

Operation Mercury - Maleme

Scenario written by Bill Slavin for BF:WW 2

Maleme Airfield, May 20, 1941

This scenario deals with the fighting in New Zealand 22nd Battalion's sector, specifically around Maleme airfield and the Tavronitis bridge on May 20, 1941. It is only part of a larger action in this area.

This was the opening gambit of Operation Mercury, the German airborne invasion of Crete. Thirteen days later the last of the defenders withdrew from the island, but the blow they had dealt the attackers signaled the end of major German airborne operations for the duration of the war.

The Germans knew that control of an airfield on Crete was vital to the success of the mission, and Maleme, among others, was targeted on the first day. Equally important in the Maleme sector was the high ground around Point 107, which dominated the airfield and made it largely unusable if still in enemy hands.

The defenders were undersupplied and bombing had disrupted Allied communications to such an extent that the day mainly consisted of confused and isolated fighting. But with the German III Battalion landing in the middle of 5th Brigade positions east of the airfield and being mostly eliminated the remaining three battalions of Assault Regiment Group West had to complete the task.

By the end of the day elements of the 22nd still hung on to parts of the airfield and Point 107 was firmly in the hands of the defenders, but bad communications again lead to faulty reading of the situation, and the New Zealanders withdrew, leaving the airfield firmly in German control. From that point on the battle for Crete had arguably been lost.

Duration

20 turns

Turn Sequence

The Germans move first.

Special Turn Events

Turn 1

German 3 Kp. and Specialstrosstrupp Brucke are placed on board using the glider landing procedures described in the orders of battle below. German attackers cannot enter the bombardment zone on Turn 1 without being disordered.

Turns 1 and 2

A massive preliminary aerial bombardment kept the defenders with their heads down for the first portion of the attack, giving time for the attackers to close. To simulate this, consider all the defenders unable to move and disordered for the first two turns. At the beginning of turn three the disorder effects of the bombardment are automatically removed, although any disorders or suppressions as result of combat in the first two turns

stay in effect. In addition the positions are enveloped by a dust cloud (covering the area east of the Tavronitis Valley) raised by the preliminary bombardment that will reduce spotting by two (treat as smoke) on Turn 1, and by one (treat as dissipating smoke) on Turn 2.

Turn 4-5

8 Kp. arrives at west edge of board within 5" of coastal road. Roll a d10 at the beginning of the German maneuver phase on turn 4. On a roll of 1-5 the reinforcements arrive immediately, on a 6-10 they arrive on turn 5.

Turn 5-6

Remnants of 4 Kp. enter Tavronitis Valley, south edge of board. **Note that this ME is considered to be at 50% casualties on the maneuver table.** Roll a d10 at the beginning of the German maneuver phase on turn 5. On a roll of 1-5 the reinforcements arrive immediately, on a 6-10 they arrive on turn 6.

Turn 6-7

IV Battalion arrives at west edge of board within 5" of coastal road, along with forward observer for 13 Kompanie (off board rocket launchers and mortars). Roll a d10 at the beginning of the German maneuver phase on turn 6. On a roll of 1-5 the reinforcements arrive immediately, on a 6-10 they arrive on turn 7.

Turn 7

The NZ reserve force, (Matilda), "A" company and Bn. HQ (+ attachments) are released from starting points. To reflect the mechanical problems experienced historically by the Matildas at Maleme, once the unit is released the unit's maneuver roll will also reflect a chance for breakdown and elimination from the game.

Turns 1-3: No breakdown

Turns 4-6: 1-3 on maneuver roll indicates breakdown

Turns 7+: 1-5 on maneuver roll indicates breakdown

If enemy units approach within 5" of this unit or engage it with direct fire, the NZ commander may opt to release it earlier.

Victory Conditions

Germans

Victory: Eliminating or disordering all enemy units within 5 inches of the Maleme airfield and Point 107, or reducing all enemy ME's to 25%. (Armour cannot hold an objective).





New Zealanders

Victory: Having at least one undisordered unit within 5 inches of both enemy objectives, or reducing all enemy ME's to 25%. (Armour cannot hold an objective).

Draw

Germans achieve only one of their objectives or both sides have all ME's reduced to 25%.



