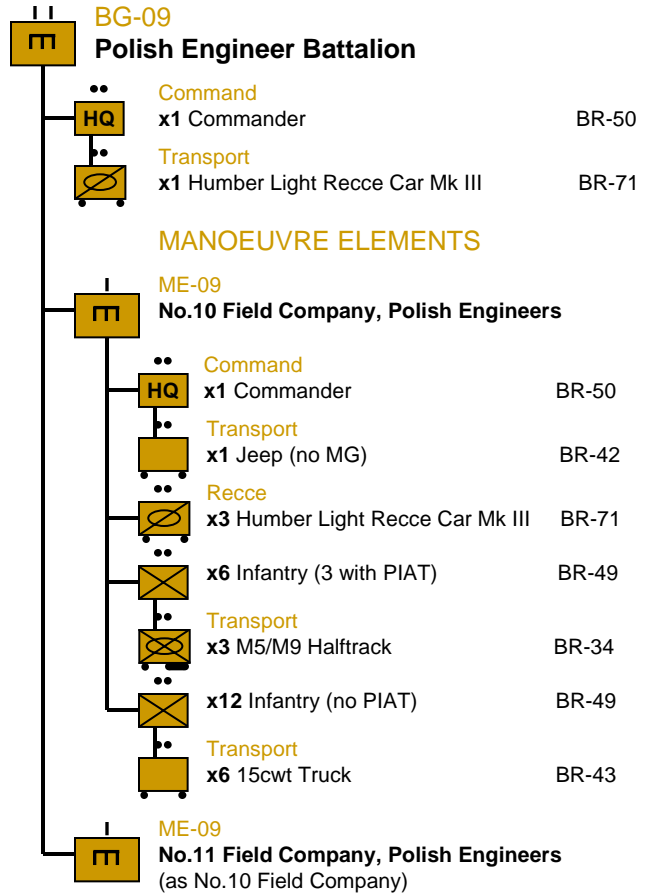
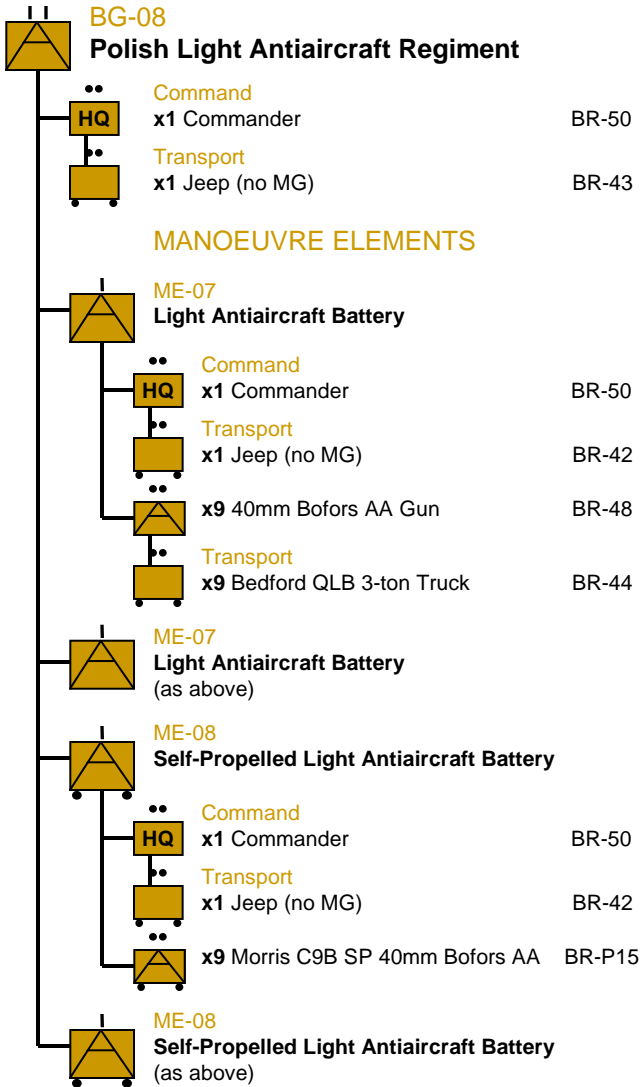


(a) Given the manning crisis in 1st Polish Armoured Division, it seems reasonably likely that individual rifle companies were rather weaker than their British equivalents. You may therefore wish to reduce the strength of companies to **x6** Infantry (1 with PIAT) rather than the theoretical full strength shown here. However, battalions retained their full strength in terms of support elements, such as heavy weapons and Carriers.

