

Springtime on the Oder

8th Guards Army on the Road to Berlin

March 1945

Scenario written by Iain Craven

With contributions and play testing by Richard Lawrence

Introduction

March 1945: The death throes of the 'Thousand Year Reich' are being enacted on the banks of the river Oder. The Soviet Winter Offensive partially carried the Oder line off the march at the beginning of February, although the German defenders have been successful in stabilising their position and preventing the 'Fortress' city of Kustrin from becoming encircled. Whilst the Red Army has brought up reinforcements of men and equipment the Wehrmacht has rushed reinforcements to the sector and formed a number of new units, notably the Panzer Division "Muencheberg", with the intention of preventing the loss of the Kustrin garrison. Whilst the newly installed Gotthard Heinrici, commander of Army Group Vistula, ponders exactly when and where the next Soviet thrust will fall, the 8th Guards Army of Lieut-General V.I. Chuikov, and the 5th Shock Army of Col-General N.E. Berzarin are preparing to assault the defences to the west of Kustrin with the intention of consolidating their bridgeheads, and breaking through to Seelow, leaving SS General Friedrich Rienefarth and his beleaguered garrison cut off in the city.....

Scenario Notes

This scenario actually includes elements of a series of engagements that took place between the 22nd and 29th of March 1945 and ended with the Russians in possession of both Gorgast and Kustrin, but not until the very end of the month Golzow. These battles resulted in heavy losses of both men and equipment.

The Muenchberg Division (all 18 tanks of it) was probably the closest thing to an elite "division" that the Germans had on the Oder front, certainly Doeberitz and 20th Panzergrenadier Divisions were hastily assembled formations. I've tried to reflect this in the morale values - the Russians don't seem to have foundered for any other reason than the quality of the Muenchberg's gunnery.

The initial Russian attack appears to have more or less destroyed the Doeberitz Division, but to have taken shattering tank casualties (sources (German I hasten to add – as ever unit level Russian accounts are not to be found) suggest 150-200 vehicles were destroyed, although as with the biblical "40 days and 40 nights" this may just be another way of saying "a lot". However, the German counter attacks do not appear to have fared any better, and Russian numbers appear to have told in the end.

The ground over the battlefield is low lying and prone to flooding. Although none of the accounts I have read mentions the ground conditions specifically, the approach of the Soviet tanks does appear to have been influenced by the presence of poor ground. The scenario rules above are designed to make the ground broadly passable, but to reflect the difficulties for armoured units operating in this environment.

The contours on the available maps (and a look at Google earth), suggest a shallow slope from the NE to the SW of the map. There don't appear to be any ridgelines and I suspect the "hills" are pretty difficult to detect even if you are on one.

Neither side was in possession of a huge amount of artillery – the Germans because of losses and a faltering supply system, the Russians because they were conserving ammunition for the drive on Berlin.

The 2nd Battalion of 90th PG Regt is Mot – ie on foot for all practical purposes. By this stage in the war I think extemporisation was the watch word for the Germans and I therefore see no reason why the halftacks of 1st battalion shouldn't come back and pick them up if they are able to.

As mentioned above, Google Maps is worth a visit if you want to check out the terrain – 60 years on of course, but looking at the nature of the countryside one gets the feeling that it hasn't changed much. There is also a video clip that someone has taken of a drive up one of the local main roads (!), which gives a ground level feel for what the general area is like.

For Google Maps try: http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=golzow&sl=37.0625,-95.677068&sspn=35.547176,92.197266&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=Golzow,+M%C3%A4rkisch-Oderland,+Brandenburg,+Germany&ll=52.567691,14.521437&spn=0.026659,0.090036&t=h&z=14&iwloc=A

For the video try: <http://www.youtube.com/user/DSzumaher#p/u/43/ly0PDJkP4-8>

If you have any trouble with the front line set up, I have attached a photograph of our interpretation of the battlefield below, although feel free to improvise!

Soviet Briefing

Situation

147th Guards Rifle Regiment Command Post, 7am, 23 March 1945.

General Chuikov called you and the other regimental commanders of 8th Guards army to his headquarters yesterday morning. He seemed to be under a lot of pressure. Kustrin was mistakenly declared liberated by Berzarin and his 5th Shock Army back in February, and now Front desperately needs it to be taken so that the advance on Berlin can continue. Rumour has it that Chuikov's response to Malinin, Zhukov's chief of Staff had not gone down well with the Marshal ("Did not Kustrin fall a month ago? Surely it will be unnecessary to take it for a second time"), and that the Hero of the Defence of Stalingrad was now fully focused on the task in hand.

The city of Kustrin is already more than 80% encircled, with only a single road to the west still allowing food and ammunition to be brought into its defenders. Our front line positions are 2km apart at the widest point, with only the villages of Golzow and Gorgast providing any cover in the flat, boggy terrain of the Oderbruch. Chuikov's orders are simple: annihilate the Fascist positions to your front and drive the enemy backwards. Golzow must be ours by nightfall.

