

# Smashing The Crust!

The Irish Guards at Aalst, 18th September 1944

A 'Battlefront: WWII' Scenario

*By R Mark Davies*

*'We had been hit hard but we got through [to Valkenswaard] and we expected that, with the airborne in front of us this would be another Monty victory. We were used to hard fighting but we were sure we would succeed.'* – Guardsman Fitzgerald, Irish Guards

*'There is no doubt about it the enemy has broken through.'* – Telephone log, LXXXVIII Korps

*'Divisional HQ was mortared during the night; the news gave general pleasure'* – Major Desmond Fitzgerald, Irish Guards

## **Scenario Overview**

Operation 'Market-Garden' has begun. At 1400hrs, 17th September 1944, a massive rolling artillery barrage signalled the commencement of the breakout from the Neerpelt Bridgehead by the British XXX Corps. Almost simultaneously, Allied paratroops from 1st Allied Airborne Army began dropping around Eindhoven, Son, Veghel, Grave, Nijmegen and Arnhem with the objective of securing all the bridges between XXX Corps and Germany.

The forward antitank defences of *I Fallschirmjäger Armee* were pulverised by the initial artillery onslaught, but enough SS armoured self-propelled guns and *fallschirmjäger* armed with light *panzerfaust* antitank rockets survived long enough to give the Allied spearhead (the Irish Guards Battlegroup) a bloody nose south of the town of Valkenswaard. However, hundreds of rocket-firing RAF Typhoons were swift to exact vengeance on the Irish Guards' behalf and the ponderous armoured column slowly rolled north once again, stopping every so often as a *panzerfaust* streaked out of the bushes to claim another victim.

The 'Irish Group' was to have linked up with the US 101st Airborne Division at Eindhoven by nightfall on the first day. However, having taken Valkenswaard, they were ordered not to leave the town undefended until follow-up forces had relieved them. A battlegroup formed by the 1st Dorsets (50th Division) and 15/19th Hussars (11th Armoured Division) was earmarked for this task though found itself in an identical situation – it was ordered not to move north until other units took over the task of defending a field artillery regiment in their care! Consequently, a halt was called for the night and the timetable slipped by twelve hours – to the fury of the Irish Guards' commanders (and latterly, to the fury of the airborne troops).

At long last, after a frustrating night in Valkenswaard, the confusion was sorted out and the Guards Armoured Division was once again rolling north towards Eindhoven. However, the German defensive 'crust' was still to be conclusively smashed and waiting for them were the men of *Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 'Hoffmann'*...

## **Terrain Notes**

- Squares on the map are 480 yards wide (12 inches), giving a total table size of 4x6 feet.
- For the sake of clarity, I have not marked all hedges, ditches and field boundaries on the map. However, all roads should be bordered by low or high hedges or brick walls closer to the settlements. Similarly, the open spaces should be crisscrossed by numerous hedges – particularly in the area between the main villages and the Tongelreep stream, where fields and allotments were very densely packed. This was very close terrain!
- Roads are all paved.
- Dark grey roads are classified as Streets – dense area concealment and soft cover.
- The Tongelreep Stream and the marshes in the southwest corner of the map are impassable.
- A large railway embankment defines the western table edge.
- Due to the plethora of small ditches in this low-lying area, troop stands (but not guns or vehicles) receive an additional +1 Improve Position modifier.
- All woodland is classed as Dense With Undergrowth and therefore necessitates a bog-down check for all vehicular movement.
- All open terrain is classified as Boggy and thus necessitates a bog-down check for all vehicular movement.
- The tower of Aalst Church (marked with a cross in the centre of Aalst) is classed as being two levels high and is therefore the only high point in the area.



## **Select Bibliography**

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