

'Brückenkopf Broekhuizen'

The Battle of the Broekhuizen Bridgehead
The Netherlands, 30th November 1944

The 3rd Monmouthshires' Pyrrhic Victory

A Battlefield: WWII Scenario
By R Mark Davies



Broekhuizen Kasteel as it appeared before the battle (pictured in 1940)

*'A gwaedd y bechgyn lond y gwynt,
A'u gwaed yn gymysg efo'r glaw.'*

*'And the cries of the boys filled the wind,
And their blood mixed with the rain.'*

From 'Rhyfel' By Ellis Evans ('Hedd Wyn'), 1916
(Killed at Passchendaele 1917)

'The dead still lay where they died in the orchard near the Kasteel, a few German but many 3rd Mons. The weapons of the British dead had been retrieved. Some of the dead lay stiff in the prone position with their arms forward as if clutching their rifles. Some expressions were of pain and shock and some of sheer surprise. There's not much dignity to violent death.' – Lieutenant Ted Deeming, Signals Officer, 15/19th King's Royal Hussars

Scenario Overview

Following the failure of Operation *Market-Garden* in September 1944, the British 2nd Army was left holding a very vulnerable, narrow and deep salient, like a wedge into German-held territory, with the city of Eindhoven at its base and Nijmegen at its tip. The Germans had already managed to cut this salient several times during the Market-Garden battles – striking eastward from the s'Hertogenbosch and westward from Venlo.

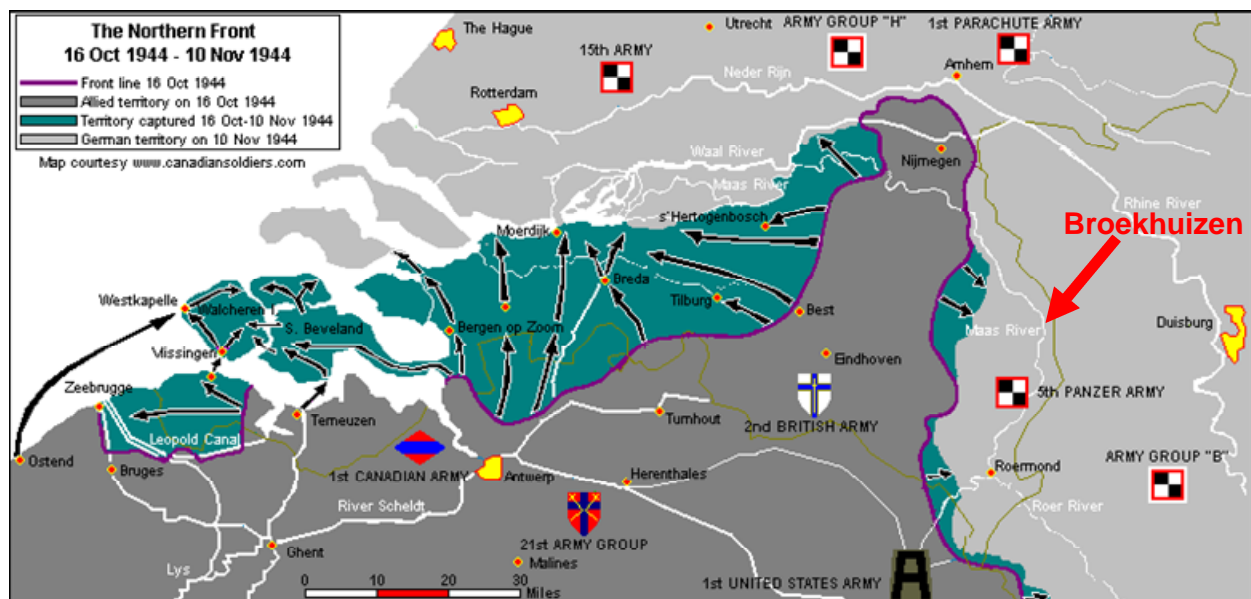
It was therefore imperative that the British 2nd Army expand its salient and remove the threats to its position in the eastern Netherlands. In a series of operations east and west of the 'Nijmegen Salient', 2nd Army would clear all German forces from south and west of the River Maas. At the same time, 1st Canadian Army, on the left of British 2nd Army, was ordered to clear the Scheldt estuary, thus allowing shipping to pass freely to the port of Antwerp, which could then be used as a new forward base of operations for 21st Army Group. 1st Canadian Army would then similarly clear all German forces from south of the Maas in the western Netherlands.

While the 1st Canadian Army commenced operations to clear the Scheldt, the British 2nd Army launched its first offensive out of the Nijmegen Salient: Operation *Aintree*. The British VIII Corps and US XIX Corps struck eastward in late September against the towns of Helmond and Overloon. Operation *Aintree* encountered stiff opposition by 5.

