

The Day of the Battle
North Nova Regiment's Second Attack on Bienen
March 25, 1945
A Battlefront WWII Scenario by Bill Slavin

"This was the Novas first battle on the east bank of the Rhine, and as if to show the significance of this action, the war diary of this veteran unit contains the heading 'The day of the battle 25 March '45'; as though everything else which had befallen since 6 June '44 was as nothing compared to this costly day."

-C. P. Stacey, Canadian Official Historian

Scenario

On the night of March 23 Operation Plunder, the crossing of the Rhine by Montgomery's 21st Army at Rees, Wesel and south of the Lippe River was launched. On the left flank 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, attached to XXX British Corps, was part of the crossing at Rees in support of the larger crossing at Wesel. Here they were expected to engage the German army where it most expected an attack, in the words of Lee A. Windsor, "to plow into the bulk of First Parachute Army, force the commitment of XLVII Panzer Corps and destroy it in a battle of annihilation. Such action would allow the main portion of Second Army to drive on Berlin unimpeded."

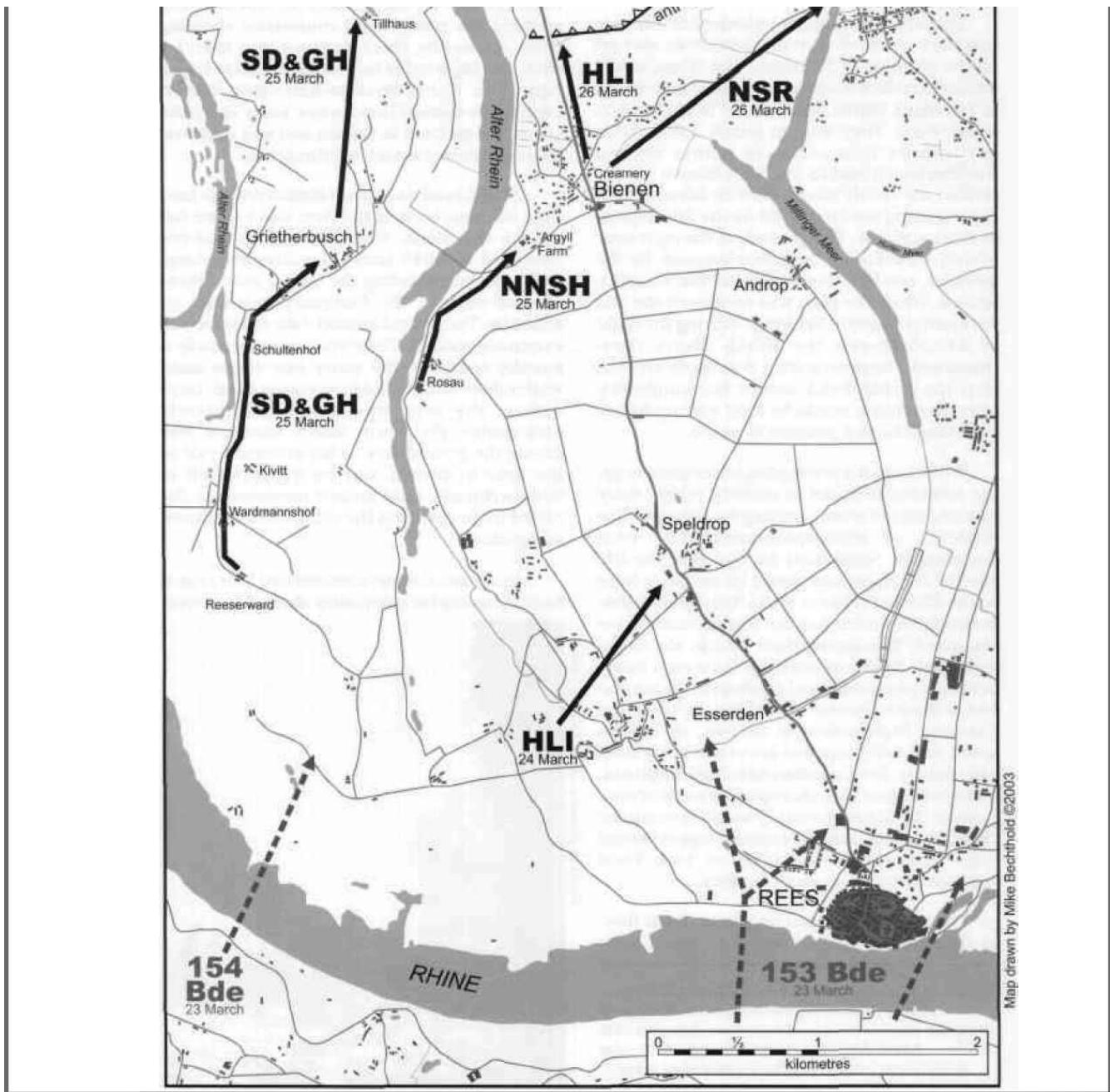
This would be a battle of attrition, pitching forces of similar size and fire power against each other in an attempt to keep the enemy engaged and allow the breakout further east.

