

“Bloody Nonsense”

Through some freak the telephone line to Guglionese was still intact, although the town was behind enemy lines. John Durnford-Slater, with the aid of an interpreter, spoke to the Mayor.

“There are hundreds of German Tanks here”, said the Mayor.

“Don’t talk such bloody nonsense. There are no tanks nearer than Rome.”

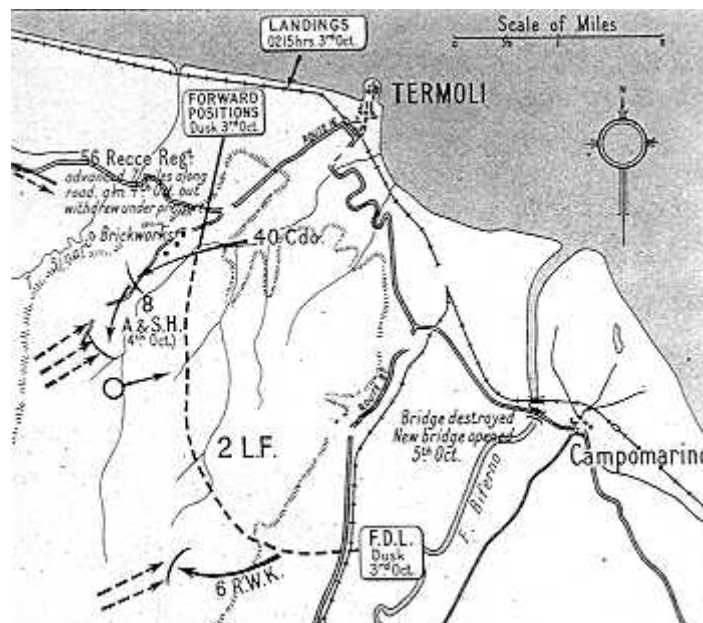
But the tanks were real enough; they belonged to the 16th Panzer Division from north of the Volturno.

1. Background

The *Battle of Salerno* is over. The Wehrmacht is withdrawing to the Gustav line, but is determined to make the allies pay for every inch of ground. Every ridge line and river is defended. To cross the line of the River Biferno, Montgomery has decided to use his few landing craft to turn its seaward flank. This was successfully accomplished on 3 October.

At this point “General Mud” took matters in hand. On October 3 it began to rain heavily, the waters of the Biferno rose high enough to prevent most of the British 78th Infantry Division from crossing. Inside the bridgehead, 4 infantry battalions from the 78th together with the Special Service Brigade, a handful of antitank guns and very little artillery have their work cut out for them. On October 5 “General Mud” was joined by the still more dangerous General Sieckenius.

On the morning of October 5 the engineers have still not completed a replacement bridge. Sufficient forces from the 16th Panzer division are in position to counterattack the isolated bridgehead at dawn on 5 October. Field Marshall Kesselring has decreed that at all cost the British must not be allowed to exploit their bridgehead.



The 16th Panzer Division’s main attacks, delivered by KG Stempel and KG vonDoering, fell upon the infantry of the 78th Division. Meanwhile, their reconnaissance regiment attempted to drive up the coast road into Termoli and was met by elements of the 56th Recce regt. And ultimately by 3 Commando occupying the right of the British defensive line.