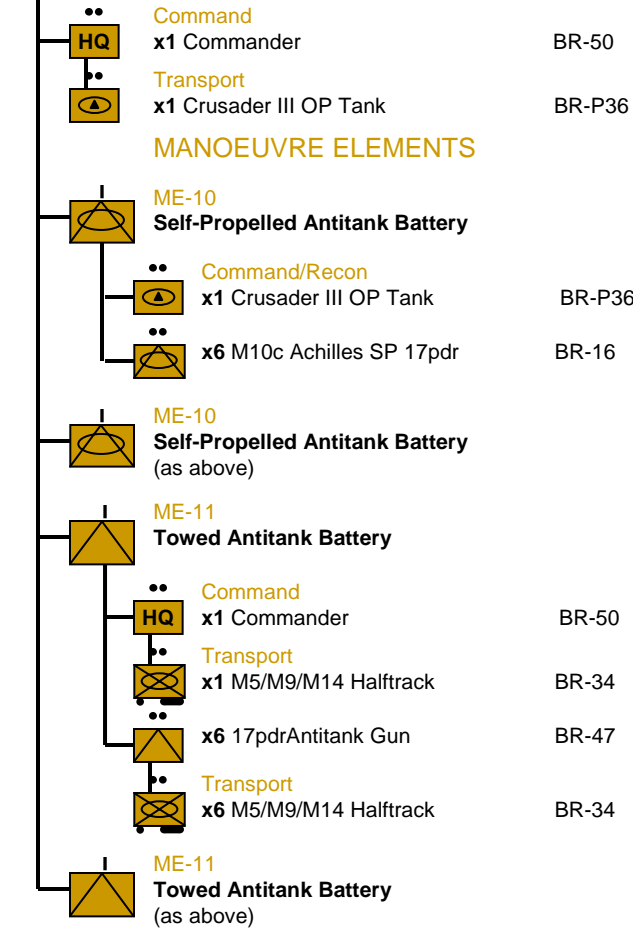
(b) Officers for the 1st Podhalian Rifle Battalion were:
 No.1 Company – Lieutenant Wladyslaw Misiewicz
 No.2 Company – Lieutenant Jerzy Wroblewski
 No.3 Company – Lieutenant Jacek Zagorski
 No.4 Company – Lieutenant Stanislaw Tkacz

(c) Officers for the 8th Rifle Battalion were:
 No.1 Company – Not known
 No.2 Company – Not known
 No.3 Company – Not known
 No.4 Company – Captain Jaworskiego

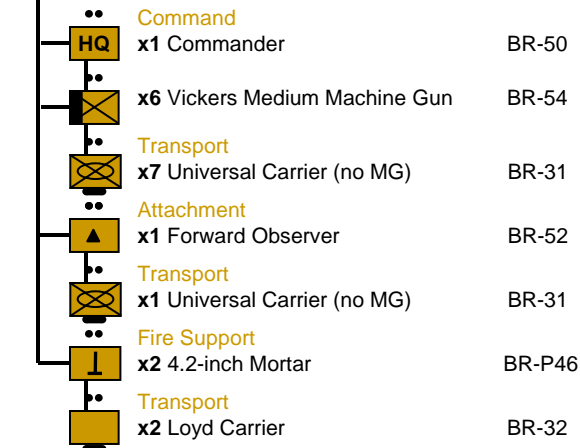
(d) Officers for the 9th Rifle Battalion are not known.



