

San Martino Monte l'Abatte, Italy 17th September, 1944

“If capturing the miserable group of houses which constituted San Martino was only a matter of courage, the Seaforths would have had the village in their pocket, but ... courage alone was not sufficient.”
- Seaforth Highlanders' Official History

Scenario

On the afternoon of 17 September, 1944, two companies of the Canadian Seaforth Highlanders advance under cover of smoke to secure San Martino. The town, already taken the day before through a successful attack by The Royal 22e Régiment (Van Doos), has been repossessed by German paratroopers during the night of the 16th after a botched handover to the Seaforths. The high ground at San Martino dominates the Rimini plain all the way to the Adriatic and is a stumbling block to the successful advance of the 8th Army as it fights its way through the Gothic Line. After successfully breaching “Green Line 1”, the 1st Canadian Division advances towards Rimini and the next line of defences positioned on San Fortunato Ridge. But until San Martino falls the west flank of the attack on Rimini is exposed to fighting in a virtual German killing ground.

The Rimini airfield to the east, yet to be taken by the 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade, has a Pantherturm (Panther tank turret mounted in an encasement) located at the north end of the airfield which has been engaging the British armour supporting the Canadians in enfilade fire for the past two days. Artillery, the Royal Navy and most recently RAF Spitfires have all had a go at knocking out the offending gun and the last has assured the Canadian command that the job is done.

Following an immense bombardment by artillery of the 1st and 5th Canadian Divisions, the 2nd New Zealand Division and the 1st Army group R.C.A and supported by the tanks of the 48th Royal Tank Regiment, the Seaforths leave their start line at Palazzo des Vergers and advance towards the village.

Duration

10 turns

Scenario Specific Rules

Machine gun grazing fire

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

with the addition that the template needs to be centered on a spotted or suspected target and only “cover” modifiers apply (i.e. suspected target status and smoke do not)

Turn Sequence

Pre-game Barrage

Well entrenched in dug outs and bunkers on the reverse slope of San Martino, the barrage had little impact on the German defenders. This scenario picks up the action as the last round of pre-planned artillery fire comes down on the village.

Turn 1

Germans unable to move, although off board artillery and AT guns may fire at any spotted targets. Unit in concrete pillbox is considered disordered for Turn 1. No Allied units may move into areas A or B on Turn 1 or 2.

Turn 2

Smoke is laid by Allied artillery (12 templates, in groupings of multiples of 2) wherever desired. Germans may exit positions in Area A and move to new positions in San Martino (Area B).

Turn 5

Canadian player may commit one reserve company if this scenario balancing option is allowed.

Victory Conditions

Major Canadian Victory

No undisordered German units and at least one friendly infantry stand in good order in Area D (defined by purple line) without committing reserve company.

Minor Canadian Victory

No undisordered German units and at least one friendly infantry stand in good order in Area D (defined by purple line) while committing reserve company.