-  Airfield (Open terrain, no units hull down or dug in)
 -  Fields (Open terrain)
 -  Olive Orchards and Vineyards (Sparse Edge/Deep - Rocky Terrain on slopes)
 -  Tall Crops and Brush (Sparse Edge/Deep)
 -  Level 1 (Treat as steep slope)
 -  Level 2 (Treat as steep slope)
 -  Level 3 (Treat as steep slope)
 -  Level 4 (Treat as steep slope)
 -  Level 5 (Treat as steep slope)
 -  BUS (Stone)
-
-  Paved Road
 -  Unpaved Road
 -  Canal (Treat as shallow ditch. Troops emplaced within treated as dug in.)
 -  Low Embankment (Sparse Edge/ Hard Cover - see notes)

Terrain Notes

Size - Map divisions are 12" across, so the battle is fought on a 4'x4' area

Elevations – Elevation levels are approximately 20 meters each. Treat all slopes as “steep”. Orchards and vineyards on hillsides are also considered “rocky”, fields are open terrain.

Ridge Line – The ridgeline running down from Pt. 107 blocks LOS. Units within 2" of the ridge do not have LOS blocked.

River Bed – The Tavronitis R. (blue lines) itself is a dry bed, and without cover. Treat as open ground.

Road to Pt. 107 – The road running up the hill to Pt. 107 negates terrain and slope penalties.

Embankment – The embankment is a special terrain feature that gives defensive and LOS benefits to units conformed to it. It gave units a sheltered area in which they could form up without being subjected to fire from above.

a) Stands within the Tavronitis valley that are conformed to the embankment (i.e they are on the “lower” side) cannot be seen by or see units on the same side of the valley on higher terrain unless those units are within 1" or conformed to the embankment. The embankment does not effect the LOS for units on the other side of the valley.

b) Stands outside the Tavronitis valley that are conformed to the embankment (i.e. they are on the “upper” side) are considered to be in hard cover and are spotted as if they are at the edge of “sparse terrain”. They may see and be seen by units on higher elevation and also units in the valley.

c) It costs troop stands half of their move to cross the embankment. Vehicle units must breach the embankment to cross it.

Canal- Treat as shallow ditch. The canal is dry. Units sighting or firing at other units within the canal, if an LOS can be drawn, do not get cover and concealment penalties. Units emplaced within the canal are considered dug-in to fire from outside the canal.

RAF Compound – As this area would include small outbuildings, supply dumps, etc., treat this entire area as “Sparse edge/deep”.

Bridge – The bridge is considered both a normal road bridge and a linear obstacle. Any unit ON the bridge is treated as if on a road in a “defile”. Units in the valley but not on the bridge receive a bonus if the LOS/LOF passes through bridge. If the LOS passes through the bridge, move down one on spotting table. If the LOF passes through the bridge and the target unit is conformed to the bridge, treat the target as if it is in hard cover.

Airfield - Units may not be in or enter hull-down/dug-in positions on the airfield.

New Zealanders

New Zealander Commander's Briefing

The long-expected German invasion of Crete has begun. Paratroops and gliders fill the skies, and battle rages all around. Where the brunt of the attack will fall is yet unknown, but with areas to the east and south held by other battalions of 5th Brigade, you have oriented the majority of your defense to face west and north. Your under-supplied troops have done the best they can with the resources at hand, and now it remains to be seen if that is enough to carry the day.

Brigadier Hargest's orders are to keep the airfield and Point 107 from falling into enemy hands. The outcome of the Battle for Crete may depend upon it!

New Zealanders starting positions

All units must be east of Tavronitis valley. It is recommended that hidden and dummy unit markers be used.

Historically, "C" Company and the antiaircraft batteries were positioned north of the paved road around the airfield, "D" Company along the edge of the valley south of the paved road and the other units around Point 107.

The Bofors must set up north of the coastal road, within 5" of the airfield.

"A" company and Bn. HQ (+ attachments) set up within 10" of point 107.

Matilda sets up within 5" of the HQ.

RAF Personnel set up within RAF compound.

Carrier platoon, carriers, "C" and "D" Companies, mortar and MG platoons can set up anywhere east of Tavronitis valley.

All NZ units begin dug in, hull down or in improved positions. They also receive 20 stands (1.5" long) of barbed wire, which should be placed on board using hidden markers (spot as troops in similar terrain).

