

Operation Spark

The Battle for Marino

January 1943

Scenario written by Iain Craven

With contributions and play testing by Richard Lawrence

After a series of costly, and occasionally catastrophic, failed offensives launched in 1942 to attempt the relief of Leningrad, the final months of that year saw relative calm descend on the Northern front. The Russians were faced with rebuilding the 2nd Shock army for the second time, whilst both sides attention was focused on the decisive battle at Stalingrad far to the south.

By January Soviet forces had recovered sufficient strength for them to consider another major offensive. General Meretskov, commanding the Volkov Front, had realised that previous attacks had foundered on the inability of his command to gain bridgeheads over the Neva River. Now, in the deep winter the river was frozen solid – sufficient to hold T-60 tanks (if not T-34s that would still require bridges to get them across to the far bank). By attacking the extended German positions along the Neva at the same time as German defences to the east of the Siniavino Heights it was hoped that the Germans would be unable to transfer forces between the two sides of their position and thus increase the chances of success for both assaults.

The relatively weak German positions on the Neva would therefore be pounded by the largest concentration of artillery yet seen on the Northern front and then attacked by four rifle divisions and one tank brigade. Marino, in the centre of the front line to be attacked would be the responsibility of the 136th Rifle Division. Of stout construction, and heavily fortified by its defenders from the 170th Infantry Division's Radfahr-Abteilung 240, it would bear the brunt of the first day of the Soviet offensive.

Soviet Briefing

Situation - 0800 Tuesday 12 January 1943

Command Post, Colonel Dimitri Bessanov, 97th Rifle Regiment.

Leningrad must be relieved. Following in the footsteps of the heroes of Stalingrad, it is now our turn to put behind us the failures of 1942 and act decisively to break the siege of the cradle of the revolution. The first step to breaking the siege is to take the Neva line and force the facists back from the shores of Lake Ladoga.

It will not be easy – whilst few in number our patrols indicate that the enemy is well dug-in and has fortified his positions. However, you will not be without support – you have been allocated a battalion of tanks from 61st Tank Brigade and a full company of engineers. Marino is an isolated strongpoint – its capture will leave a wide gap in the Neva Line through which the rest of 136th Rifle Division can pass.

Timing

The game lasts for 15 turns.

Russian Set up

The Russian Front line runs along the tree line to the West of the River Neva (top of the map). All Russian units are considered to be entrenched (+2 for direct and indirect fire).

Russian Reinforcements

The Russian player may deploy his forces in any order and to any timescale he sees fit subject to the following:

- 1) All stands (excluding FOOs and the Regimental Command Post) must leave the Russian front line within six turns and may not voluntarily return during the course of the game.
- 2) The timing of the arrival of units must be set out in advance on paper, and shown either to the umpire, or to the German player at the end of the game.
- 3) All Russian units get a free move up to the front line (ie they appear in the trenches on the turn that they are brought on per the Russian players list), and must advance out of the trenches on the same turn.

Victory conditions

The BUS marked on the map in grey are worth one point, those marked in brown are worth two points.

Victory Type	
Russian Major Victory	Russians occupy or most recently occupied with a Russian stand at least 22 points of BUS.
Russian Minor Victory	Russians occupy or most recently occupied with a Russian stand at least 14 points of BUS.
Draw	Russians occupy or most recently occupied with a Russian stand at least 4 points of BUS.
German Minor Victory	Russians occupy or most recently occupied with a Russian fewer than 4 points of BUS.
German Major Victory	All of the BUS in Marino occupied or most recently occupied by a German stand.

Snow

The air temperature on the morning of 12 January was -9 degrees Fahrenheit (-23 degrees centigrade). The River Neva is frozen and is passable to both infantry and tanks along its entire length.

The snow had been falling for 3 months. The area terrain feature “deep snow” is therefore in effect. Troops and tracked vehicles move at half speed. Any man-handled guns will move at half speed and will have to take a bog-down check per the bog down rules.

Buildings & Trenches

The buildings of Marino are of solid concrete construction and receive a +2 modifier vs direct and indirect fire.