Panzer-Armee – particularly from *Panzer-Brigade 107*, which was the main German armoured formation in the region. The fighting at Overloon was so bad that it was known at the time as ‘The Second Caen’. Nevertheless, Overloon fell within two weeks and then Operation *Constellation* pushed Allied territory even further east, liberating Venraij and steadily pushing German forces back to the Maas.

British 2nd Army then struck west from Nijmegen with Operation *Alan*; launching the British XII Corps at the heavily-fortified cities of s’Hertogenbosch, Tilburg and Boxtel. All fell within five days, in one of the most perfectly-executed and least-expensive (in terms of casualties) operations of the campaign.

The Canadian 1st Army meanwhile had cleared the ‘Breskens Pocket’ south of the Scheldt in late September. However, the fighting north of Antwerp was very hard and the 2nd Canadian Division suffered particularly heavy casualties while fighting over bitterly-contested canal crossings. Nevertheless, the Canadian, British, Polish and US divisions under II Canadian Corps command were soon pushing northward, clearing the South Beveland isthmus, liberating Roosendal, Bergen-op-Zoom and Breda and reaching Moerdijk on the Waal in late October. The last remaining German fortress covering the Scheldt was the island of Walcheren and that fell to a bloody amphibious assault by British I Corps in early November.



By late November, German forces had been completely cleared from south and west of the Maas, except for three small bridgeheads in the eastern Netherlands: at Geysteren, Broekhuizen and Blerick (this last being the western suburb of the city of Venlo). These bridgeheads were manned by elements of Kurt Student’s *1. Fallschirmjäger-Armee*. Although these bridgeheads were relatively unimportant and were contained by besieging forces, they still posed a threat and in late November, forces were assigned to their destruction.

‘*Brückenkopf Broekhuizen*’ was the central bridgehead of the three, being some 15km north (i.e. downstream) of Blerick & Venlo and 15km south (i.e. upstream) of Geysteren. The garrison was small, consisting of *6. Kompanie, II. Bataillon, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 20 (7. Fallschirmjäger-Division)*, plus some divisional support elements, comprising some 150-200 men, commanded by one *Leutnant* Lampersbach. However, despite the relatively low strength of the garrison, they were well-entrenched, were surrounded by dense minefields, were well-armed and had considerable quantities of artillery in direct support from across the Maas. The south-western bastion of the defence was formed by the *Kasteel* – a moated mediaeval manor, whose high, three feet-thick stone walls dominated the flat land around it.

In late November, Broekhuizen was being contained by the 9th Battalion of the Cameronians (15th (Scottish) Division). On the 27th, the Cameronians decided to try to take the *Kasteel* by *coup de main*. A weak platoon and a section of sappers were sent against its walls, hoping to storm the position by stealth, speed and surprise. The result was a disaster: of 32 men involved in the assault, five were killed, eleven were captured, eight were wounded and only eight men made it back unscathed. The determined young *Fallschirmjäger* holding Broekhuizen were going to need rather more persuasive methods before they would vacate the premises.

On the following day, the ‘Jocks’ of 9th Cameronians were relieved in place by the ‘Taffs’ of 3rd Battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment (11th Armoured Division), known to all as ‘3rd Mons’. The CO of the 3rd Mons, Lt Col Ralph C Stockley, was ordered to devise a plan to take the bridgehead – the 3rd Mons would be launching their assault in two days.

British Briefing – Lt Col Ralph C Stockley, 3rd Monmouths

Situation

You've been the Commanding Officer of 3rd Mons for just over two months now, since Lt Col Orr was killed at St. Anthonis on 25th September by a German halftrack's machine gun. Since then, the battalion has advanced across the 'Peel Country' east of Eindhoven with the rest of 11th Armoured Division.

For the last month or so your battalion has remained in static front-line positions on the River Maas, engaged in constant patrolling and skirmishing against determined (even fanatical at times) German paratroops. The German paras excel at mine warfare and the constant trickle of casualties caused by skirmishes, mines, mortar bombs and even the odd German air-raid, has frayed the nerves of many in the battalion. However, you were at last able to release men to spend a few days on leave in Helmond, so spirits have recovered slightly, even if the strength of your battalion has not.

At last your period of static defence is over. You've been ordered to relieve the 9th Cameronians (of 15th (Scottish) Division) at a place called Broekhuizen on the river Waal. The Germans have one of their three Maas bridgeheads there and it'll be your job to take it.

Upon arrival at the Cameronians' positions near Broekhuizen, you are told that the German position is only lightly-held, though heavily-mined. The cornerstone of the position is known as the *Kasteel*, which is a moated mediaeval manor, situated roughly 600 yards southwest of Broekhuizen village and dominates the flat land around it. The Cameronians lost a whole platoon only last night in an attempt to take the *Kasteel's* garrison by surprise.