The first Canadians into the fray on this front were the Highland Light Infantry, taking over from the Black Watch to attack the village of Speldorf on the 24th. 9th Brigades' Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders pressed north through Grietherbusch on the 25th while the North Nova Scotia Highlanders took over from the 7th Argylls in the attack on Bienen.

This scenario represents the second North Nova attack on Bienen after an earlier, failed attack by two of its companies the morning of the 25th was brought up short before the village.



A post war aerial of Bienen looking towards Rees with the Alder Rhein in the foreground. The Canadian attack came in from the south (upper right).



Map drawn by Mike Bechtold ©2003

The above map shows 9th Brigade's attacks March 24-26.

Duration

12 turns

Canadians move first.

Ground Scale

Because of the small area in which this fighting occurs, the map has been scaled up one and a half times from the normal BFWWII scale. Therefore one foot equals 600 metres. If using 15mm figures, simply use the 20mm BFWWII artillery templates and scale all movement up so that 1.5" equals the usual game inch. The simplest way to do this is to mark a tape with 1.5" "inches".

If using 20mm, as I do, it becomes a bit more complicated. Large artillery templates work well as the usual small templates, but for the larger patterns you will need to create some of your own that are 1.5

times larger. And an inch of measurement will be 2", so you might want to mark up some tapes with 2" measurements. Clear as mud?

Special and Optional Rules

Grazing Fire

The Grazing Fire rules found at <http://www.fireandfury.com/extra/mggrazing.shtml> are in effect, with the addition that the template once placed may not be moved and only cover modifiers (not smoke or "suspected" status) are applied. If the machine gun fires out of the template zone for any reason then it reverts to normal point fire. Note that no target is required for the placing of the template.

German Surrender - Scenario Specific Rule

Due to low morale amongst the Germans at this stage of the war, any CC result of "abandon position and fall back" for German infantry causes the unit to surrender instead. Also any German infantry "panic" (-1) or "fall back"(0) result because of a maneuver roll will be interpreted as an automatic surrender if within spotting distance and 2" of the enemy or passing within 2" of the enemy in a direct line of retreat.

Scenario Limited Bog Down Rule

As the ground was still soft at this time all off road areas other than the inundated ground also require bog down rolls for vehicles and guns, but only one roll needs to be made at the start of each movement action. Vehicle travel on the top of the dyke and on road is unaffected.

German Improved Positions

German improved positions within BUS's at the beginning of the game do not disappear when abandoned. (These positions are more than just hastily improvised positions.)

Victory Conditions

Minor Canadian Victory

Majority of Bienen BUS's (area bordered by mauve line) either occupied or last occupied by friendly forces by end of scenario.

