

Operation Fustian

Battle for the Bridgehead

Scenario written by Bill Slavin for BF:WW 2

Primosole Bridge, July 14, 1943

On the night of July 13, three days after the launching of the Allied invasion of Sicily, paratroopers of the British 1st Parachute Brigade set out to seize Primosole Bridge spanning the Simeto River. It was an audacious plan, with the intention of paving the way for the 8th Army's advance up the Sicilian east coast. The flight was a disaster with friendly fire shooting down a number of planes and scattering the rest. The jump was widely dispersed and of 1,856 British paratroops only a fraction were dropped close enough to the bridge to join in the fight.

Unknown to the attackers, their German counterparts, paratroopers of the 1st Machinegun Battalion of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division were dug in about 2000 meters south of the bridge. A number of the British paratroops were dropped near these German positions and at first the defenders mistook them for expected fallshirmjäger reinforcements. The battle rapidly split into two fights as a small group of British seized the bridge from the startled Italian defenders while others battled out for the high ground south of the bridge (hills designated as Johnny 1, 2 and 3). Both groups were joined by other men from the brigade who trickled in during the night. By the morning of July 14th 12 officers and 283 other ranks had gathered around the tenuous bridgehead.

This scenario is based on the fighting around Primosole Bridge on that day, focusing on the battle for the bridgehead.

Duration

12 turns

Turn Sequence

The Germans move first.

Special Turn Events

Turn 3

On Turn 3 stragglers from the 1st Parachute Battalion enter the board within 5" of the Gomalunga Canal. Treat these units as a separate maneuver element until within command range of the 1st Battalion.

Turn 10 and onwards

Each turn there is a 1 in 10 chance that elements of the 44th RTR and advance elements of 6 DLI arrive from the south within 5" of Lentini Road.

Turn 10 and onwards

Roll for each British ME present (excluding reinforcements) for low ammo. Each turn there is a 20% chance cumulative (i.e. 40% chance turn 11, 60% chance turn 12, etc.) that each ME will run low on ammo. From that point direct and indirect fire will be resolved at a -2 for that ME.

Note: This roll should only occur when the British ME fires for the first time on that round. If it doesn't fire there is no roll, and the attacker should not know in advance if a low ammunition situation is in effect.

Special and Optional Rules

1. The pillboxes have 360 degree arc of fire, with usual restrictions regarding unit facing.
2. Although BUS's are considered "single level" buildings, units may choose to occupy the upper story of a BUS and are considered one level above the surrounding terrain for spotting purposes.
3. The following optional rules should be used:
Destroying BUS (BF Optional rules/Paddy Green's Built Up Sector Options)
Attacking Forts with Direct Fire (BF Playtest Engineering Rules)
There is no Machinegun Grazing Fire in this scenario due to British being low on ammo.
4. Fire Support for Germans originates from the north side of board.

Victory Conditions

Germans

Major Victory: Eliminating or disordering all enemy units within 5 inches of both ends of Primosole Bridge while maintaining at least one unit in good order in the same area.

Minor Victory: Eliminating or disordering all enemy units within 5 inches of the north end of Primosole Bridge while maintaining at least one unit in good order in the same area.

British

Major Victory: Eliminating or disordering all enemy units within 5 inches of both ends of Primosole Bridge while maintaining at least one unit in good order in the same area.

*Note: Armour or vehicles cannot hold an objective.

British

British Player Briefing

Despite a disastrous drop, enough of your men gathered during the night to quickly seize the bridge from the 50 Italian defenders. Although injured by a lone Italian grenade, Brigadier Lathbury is present to command what is left of his brigade. Lieutenant Colonel Pearson has gathered remnants of the 1st Battalion and has assumed responsibility for the defense of Primosole Bridge.

3rd Battalion, worst scattered of all, has managed to rally only 35 men and 4 officers, and its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Yeldham has placed his meager force at the disposal of Lieutenant-Colonel Pearson. A few 6 lbs. of the 1st Airlanding Anti-tank Battery also bolster the defense.