Trenches also receive a +2 modifier. The troops in trenches may move within them without incurring the +1 to spot modifier.

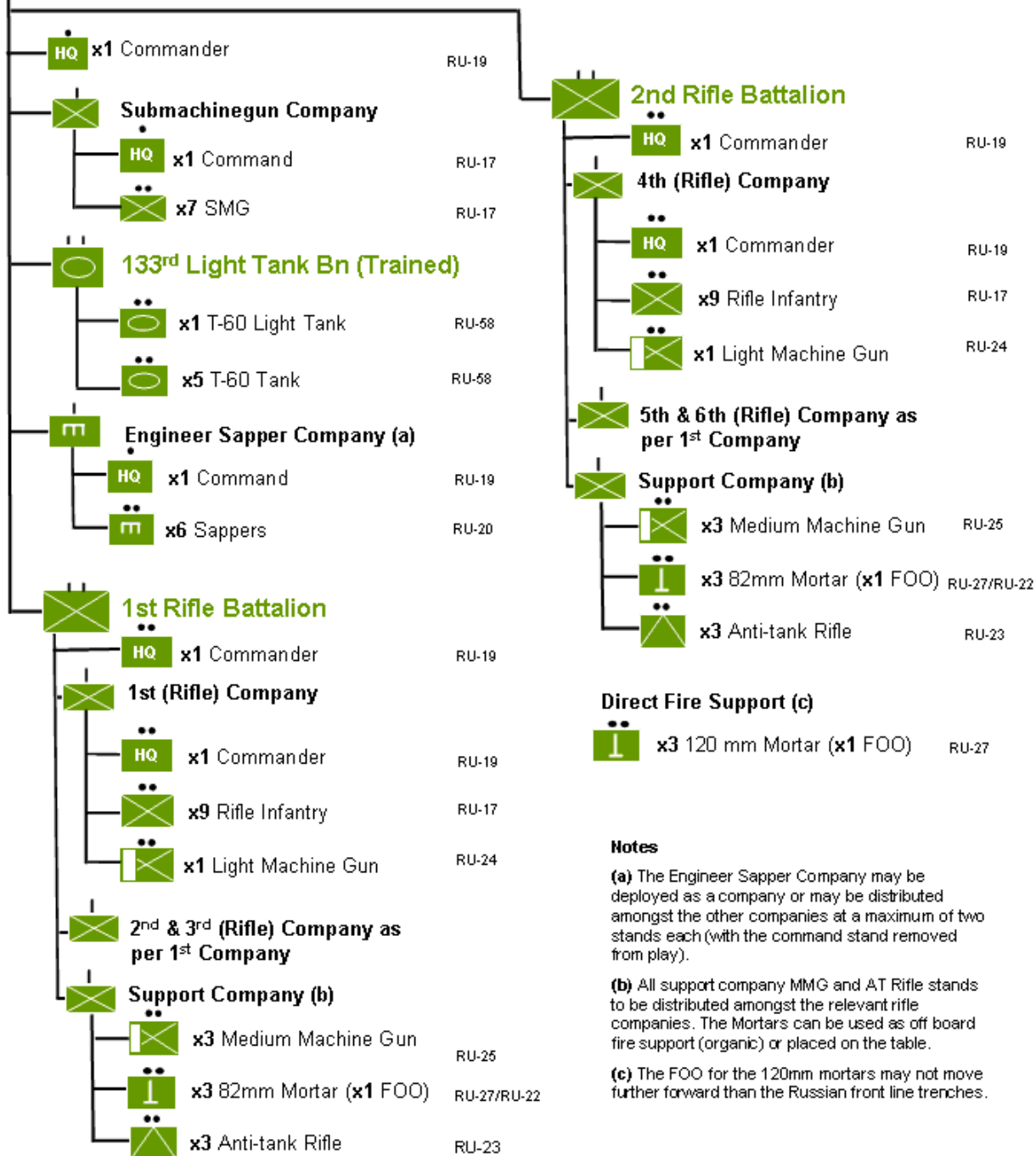
Command Posts

The Regimental command post is considered dug in and retains a 10” command radius until the stand is moved.