Major Canadian Victory

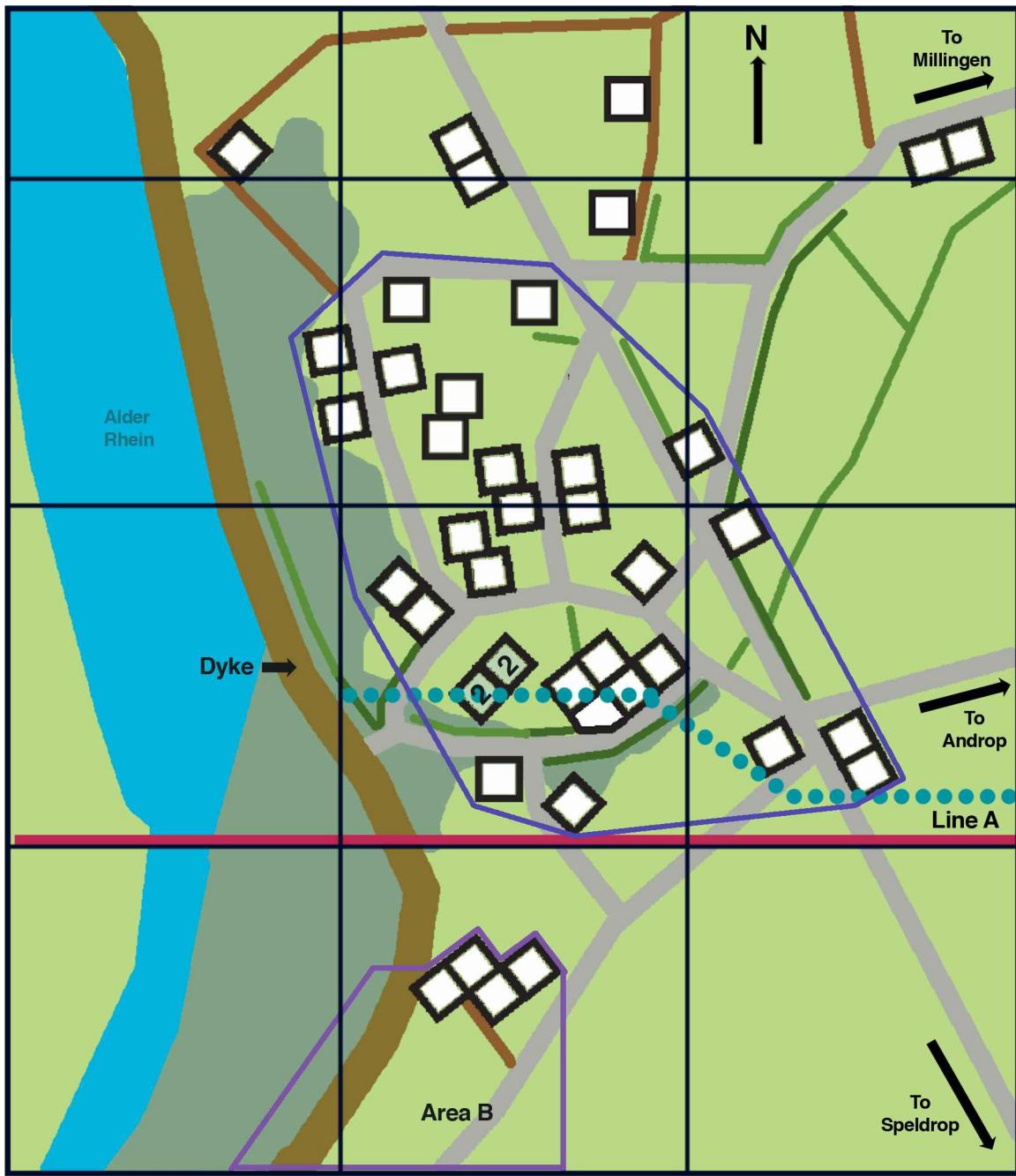
All of Bienen (area bordered by mauve line) in friendly hands, no undisordered enemy within 5" of any BUS.

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Terrain Notes

- The Alder Rhein is impassable.
- Inundated areas are treated as “soft ground”. This includes the area west of the dyke.
- All other off road areas require a bog down roll, but only once per movement action.