2. The Scenario

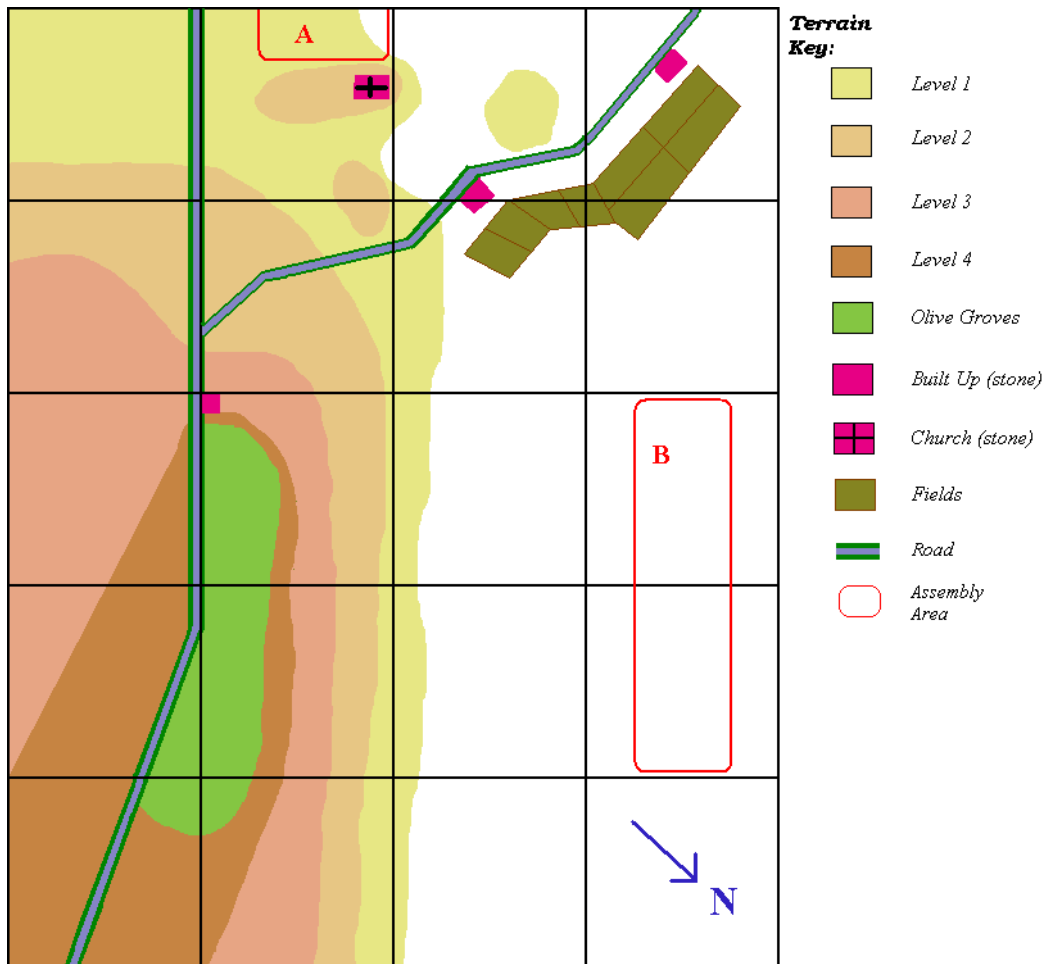
After chasing the British 56th Recce regiment back into the defensive line behind 3 Commando, elements from the 16th Panzer's reconnaissance regiment spent most of the afternoon manoeuvring around 3 Commando's flank, while keeping up a long range desultory shelling of their positions. As a result, the major attack on the ridge line did not get underway until quite late in the day. This scenario is based on the account of 3 Commando's fight in Brig. Peter Young's wartime memoir :*"Storm from the Sea"*, from which the quote at the start was taken.

2.1 Duration

This scenario begins at 17:00 on the afternoon of October 5 1943. lasts twelve (12) turns.

- The first six (6) turns are fought under **Day: Poor-Visibility** conditions. (dusk)
- The last six (6) turns are fought under **Night: Good-Visibility** conditions.

2.2 Scenario Map:



Termoli

- The map is marked with a 12" grid for the 15mm game scale.
- To represent the effects of slope and rain, treat all higher elevations (levels 1-4) as **muddy**, except for the road and olive groves.

- Photographs show the roads in this part of Italy to be lined on both sides with a row of poplar trees. Treat the road as **unpaved**, and lined on both sides with a linear **sparse edge terrain** feature.
- The Olive Groves are treated as Orchard (sparse area terrain).
- The Built Up Areas are all single sector stone buildings. The farmhouse on level 3 and the church may additionally hold a Forward Observer stand in an upper floor.
- The fields are **muddy** terrain, and surrounded by a **low wall**.

2.3 Scenario spotting Rules

2.3.1 Day: Poor-Visibility

- Spotting additional **down 1** spotting modifier
- Manoeuvre **no +2 modifier** for no LOS to spotted or suspected enemy

2.3.2 Night: Good-Visibility

- **Discipline Rating**
 - All units are rated one level lower than normal unless they are considered *night combat trained*.
- **Spotting**
 - Additional **down 2** spotting modifier
 - **No up 1 modifier** for higher elevation.
- **Direct Fire**
 - Additional modifier of -1 for all direct fire.
- **Manoeuvre**
 - No rapid advance.
 - No +1 command modifier for troops unless within 1 inch of commander.
 - No +1 command modifier for vehicles unless within 4 inches and LOS of commander.
 - No **+2 modifier** for no LOS to spotted or suspected enemy.
 - Additional -1 modifier on bog down table.