Soviet Order of Battle

XX
 Elements, 136th Rifle Division and 61st Tank Brigade, 67th Army.

III
 97th Rifle Regiment (Experienced)



Notes

- (a)** The Engineer Sapper Company may be deployed as a company or may be distributed amongst the other companies at a maximum of two stands each (with the command stand removed from play).
- (b)** All support company MMG and AT Rifle stands to be distributed amongst the relevant rifle companies. The Mortars can be used as off board fire support (organic) or placed on the table.
- (c)** The FOO for the 120mm mortars may not move further forward than the Russian front line trenches.

German Briefing

Situation - 0800 Tuesday 12 January 1943

Command Post, Oberstleutnant Horst Albinus, Radfahr-Abteilung 240

After days of increasing patrol activity the Russians launched their expected offensive this morning with a two hour artillery bombardment which thankfully failed to make any great impression upon your positions. However, you are isolated from other formations along the Neva line (which are also under attack) and acutely aware of the importance of holding the river to enable the siege of Leningrad to be effectively maintained.

The Marino Strongpoint has been developed over the course of the last year and you are both well dug in and protected by belts of wire and anti-personnel mines and although relatively few in number, the 300 odd men of your reconnaissance battalion are well equipped, experienced and despite the biting temperatures, confident that they can hold their positions. Your mission, at least is simple – you must hold the Marino Strongpoint.

Timing

The game lasts for 15 turns.

German Set up

The German forces are set up anywhere to the East of the Neva River. The German player may place up to 36" of trenches, 48" of barbed wire and 12"x1" of anti-personnel mines. Any German units not placed in trenches are considered dug into improved positions. The German player deploys using hidden unit markers and may place 55 markers in total.

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The snow had been falling for 3 months. The area terrain feature "deep snow" is therefore in effect. Troops and tracked vehicles move at half speed. Any man-handled guns will move at half speed and will have to take a bog-down check per the bog down rules.

Buildings & Trenches

The buildings of Marino are of solid concrete construction and receive a +2 modifier vs direct and indirect fire. The German player may nominate two BUS as fortified. These receive an additional +1 modifier for direct fire only. Trenches receive a +2 modifier. The troops in trenches may move within them without incurring the +1 to spot modifier.

Command Posts

All German Command stands are considered dug in and retain a 10" command radius until the stand is moved.

German Artillery

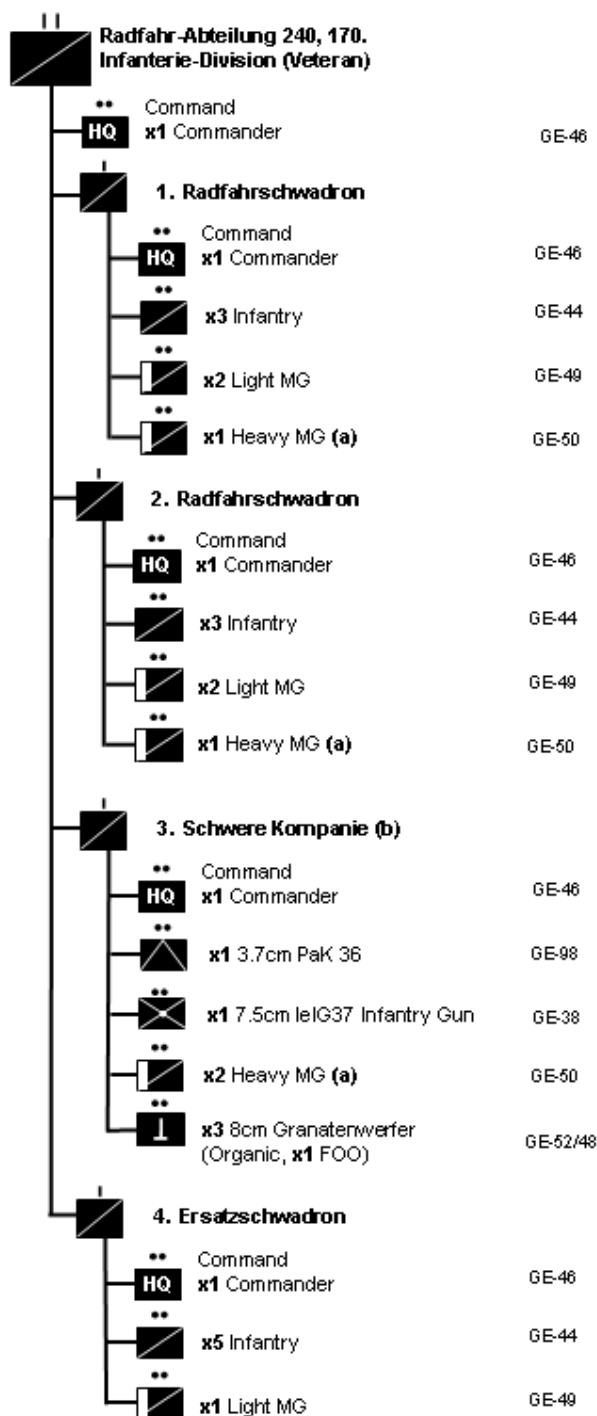
The entire German front around Lake Ladoga was attacked at the same time. No additional Artillery support is available in addition to the organic mortars of 240 Radfahr-Abteilung.