- Treat fortified BUS's as concrete pillboxes, but with 360° LOS. This “fortress house” is also two stories, so four units can occupy the two BUS's. Pillbox benefit only applies to attacks from exterior, units fighting between BUS's from inside engage normally. See Multi-level BUS rules for clarification of handling close assaults: <http://www.fireandfury.com/extra/downloads/multilevelbus.pdf>
- Treat dyke as “embankment, low”. It is a linear obstacle and blocks LOS but gives no “up level” advantage. Where it meets the Alder Rhein however it no longer blocks LOS and units can only gain sparse edge concealment.
- Tracks are considered cross country but negate bog down checks.
- There are no BUA's in this scenario.

Briefing for Lieutenant Colonel D.F. Forbes, Commanding Officer, North Nova Scotia Highlanders

At 745 this morning you established your battalion tactical HQ at Rosau Farm windmill along with your 3" mortars and the attached Cameron 4.2" mortars, taking over the attack on Bienen from the 7th Argylls. A and B Companies moved up to their start line at what has become known as Argyll Farm, held by the 7th Argyll's and a scant 150 yards south of the village, only to find it partially in enemy hands as a result of a pre-dawn counterattack. After a brisk fight the start line was secured and at 900, under an artillery barrage, the attack went in, but piecemeal as part of B Company became pinned down before reaching the start line. Things quickly fell apart as the one of the supporting Staffordshire tanks became bogged down, a second holed and the third withdrawn. Murderous machine gun fire from the flank, originating from the village of Androp enfiladed the two companies which were pinned down in front of Bienen. Survivors were finally called back at 1145.

Now you are queuing up the second attack of the day, slated for 1430. This time the Camerons Vickers and 4.2" mortars and your own 3" mortars will keep your right flank (Androp) screened, while the 25 pdrs. shell the rear areas of Bienen and smoke the front. Unfortunately, with some of you own men still lying wounded in the fields before Bienen, the big guns will be unable to target the near side of the village, only 150 yards away!

Elements of the 16th Fallschirmjaeger have been identified as the troops now holding Bienen, and in the earlier attack, self-propelled assault guns had been seen on the village edge engaging the Staffordshire Shermans. This time, with a better understanding of the enemy troop dispositions, you will be sending in C and D Companies with the support of a troop of Shermans of 4/7 Dragoons, the carrier platoon's Wasps and following up with a troop of self-propelled 17 pdrs. from 94th AT Battery. A and B Companies will be held in reserve, along with the surviving Staffordshire tank, which will lay down covering fire from Argyll Farm.

At 1415 the mortars and artillery open up on Bienen and Androp. Your mission is to advance your companies into Bienen and clear the village.

Pre-game Barrage

Prior to the start of the game, 25 pdr. concentrations may be directed at any point in the German deployment zone, other than the south edge of Bienen (no template may extend below dotted line). This will be represented by 3 battery level concentrations (2 templates, 0/+1) for one turn. At the beginning of Turn 1, 12 templates of smoke, in three groups of four templates, may be targeted anywhere on the board.

(Enfilading long range German machine gun fire on the Canadians' right flank, originating from the Androp area, which caused great disruption in the earlier attack is neutralized in this attack by the battalion mortars along with Vickers machine gun and 4.2" mortar fire by the Camerons. As noted, the 3" mortars will become available again on Turn 3.)

Deployment

Companies A and B set up in Area B around Argyll Farm, along with the battalion HQ stand and Staffordshire Sherman. They may begin dug in or in improved positions within BUS's.

