

FUNNIES!

British Specialist Armour NW Europe 1944-45 & Italy 1945

After much thought as to how to incorporate 'Funny' support into the 15th Army Group (Italy) and 21st Army Group (NW Europe) TO&Es, I decided to keep them as a separate TO&E page – this saves having to add the whole gamut of optional 'Funny' Manoeuvre Elements to each and every Battlegroup.

So, the question remains: 'When can I use 'Funnies' in a battlegroup?' or in other words, 'Gimme those Crocs!'

In theory, the 79th Armoured Division was specifically designed as a 20th Century 'siege train'; to be allocated at will to any formation in the army group carrying out an offensive task against a heavily-entrenched enemy. This allocation was usually done at the operational planning stage by divisional and higher staffs (with little input from brigade and battalion commanders) and would not normally be available 'on call' as it were, to individual brigade or battalion commanders.

The specialist armour concept was also adopted in Italy at the end of 1944, in preparation for the Spring offensives of 1945. 25th Army Tank Brigade was re-designated 25th Armoured Engineer Brigade and 9th Armoured Brigade was converted from Shermans to Ram Kangaroos, Sherman Kangaroos, Priest Kangaroos and Buffaloes.

However, even the largest operations were not guaranteed 'Funny' support. For example, Operation Market Garden was planned and mounted at very short notice, while 79th Armoured Division was busy away to the west, conducting operations to open the Channel Ports and thus Market Garden had no 'Funnies' present.

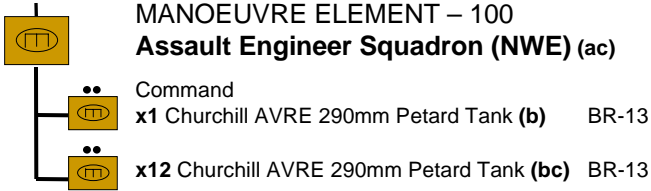
What is more, there were simply not enough 'Funnies' to go around – only the spearhead battalions (usually just one or two) would get the full range of support, while the others might get the odd troop or two.

A spearhead battlegroup in such a deliberate assault would typically entail a full battalion of infantry from an infantry division, mounted in Kangaroos (from August 1944 onwards), supported by a full regiment of tanks from an independent brigade and preceded by a Breaching Team of 'Funnies' and at least a full corps'-worth of artillery. Other assets would be allocated from division as normal.

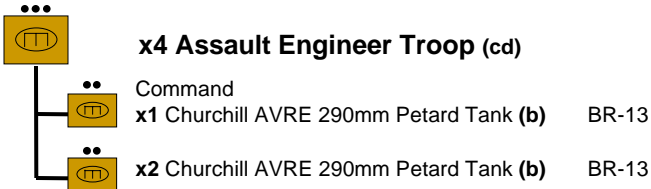
If the British/Allied player insists on using 'Funnies' in a non-historical scenario, use the following guidelines:

- 'Funnies' should only be available in scenarios where the British are on the offensive – never, ever in a defensive scenario (although perhaps a troop or two of Crocodiles could be involved in a local counter-attack).
- The German player in such a game should have considerable quantities of mines, dug-in or revetted heavy weapons, obstacles and all manner of military nastiness.
- Use your 'Funnies' sparingly – if they turn up in every game, the German player will be justified in using his lovingly-painted Jagdtigers!
- Use imaginative scenario rules to restrict the use of 'Funnies'. For example, it was not uncommon for there to be insufficient Buffaloes or Kangaroos to transport an entire infantry battalion. The Kangaroos or Buffaloes may therefore have to depart immediately upon depositing the first wave to go and fetch the second wave. Similarly, a Breaching Team may be tasked with destroying specific concrete fortifications and may be forced by its own orders to withdraw once that task is completed.
- It was very rare for the armoured divisions to be given the task of assaulting a fortified defence line and as such, scenarios involving troops from an armoured division should not normally be given 'Funny' support.

BR ME-100 to 102



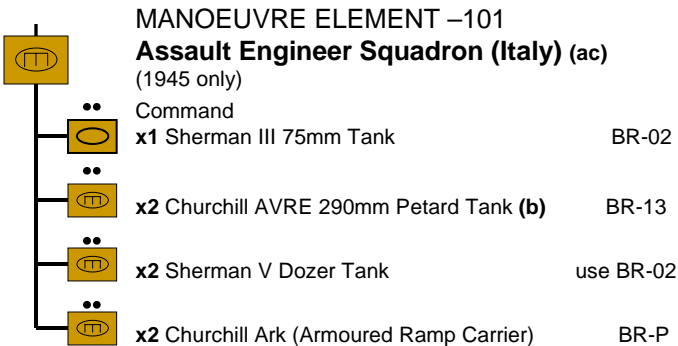
(a) There were initially three Assault Engineer Regiments in 79th Armoured Division, each with four squadrons. The number of squadrons in each regiment was reduced to three after Normandy. The use of AVREs as complete squadrons was very rare, though did happen on occasion. Alternatively, a far more likely option is to field a single Assault Troop:



(b) AVREs may be fitted with a variety of engineering equipment – SBG Bridge, Bobbin, Fascine, Demolition Charge Layer, Line Charge Trailer, etc. See the playtest engineering rules.