Your troops are rested and reinforced after the advance through Poland, and whilst you are disappointed that you have not been withdrawn to the rear for "special training" prior to the advance on Berlin along with 8th Guards other crack regiments, you have at least been reinforced with replacements of reasonable quality. Since the Polish campaign drew to a close your veterans have had an opportunity to whip these lads into shape and you are confident that your companies will go into battle with their customary élan.

Your supply situation is of greater concern. Day after day relays of supply trains disgorge ammunition and new equipment along the Oder front. Artillery ammunition, however, is being jealously hoarded for the main offensive and it has been made clear to you that you will not be able to rely on the ferocious fire support to which you have become accustomed. Rather, you will have to make do with the division's own field guns and mortars, and (heaven help you) captured German pieces and ordnance – part of the spoils from the butchering of the reconstituted Army Group Centre during the winter.

To compensate you will be properly supported by the T34s and JSIIs of two full Tank Brigades, and you are confident that, given the increasingly ragged nature of the prisoners your patrols are bringing in each night, these should be more than adequate to allow you to deal with the scratch formations that are manning the lines opposite your positions. The enemy has had time to prepare his defences, but your patrols suggest relatively limited belts of mines and wire, and the high water table makes the construction of deep bunkers as much of impossibility for the enemy as it is for your own troops.

Now, with the watery sun hanging over the horizon, the fire of your batteries has descended on the German positions for a short barrage, drowning out the roar of the tanks that will shortly support your leading infantry units. You scan the desolate expanse in front of you through your binoculars for signs of movement, but to no avail. You watch the second hand of your watch count down to seven o'clock and in the brief silence which falls as the guns re-register their fire deeper into German lines, you hear the "Hurrahs" of your riflemen over the revving of tank engines as they rise from their trenches and head off into the early morning gloom.....

Timing

The game is played over 15 Turns.

Soviet Reinforcements

Infantry MEs – The Russian front line is made up of a trench system and / or improved positions at the player's discretion. MEs can be deployed anywhere in or behind the front line in trenches / improved positions. The front line includes a one deep line of BUS on the southern edge of Gorgast (see the map, the exact number will depend on how you choose to configure the town). There is a buffer of empty BUS one deep, between you and the German forces deployed in the town.

The Soviet player can start the game with as many infantry MEs on the board as he chooses (other than MEs designated as tank riders which must enter the table with their assigned armoured ME. The Soviet player can, if he chooses, provide the umpire with a reinforcement schedule for Infantry MEs that do not start in the front line trenches, designating the turn and the part of the trench system where the reinforcements will arrive. These units are placed directly into the designated area on the designated turn. Where the designated trenches are occupied (ie the ME can not be physically placed in the trenches in its entirety) any excess units are placed outside the trench and receive a disorder marker.

Armoured MEs – the T34/76 and SU76 MEs commence the game deployed anywhere within the Soviet Set up area. The Soviet Player may start the game with one armoured ME deployed just on the Southern map edge not

more than 20" from the Eastern map edge. Each subsequent turn the Soviet player may, at his discretion, place on further armoured ME in the same area. This completes the movement capability of the ME being placed on the table.

Victory conditions

Soviet Major Victory	As per a minor victory plus gain a foothold (ie an undisordered unit in 1 BUS) in Golzow.
Soviet Minor Victory	Control all BUS in the Old Soldiers Settlement.
Draw	Russians hold the initial frontline positions of the Doeberitz Division (ie all BUS and improved positions / trenches within 24" of the Soviet Front Line.

Losses / kills are disregarded from the Soviet victory conditions.

Boggy Ground

Areas of marshy ground should be randomly placed on the board by the umpire. Vehicles that touch any part of such an area during their movement phase must take one bog down check for each movement action they make during the turn. If failed the vehicle is considered to be bogged down at the point at which it entered the boggy terrain.

In all other off road / track areas any vehicle that makes a rapid advance must make one bog down check. If failed, the vehicle is considered to be bogged down at the end of its first move action.

Hull down

All vehicles apply a negative modifier of "1" to hull down attempts.

Buildings & Trenches

All buildings on the table are considered to be of two stories. The buildings in this area were historically of solid construction. Troops in buildings therefore get a -2 fire modifier from both direct and indirect fire. In addition, troops and guns that occupy prepared positions that exist at the start of the game receive a -2 modifier to all direct and indirect fire. Any improved positions created during the game will provide a -1 modifier to both types of fire.

Troops in trenches may move at normal speed. Such troops do not receive a +1 modifier on the spotting table.

Hedges LOS impact

Each of the tracks running roughly North-South on the map has a hedgerow running along its east side. These were bare at the time of the battle, have no impact on LOS, and do not require a breach action to cross.

Troops/guns attempting to improve position whilst conformed to the base of these hedgerows receive an additional +1 modifier.