Turn Sequence

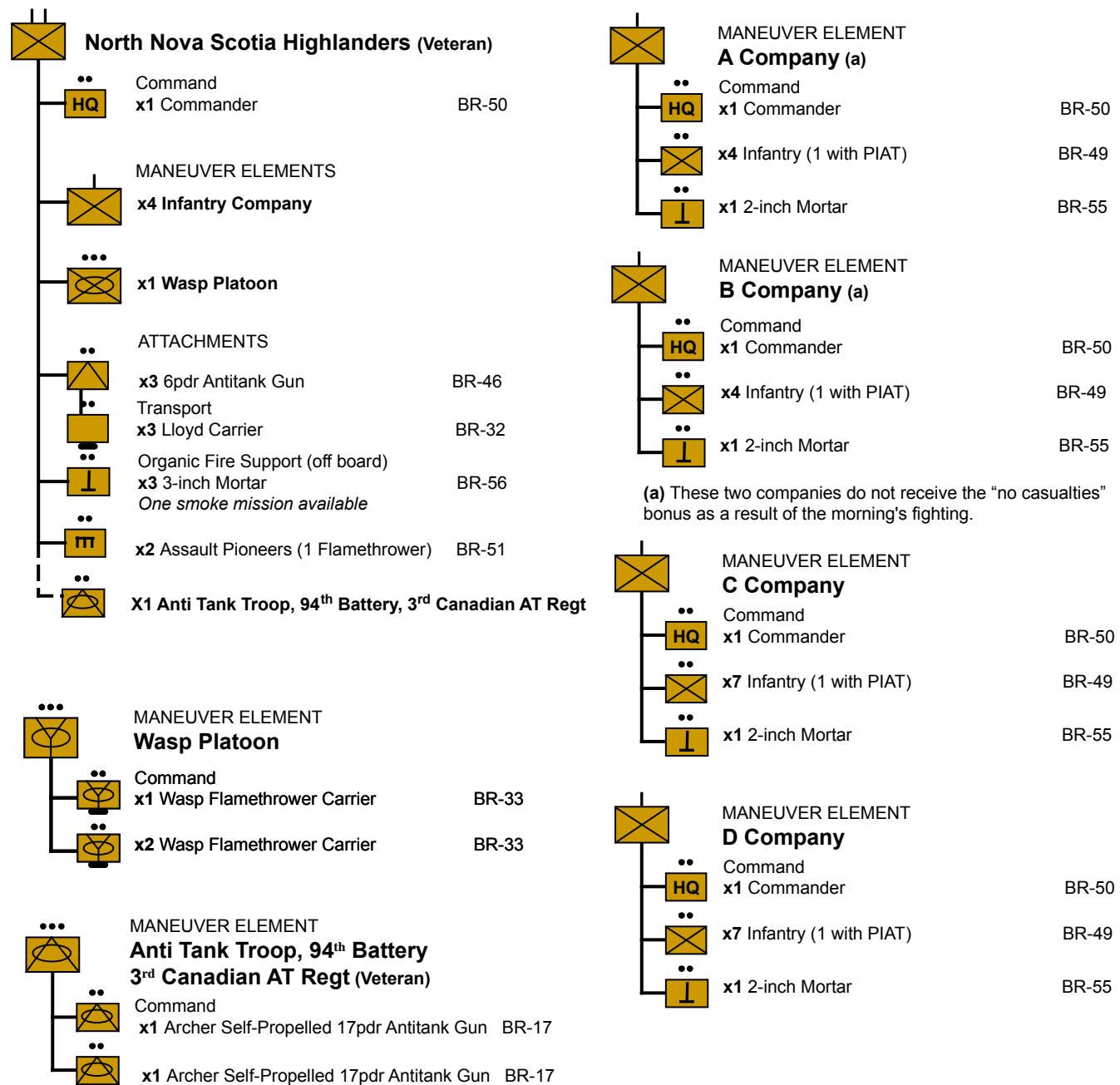
Turn 1 D and C Companies (with attached FOO's and assault pioneers) begin their move action from anywhere within Area B. Shermans of 4/7 Dragoons and carrier platoon Wasps enter from table edge within Area B.

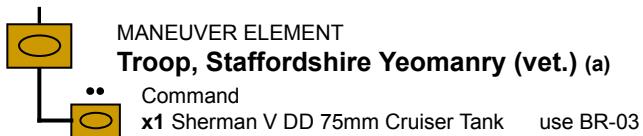
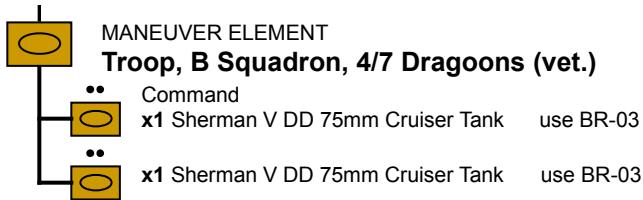
A and C Companies, and the surviving Staffordshire Yeomanry Sherman may fire from their positions at Argyll Farm, but may not join in the attack until Turn 5 or later.