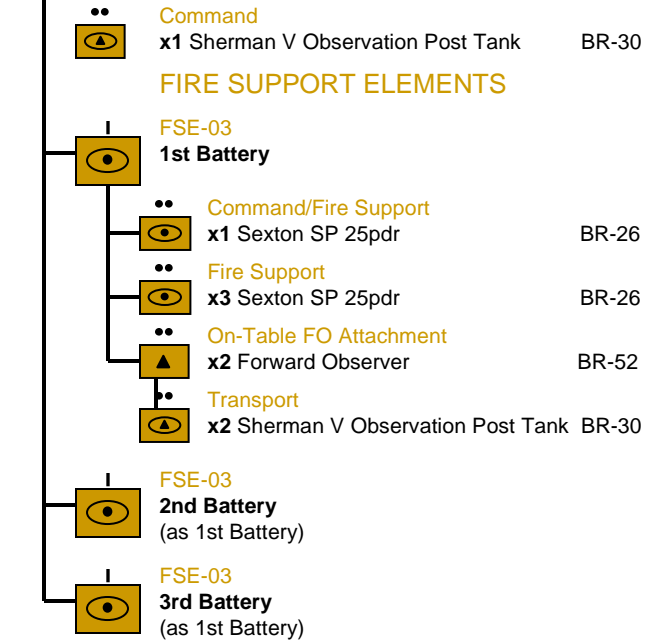
BG-10 Polish Antitank Regiment



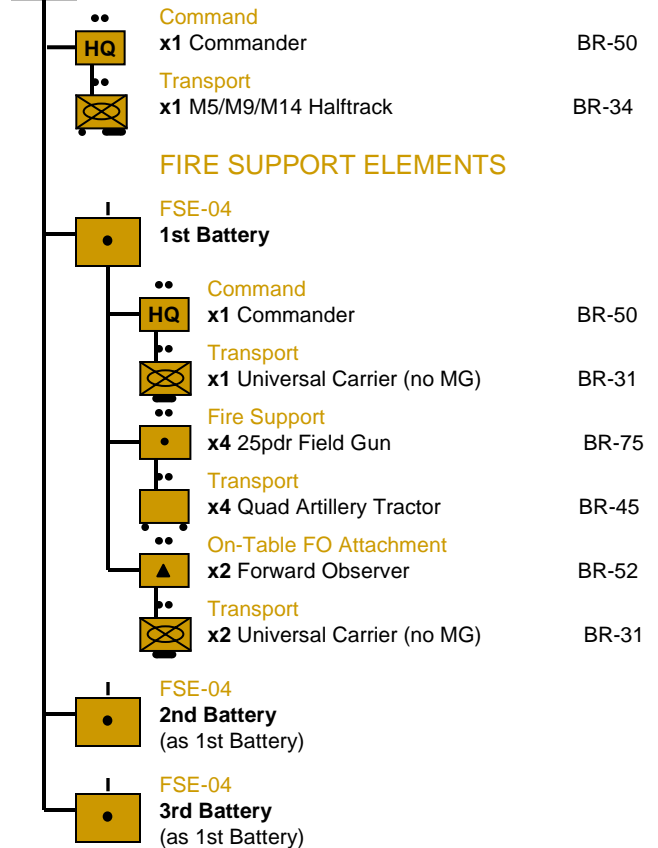
ME-12 Polish Independent Machinegun Company



FSE-01 Polish Motorised Artillery Regiment (SP)



FSE-02 Polish Motorised Artillery Regiment (Towed)



1st Polish Armoured Division Unit Markings

40	Headquarters, 1st Polish Armoured Division					
50	Headquarters, 10th Cavalry Brigade					
51	1st Armoured Regiment	HQ Sqn 	No.1 Sqn 	No.2 Sqn 	No.3 Sqn 	No.4 Sqn 
52	2nd Armoured Regiment					
53	24th Lancers					
54	10th Dragoons					
45	10th Mounted Rifles					
60	Headquarters, 3rd Rifle Brigade					40 Headquarters, 1st Artillery Group
61	1st Podhalian Rifle Battalion					74 1st Motorised Artillery Regiment
62	8th Rifle Battalion					76 2nd Motorised Artillery Regiment
63	9th Rifle Battalion					77 1st Antitank Regiment
64	1st Independent MG Company					78 1st Light Antiaircraft Regiment
40	1st Engineer Battalion					 1st Polish Armoured Division Formation Sign (The backing should be white rather than orange. On uniform it had no backing at all)
41	10th Engineer Field Company					
46	11th Engineer Field Company					 Free Polish Forces' Sign

As can be seen from this table, the system of unit 'flashes' was exactly the same as a British or Canadian Armoured Division. These markings were painted on the front-right and rear-right of every vehicle, while the divisional sign was painted on the left (though was painted on a white rectangle, rather than the orange shown here). The 'PL' sign was painted on the rear-left, outboard of the unit flash (however, some vehicles such as Crusader AA tanks had them painted on the front as well).