(c) After Normandy, reduce to **x3 Assault Troops (x9 AVRE)**.

(d) Mixed 'Breaching Team' MEs may be formed by taking one or more Assault Troops and attaching elements from Flail Tank Squadrons (and/or Flame Tank Squadrons from July 1944). Up to **x1 Churchill Ark (BR-P)** and/or **D8 Armoured Bulldozer (BR-P)** may also be attached from 79th Armoured Division stocks. The Breaching Team must always be commanded by an AVRE and should not exceed **x9** vehicles. For example, each assaulting infantry battalion on D-Day of the Normandy Landings was supported by half an Assault Squadron, with a Flail Tank Troop and a few armoured dozers attached.

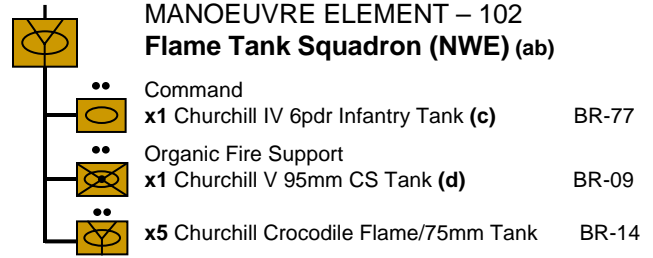


(a) There were five such Assault Squadrons in Italy in 1945. Alternatively, a squadron may be deployed as individual Assault Troops, each of **x1** model.

(b) AVREs may be fitted with a variety of engineering equipment – SBG Bridge, Bobbin, Fascine, Demolition Charge Layer, Line Charge Trailer, etc. See the playtest engineering rules.

(c) One Assault Squadron was designated as a specialist Assault Bridging Squadron. For this squadron add the following:

- x2 Churchill Bailey Bridge Carrier** no card
- x1 Sherman Plymouth Ark** no card

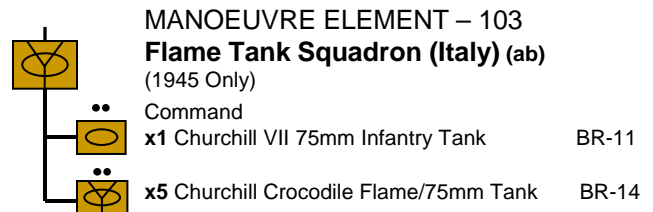


(a) As with AVREs, it was rare for Crocodiles to operate as complete, unified squadrons. However, it did happen on occasion (such as the occasion when a squadron was detached to assist the US Army take the citadel of Cherbourg). There was initially only one regiment of Flame Tanks

(b) Alternatively, the squadron may be fielded as five troop-sized Maneuver Elements, each of **x1** Crocodile.

(c) The command tank may be replaced with:
 Churchill VII 75mm Infantry Tank BR-11

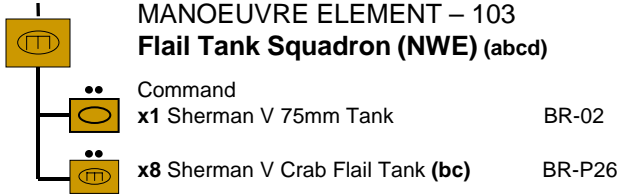
(d) The Close Support Tank may be replaced with:
 Churchill VIII 95mm Close Support Tank BR-12



(a) As with AVREs, it was rare for Crocodiles to operate as complete, unified squadrons. However, it did happen on occasion. There was only one squadron of Flame Tanks (being a part of 51 RTR, 25th Armoured Engineer Brigade), though the North Irish Horse (21st Tank Brigade) also had two Crocodile Troops in 1945.

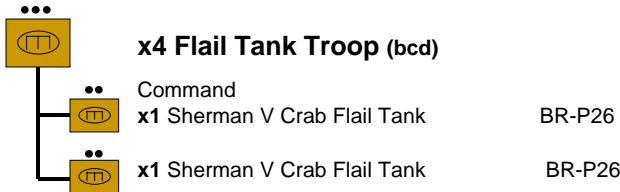
(b) Alternatively, the squadron may be fielded as five troop-sized Maneuver Elements, each of **x1** Crocodile.

BR ME-103 to 105



(a) There were three regiments of Flail Tanks in NW Europe, each with three squadrons. Individual troops of Crabs were often attached to battlegroups or Breaching Team (see ME-100) to provide mine-clearing capability.