Shelled and strafed by enemy aircraft during the early afternoon, you have fought off minor probes but no significant attacks have yet materialized as you attempt to strengthen your tenuous position north of the Simeto. You have no idea if Frost's group to the south still holds its positions on Johnny 1 and when (or even if) the 8th Army will arrive. But enemy shelling has once more resumed and it looks as if the Germans have returned in force, determined to retake the bridgehead.

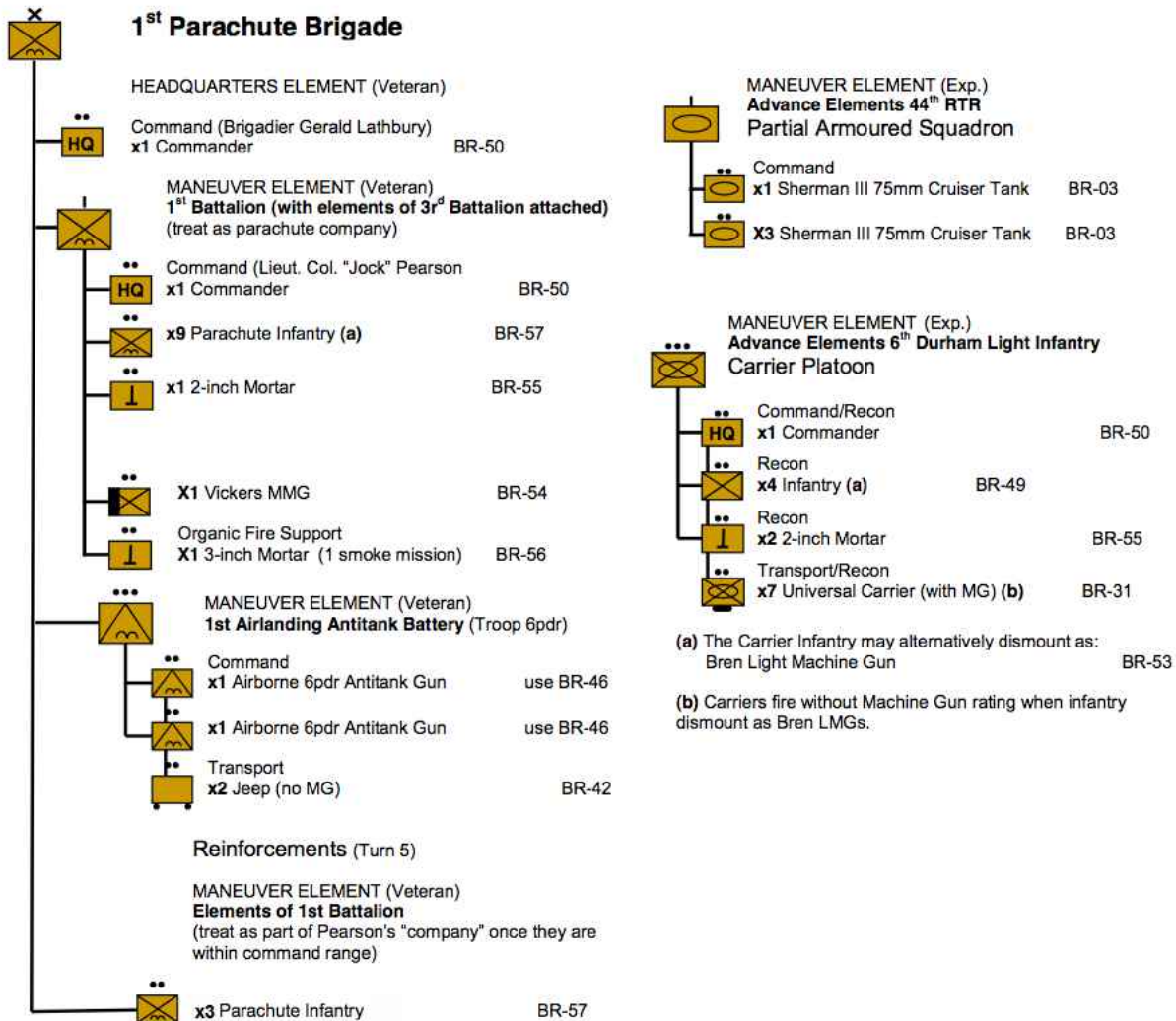
Mission

Your orders are to hold Primosole Bridge until lead elements of the 8th Army arrive. They were expected to arrive on the morning of the 14th and now it is already past noon.