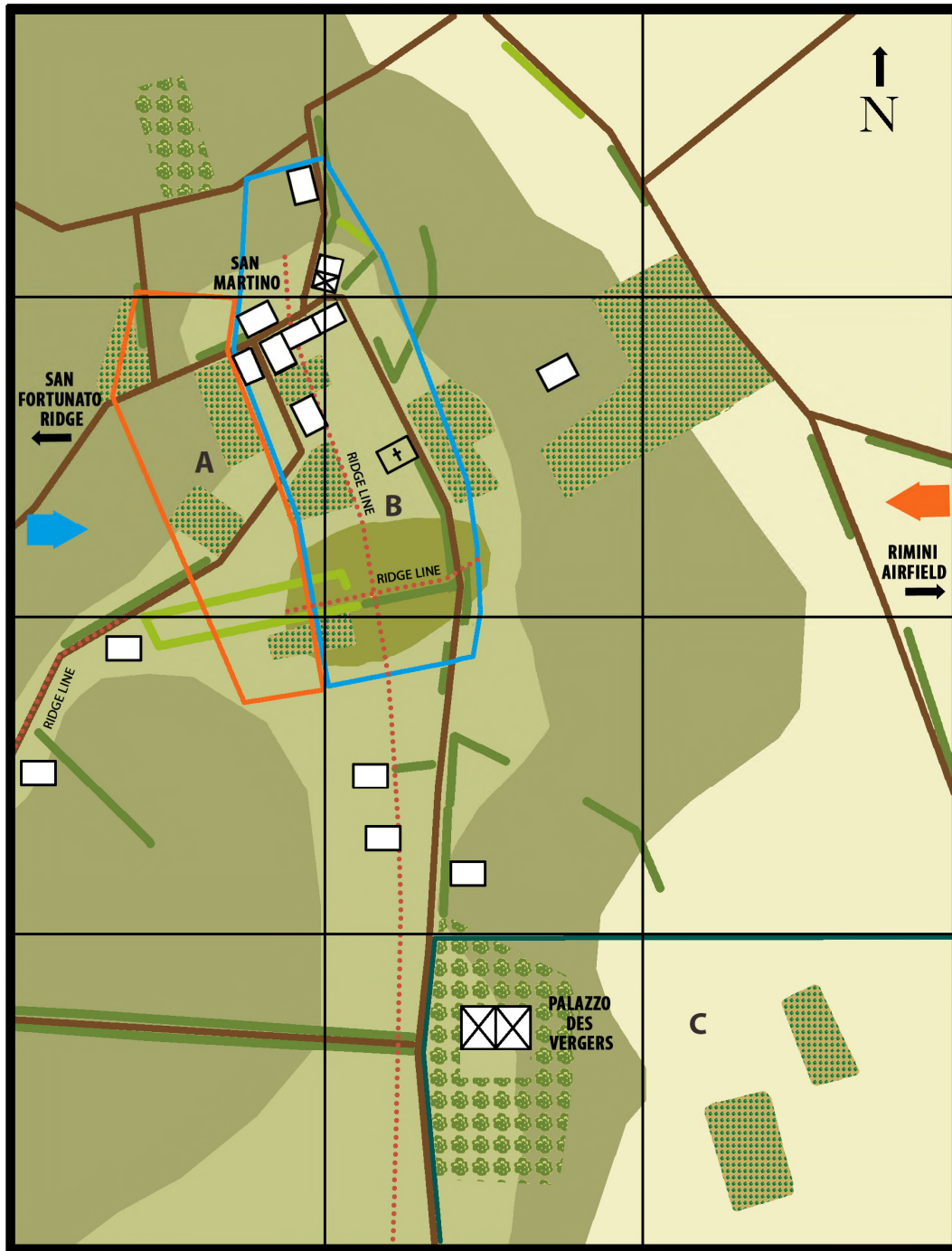
German Major Victory

No undisordered Allied infantry units and at least one friendly infantry stand in good order in Area D (defined by purple line).

Draw

Any other result.

Table set-up



Terrain

- BUS
- Graveyard +
- (Low stone wall)
- Unpaved Road
- Orchard
- Woods (Cleared)
- High Hedgerow
- Low Hedgerow
- Ridge Line