Grazing Fire

The German HMGs may use the Grazing Fire rules to be found at:

<http://www.fireandfury.com/extra/mggrazing.shtml>

German Order of Battle



(a) German HMGs may use the "Grazing Fire" per the rules at: www.fireandfury.com/extramggrazing.shtml

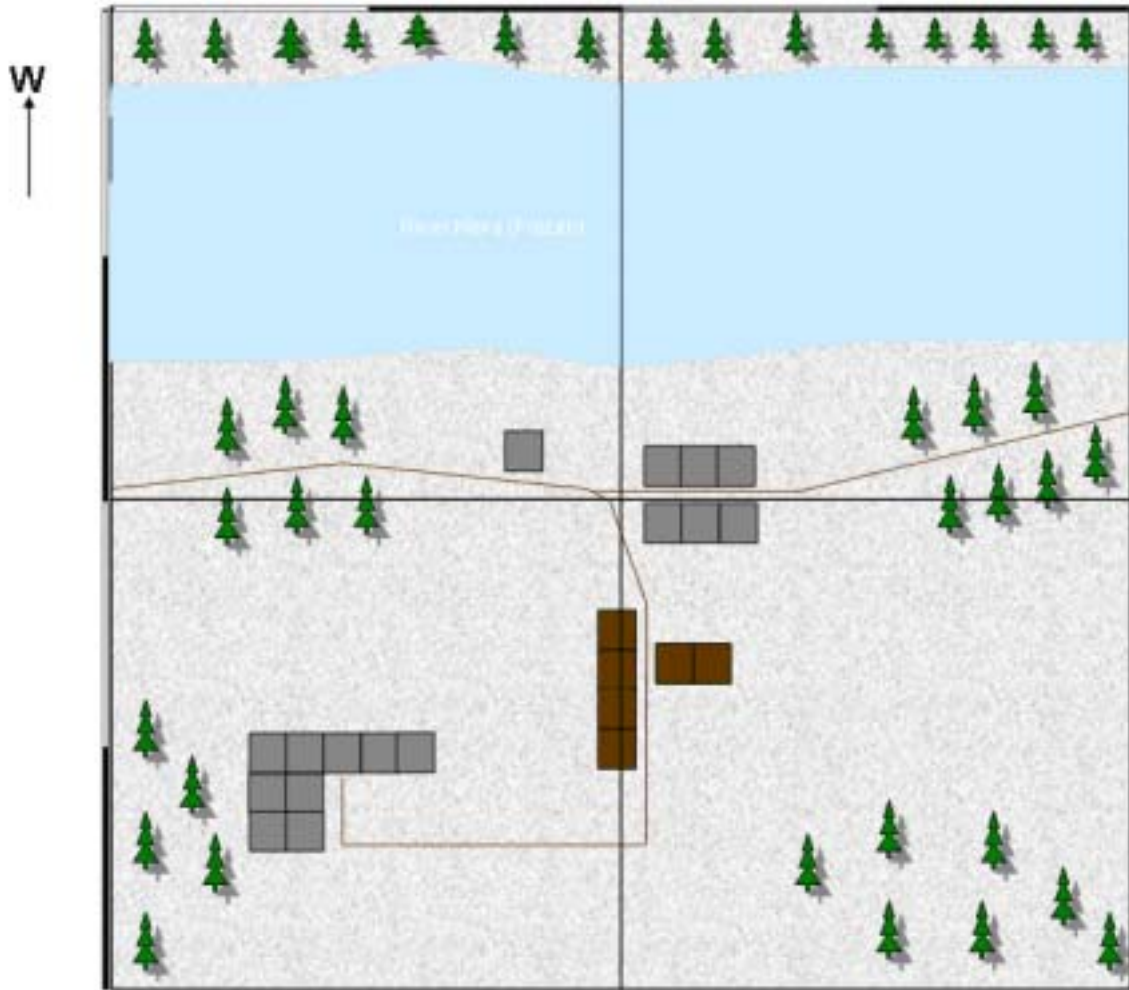
(b) The Heavy Company can be deployed as a unit or broken up and attached to the other German manoeuvre elements. The 80mm mortars must be deployed on the map board.