Gorgast starting positions

The Soviets begin the game with a foothold in Gorgast (see the front line marked on the map). All the adjacent built up areas are vacant and can not be set up as occupied by the German player.

Suspected positions and first fire modifier

The front lines had been stable for around 1 month and the Soviet forces had had plenty of time to reconnoitre the German defences, including mine fields, wire, and the trenches themselves. All German and Soviet positions (but not units – ie) to a depth of 20" are considered suspected for the purposes of direct and indirect fire. German first fire modifiers, however, still apply.

Soviet Artillery

Soviet Artillery is oriented on a South East to North West Axis.

At his option the Soviet player may pre-plan the first three turns of fire from his off board artillery. Pre-planned fire arrives automatically (although a role is still made for danger close. This fire does not constitute a "barrage".

Command Posts

All commanders are considered to be dug in at the start of the games, and until moved have a command radius of 10".

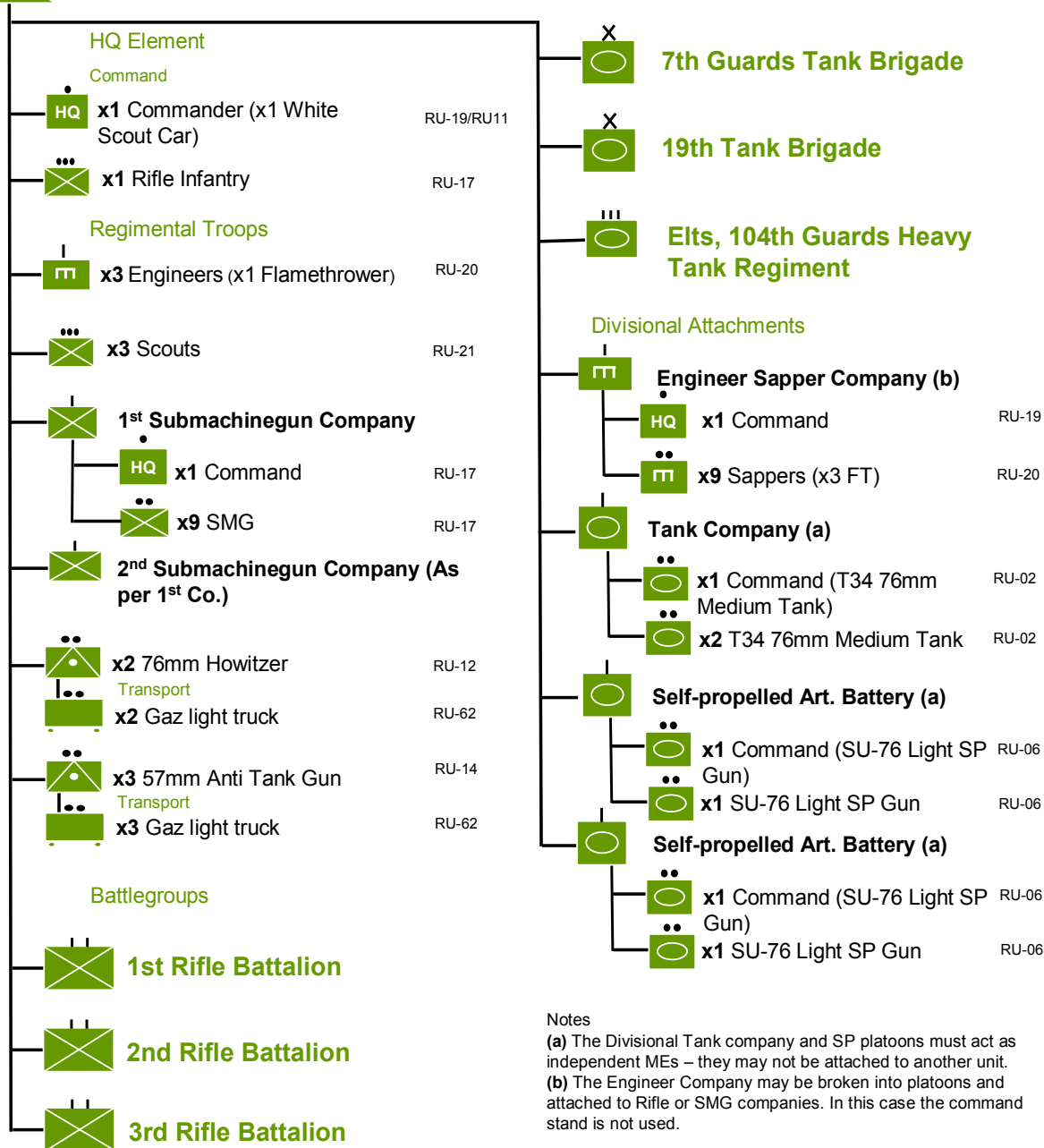
Soviet Order of Battle



Reinforced Elements, 47th Guards Rifle Division, 4th Guards Rifle Corps.



