

TAC NEWS

November-December 1996

Celebrating GHQ's Twenty Nine Years of Modeling Excellence

FINAL DEFENSE OF THE REICH

G45 PzFiaK IV Wirbelwind



R2 T34-85



G49 PzJg IV



By April 1945, the German defenses in the east were hemorrhaging beyond repair. While the German doctrine of defense in depth—fighting holding actions against the Soviet attackers long enough to allow a stable front to establish itself a few miles back from the point of attack—was successful in staving off a catastrophic collapse, the German high command had finally run out of breathing space. By the time the front had settled again at the Oder River line, the *Wehrmacht* couldn't afford to retreat any further. While the final outcome of these April battles was never in any doubt, they provide an excellent opportunity for wargamers. Late war German armies can try their hands at fighting desperate battles with ad hoc battlegroups and limited numbers of futuristic weapons against the best-led and best-equipped Soviet force ever fielded. For Soviet players, the Oder battles represent the apex of Soviet tactical development and provide the challenge of overcoming often fanatical resistance with purpose-built battlegroups and massed firepower. In this issue, we'll take a look at one such battle—an action in the Langsow-Werbig sector between forces of the Soviet 5th Shock Army and the German LV1th Panzer Corps.

ARDOR OVER THE ODER

Operational Overview

Zhukov's orders for 5th Shock Army (SA) on 16 April were simple: following a punishing barrage by the 1,824 guns and 361 multiple rocket launchers organic to 5th SA—as well as the supporting fire of the Dnieper River Flotilla's gunboats and floating batteries—they were to steamroller straight ahead, their final objective being the northern suburbs of Berlin by 27 April (an amazing pace of 165 kilometers in 11 days). On the first day, they were expected to plow through the low ground east of Gusow-Neu Hardenberg-Quappendorf. To maximize the amount of time 5th SA had to complete its Day 1 objectives, Marshal Zhukov authorized the use of 36 searchlights to mark boundaries between units and light avenues of advance. As can be expected with such an ambitious plan, the Soviet advance foundered amid aggressive—if local—German counter-attacks; while the Soviet spearhead units attempted to bypass centers of resistance, their dependence on hard surface roads and the multiplicity of hamlets and small towns inevitably reduced the columns' advances to a crawl. While space here precludes an in-depth

analysis of the fighting in the entire 5th SA sector, a brief look at the actions 5th SA's 1052nd Rifle Regiment near Alt Langsow highlights some of the main differences in fighting style between the Soviets and the Germans.

The 1052nd Attacks Alt Langsow

Prior to the Soviet barrage, the advanced Panzergrenadiers of Glowzov had outposts 30 meters from the Russians. Following the preparatory barrage -- described as an "earthquake" lasting several hours -- The forward Germans fell back toward Alt Langsow under cover of the Russian smoke screen, where the main defensive positions had been prepared in the tangle of stream beds, drainage ditches, and railroad embankments.

The 1052nd Rifle Regiment, commanded by Colonel Peshkov, advance with the three battalions abreast, centered on Alt Langsow. His armor and SP guns supported the middle battalion: the flank BNs swept over the open ground as best they could to envelope the German defenders.

The German 8th Panzer Battalion fought in the town. Sgt. Waldmuller, commanding

(continued on page 4)

VE Minus Twenty Three (and Counting)