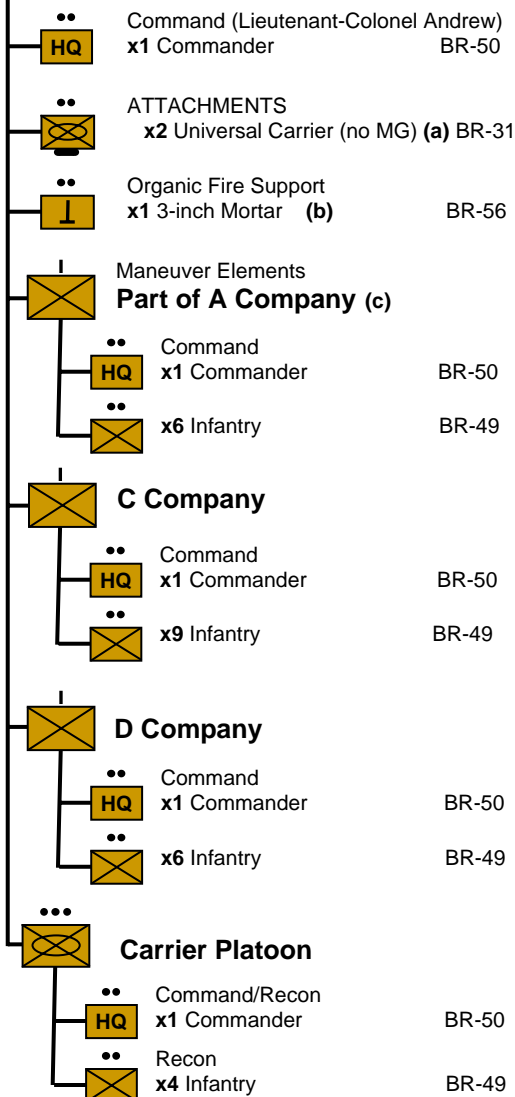
Notes on 27 Battery off board fire support

The guns of 27 Battery were composed of a mix of Italian and French 75 mm guns and British 3.7" howitzers. A and B Troops, with five guns in total, were positioned to fire in indirect support, but support was intermittent due to poor communications. Restrictions noted on the New Zealand orbats are an attempt to represent this situation.

A third troop, C Troop, had no such problems as it was positioned northeast of Modhion on a hill with a commanding view. Because of lack of instruments, the guns were forced to fire over open sights, sights that had been cobbled together from wood and chewing gum! However, its field of fire was restricted to targets east of the airfield, and therefore it is not part of this scenario.

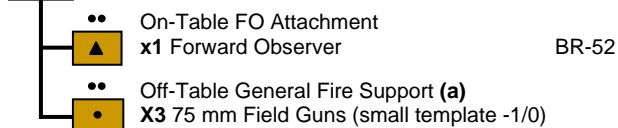
New Zealanders

22nd Battalion (All experienced)



- (a). These units are not part of the carrier company, may not have MG's mounted, but may be assigned as desired.
- (b). Because of communication problems, limited to self spotting. 2 smoke mission available.
- (c). Remainder of A Co. and B Co. are not part of the scenario.
- (d). The carrier platoon was stripped of its transport and Bren guns on evacuation from Greece.

OFF BOARD FIRE SUPPORT 27 Artillery Battery (A and B Troops)

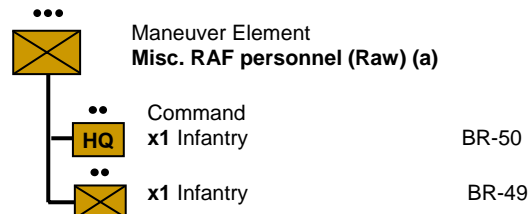


- (a). Disrupted communications limit off board fire support to "general" and five successful missions. Support can only be called in by the FOO and originates from the east side of the board.

ATTACHED MANEUVER ELEMENTS

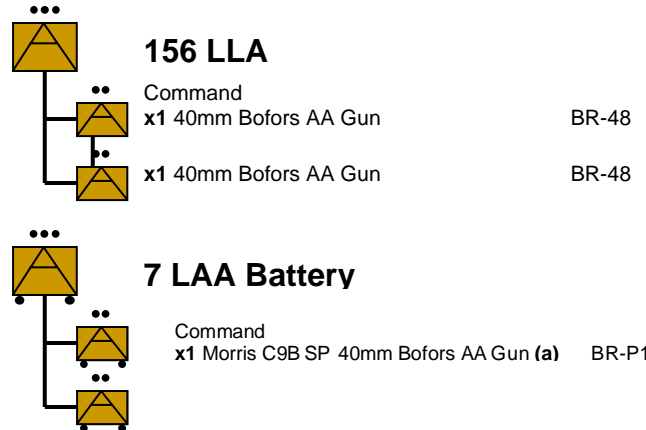


- (a). May be attached to other ME's. Due to ammunition restrictions, no grazing fire is allowed.