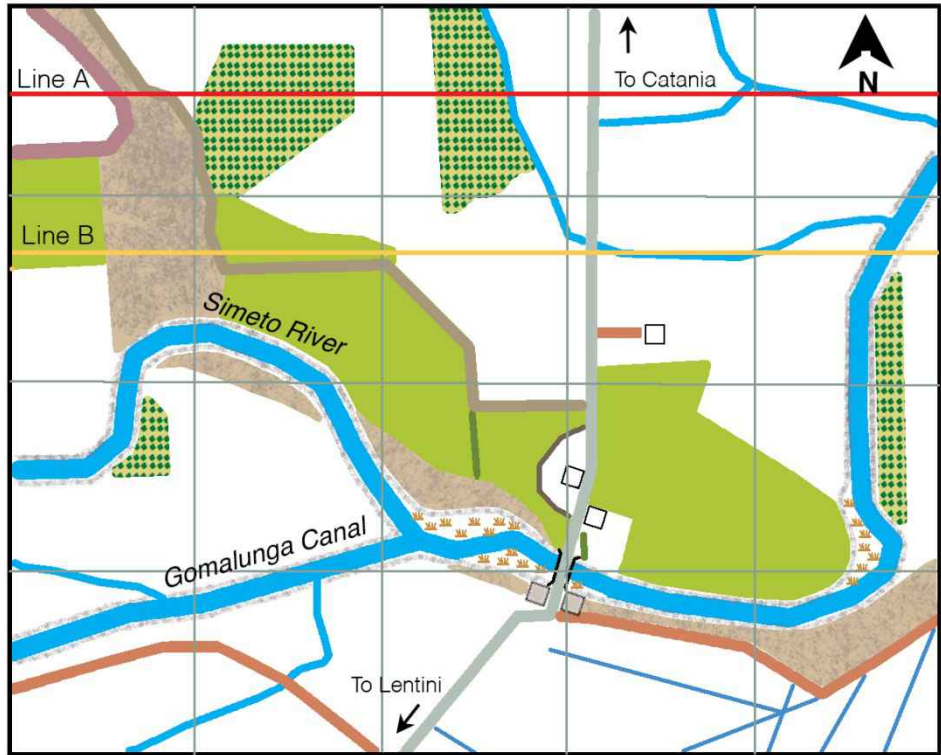
Deployment

1st Battalion, Brigade HQ and anti tank platoon begin deployed south of line B. All British units begin dug in or in pillboxes. British units can opt to deploy out of their entrenchments. In this case use hidden unit markers to indicate the vacated entrenchments.







British Forces



(a) The PIAT was relatively new at the time of this battle and was not in general issue. However, there is some evidence that the paras had trained with it. As an option, up to 2 of the para infantry can be armed with PIAT.



Terrain

-  Olive Orchards (Treat as Orchards)
-  Sunken Road (Treat as Wide or Deep Gully)
-  Unpaved Road
-  Paved Road
-  Low Hedgerow
-  BUS (Stone)
-  Pillbox
-  Tall Crops (Include vineyards)
-  Rough Ground
-  Embankment (High)
-  Reeds (Treat as Brush)
-  Irrigation Ditch (Treat as Shallow Ditch - no cover for vehicles)
-  Stream (Wide and Deep)
-  Stream (Shallow)
-  Embankment surrounding Farmhouse (Treat as Low Wall)
-  Dry Gully (Wide and Deep)

Terrain Notes

BUS's – Upper floors of BUS's are considered one level above surrounding terrain for spotting purposes (see above Special Rules #2).