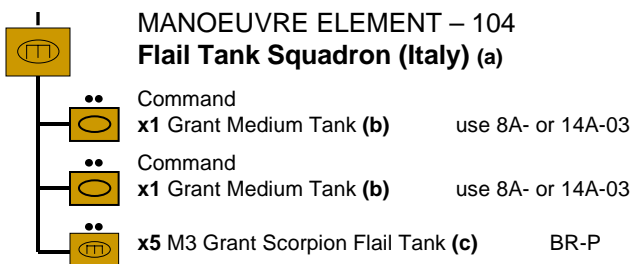
(b) The squadron may be deployed as four troop-sized Maneuver Elements:



(c) Late 1944: Squadrons reduced and reorganised into x5 Troops, each of x1 Sherman V Crab.

(d) Late 1944: Mark Bevis suggests that each Flail Tank Squadron was allocated a section of Sherman Ib 105mm Close Support Tanks. I have not been able to discover what his supporting evidence is and this is not borne out by Pete Brown's research into Commonwealth tank strengths. The Sherman Ib was widely used by Commonwealth forces in Italy, but its use is otherwise unheard of in NW Europe. If you believe Mark Bevis' research, add the following Organic Fire Support unit:

x1 Sherman Ib 105mm Close Support Tank BR-

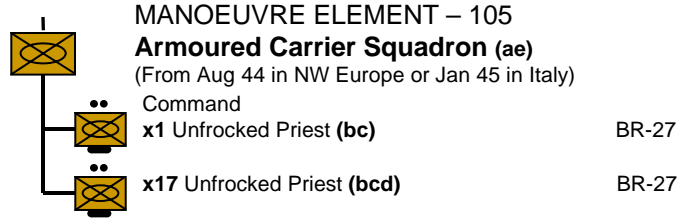


(a) There was only one squadron of flail tanks in Italy and it was little-used until the formation of 25th Armoured Engineer Brigade in 1945 and the arrival of the excellent Crab flail system.

(b) In 1944: Replace Grant Medium tanks with:
 Sherman V 75mm Tank BR-02

(c) In 1944: Replace Grant Scorpions with:
 Sherman Scorpion Flail Tank use BR-P26

In 1945: Replace Sherman Scorpions with:
 Sherman V Crab Flail Tank BR-P26



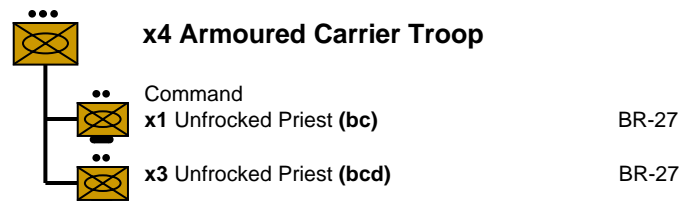
(a) The first such squadron to be created was 1st Canadian Armoured Carrier Squadron in August 1944. In October 1944 the Priests were exchanged for Ram Kangaroos and the regiment was expanded to two squadrons. 49th RTR also converted to Ram Kangaroos later in 1944 and by the end of the war had three squadrons (for a total of five Armoured Carrier Squadrons in NW Europe). In 1945, three Armoured Carrier Squadrons were also created in Italy – two were equipped with Priest Kangaroos, while the third was equipped with Sherman and Ram Kangaroos.

(b) From Oct 1944: Replace with:
 Ram Kangaroo BR-28
 However, as mentioned above, two new Priest Kangaroo squadrons were created in Italy in 1945.

(c) The transport capacity of BR-27 & BR-28 should be amended to read 3T as opposed to 2T as printed on the original card.

(d) Unfrocked Priests (aka Priest Kangaroo or Holy Roller) were only used to replace the troop-carrying trucks. All heavy weapons platoons and other elements equipped with carriers continued to use their usual transport.

(e) Armoured Carrier Squadrons were normally split up into four Troops, with one Troop being allocated to each infantry company to be transported:



BR ME-106 to 109

MANOEUVRE ELEMENT – 106

Amphibious Armoured Carrier Squadron

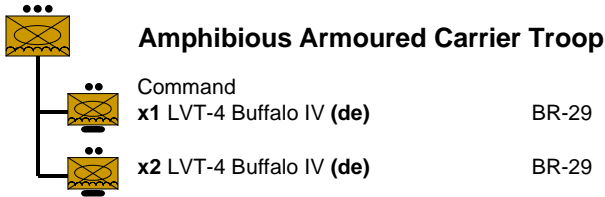
(From Sep 44 in NW Europe or Jan 45 in Italy) (af)



(a) All but one Buffalo regiment was organised into three squadrons, each of five troops (shown above). However, 5th Assault Regiment Royal Engineers was organised into four squadrons, each of four troops; in which case, for this unit reduce the overall number of Buffaloes to thirteen models per squadron.