Levels

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3

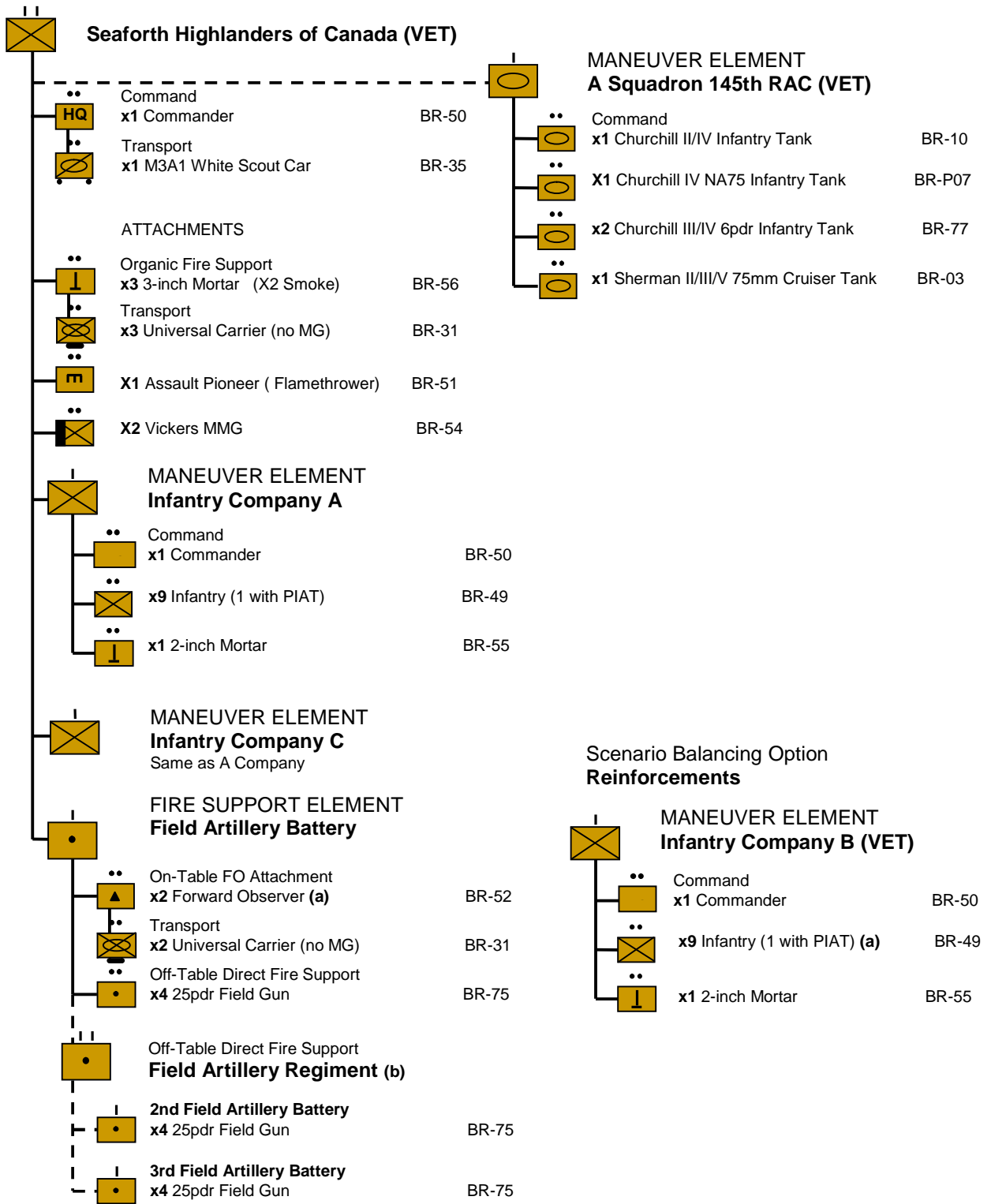
Briefing for Canadian Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. S.W. Thomson, Seaforth Highlander Regiment

After the botched handover of San Martino to the Seaforths by the Van Doos on the night of the 15th this all important ridge has been re-possessed by German paratroopers. This fact was only discovered early yesterday when your leading platoon approaching the feature was driven to ground by enemy machine-gun fire. An immediate attempt to bump them with a one company attack failed, and you were forced to retreat to safer positions around the Palazzo des Vergers. Despite brigade pressure to seize the feature at once you have delayed the attack while probing the defences with fighting patrols. Now the plan for the 17th is to pound the enemy defences on San Martino and elsewhere across the front with a massive pre-arranged artillery barrage followed by a dense blanketing of smoke. The Royal Canadian Regiment and 48th Highlanders will strike to your right while your Seaforths attempt to clear the ridge of the enemy presence. Failure to do so will have dire consequences on the attack to the east as artillery observation from the ridge has allowed accurate and sustained artillery and mortar fire over the entire area. Supporting A and C Companies in the attack on San Martino are the tanks of A Squadron of the British 48th Royal Tank Regiment. The attack is scheduled for 1330 hours.