Tac News Scenario #12

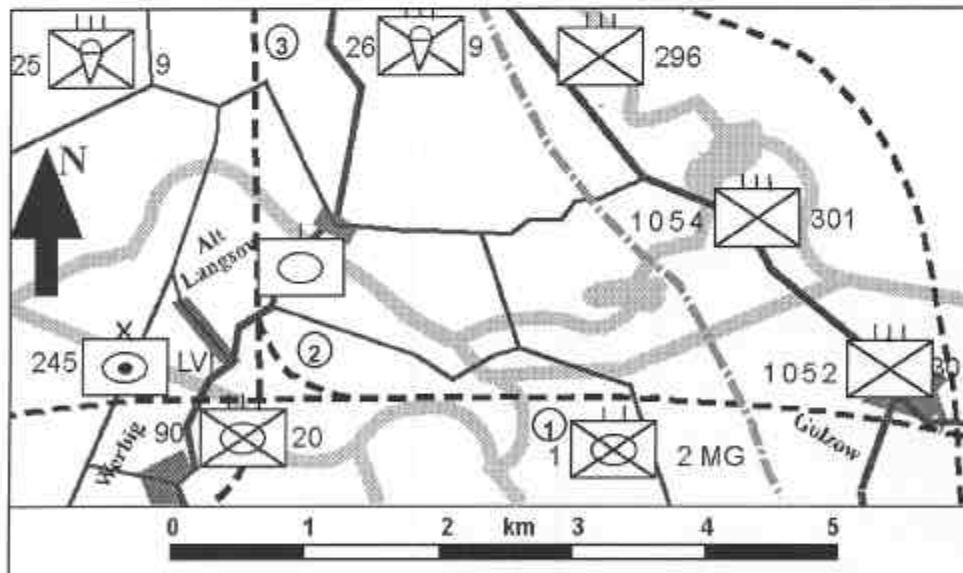


SET-UP SUGGESTIONS

- ① Forward pointing 4/14/45
- ② The Railroad Embankment Triangle
- ③ Another raised railroad embankment

TIME CHART

Battle runs from 5:00AM to 12:00PM



This map gives an overview of the area around Alt Langsow. The 1054th Rifle Regiment could have been used to support the northern flank attack around the triangle. The 9th Fallschirmjagers were north of Alt Langsow, as was their SP Anti-tank unit. Use of any of the 9th Para units would require crossing divisional boundaries: avoid it.

Experiment assembling different "building blocks" from the orders of battle in different scenarios. Keep Soviet Reinforced Assault battalions independent units: remember that a regiment had three battalions. The Germans should be hard pressed. After all, these are the last days of the Third Reich.

SUGGESTED SPECIAL RULES

- In cities and other restricted terrain, the Soviets frequently attacked with columns of tanks on either side of an axis of advance protecting a core of infantry in the center of the formation. The tanks blasted the upper storeys of buildings to suppress snipers, machine gunners, and artillery observers, and the infantry engaging German tank-hunters and anti-tank guns.

Alt Langsow, Germany, April 15, 1945: The war would be over in Germany within the next couple of weeks. Everybody knew it, the end hung palpable in the air. The warm spring air stank with death, seasoned with those odd, acridly sweet aromas that accompany modern armies. Berlin was so close the Red Army could almost reach out and touch it. They had all come so far from the Volga and the Caucasus, from Lake Ladoga and the outskirts of Moscow.

The tankers and panzergrenadiers of the scratch force that held the triangle of railroad embankments south of Alt Langsow were all veterans, and held few illusions of their imminent fate. "Prisoner" was a word that had lost most of its meaning on the eastern front. Yet they knew good defensive ground when they saw it, and the hated Bolsheviks would have to pay in blood for taking this patch of the Fatherland.

The first wave of the attack against the railroad triangle was made by the Soviet 1052nd Rifle Regiment. Each of their three battalions had been reinforced into "assault" battalions. There were few illusions as the young and old alike prepared, in the mists of early dawn, of the coming storm. The infiltration group would slink forward, only to be pinned by the Nazis. Then the assault group would sweep forward, using the increased firepower to try and suppress the death trap of the enemy's trip lines, prepared mortar and MG killing ground. The support group waited their turn, hopefully for exploitation of a breach prior to the arrival of a breakthrough battalion.