(b) Two squadrons in each regiment were equipped with mixed Buffalo types, while the remainder were probably exclusively Buffalo IVs. These Buffalo IIs may therefore be replaced with Buffalo IVs (BR-29).

(c) Alternatively, the squadron may be split into individual troops:



(d) Alternative:
LVT-2 Buffalo II (e) BR-P14

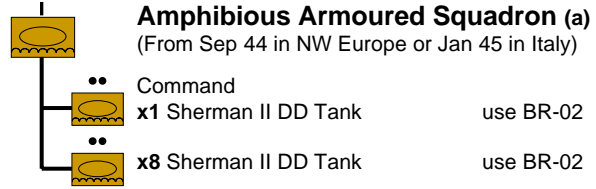
(e) Buffalo IIs had a rear-mounted engine and therefore could only be entered or exited by clambering over the side in the manner of Carriers or Kangaroos. They could alternatively be fitted with a temporary deck, which enabled them to carry 17pdr Antitank Gun or 'Quad' tractor. However, the loading of these was enormously complicated and would be outside the timescale of Battlefront. Use the Battlefront 'Improve Position' table to simulate the unloading process. Buffalo IVs had a front-mounted engine and a rear ramp, which allowed small vehicles such as Jeeps, Universal, Windsor and Lloyd Carriers, Weasels and Dingos to be carried, as well as smaller guns such as 6pdr Antitank Guns and 25pdr Field Guns (though not 17pdr Antitank Guns).

(f) There was a single Amphibious Carrier Regiment in Italy, where Buffaloes were known as 'Fantails'.

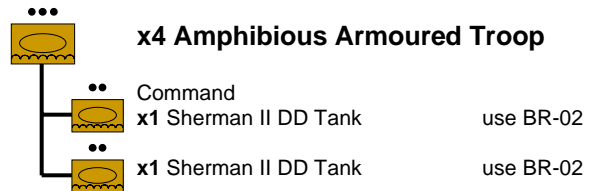
MANOEUVRE ELEMENT – 107

Amphibious Armoured Squadron (a)

(From Sep 44 in NW Europe or Jan 45 in Italy)



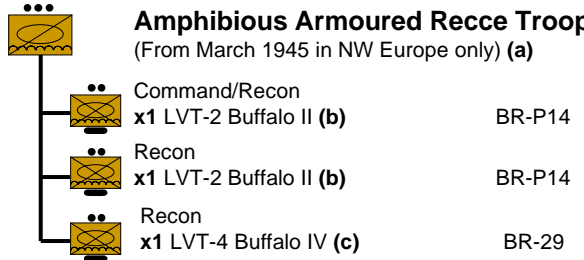
(a) After Normandy, a single armoured regiment was retrained for DD duties in preparation for the various amphibious and river-crossing operations that were going to be necessary in the Netherlands and Germany. The first of these operations was the clearing of the Breskens Pocket, west of Antwerp, in October 1944. Another regiment was raised afterwards and DDs took part in the Rhine and Elbe crossings. Another regiment was raised in Italy for the 1945 offensive. There were three such squadrons in each regiment, each of four troops:



MANOEUVRE ELEMENT – 108

Amphibious Armoured Recce Troop

(From March 1945 in NW Europe only) (a)



(a) This unit replaced the Armoured Recce Troop (normally equipped with Stuarts) in the two DD Sherman Regiments (44 RTR and the Staffordshire Yeomanry) in 1945. Its role during the crossings of the Rhine and Elbe was to scout across the river ahead of the main assault and seek out good landing places for the DD tanks to land.

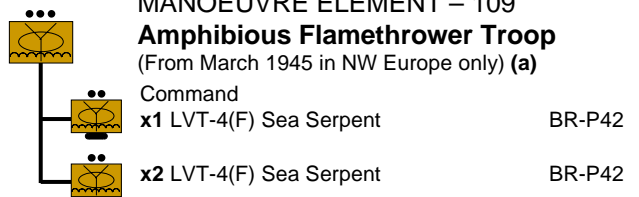
(b) The Buffalo IIs in the troop carried rolls of 'Chesepale' corduroy matting, which could be used, rolled out flat, to provide grip on the riverbank for the tanks, or alternatively as a fascine to bridge an obstacle.

(c) The Buffalo IV carried an airborne bulldozer, which would be used to improve an exit point for the DD tanks.

MANOEUVRE ELEMENT – 109

Amphibious Flamethrower Troop

(From March 1945 in NW Europe only) (a)



(a) Maximum of one troop allowed in Rhine or Elbe crossing scenarios only. These were very rare beasts indeed!