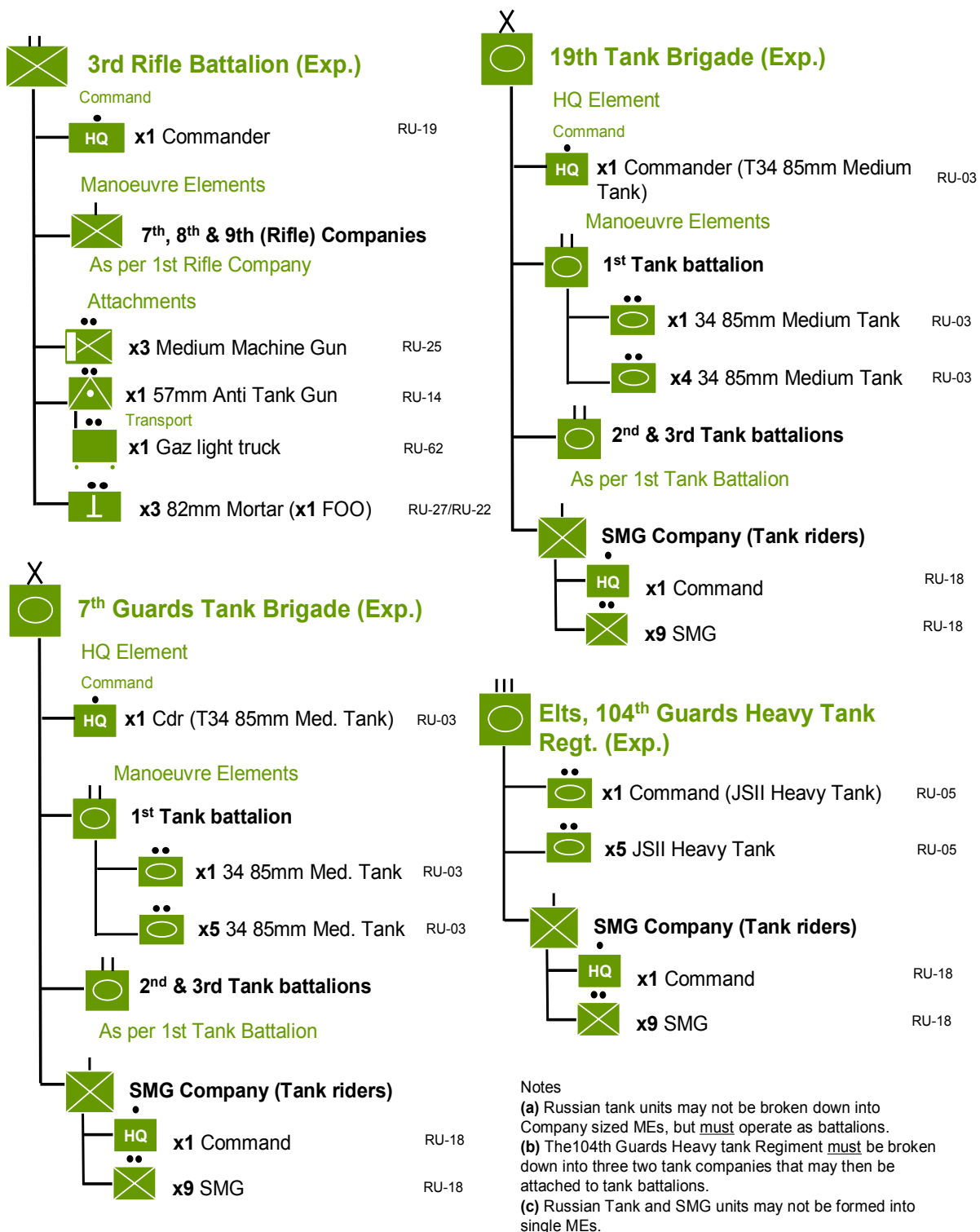
142nd Guards Rifle Regiment (Exp)