Allied Stars were painted on the hull sides (some were painted upside-down), with the squadron sign painted alongside and toward the rear of the vehicle. Squadron signs were also painted centrally, front and rear. A circled star was painted on upper surfaces, such as roof, bonnet or engine deck.

However, some units in the division (certainly at least one squadron of 24th Uhlans and one squadron of 10th Mounted Rifles) adopted a policy of painting over all markings except unit flashes, 'PL' signs and bridge discs with dark (black?) paint immediately before Operation 'Totalize'. However, many tanks of 1st and 2nd Armoured Regiments and 10th Mounted Rifles were photographed after the Battle of the 'Mace', still resplendent in the full array of markings, including stars on the hull-sides (the Cromwells sported a very small star and squadron sign on the side stowage boxes).

Notes on 1st Polish Armoured Division

- Ordinarily, the division was organised as a standard British armoured division of one Armoured Brigade and one Infantry Brigade. However, as can be seen above, these theoretical organisations became rather blurred in practice. General Maczek was a very 'modern' armoured commander, having commanded brigades in the campaigns of 1939 and 1940 with great skill. He had carefully studied German tactical methods and applied what he had learned in the field.
- See the Battlefront 21st Army Group TO&Es in the Late War Supplement on this website for details of British organisation.
- While 3rd Rifle Brigade (with the 1st & 2nd Armoured Regiments under command) was sent to seize 'The Mace' (Mont Ormel or Hill 262 North), the 10th Cavalry Brigade to seize and hold the village of Chambois, thereby linking up with the US XV Corps coming up from Le Mans. The Divisional HQ and both Brigade HQs remained distant throughout the battle. I have been unable to determine their location, but it seems that they were all in a defensive 'box' (together with the two Artillery Regiments, the Light AA Regiment and the Engineer Battalion) somewhere near Jort, where the division had crossed the River Dives.
- The 10th Dragoons and 24th Lancers of 'Zgorelski' Group, reinforced by the 10th Mounted Rifles and the division's M10c tank destroyers, defended Chambois alongside the 2nd Battalion, US 359th Infantry Regiment (US 90th Infantry Division 'Tough Ombres'), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Leonard Dull.
- Thanks to the attached observers from 2nd Canadian AGRA (II Canadian Corps artillery reserve), both brigades were able to call upon the 4th Medium Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery. It seems to me that the division's own 25pdrs were out of range for much, if not all, of the battle.
- The 10th Mounted Rifles, despite the historical title, was the divisional Armoured Recce Regiment. The regiment had not received Challengers (nor Fireflies, come to that) prior to the battles of Chambois & 'The Mace'.
- The Polish soldiers wore British uniforms with their own national badges. The divisional sign was worn on the shoulders of the Battledress (though without the white rectangular backing), with the 'POLAND' shoulder-title above (on khaki or red backing). The Polish eagle was stencilled onto the fronts of their helmets, while berets were black and bore the same eagle insignia (embroidered for officers). Units were identified by distinctive, brightly-coloured regimental collar patches on their battledress, shaped like lance pennants. For example, the 24th Lancers had white 'pennants', with a yellow central stripe, while the 1st & 2nd Armoured Regiments had black/orange 'pennants' with white and red central stripes respectively. However, it seems that only the officers wore these collar decorations in the field, while the ORs reserved them for parade dress. Each regiment also had its own enamelled metal insignia (usually taking the form of a star or cross), which was worn only by officers and was worn centrally on the left-breast pocket, like an order of chivalry. However, only a few officers tended to wear these in the field. Officers and NCOs wore badges of rank on the shoulder-straps of the Battledress (NCOs has simple stripes across the strap – they didn't wear sleeve chevrons like the British), though these were often replaced by full-dress black shoulder-boards.

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