Nevertheless, you have been promised armour, artillery and 'Funny' support for this operation, so you are confident that the Mons and the Black Bull will succeed where the Cameronians failed.

Mission

You are to assault the enemy bridgehead at Broekhuizen, with the intention of eliminating the enemy presence on this side of the River Maas.

Execution

General Outline

- Following a preparatory barrage by 151 Fd Regt, the assault will be mounted by A & C Coys 3 Mons, reinforced by the 3 Mons Assault Pioneer Platoon and the two troops of WD Crab flail tanks.
- D Coy 3 Mons, due to its low strength, will remain in reserve.
- 15/19 KRH will provide direct fire support from the start-line.

Artillery Preparation & Fire Support

- At H-minus-10 the 151 Fd Regt (three Batteries, each of [**x4 models**]) will commence firing a barrage onto targets selected by you. They will fire for [**x3 turns**] and will end the barrage with a smokescreen [**x1 turn duration**].
- A single Field Battery will be available in direct support once the barrage has ended.

Friendly Forces

- Are detailed in the order of battle at Annex A below.

Enemy Forces

- Are thought to consist of a company of paratroops, though some reports say SS. They are known to be tough customers, whoever they are. Nevertheless, it is only a single company, so your three companies, with support from your 'Big Friends' should be more than enough for the job.

Deployment

- You may deploy your forces within the area shown on the map below.

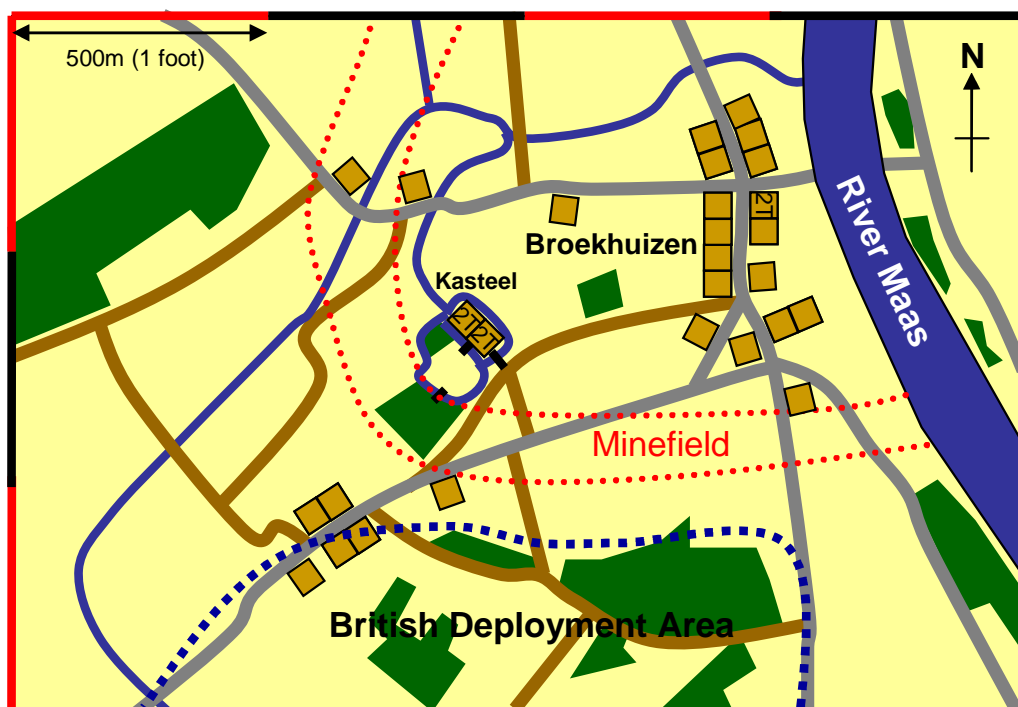
- Note that the tanks of 15/19 KRH are there to provide fire support – not to lead an assault.
- D Coy is weakened by previous actions and is therefore in reserve for this battle.
- **In game terms, neither D Coy of 3 Mons, nor the tanks of 15/19 KRH may leave the British deployment area until Turn 6. If they do then leave their deployment area, the British player will suffer a VP penalty for using them.**