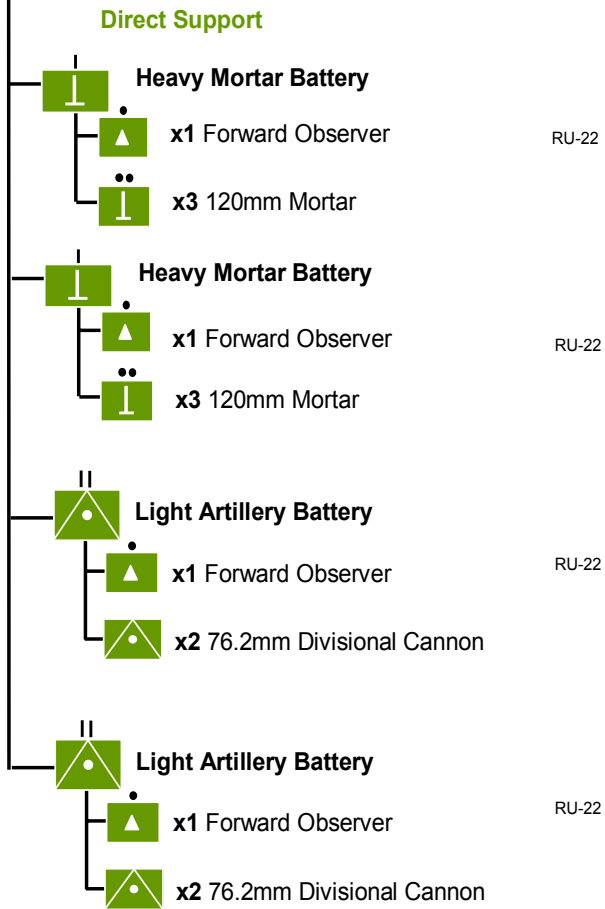
Notes

- (a) The Divisional Tank company and SP platoons must act as independent MEs – they may not be attached to another unit.
- (b) The Engineer Company may be broken into platoons and attached to Rifle or SMG companies. In this case the command stand is not used.





 **142nd Guards Rifle Regiment, Artillery Support**



Notes

- (a)** On the first turn all calls for fire are automatically successful. On turns 2 and 3 calls continue to be automatic providing that the Soviet player provided the umpire with a fire plan prior to the game commencing. Danger close rolls must still be made.
- (b)** No smoke rounds are available to the Soviet player.
- (c)** Soviet FOOs are unable to call for fire in the turn they move, or the subsequent game turn.

German Briefing

Situation

Command Post, Panzer Regiment Muenchberg, 7am, 23 March 1945.

Things are going from bad to worse. Having taken command of the sector 48 hours ago, you have spent the time since reassuring and cajoling the hastily thrown together troops of the Doeberitz Infantry Division stationed to your front. Both the general situation and the increase in Soviet patrolling activity suggest that an attack is imminent, although you have assumed until now that the moment of crisis would be preceded by the usual heavy artillery preparation.

In the meantime you have also been attempting to co-ordinate newly arrived elements of 20th Panzer-Grenadier Division and the Tigers of 502 SS Heavy Tank Battalion with your own forces with the intention of striking the Soviets' southern bridgehead, and widening the "Pipeleine" down which all men and materiel must pass to enter the Kustrin Garrison.

Yesterday was spent with Maj. Benno Weber, commanding officer of Grenadier-Regiment 302, agreeing with him the defensive plan for the area. You noted his *Landseers* to be a worrying mix of boys and elderly men, with only a smattering of experienced officers and NCOs. On top of that there is insufficient wire (or mines) to adequately screen the 302nd trenches, and the high water table is causing havoc with the less than perfect physical condition of the troops. They have, however, had over a month to improve their positions and have been able to develop a reasonable defensive network in that time.

Artillery shells are in short supply, and whilst it should be possible to respond to any Soviet thrust, any sustained counter fire will be all but impossible. Likewise, the Pak fronts of former years are just a fond memory, although there are sufficient Pak40s that it should be possible to slow down, if not stop, any armoured thrust.

On the bright side, the 302nd is well equipped with *panzerfauste* and MG42s, and in your own regiment you have one of the last remaining crack armoured units on the entire Eastern Front, indeed in the entire Wehrmacht. Equipped as you are with Tigers, Panthers, Jadgpanzers and Stugs you are confident that you can stop any initial assault and indeed carry the limited offensive objectives you have been set once your reinforcements arrive.

Then, 30 minutes ago a surprisingly modest barrage fell on the front line 3000 metres in front of your own positions. Assuming this to be the opening bars of a longer recital you continued with your breakfast, but now, right on 7am, the shells have begun falling on your command post and you and your crews are now dashing to their vehicles to take cover from the shelling. As you leap onto the hull of your Tiger you pause and peer through your field glasses towards the village of Gorgast where the assault guns of your 1st Company are located. Through the dust and flames in the early morning light you can make out the outlines of numerous large vehicles on the move. Not only the familiar outline of the T34s, but also the ominous low slung presence of JSIIs, no doubt with the ubiquitous tank riders clinging stubbornly to their sides. Ivan is on the move. You clamber into the turret and pull the hatch down after you, feeling the vehicle begin to move off under you even as you give the order to take up a firing position on the edge of the village.....

Timing

The game is played over 15 Turns.

German Set up

The German player should set up the elements of Doeberitz (including the Gorgast Volksturm) not closer than 10" and not further than 24" away from the Russian front line (with the exception of Gorgast). All stands occupy trenches or improved positions, at the discretion of the German player. In Gorgast the Russian occupies a line of BUS on the southern fringe of the town (see the map), and the German only need leave one empty BUS between himself and the Russian positions. Otherwise, any BUS can be occupied, regardless of distance from the Russian front line. The Golzow Volksturm should be deployed in Golzow.