2.3.3 Flares

- Generally, a unit that can fire smoke can fire a flare out to its maximum range.
- Additionally, a commander (troop stand) may also fire a flare out to 10 inches using a small template.
- Normally, like smoke, a unit may only fire a flare once per game, although many night scenarios may have reason to allocate more.
- Flares are fired in the Indirect Fire segment, using the same procedure as for smoke.
- Flares may be fired at the same targets as smoke.
- Each firing section gets 2 templates of the same size as its indirect fire template.
- The centre of the beaten zone is placed over the target just as in normal indirect fire.
- Any unit with an aiming point within the beaten zone is considered to be in **Day - Good Visibility** when a **TARGET** of spotting and fire combat. In addition there is a modifier of +1 to the spotting table when spotting such targets.
- A flare template remains on the table until the beginning of that player's next Indirect Fire segment.

- A unit with an aiming point inside a placed flare template suffers an ADDITIONAL "DOWN 2" modifier on the spotting table when trying to spot an enemy target. (loss of night vision).

2.4 Special Rules.

- Elements that have **Panicked Disordered**, are treated as lost when rolling on the Manoeuvre Table until they are rallied.
- Elements that have **bogged down** are treated as lost when rolling on the Manoeuvre Table while they remain bogged.
- An additional modifier of -1 applies to the "Call for Fire" table when a spotter is used to call fire against "suspected" targets when the *Night-Good Visibility* rules are in effect, unless the "suspected" target is illuminated by flares.
- the additional -1 modifier for all direct fire at night **is not additional** to the -1 factor for emplaced MMGs that are using the grazing fire rules and template.

3. Historical Outcome

Termoli is a battle that has fascinated me for years. It is yet another of the British Army's many *Forgotten Battles*. Yet the story deserves wider coverage, including how the day was saved by the arrival of the 78th's Irish Brigade by sea and by the engineers success in early completion of a Bailey bridge that allowed a Canadian Armoured regiment to cross.

History's judgement on General Sieckenius' performance has been harsh. He was blamed for the failure and removed from command. Yet the battle was a near run thing and most of the German attacks were pressed with vigour. Considering the impact of the weather (mud) on tank off-road mobility I've always thought their performance creditable. He seems to have made only one mistake: a failure to bring up enough artillery support and ammunition. However, given the speed with which this counter-attack was mounted (in keeping with German anti-invasion tactics) any delay may have been disastrous.

The capture of the minor port of Termoli was gratefully acknowledged but soon forgotten. However, there is ample evidence in German documents that Termoli was watched in high places with unusual interest and that Marshal Kesselring was most anxious that Termoli should not be lost.

The seaborne elements of the 78th Infantry Division and Commandos landed at Termoli in the early hours of the morning of 3 October. At 1150 the same day the 16th Panzer Division received orders to destroy the enemy at Termoli, the enemy possibly advancing from Termoli to the West and to concentrate the division in the area of Palata after completion of the task. The division had as its main components:

- Recce Bn 16
- Panzer Regiment 2 (2nd Battalion)
- Pz Gren Regt 64 (battle group Stempel)
- Pz Gren Regt 79 (battle group Doering)

The division was 100% mobile but suffered delays on the trip to Termoli because the quartermaster had made arrangements for only half of the available petrol supply to be taken along in the hope of getting more from 76 Corps. This piece of hoarding, as well as the not too brilliant employment of the artillery by Sickenius and the absence of the usual verve of the troops, figured largely in the after-battle comments.

In contrast, the British command at Termoli was elastic and resourceful; the troops fought well and supplied the extra bit of stamina and obstinacy that was required to withstand and overcome the German attacks of the 4th and 5th Of October. For three consecutive days the enemy tried to dislodge the British and Canadian forces but by the afternoon of 6 October the Germans were hard pressed themselves and gave up all hope of taking Termoli. At 1635 they reported that "Enemy attack in brigade strength has crushed exhausted left wing of battle group Doering and has reached the area west of S. Giacomo. Numerically superior forces are attacking on the eastern flank. Orders have been given to withdraw to the area north of Guglionese."

In the evening of 7 October, Marshal Kesselring appeared in person at the headquarters of 16th Panzer Division, and a full discussion of the defeat at Termoli took place. One month later, on 7 November, Maj-Gen Sickenius left the Division to enter the "Reserve of Higher Commanders" of the Armed Forces High Command, and Colonel Back assumed command of the Division.