Game Sequence

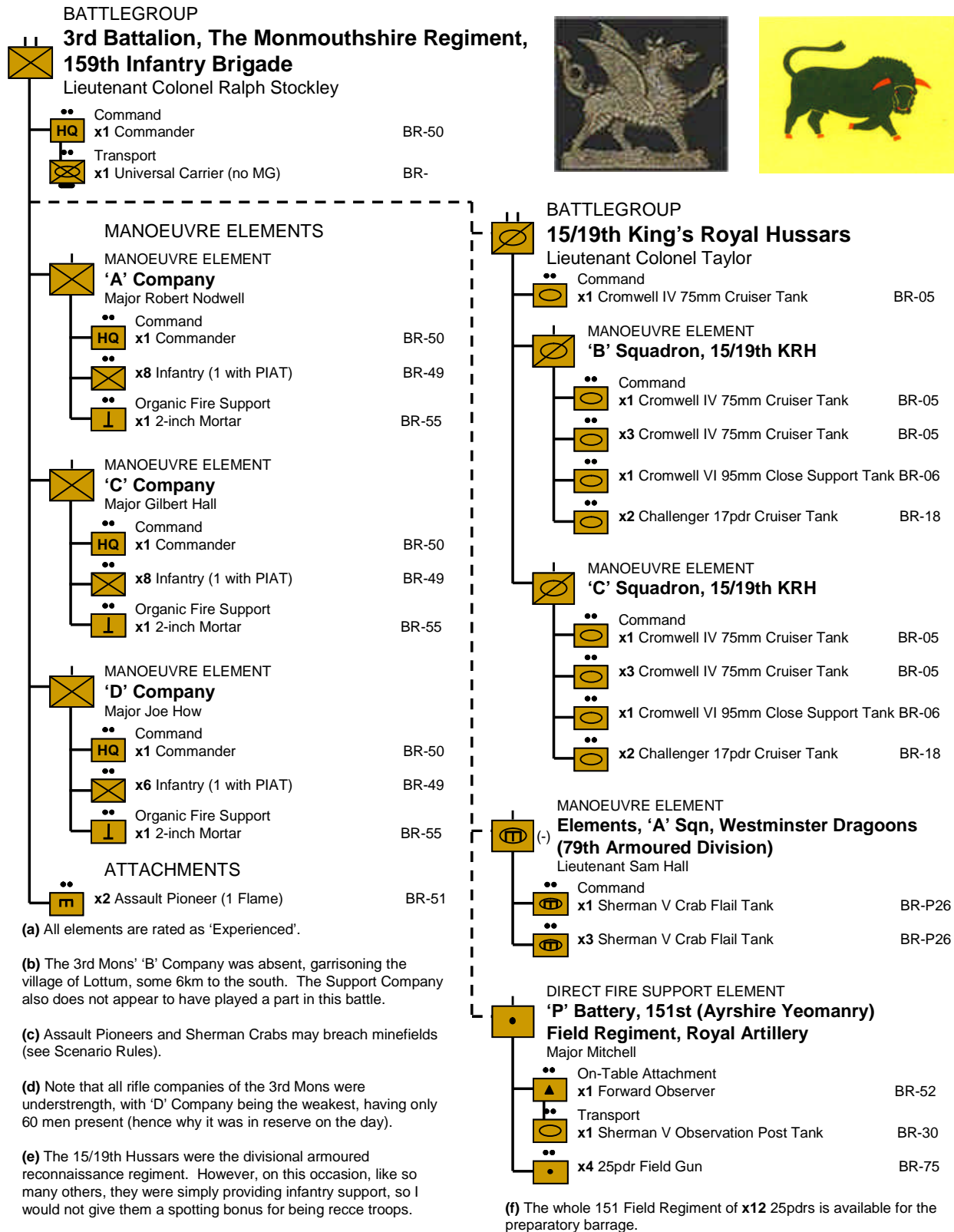
- The Germans have the first turn (having detected the British moving up to the start-line).
- The game lasts 20 turns or until one side concedes.

Victory Points

- **1 VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 25% casualties OR each knocked out Gun.
- **2 VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 50% casualties.
- **3VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 75% casualties.
- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within the Kasteel BUAs.
- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of Broekhuizen Church
- **Minus 1 VP** for the British player, for each reserve ME that leaves the British deployment area (this applies to D Coy 3 Mons and the two 15/19 KRH Squadrons).
- **Total Victory** – for having more than 11 VPs or more than the enemy.
- **Partial Victory** – for having 6-10 VPs more than the enemy.
- **Draw** – for having 0-5 VPs more (or less) than the enemy. The side with the higher number can claim a 'Winning Draw'.
- **Pyrrhic Victory (exception to the above)** – The British player may claim a 'Pyrrhic Victory' if he inflicts more than 50% casualties on the Germans AND complies with both 5 VP victory conditions listed above, but loses on points (this is the historical result).