Turn 3 Battalion 3" mortars and 14th Field Regiment become available.

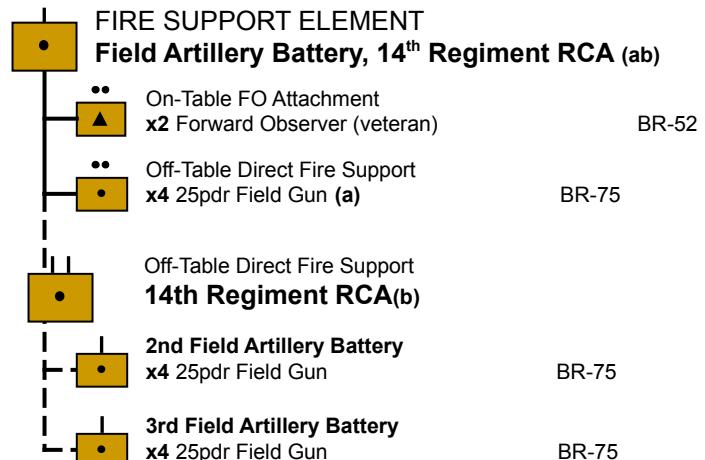
Turn 5 Remainder of forces at Argyll Farm are released for deployment. 94th's Archer troop and the 6 pdrs. may enter anywhere along table edge within Area B.

Allied Forces





(a) This troop does not receive the "no casualties" bonus as a result of the morning's fighting.



(a) The battery may be called as Direct Fire Support by either FO, or alternatively by Infantry Battalion/Company Commanders. Commonwealth artillery may also fire by Troop (i.e. a half-battery of two guns). Each FO may call for a single Field Artillery Troop as Organic Fire Support.

(b) The entire Field Regiment is available as Direct Fire Support when the FO calls for a 'Mike Target' for targets deemed of significant value. Commanders may not call for 'Mike Targets' or General Fire Support.

(c) One smoke mission available after opening barrage

Briefing for German Commanding Officer, 16th Fallschirmjaeger Regt.

Since the near annihilation of your division in Normandy, you were in the process of rebuilding when once again you were thrown into the fighting in the Arnhem corridor. Most of your new troops are former Luftwaffe ground personnel, and virtually none have actually completed a jump, but they are still the best the Fatherland can offer at this point in the war.

Your battered regiment has been pushed back from their positions along the Rhine, with remnants withdrawing last night to take up new prepared positions in Bienen and area. A predawn counterattack by the 115th PGR partially drove the Tommies out of their positions in the group of farm buildings a mere 150 metres south of the village, but this morning they were recaptured prior to the Canadians' failed frontal assault. Now more activity around the farm presages a second attack as the enemy artillery once more begins shelling your positions.

Not only do you have your own troops and a weak company from 18th FJR in defence of Bienen, but also soldiers from the 115 Panzer Grenadier Regiment. These, supported by assault guns arrived in the area yesterday evening after a counterattack from Isselburg towards Rees was stopped at Millingen (a couple of kilometres to the west). They are now in reserve in preparation for a counterattack.

Your mission is to hold Bienen and keep the enemy from breaking out from the Rees pocket between Alder Rhein on your right and Millinger Meer on your left.

Deployment

The 1/II Battalion of 16th Fallschirmjaeger Regiment along with a company from 18th FJR deploy anywhere north of Line A and east of the Alder Rhein. They may begin in IP's (permanent) if in BUS's and otherwise are dug in inundated areas.