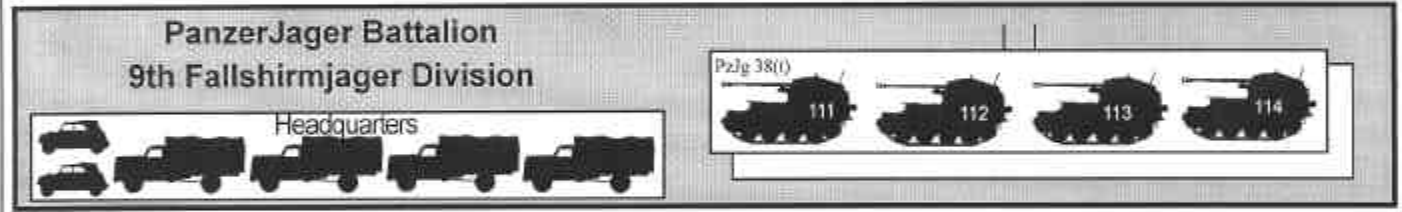
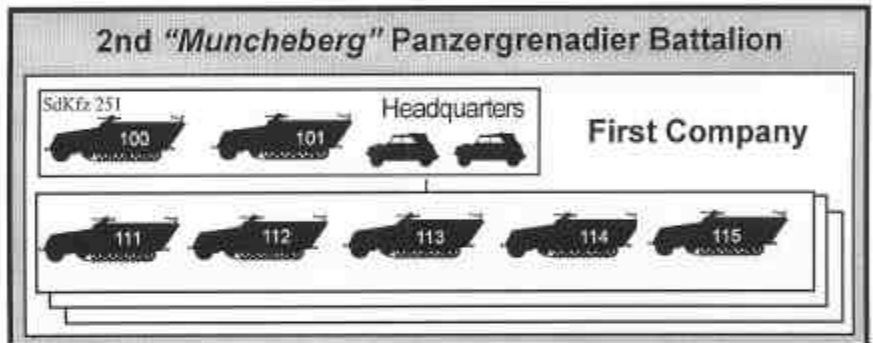
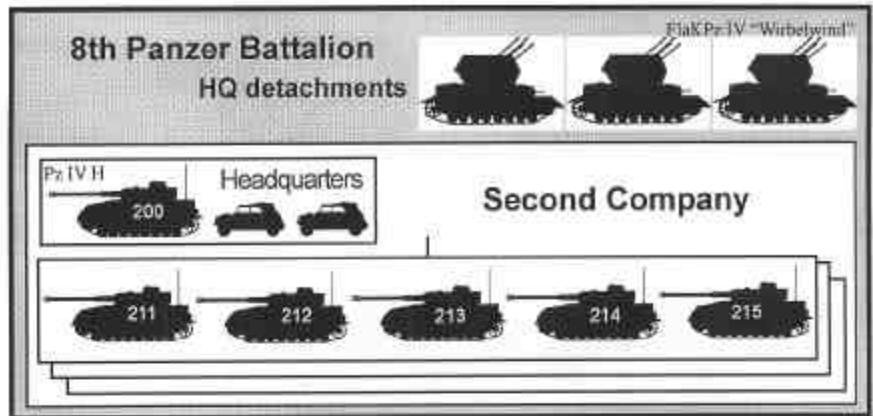
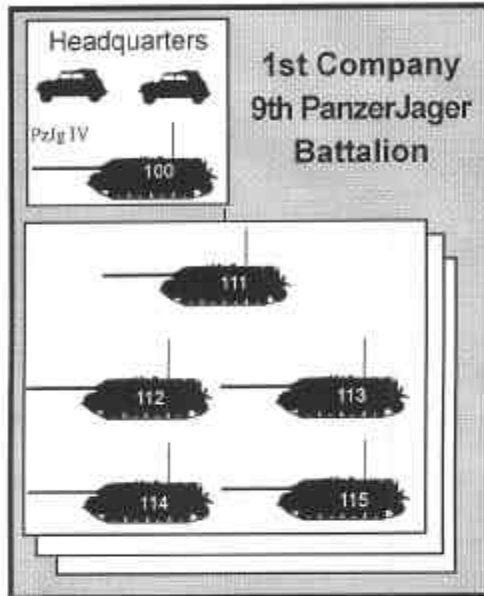
With luck, they might live through the day.

- It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of German handheld anti-tank weapons. Colonel General Raus claimed that in Pomerania, 380 of the 580 tanks destroyed were killed by handheld AT weapons.

- There are reports of an improvised "Berlin" armored train operating in the vicinity of Langsow. This train was reputed to be made up of five flatcars mounting 5 immobile—but still deadly—Tiger tanks and was credited with the destruction of up to 56 Soviet tanks during the April 16 fighting.