British Order of Battle: Elements, 11th Armoured Division



German Briefing – Leutnant Lampersbach, 6. Kompanie/ II./ FJR 20

Situation

You command one of 1. Fallschirmjäger-Armee's three bridgeheads over the River Maas in the eastern Netherlands. It is absolutely imperative that the bridgehead be maintained at all costs, as it will be needed for the future counter-attack that will throw the Allies back into the sea. Although your men are largely young recruits (as you are yourself), they are all dedicated to the cause and are fighting with their backs not only to the river, but also to the Fatherland. You are absolutely certain that they will not fail you or the *Führer!*

Although your garrison is small, your position is extremely well-prepared with trenches, bunkers, a thick minefield and considerable quantities of artillery in direct support. The keystone of your position is the *Kasteel*: a thickly-walled, moated mediaeval manor that you have turned into a fortress.

You have been besieged now for several days, but so far the Allies have not made any serious attempt to dislodge you from your position. Two nights ago, a platoon-sized raid was mounted on the *Kasteel*, but this was beaten off with heavy loss to the attackers – eleven British soldiers were captured by your men and the remainder were mostly killed or wounded.

Your men's spirits have been buoyed by this small victory and are ready for the next attempt by the enemy.

However, it seems that you will not have long to wait... The rumble of tank engines is growing in the dawn twilight... Something is brewing...

Mission

You are to repulse any and all attempts to assault the bridgehead, with the intention of retaining the bridgehead for future offensive purposes.

Execution

Friendly Forces

- Your forces are detailed in the order of battle at Annex A below.

Enemy Forces

- You have only the sketchiest idea of enemy forces, though you can definitely identify tanks in roughly battalion strength, from the considerable amount of noise they are making.
- If it helps, the troops who attacked you two days ago were identified as British, from 9th Cameronian infantry battalion of the 15th (Scottish) Division.

Deployment

- 6. Kompanie and its attached heavy weapons may deploy, as dummy unit markers, anywhere within the area bordered by the minefield. Nothing may of course, be deployed within the minefield.
- Other forces are deployed east of the River Maas.
- All units may start the game dug-in, in foxholes or weapons pits, or dug in to BUAs.
- You may place up to 24 inches of contiguous trenches and units may be placed within these instead of individual foxholes or weapons pits.
- You may place up to 24 inches of barbed wire.
- You may place up to four log pillboxes and units may be placed within these instead of weapons pits. Note however, that mortars and AA guns may not be placed within pillboxes.
- You may place up to six road blocks on roads within your deployment area.
- You may place up to five dummy unit markers west of the Maas and a further two east of the Maas.

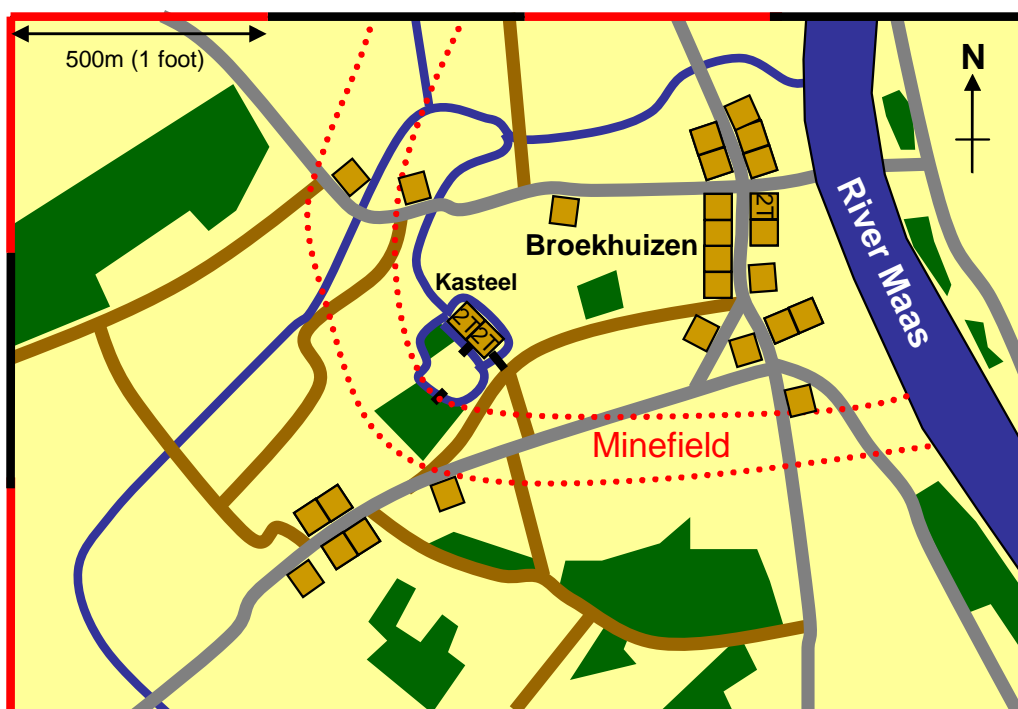
- You may pre-register defensive fire targets for each of your IDF elements. If you are not playing with an umpire, these should be clearly marked on a map, to be revealed when declaring pre-registered fire.