"General Mud", however, effectively prevented the 8th Army from exploiting this victory.

4. References

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This Battlefield scenario is based on the information presented in:

1. *Tug of War: The battle for Italy 1943 - 1945*, Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell, Hodder & Stoughton, 1986.
2. *Storm from the Sea*, Peter Young.
3. *Commando and Rangers of World War II*, J Ladd, Macdonald and Janes, 1978.
4. *The campaign in Southern Italy (September - December 1943)*, Report no 18 Historical Section (GS) Army Headquarters, Canadian Armed Forces, 1947.
5. *Battle-Axe Division*, Ken Ford, Sutton Publishing, 1999.

5. German Briefing

It is late in the day and much time has been wasted manoeuvring and shelling to little effect. The division's main attacks have made progress, but are in need of re-supply if they are to take the port of Termoli.

5.1 Commander's Intent

You are to use the Kampfgruppe formed from the 16th reconnaissance regiment seize without delay the Olive Groves to your front and the Termoli Rd. This will allow the much needed supplies to reach our forces preparing to seize the port of Termoli.

- The German player is the first player.
- The first 6 turns use Day-Poor visibility rules, the final 6 turns use Night-Good visibility rules.
- To reflect the German poor handling of artillery, use the **General Fire Support** line on the call for fire table.
- The artillery only has HE rounds available.
- The mortars have 1 round of smoke and one of flares in addition to HE.

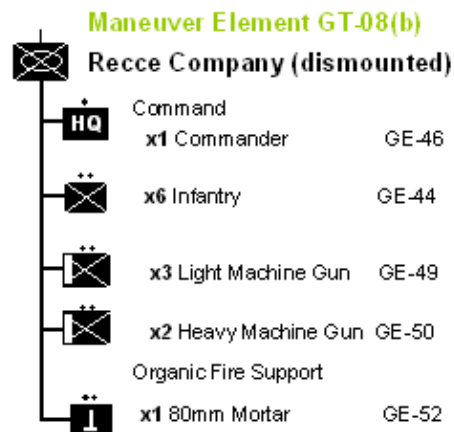
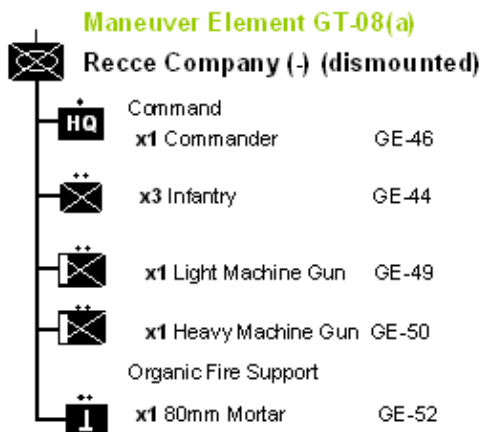
5.2 Victory Conditions

The German side wins if at the end of the scenario they have more undisordered elements in the **Olive Groves** than the British.

The result is a draw, if the German victory condition is not met, but if at the end of the scenario they have at least 3 undisordered elements (including at least 1 tank and at least 1 infantry stand) on **level 4 of the ridge south** of the Termoli road.

All other results are a British victory.

5.3 Available Forces



All German forces are VETERAN. They are NOT night combat trained.

5.4 Deployment

- Manoeuvre Element GT-01(a) Deployment Area A
- Manoeuvre Element GT-01(b) Deployment Area B
- Manoeuvre Element GT-08(a) Deployment Area A
- Manoeuvre Element GT-08(b) Deployment Area B
- Fire Support Element FS-02 attached to either GT-08(a) or GT-08(b)

6. British Forces

It is late in the day and the Germans have wasted much time in manoeuvring and shelling to little effect. German attacks elsewhere have made progress and are in danger of taking Termoli. However, The Irish brigade has landed and rumours of Canadian tanks abound. It only remains to hold fast until morning when we should be able to give the Germans a nasty surprise.

6.1 Commander's Intent

You are to hold the Olive Groves and the Termoli Rd with the forces of 3 Commando and the supports from 78th Division available to you. Losing your position may lead to the main defensive line for Termoli being outflanked. Very little artillery crossed the river before it flooded. There is little fire support available, other than some long range fire from the medium guns of the RA.