The detached elements of Muenchberg should be deployed east of a line 10" west of the western edge of Gorgast. These vehicles are dug into improved positions and start the game hull down and with a -1 spotting modifier for dug in.

German Reinforcements

Turn 6 – The Elements of 502SS and II/90th PG Regt are set up in an area 24” deep and 36” wide (ie towards Golzow) from the SW corner of the map (all vehicles must be set up in the area 24” x 24”). These become active on the earlier of:

1. Any element coming under any kind of fire from the enemy
2. Any Russian Unit coming within 10” of any part of these MEs
3. Turn 6.

There is no line of sight from these initial positions in excess of 10” from the area of deployment (ie these units can not see or be seen by Russian units beyond this range). There is, however, a LOS from the upper stories of the Old Soldiers Settlement. These units are not dug in – they are preparing a counter attack to widen the Kustrin Corridor.

Any time beginning on turn 6 - I/90th Panzer-Grenadier Regt enter the playing area anywhere along the Western Map edge, or the road NW of Golzow.

II/90th Panzer-Grenadier Regt. lacks organic transport. The German player may choose to send the half tracks from I/90th back to collect these troops. For this to be allowable the German player must avoid voluntarily approaching closer than 8” to the enemy, and must return directly to II/90th once I/90th has been deployed (ie it needs to have been planned in advance).

The un-detached units of Muenchberg are dug into concealed positions marked on the map by the German player. One company must be placed within 4” of Golzow (and is considered on the edge of a built up area for spotting purposes), the other not less than 20” and not more than 30” from the Old Soldiers Settlement anywhere in an Arc from NW to NE. The units may engage in fire combat at any time, with spotting performed by the Soviet player as normal and any spotted units placed on the board. Units may not move closer to the enemy until activated. Activation will occur when either (i) a soviet armoured vehicle advances to within 20” of any part of either manoeuvre element or (ii) A vehicle of 502SS moves further east than the eastern most part of either element.

Victory conditions

Draw	Germans partially hold their initial positions
German Minor Victory	Germans hold any part of their frontline positions
German Major Victory	Germans hold not less than half their frontline positions (at the umpires discretion as to what constitutes half).

Losses / kills are disregarded from the victory conditions of both sides.

Boggy Ground

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Command Posts

All commanders are considered to be dug in at the start of the games, and until moved have a command radius of 10".

Mines & Wire

The German Player may place 12 square inches of mixed AT/AP mines and 20 inches of barbed wire anywhere on the board.

German Artillery

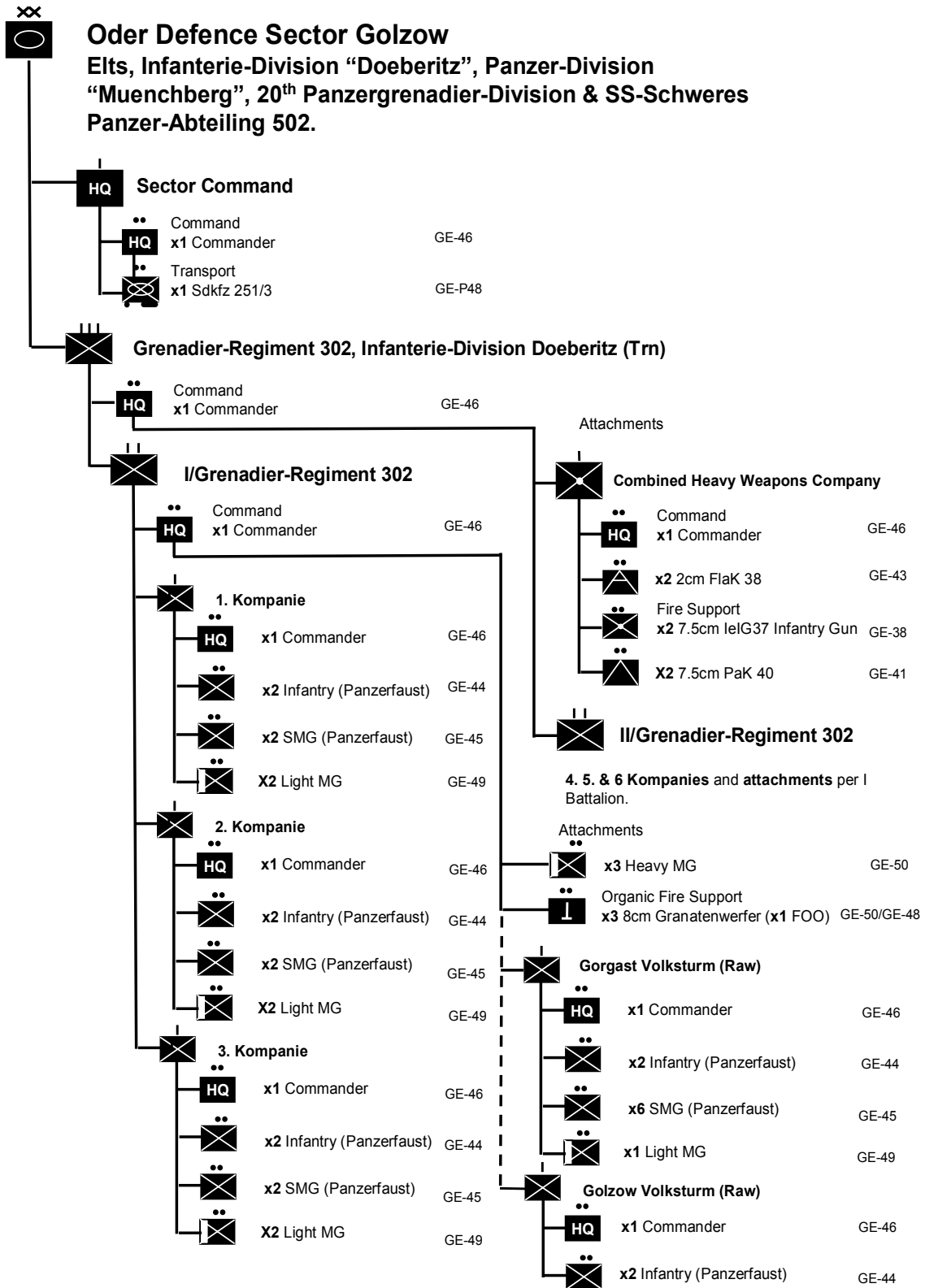
German artillery fire is orientated on a West to East axis.