Game Sequence

- You have the first turn (having detected the British moving up to the start-line). You can automatically spot any enemy tanks in the open, or on the edge of terrain and may immediately direct artillery fire on them in the first turn. After Turn 1 the normal spotting rules apply.
- The game lasts 20 turns or until one side concedes.

Victory Points

- **1 VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 25% casualties OR each knocked out Gun.
- **2 VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 50% casualties.
- **3VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 75% casualties.
- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within the Kasteel BUAs.
- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of Broekhuizen Church
- **Minus 1 VP** for the British player, for each reserve ME that leaves the British deployment area (this applies to D Coy 3 Mons and the two 15/19 KRH Squadrons).
- **Total Victory** – for having more than 11 VPs or more than the enemy.
- **Partial Victory** – for having 6-10 VPs more than the enemy.
- **Draw** – for having 0-5 VPs more (or less) than the enemy. The side with the higher number can claim a 'Winning Draw'.
- **Pyrrhic Victory (exception to the above)** – The British player may claim a 'Pyrrhic Victory' if he inflicts more than 50% casualties on the Germans AND complies with both 5 VP victory conditions listed above, but loses on points (this is the historical result).



German Order of Battle – Elements, 7. Fallschirmjäger-Division



(a) All elements of the reinforced 6. Kompanie are rated Veteran. All other elements, including the attached FOs, are rated as Experienced.

(b) The 6. Kompanie group (and attached FO) must deploy on the western bank of the River Maas, within the perimeter defined by the minefield.

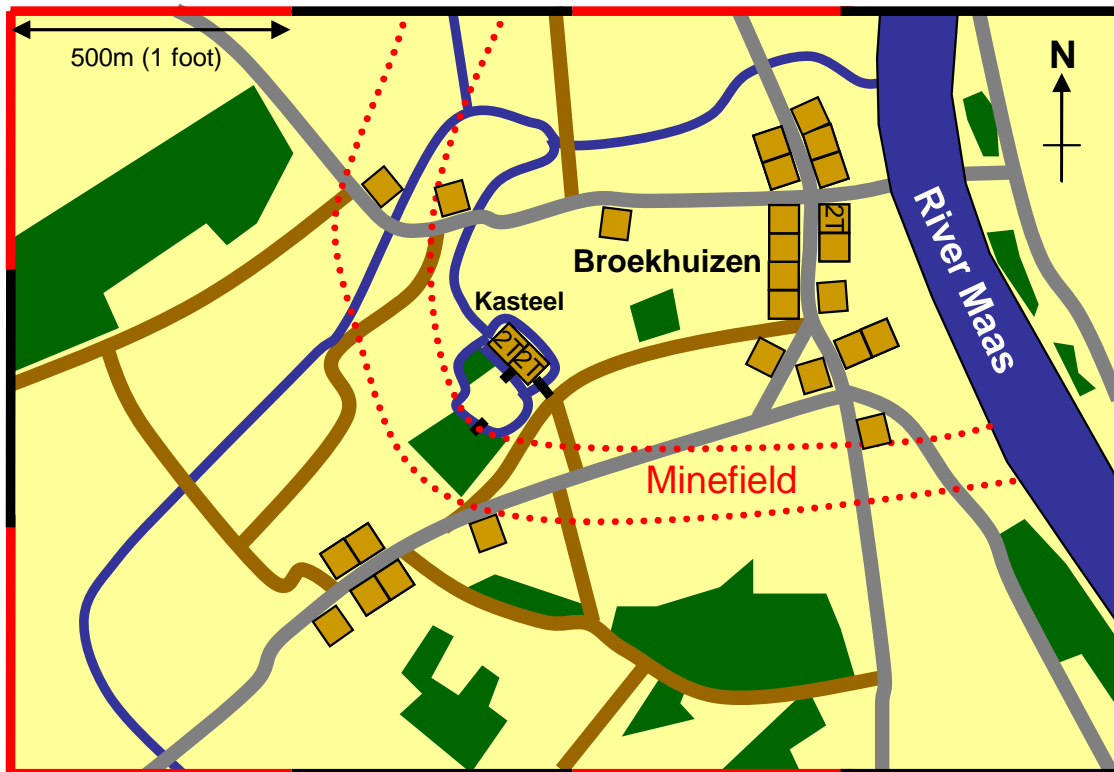
(c) The FlaK Detachment (and attached FO) must deploy on the eastern bank of the Maas. Their role in this battle is limited to providing flanking fire support to the defenders.