Simeto River and Gomalunga Canal – The Simeto and Gomalunga Canal (wide blue lines) should be treated as “Stream - Wide and Deep”, making them impassable to all vehicles. In addition, both banks are treated as “High Embankment”. Therefore any troops crossing must perform breach, breach/bog-down check, and breach. Only units that are conformed to the edge of the river or canal embankment, in the bed itself or on the bridge can spot units in the river bed. Units in the river bed can only spot out if conformed to embankment.

Sunken Road – Treat this feature, sunken and lined with cactus, as “Ditch/Gully – Wide or Deep”.

Bridge – The Primosole Bridge was an iron girder bridge approximately 400 feet long. Ideally, it should be represented by a model approximately 3 inches long. Units on the bridge will receive linear hard cover from fire that passes through the sides of the bridge.

Pillboxes – 360 degree arc of fire. Armour 3 (see Special Rules #5).

Germans

German Player Briefing

During the night British paratroops have seized Primosole Bridge from your cowardly Italian allies. After discovering this morning that the bridge was in enemy hands, you have returned to Catania to hastily assemble a reaction force in order to retake the bridge. Made up of the only available local reserves at Catania – a 1st Parachute Division signal company and an ad hoc collection of administrative troops from Catania airfield – your kampgruppe is bolstered by an AA battery, a handful of antitank guns and a self-propelled gun. As your supporting artillery begins shelling enemy positions, you prepare to attack the Red Devils dug in around the north side of Primosole Bridge. They must be dislodged before the main British force arrives.