The Germans are short of ammunition. All calls for fire from off-board artillery or mortars receive a +1 modifier to the dice roll.

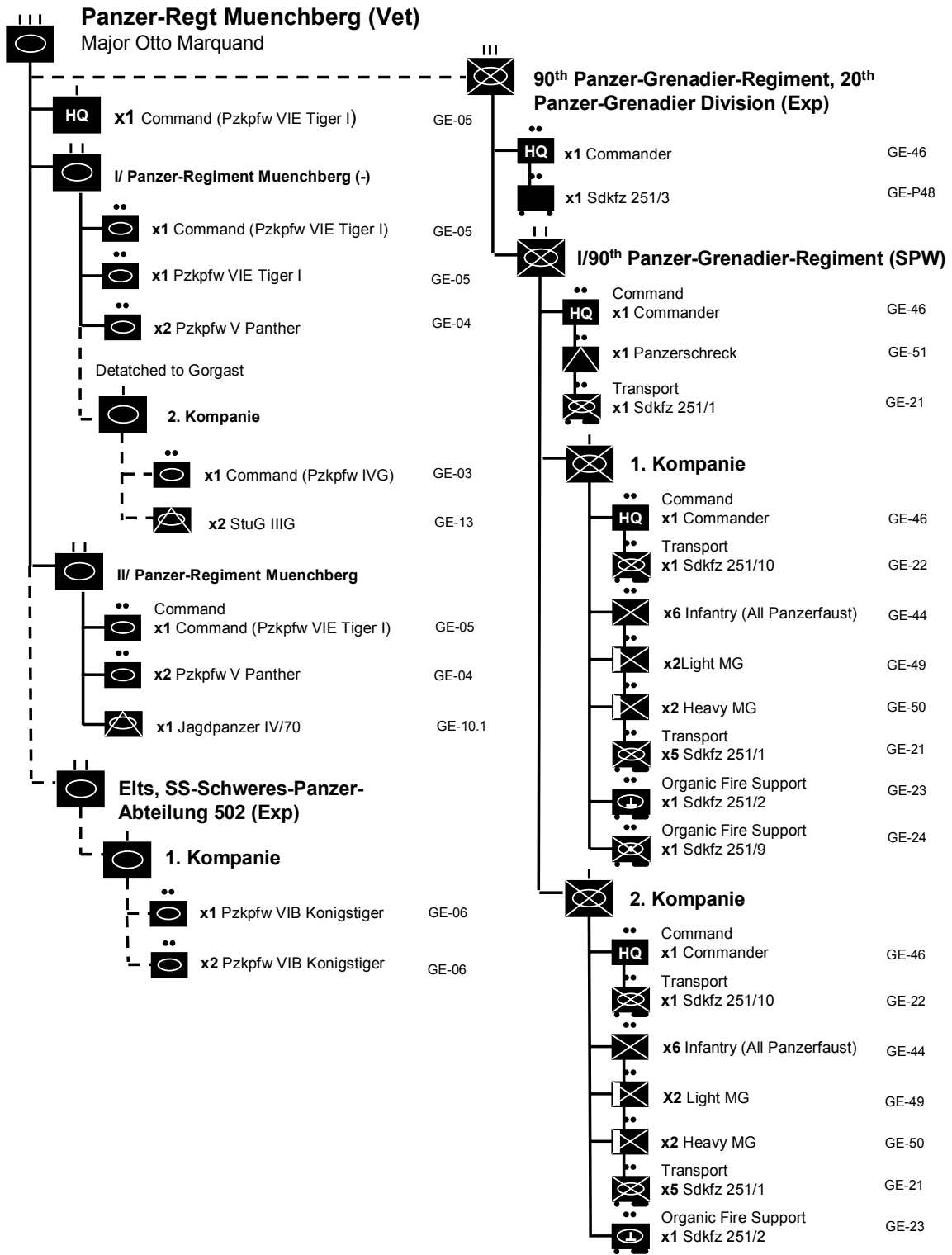
Volksturm

The Gorgast Volksturm receive a +2 manoeuvre roll modifier and a +1 close combat modifier as long as they are within the Gorgast built up area. Any Volksturm unit which is no longer within the Gorgast boundary immediately loses the benefit of this modifier. The Golzow Volksturm is simply Raw.