(c) The Infantry Gun Company may be called in as Direct Fire Support by Lt Lampersbach. It may not be called in by the FOs, as they are not a part of the same organisation.

(d) Either FO may call for their own 105mm battery as Direct Fire Support or for the 6. Batterie (150mm) as General Support. They also have the option of thickening their own battery's concentration with 6. Batterie's guns as General Support and may also call down the entire battalion as General Support. Remember however, that the same guns may not be called simultaneously by different FOs in the same turn!



Terrain



- Open Country** - Use Cross-Country movement speed, but the ground is soft – full-speed for Troops, but half-speed & bog-down checks in every inch of movement for Vehicles & Guns.
- Roads** - Use Road movement speed, but do not double the move as you would normally do for paved roads.
- Tracks** - Use Cross-Country movement speed (but no bog-down check for soft ground).
- Castle Moat** - Classed as Deep & Wide Stream – passable only to Troops, requiring a Breach action and a bog-down check. There are three footbridges across the moat (marked in black).
- Stream** - Classed as Shallow Stream – Half-speed for Troops and requiring a Breach action for Vehicles and Guns. Guns also require a bog-down check.
- River Maas** - Impassable.
- Woods** - Classed as Woods with Underbrush – Dense Concealment & Soft Cover. Full-speed for Troops, though half-speed and bog-down checks for Vehicles and Guns.
- Built-Up Areas** - Stone construction. Some may be fortified (see German briefing). The church tower is two levels high.
- The Kasteel** - Classed as a very large Concrete Pillbox. The whole building is two levels high. The moated garden on the south-western side of the Kasteel is surrounded by low walls – Dense Edge Concealment, Hard Cover, half-speed for Troops to cross.
- Minefield** - Very extensive, marked belt of mixed anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. The minefield is a fairly constant 160 yards (4 inches) wide all along its length.
- Streets** - Areas immediately between Built Up Areas are classed as 'Streets' terrain type – half-speed for Vehicles and Guns, Dense Concealment and Soft Cover.

Special Rules Used In This Scenario

- **MG Grazing Fire** (see website)
- **British Forward Observer Replacement Rule** (see website)
- **Clearing Minefields with the Sherman V Crab Flail Tank (Playtest Rule)**
 - The Sherman Crab may clear 1 inch of minefield per movement action.
 - 'Rapid Advance' (i.e. two actions per turn) is permitted.
 - For each inch of minefield, roll on the Mine Passage Table with a +2 modifier. If the Crab passes through the minefield safely, it also creates a 1 inch-wide safe path for others to follow. Mark the safe path on the table using thread or wire.
 - If the minefield is in terrain that requires a bog-down test, conduct the bog-down test before attempting to clear the minefield. A 'Bog' or 'Displace' result will prevent the Crab from clearing mines for that action.
 - The Sherman Crab may not perform Defensive Fire in its front arc if it was attempting to clear mines in its last turn. However, it may engage targets in its rear arc, with the usual modifier.
 - Once a safe path has been cleared through a minefield, units may only pass through in single file and may not perform a Rapid Advance through the breach.
- **Clearing Minefields with Assault Pioneers (Playtest Rule)**
 - Assault Pioneers may clear up to 1 inch of minefield per movement action.
 - 'Rapid Advance' (i.e. two actions per turn) is not permitted.
 - For each inch of the minefield, roll on the Improve Position Table with a +3 modifier. If the Assault Pioneer section succeeds on the 'Improve Position' table, the Assault Pioneer section moves forward 1 inch and clears a 1 inch wide safe path for others to follow. Mark the safe path on the table using thread or wire.
 - Ordinary (i.e. non Pioneer-trained) Troop elements may also attempt to clear mines using this method, but do so without applying the +3 modifier. However, Veteran and Elite troops may apply a +1 modifier.
 - Assault Pioneers may conduct Defensive Fire as normal while attempting to clear mines (we've all seen Kelly's Heroes!).
 - If the minefield is in terrain that requires a bog-down test, conduct the bog-down test before attempting to clear the minefield. A 'Bog' or 'Displace' result will prevent the unit from clearing mines for that action.
 - Once a safe path has been cleared through a minefield, units may only pass through in single file and may not perform a Rapid Advance through the breach.

Scenario-Balancing Options

Favouring the British

- Add the missing elements of the 3rd Mons – C Company, the Mortar Platoon and the Carrier Platoon. The Antitank Platoon however, is somewhat surplus to requirements.
- Dry Ground – remove the necessity for the British tanks to roll bog-down checks for soft ground.
- Add a Medium Artillery Regiment to the opening barrage.
- Add some other 'Funny' elements such as AVREs and Crocodiles.

Favouring the Germans

- Add a second Fallschirmjäger Company of 1x Commander and 9x Fallschirmjäger.
- Add another PaK 40 antitank gun.
- Add an antitank ditch.