Deployment

All Allied units begin in Area C (defined by dark green line, SE corner of board). No Allied units may move into areas A or B on Turn 1 or 2.

Canadian Order of Battle



(a) Each FO may call for a single Field Artillery Troop as Organic Fire Support.

(b) The entire Field Regiment is available as Direct Fire Support when the FO calls for a 'Mike Target'. See the website British Artillery Tutorial. Commanders may not call for 'Mike Targets'.

Briefing for German Commanding Commander, Major Paul Ernest Renish-Ritterkreuz, 1st Battalion, 1st Fallschirmjaeger Regiment

A major 8th Army offensive up the coast of the Adriatic breached the German 10th Army's Green Line 1 a few days ago. Your forces have now been pushed back to their last prepared defensive line, running from Rimini inland through the San Fortunato Ridge. Your command post, "Cecilia", in the village of San Martino, in front of San Fortunato and with a commanding view of the coastal plain has been heavily fortified and is to be defended to the last man. You must delay the enemy as long as possible from breaking through. Once he gets into the open ground of the Po Valley there is little to stop him in his rush north - other than the October rains, if you can only hold long enough!

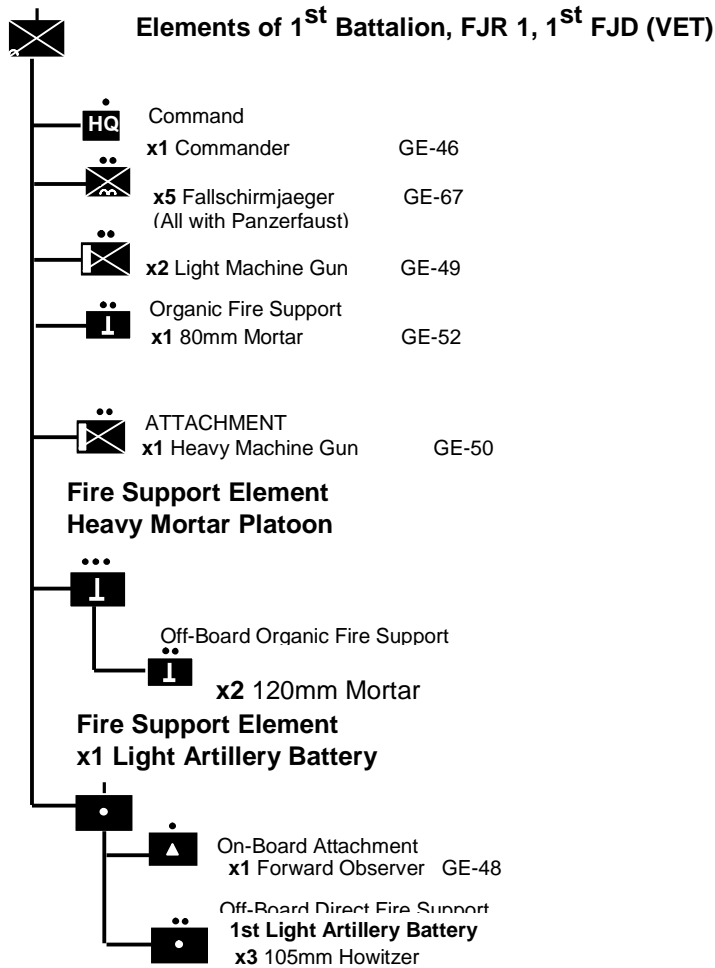
Deployment

Germans begin dug in in Area A (defined by red line) (exception: See HMG below). At the beginning of their movement phase Turn 2 they may exit these positions (which stay on board) and move to new positions in San Martino in Area B (defined by blue line). In order to disguise movement it is recommended that the German player employ either hidden movement or an equal number of dummy markers as he has real markers. Dummy markers may move and are spotted as troops in the same terrain.