Turn Sequence

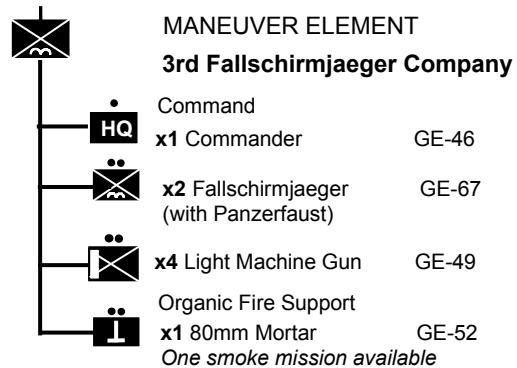
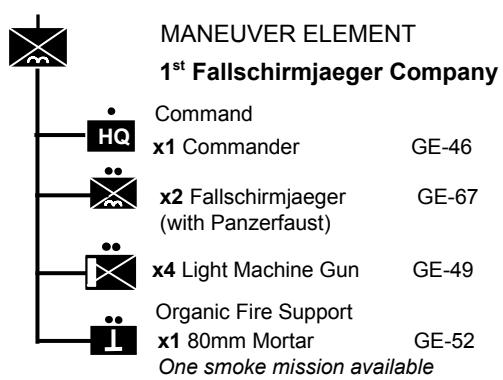
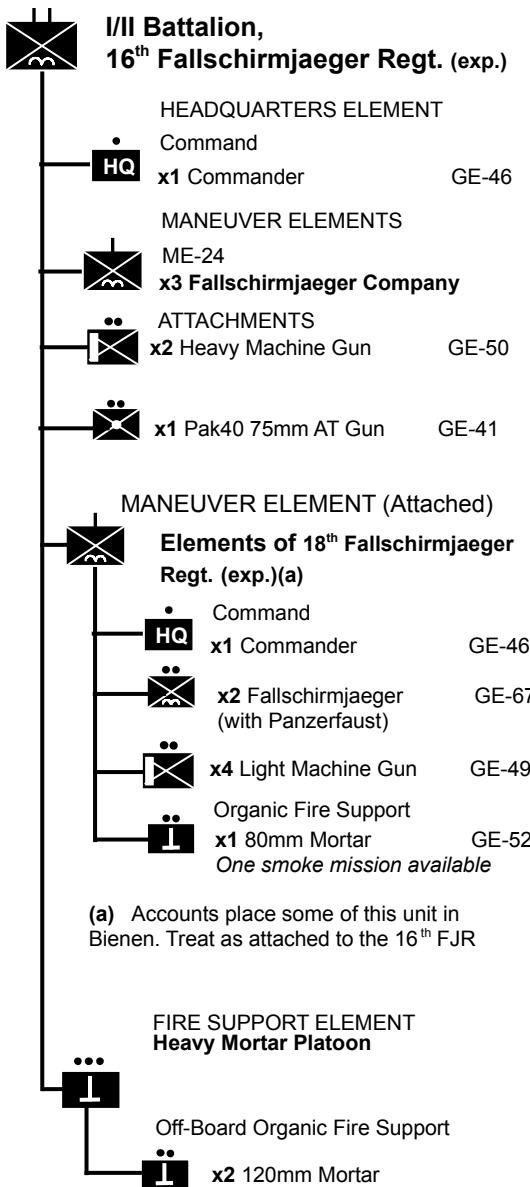
Turn 7 Counterattack enters from north side of board



The backside of the Fortress House, the last German stronghold in Bienen. This part of the house faces the dyke over which 'D'Coy, North Novas tried to rush into the village.