Umpire's Notes

- This battle actually starts prematurely for the British. The Germans detected their movement up to the start-line (it's pretty difficult to keep some 40-50 tanks quiet!) and immediately shelled the general area – catching the 3rd Mons as they were forming up.
- For this reason, the Germans have the first turn and may fire Shelling missions with any and all of their Direct and Organic IDF elements against any British tanks that are in the open or are on the edge of dense terrain. There is no need to spot or to call for fire. However, only Shelling missions may be fired in this manner – no concentrations or thickening by General support elements.
- It may be the case that the tanks may be spotted normally anyway, in which case the German player may opt to call for concentrations and General support elements in the normal manner.
- These special rules regarding spotting and calling for fire will only apply in the German's first turn. Normal rules will apply from then on.
- The British preparatory barrage will commence in the British first turn.
- 25pdr Field Guns have a Large IDF template and are rated -1 vV and 0 vTGsV.
- 105mm Light Howitzers have a Large IDF template and are rated -1 vV and 0 vTGsV.
- 150mm Heavy Howitzers & Infantry Guns have a Large IDF template and are rated +1 vV and +2 vTGsV.
- German units that fall back or panic will move toward the Maas ferry point, which is adjacent to Broekhuizen church. Once they reach it, they will not panic into the river! They will simply remain stationary and disordered, or will surrender to any un-disordered British unit within 2 inches.

The Historical Events – From The Royal Regiment of Wales' Official History

By late November 1944 the Germans had been driven east of the Maas except for a few pockets, one of which was at Broekhuizen where they held the village and nearby '*Kasteel*' - an old fort surrounded by a moat.

The Battalion attacked these German positions on 30th November. The Germans were thought to be weak and only a two company attack was launched. 'A' Company attacked the '*Kasteel*' and 'C' Company, Broekhuizen. The infantry went in along a path cleared for them by flail tanks. They had to cross seven hundred yards of open country. Halfway they came under withering artillery fire followed, when the tanks withdrew, by accurate machine gun fire the more devastating since they were confined to the narrow paths cleared by the flails. The Germans were well entrenched in the cellars of the village and in the '*Kasteel*'. Both 'A' and 'C' Company commanders were killed and most of the other officers and senior NCOs and many of the men. The remainder were pinned down to whatever cover they could find and isolated as the wireless transmitters were damaged. The Intelligence Officer and the Second-in-Command were both shot down trying to reach them. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Stockley, unable to find out what was happening went forward on foot to investigate. He reached 'A' Company's forward troops. Seeing the seriousness of the situation he rallied the men and tried to lead a gallant attack on the '*Kasteel*'. He was killed, revolver in hand, leading his troops, on the bridge over the moat.

The Commanding Officer of the 15th/19th Hussars now came forward to investigate the position in his tank. As a result, 'D' Company with only sixty men was now ordered into the battle with tank support. The tanks fired at the '*Kasteel*' while 'D' Company advanced; arriving at the '*Kasteel*' they swung around and with tank support attacked Broekhuizen from the west. The Germans were unprepared for an assault from this direction and 'D' Company reached the village. With the tanks they cleared the houses, no mean feat since there were over two hundred Germans in the village entrenched in a veritable maze of dugouts, trenches and reinforced houses. While the village was being cleared, a task which took the whole of that night, the '*Kasteel*' was attacked by tanks firing at point blank range and then captured by the survivors of 'A' Company.

Victory had been obtained at a heavy cost. Of the three hundred men who fought, one hundred and forty had fallen, including ten officers, of whom eight were killed. 'D' Company and the tanks of the 15th/19th had retrieved an apparently hopeless situation in the face of heavy odds



The shattered *Kasteel* pictured after the battle



The British War Memorial at Broekhuizen

Author's Note Regarding Sources

Patrick Delaforce, in his book 'The Black Bull', describes the battle using the recollections of the 2IC of 3rd Mons – Major L Moody. However, his account differs from other sources in significant areas. For one, he describes two separate attacks – A & C Coy 3rd Mons and C Sqn 15/19th Hussars from the south and B Coy 3rd Mons, with B Sqn 15/19th Hussars from the north-west. D Coy isn't mentioned at all and he also suggests that the Sherman Crabs were destroyed.

However, a superb article by John Gaunt (who served with D Coy, 3rd Mons and who took part in D Coy's attack) provides a lot more detail and has more of the ring of truth about it. His account also generally agrees with the official history above, as does the war diary of the 15/19th Hussars.

I am inclined therefore to go with John Gaunt and the official history as the basis for this scenario, though as a scenario variant, the player could experiment with a 'pincer' consisting of one infantry company and a tank squadron, starting deployed in the north-western woods.