- The British player is the second player.
- The first 6 turns use Day-Poor visibility rules, the final 6 turns use Night-Good visibility rules.
- To reflect this shortage of artillery support, use the **General Fire Support** line on the call for fire table. The artillery only has HE rounds available.
- The mortars have 1 round of smoke and one of flares in addition to HE.

6.2 Victory Conditions

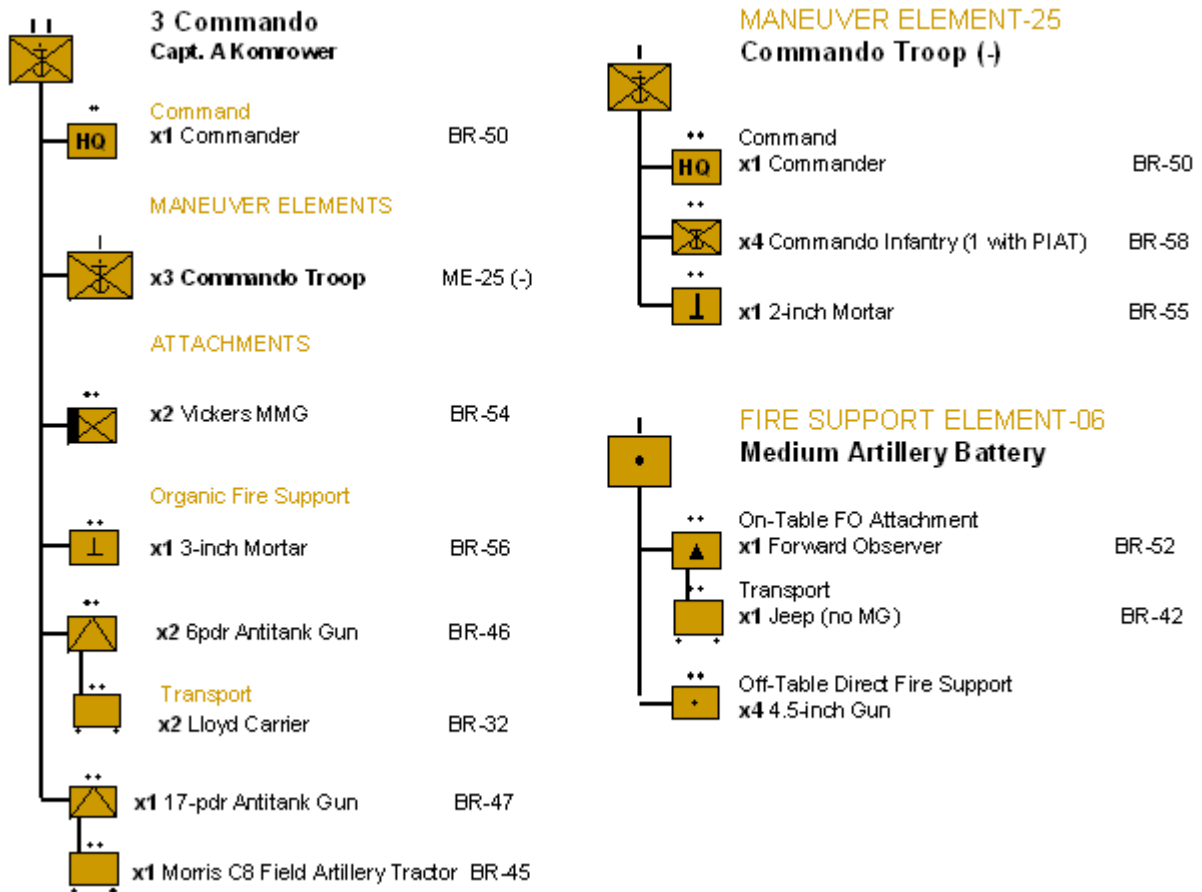
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All other results are a British victory.

6.3 Available Forces

- The Vickers MMG, all anti-tank guns and the artillery are attachments from 78th Division and are rated EXPERIENCED.
- All other elements are from 3 Commando and are ELITE.
- In this scenario only elements organic to **3 Commando** are night combat trained.



6.4 Deployment

- 3 Commando and attachments may deploy anywhere on level 4 and in the farmhouse on level 3. This includes the Olive Groves.
- They may begin the game in **Improved Positions**.
- They may position a **road block** on the Termoli road adjacent to the farmhouse on level 3.