(c) Starting on turn 6 the German player rolls one dice. The German reinforcements arrive on a roll of 1. If the reinforcements do not arrive then the player rolls on each subsequent turn until they do, or the game ends. The die roll required for the reinforcements to arrive increases by 1 on each even numbered turn. The StuG receives no command modifiers on its manoeuvre rolls and does not receive the +1 modifier for being at full strength. If possible the StuG must be brought on anywhere along the east edge of the Map more than 10" away from any Russian stand where a possible LoS exists and not in the trees (if this is possible in more than one location then the German player gets to chose). If this is not possible it should be placed on the board at the maximum possible distance from any Russian stand where a possible LoS exists. The STuG is assumed to have completed its first action by being place on the board with at least one aiming point conformed to the edge of the board.

Reinforcements (c)

 x1 StuG IIIb GE-87

Each square on the map is 1 foot x 1 foot



The woods are treated as “woods with underbrush”.

The road and river are for aesthetic effect only and have no effect on play.

All BUS are considered solid concrete and have the same defensive values. The brown BUS are worth more for determining victory.

Scenario Notes

This scenario should represent a challenge for the Russian player, as indeed the original attack did to the Soviet attackers. The Germans had been in the same position for over a year and the defences and the weather both acted as significant force multipliers for the defenders.

The Battle of Marino was fought as part of a general attack on the Neva line, and as the attack developed Marino was identified as a weak point and was the location for the only significant breakthrough between Shlissel'burg and Dubrovka, allowing the Russians to send two rifle divisions and a tank brigade through the gap created which, by linking up with units attacking from the east, were able to lever a narrow land corridor into Leningrad along the shores of Lake Ladoga.

Evicting 300 German soldiers from Marino cost the Russians 3,000 casualties from the 136th Rifle Division which had to be committed in full to achieve the breakthrough. In our first playtest we managed to replicate exactly the fate of the first attacking waves, which whilst one-up for the ability of the rules to simulate a set of historical events was of limited use as a game as the Russians managed to lose their entire force (give or take) whilst inflicting three stands of casualties on the Germans for zero captured BUS.

The amendments made have evened things up a bit and one could no doubt take exception to the morale class of the attackers, which should probably have been trained at best, although there's not much to be done about the relatively poor long range factors on the Russian MMGs and LMGs or the spotting modifier applied to the T60 tank..... This all still leaves the Russian with significant challenges, and I would recommend that the more experienced player(s) take the Russian side.