German Forces

(None of these units gain the “no casualties” bonus as a result of two days of uninterrupted fighting)

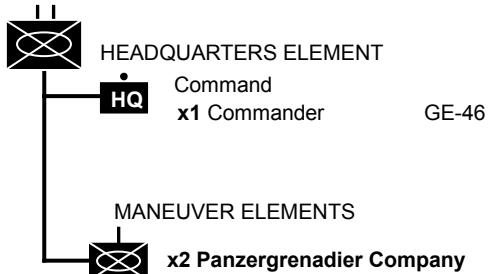


Counterattack

(None of these units gain the “no casualties” bonus as a result of two days of uninterrupted fighting)

Kampfgruppe

II Battalion, 115 Panzergrenadier Regt. (Trained)



MANEUVER ELEMENT

1st Panzergrenadier Company



MANEUVER ELEMENT

2nd Panzergrenadier Company



Historical Outcome

On the morning of March 25, 1945 the North Nova Scotia Highlanders moved to their start line, a group of farm buildings known as Argyll Farm 150 metres south of Bienen. The 7th Argylls had supposedly seized this earlier but it soon turned out that even the start line wasn't secure, and the North Novas had to fight to bring it into friendly hands.

The first North Nova attack on Bienen of A and B Companies, supported by a troop of the Staffordshire Yeomanry Shermans, ended in failure as the North Novas entered a killing ground before Bienen. They found themselves savaged by small arms, mortar and artillery fire while taking enfilading machine gun fire from the 24th Fallschirmjaeger Regiment holding Androp. With the two companies pinned and scattered, the attack was finally called off by Brigadier Rockingham when he came forward to Forbes' HQ shortly before noon.

A second attack was queued up, this time ensuring that enfilading fire from Androp on the right flank would be neutralized by smoke and HE. Things had improved on the left as well, as the Glens had made considerable headway, reducing observed artillery and mortar fire from this direction that had plagued the earlier attack. While the remaining Staffordshire tank and A and B Companies poured fire on the south of Bienen, artillery masked Androp and Bienen with smoke. D Company made its way up the west side of the dyke, assaulting Bienen from the left. However the Germans had spotted their advance and were ready for them, and a vicious murderous fight broke out as D Company tried to make its way over the small amount of ground between the dyke and the village. Meanwhile C Company crossed over to the southeast corner of Bienen and, with the support of the 4/7th Dragoons' Shermans managed to fight their way into Bienen from this unexpected direction (the carrier platoon's Wasps all were bogged down or disabled before closing with the enemy).

With both companies achieving footholds in the town A and C Companies and the remaining

Staffordshire tank were sent in to reinforce along with the troop of Archers from 3rd Canadian Anti tank Regiment. A difficult battle ensued, with the Canadians fighting their way through the village house by house. A late day counterattack by Panzer Grenadiers of the 115th Regiment, supported by assault guns, was brought to a halt by the North Novas (who had withdrawn and consolidated in the south part of Bienen to meet this threat) and artillery concentrations. It was now the Germans' turn to grind themselves down in a killing ground. When the Highland Light Infantry arrived at 2300 it fell to them to finish the job of clearing Bienen, which they had successfully done by dawn, pushing all the way to the anti tank ditch north of the village.

The battle of Bienen was one of the most costly for the North Novas of the entire war. 44 men were killed and another 68 wounded, while the enemy gave up 200 soldiers captured and even more killed. In the words of Lee A. Windsor, it was “a battle of annihilation against a larger German force. This was the unstated, but eminently clear, primary mission. In doing so they created a threat to the German line sufficient to draw the bulk of their artillery and mortar attention away from the crossing sites and onto 9 Brigade, thereby accomplishing their other task of easing pressure on engineers working at the river bank.”

Bibliography

“Too Close for the Guns!” 9 Canadian Infantry, Brigade in the Battle for Rhine Bridgehead, Lee A. Windsor University of New Brunswick

On to Victory: The Canadian Liberation of the Netherlands, March 23-May 25 1945, Mark Zuehlke, Douglas and McIntyre 2010

The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945, Colonel C.P. Stacey

Operation Plunder: Rhine Crossing: the British and Canadian Operations, Tim Saunders

For anyone interested in Operation Plunder the following WW2 Talk forum resource was invaluable, full of scanned situation reports, contemporary images and information on German dispositions:

RHINE CROSSING 1945: The Rees bridgehead (51st Highland Div in operation 'Turnscrew')

<http://ww2talk.com/forums/topic/50742-rhine-crossing-1945-the-rees-bridgehead-51st-highland-div-in-operation-turnscrew/page-2>