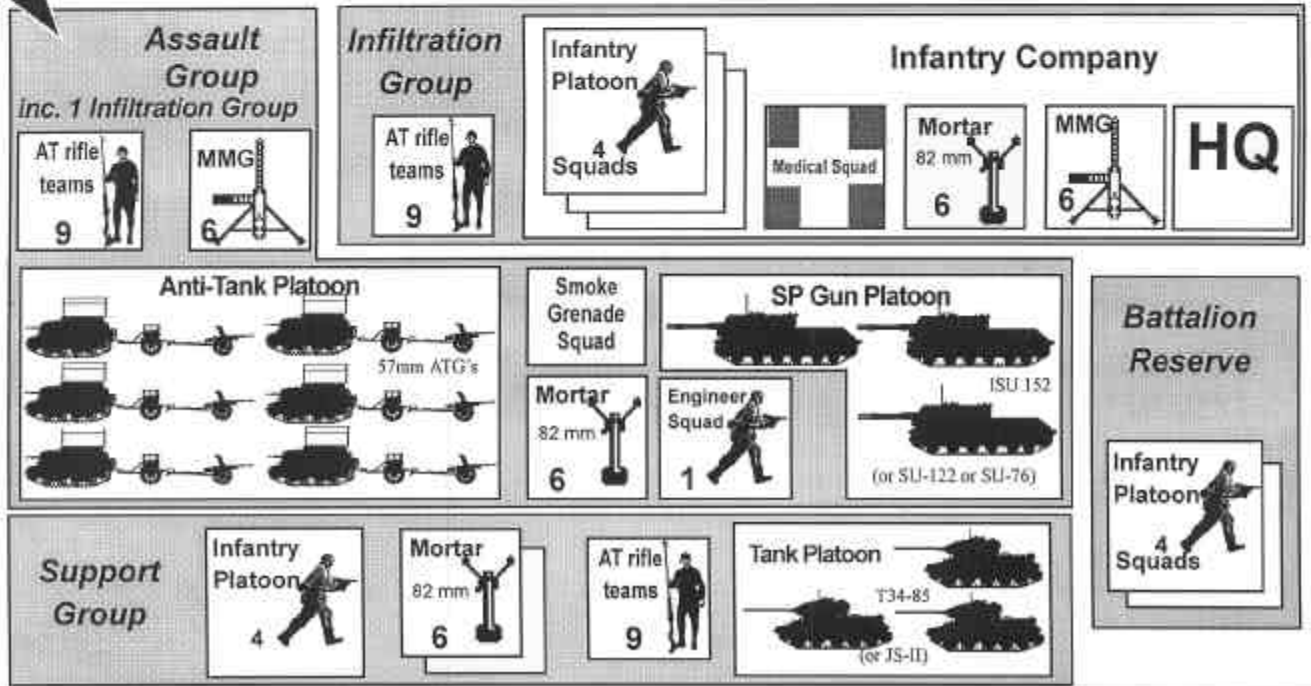


ELEMENTS OF LVith PANZER CORPS



ELEMENTS OF 5th SHOCK ARMY

REINFORCED ASSAULT BATTALION





HUS15 SS Norway

IT15 SPA 35

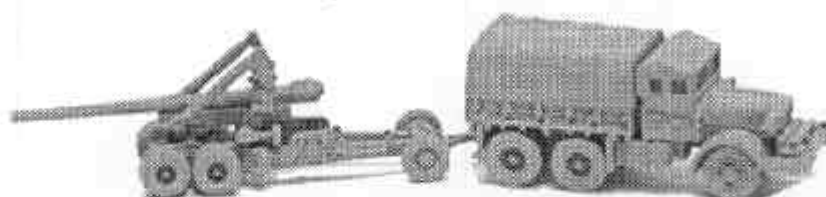


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(continued from page 1)

a PzJg IV, left a vivid account of the fighting:

"Our infantry are streaming back toward us in the dawning light...The Russians have hardly any tanks in our sector, but are attacking with masses of infantry and antitank weapons. We pull back westward along the village street...Russian antitank guns and infantry are bypassing the village to the north."

Bypassed on both flanks, the armor retreated westward, leaving the panzergrenadiers to slug it out in the triangle. Before the Russians overcame the resistance, two corps and divisional barrages had to be zeroed in, and T-34s attacked at point blank range. The road and railroad tunnels though the embankment were literally choked with dozens of burned out vehicles and so many slain Russians that one source described as "thousands." When the Germans who couldn't escape surrendered. Few prisoners were taken.