- (a). These units represent a significant number of RAF base personnel that were armed and incorporated into the defense. They essentially represented a nuisance factor - to the defense.

SEPARATE MANEUVER ELEMENTS



- (a). This model may be substituted with BR-48, as the units were emplaced and really shouldn't move. It's also important to note that the AA was not tied into 22nd Battalion's command structure and operated as two separate ME's.

Germans

German Commander's Briefing

Your crack troops of Assault Regiment Group West have been chosen to spearhead the airborne invasion of Crete. Early seizure of an airfield on Crete is of paramount importance to the success of Operation Mercury, and Maleme Airfield is your initial objective. Point 107, immediately to the south of the airfield is of equal importance, as failure to control those heights will mean the airfield will remain unusable.

The enemy is thought not to be strong here, especially east of Maleme, where III Battalion will land and form up, joining the attack from that direction. Early elimination of the anti aircraft guns known to protect the airfield will help insure a quick end to this preliminary stage of the battle.

German starting positions

Historically 3 Kompanie landed at the mouth of the Tavronitis R. (north of the bridge) and Specialstrosstrupp Brucke (tasked with seizing the bridge) south of the bridge (see map). The German attackers were devastated on landing by ground fire, and to a lesser extent glider crashes. The orders of battle for this scenario represent the German strength after landing with losses due to ground fire already been subtracted from the initial organizations.

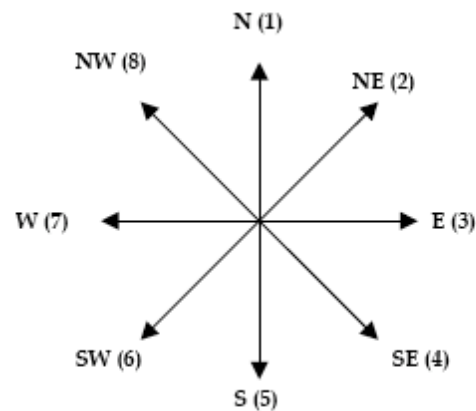
Gliders

The attacking player may select a landing point for each starting ME anywhere within the Tavronitis Valley between the embankments. Landing points should be far enough away from bombardment area as to not place troops within it and should be determined prior to seeing the New Zealand set up. Landing points for Specialstrosstrupp Brucke and 3 Kompanie must be at least 10" apart and 6" from the bridge. The attacker should bear in mind that any units that land in the sea or within 1" of enemy positions are automatically eliminated.

For actual placement of units, select a mid point for each group and then determine the actual landing position for each unit in the group. For each unit, roll a D10 for direction of each unit, with 9-10 being on target, and all other numbers representing points of the compass (see the chart to the right). Roll a second D 6 for number of inches from that point, (unless on target).