In addition to the dug-in positions on the reverse slope from San Martino (Area A) the Germans may also have up to 10 improved positions in BUS's or dug-in positions plus one concrete pillbox (which may be located in a BUS) in Area B. The pillbox is considered to have a 180° unlimited arc of fire from front facing, 1" in other directions.

The HMG may use grazing fire if located in the pillbox (or in another dug in position in Area A) at the beginning of game (see disruption due to barrage under "Turn Sequence").

German Order of Battle



Off Board Direct Fire (a)

Elements of 590 Hvy. G.H.Q. Antitank Battalion (EXP)



Pantherturnm North End of Rimini Airfield (EXP)



(a) The Pantherturnm on the north end of the Rimini airfield will trace its LOF from the red arrow on the east side of the board with the gun being considered at Level 0. The 88 located on San Fortunato Ridge traces its LOF from the blue arrow with the gun being considered at Level 3. Add 20" to firing and spotting distances for both guns. Neither gun may be targeted but a roll of 1 on its direct fire roll indicates that it has been knocked out. See additional rules regarding LOS and ridgelines.

Scenario Balancing Option

In playtests this proved a hard nut to crack and very difficult to improve upon the historical record. A few tweaks have been made within the known existing orbats since then, but it may be advisable to consider allowing the Canadian player a reinforcing round on Turn 5, with the caveat that he forfeits a major victory if he does so. Certainly Companies B and D were available to Thomson, but he did not commit them to the attack believing that even if they were successful, the cost would be too high.

Historical Outcome

The afternoon attack on September 17, 1944 by A and C Companies of the Seaforth Highlanders was unsuccessful. Although No.15 Platoon of C Company did manage to gain a lodging in some of the houses of San Martino, the tank support was badly shot up, losing four in quick succession with the remainder stalling out behind the infantry attack. Thompson, believing that more tank support may be enough to break the deadlock, pleaded with the commander of the 145th RAC and then his own brigadier to release that support, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Convinced that his unsupported troops would be destroyed he had them withdraw at 1600 hours, with the 48th RTR leaving six tanks burning on the ridge.

The Seaforths B and D Companies attempted a second time to take San Martino that night, but that attack, too, failed. The handful of paratroopers held out until September 19th, when they were forced to withdraw to San Fortunato once San Martino was outflanked to the west. But the stalwart defence of San Martino Monte l'Abatte delayed the Allied advance by three days, meaning the 8th Army only entered the Po Valley after the October rains began. And there they became mired in the muck.

Years later Thomson wrote of the battle "four companies attacking might have succeeded, but only half would have survived. The art of war is to win and live."

Bibliography

Report # 27 Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters The Italian Campaign: The Battle of Rimini and the Subsequent Advance to the River Ronco (11 Aug. - 31 Oct. 44)
The Gothic Line: Canada's Month of Hell in World War II Italy, Mark Zuehlke
The Canadians in Italy, Lt.-Col. G. W. L. Nicholson

Additional On-Line Sources

The North Irish Horse and Steeds of Steel
<http://northirishhorse.net/>

The Gothic Line: The Battle for San Martina (BBC/WW2 The People's War)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/04/a2221804.shtml>

Legion Magazine, An Entrenched Enemy: Army, Part 82
<http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2009/06/an-entrenched-enemy-army-part-82/>

Legion Magazine, Collapse of the Rimini Line: Army, Part 83
<http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2009/08/collapse-of-the-rimini-line-army-part-83/>