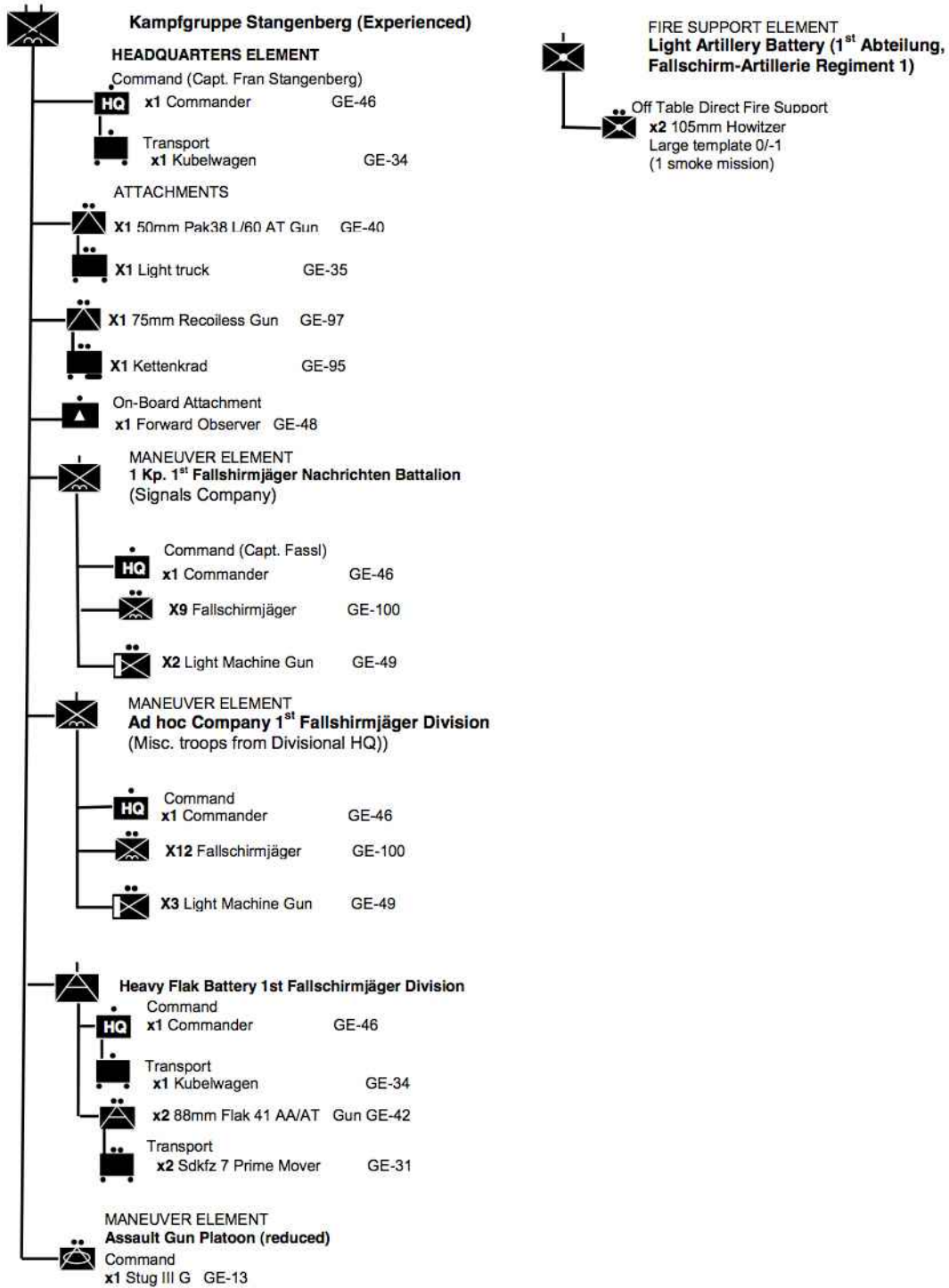
Mission

To drive the British from their positions and secure the north and south ends of Primosole Bridge, thus eliminating the bridgehead.

Deployment

Kampgruppe Stangenberg begins the game positioned north of Line A.

German Forces



Scenario Balancing Options

This is a tough fight for the British. Players can opt to try either or both of these scenario balancing options:

1. Remove “low ammunition” rule for British.
2. Increase the chance of arrival of the 44th RTR and advance elements of 6 DLI by 10% *cumulative* each round after 10.

The Historic Battle

The fight on the 14th of July was only the first of many days’ fighting around the Primosole Bridge. The rapid response by Stangenberg, whose attack went in about 2 p.m. on the 14th, succeeded in driving the British off their objective. By 5 p.m., running out of ammunition, the small force of British paratroops abandoned the north shore of the bridgehead, and were soon driven from the south side as well, withdrawing about 1200 meters south of the river. There they held on until midnight, at which time they worked their way further south, leaving their wounded behind.

Unknown to Brigadier Lathbury, less than an hour after abandoning the bridgehead, at 7:30 p.m., lead elements of the 4th Armoured Brigade and the 6th Durham Light Infantry made contact with the remnants of Frost’s 2nd Battalion, still managing to hold onto the high ground of Johnny 1. Of the 295 defenders of the Primosole Bridge, 115 had been killed wounded or captured by the end of the day.

Designer's Notes

I have done my best to accurately portray the fighting around Primosole Bridge on the 14th. Because the majority of the fighting to the south around Johnny 1, 2 and 3 happened during the night and into the morning, while the battle at the bridge occurred in the afternoon, I have decided to focus on the holding of the bridge, rather than one large one as I had originally intended.

I confess that the makeup of Kampfgruppe Stangenberg is really a best guess attempt. It was difficult to ascertain who the headquarters troops were that were gathered up to oust the British from Primosole Bridge, so I eventually opted for fallschirmjäger divisional units for the ad hoc group. I have tried to compensate for their lack of experience as frontline troops by rating them “experienced”. The Signals Company was better defined, but the supporting weapons and fire support of the Kampfgruppe, other than the flak battery, are really just a guess based on slim information. So feel free to improvise!

The lead elements of the 8th Army never engaged in the battle on the 14th, (perhaps other than with elements of the machinegun battalion), but the possibility of their earlier arrival to save the day makes for good drama.

And finally many thanks for members of the Battlefront forum whose collective wisdom helped me with some key points on which my own knowledge was pretty limited.

Bibliography and sources

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