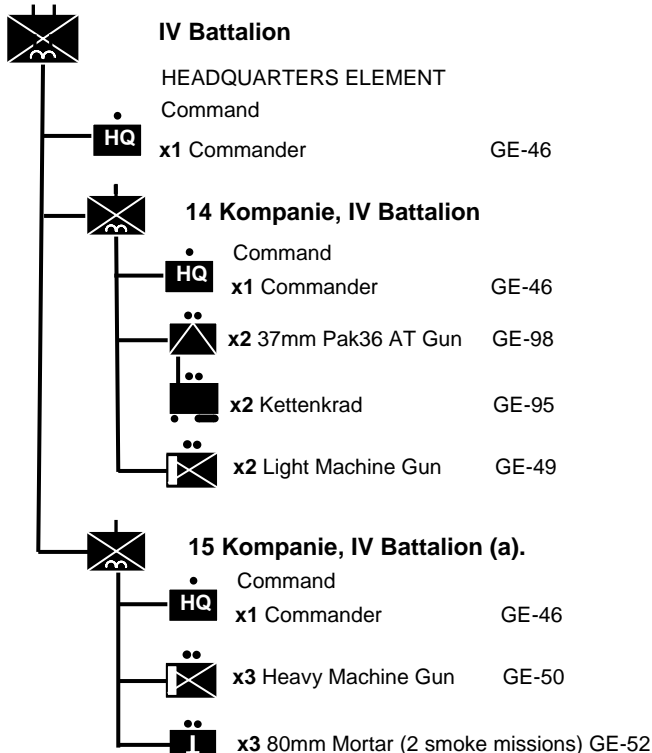
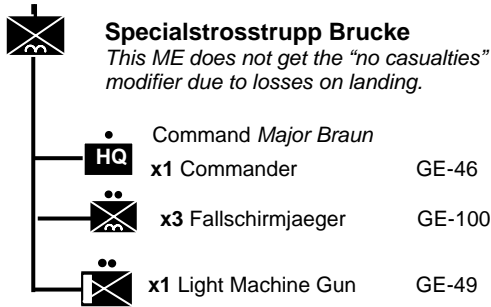
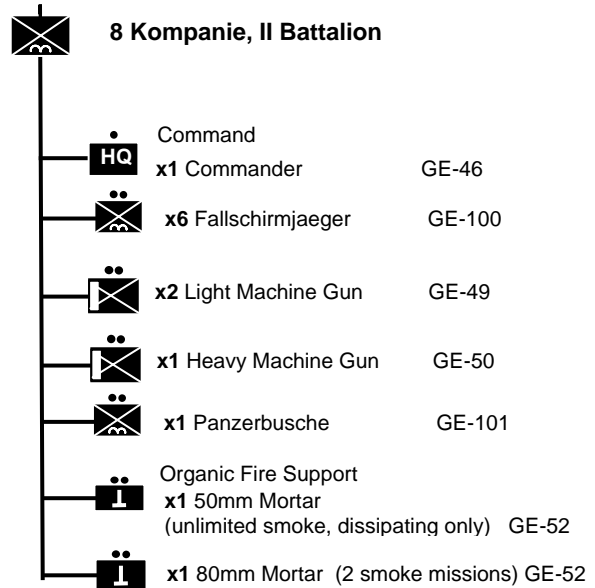
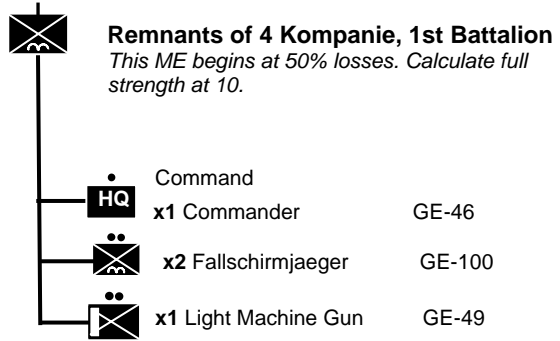
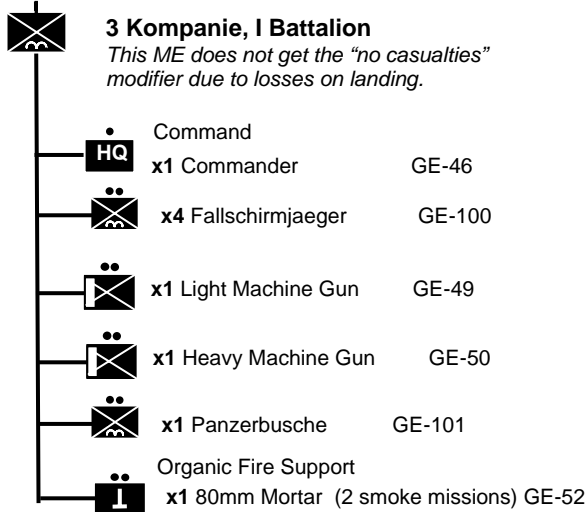
Units that land on the same point land beside one another. Units may be placed with desired facing.

Units that land in the sea or within 1" of enemy positions are considered automatically eliminated.



Germans

Assault Regiment Group West (All veteran)



Due to ammunition restrictions, 13 Kp. is limited to 5 fire missions and no concentrations. German off board fire support can be called in as a single mission by the FO (organic) or Commanders (general). In this case it would be 3 templates, thickened in the middle by the Do-Gerat's single small template. The 10.5mm mortars and Do-Gerat 38's may also fire separate missions, including battery level missions by the mortars (concentrations excluded) 2 smoke missions per stand are available.

(a).15 Kp. HMG's and mortars may function as a separate ME or be assigned to other ME's on arrival to the board. If assigned. remove command stand.

Designers Note

A battery of 3" AA guns as well as a battery of 4" guns of the Royal Marines Mobile Naval Base Defense Organization were also positioned on Point 107. I've left these off the map and ORBATS, as I can find no record that they or their crews were ever directly involved in the fighting. It seems they were withdrawn intact at some point during the day.

Bibliography and sources

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The Royal Marines 1939-93, Nick van der Bijl and Paul Hannon

The Battle of Crete, D.W. Pissen

Also terrific information gleaned from the pages of the Fallschirmjager group on the *Axis History Forum* <http://forum.axishistory.com/viewforum.php?f=83>