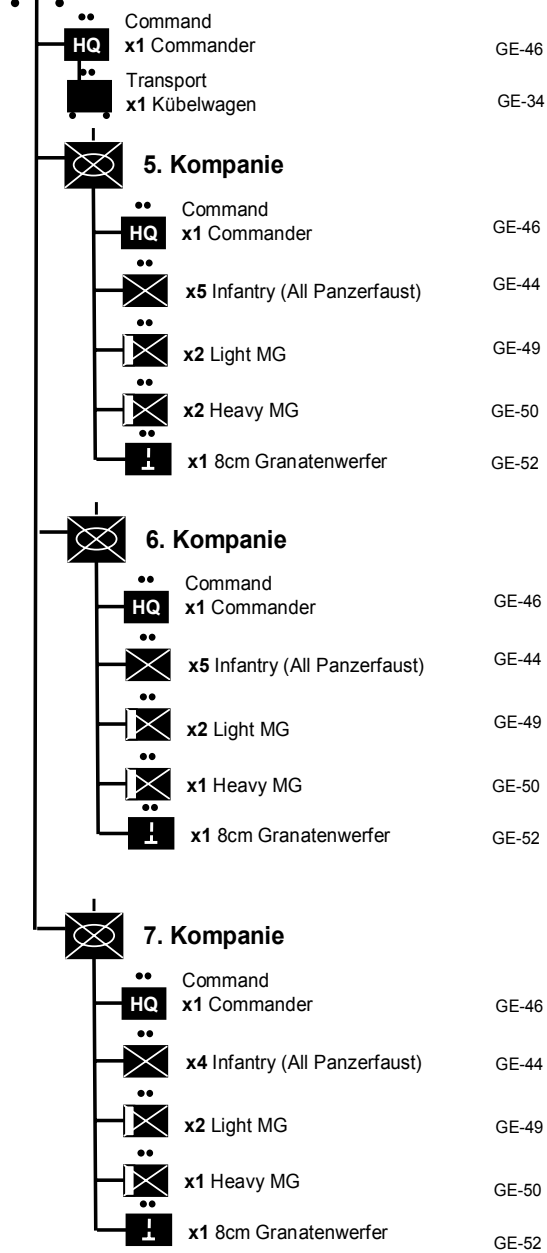
German Order of Battle



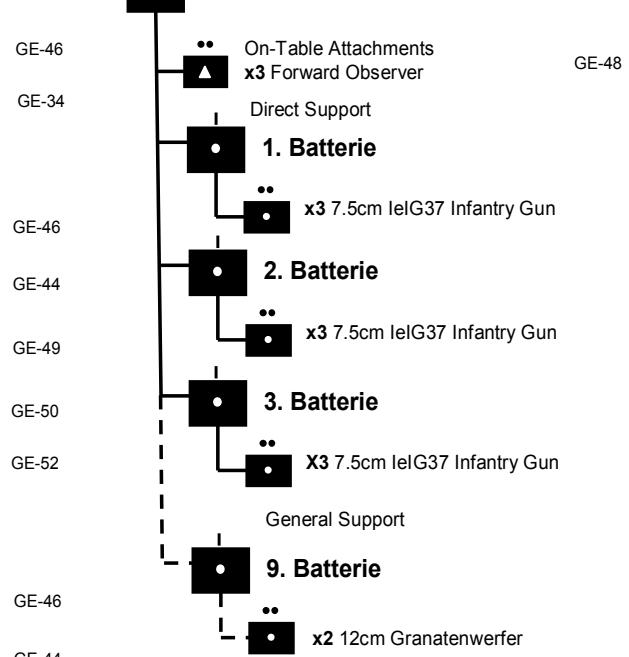
NB – For SMG with P'faust use GE44 vs Vehicles



II/90th Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment (Mot.)



I/Artillery Regiment 303 (Exp)



Springtime on the Oder - Map

One Foot



- Key**
- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Metalled Road | Contour | Built up area |
| Farm Track | Soviet Front Line | Woods |
| Railway | Alte Oder | |

