

TAC NEWS

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Fallschirmjäger

The Birth of a Doctrine

It was the Italians who first developed the idea of combat parachutists. In 1927 they demonstrated the concept to an international audience by successfully dropping nine men in full combat gear. It was the Soviets, however, unhampered by military traditionalism and enamored of anything modern or technologically advanced, who first expanded on the early Italian experiments. In 1934, they successfully dropped forty-six men and a light tank. In 1936 they astounded a group of foreign observers by doing the same with two full battalions of what they called "Locust Warriors". By the end of the year they had dropped 5,200 fully armed men and perfected a glider capable of carrying eighteen troops. After this, the idea of landing large numbers of men by parachute only was largely eclipsed by combined "airlanding" operations using gliders as well.

The Germans, based on Hitler's fascination with the spectacular, pursued "airborne" doctrine with more enthusiasm than anyone else during the 1930s. In 1935 Hermann Göring began organizing the Luftwaffe's first parachutists near Spandau, and sent fifty of these to Spain with the "Kondor Legion" in 1936. The survivors brought back much useful information. The first German "Fallschirmjäger" (combat parachutist) Regiments were organized and equipped based largely on this information and the first Fallschirmjäger Divisions were formed in 1939.

Physical and mental standards for Fallschirmjäger recruits were very high.



Training, under General Kurt Student, was strenuous, realistic, and dangerous. Political indoctrination in the principles of National Socialism was deep, and discipline was ruthlessly enforced. Field skills training included "jump" school, with five regular training drops and one under simulated combat conditions at less than four hundred feet. There were also regularly scheduled combat maneuvers with particular stress on demolition work. Individual equipment included loose trousers bloused over high boots, a weatherproof coverall, and a well-padded helmet. Personal weapons consisted of automatic rifles and machine pistols. Various combat knives, daggers, hand grenades, and pistols could be added.

Early Combat Operations

Fallschirmjäger took no part in the invasion of Poland in 1939, primarily due to the short duration of that campaign. But, numbers of Fallschirmjäger did take part in both the Danish and Norwegian operations in 1940. Over five thousand landed at Stavanger to seize the airfields there and three thousand did the same at Oslo. Other landings at Narvik and a railway station in Central Norway were not so

successful. The railway station force, in particular, met strong resistance from Norwegian forces, suffering 80% casualties before being rescued. The mixed results obtained in Scandinavia did not impress foreign observers, but the successes achieved in the Netherlands and Belgium did.

Fallschirmjäger seized several important Dutch objectives. A battalion grabbed the airfields surrounding The Hague and occupied the city, but later lost it. They captured bridges over the Waal River at Dordrecht, lost them to a Dutch counterattack, but regained them with ground support. A battalion-sized force also took the Maas River bridges at Moerdijk. Student's main effort at Rotterdam, however, consisting of a two-battalion assault on an airfield outside the city, was followed by a smaller landing within it. A combined action with six seaplane-loads of infantrymen seized and held the Neder Rijn Bridge at Rotterdam as well, until they were relieved by German ground troops.

In Belgium, Fallschirmjäger were able to seize an important bridge over the Albert Canal, but it was their successful assault on the "impregnable" fortress of Eben Emael on May 10th that really brought them to the military "center stage". Here, a small party of Germans swooped down in DFS-230 Gliders and landed directly on top of the fort! They were busily destroying turrets and casemates when a second wave of three hundred Fallschirmjäger "jumped" in as reinforcements. One thousand bewildered Belgians surrendered the next day.

Crete: A "Pyrrhic Victory"

Crete has been simultaneously called the zenith and nadir of German airborne doctrine. It was the zenith because this strategically important island, with its large sheltered port and three airfields, was conquered almost entirely from the air. It was the nadir due to the crippling losses suffered by the victors in both men and equipment. The Allied defense force consisted of approximately 30,000 men, including two-thirds of Major-General Bernard Freyberg's New Zealand Division, other British and Commonwealth troops, 11,000 Greeks, and some Cypriots. The New Zealanders, led by the charismatic Freyberg, were tough and reliable, as were many of the other troops, but there was little cohesion among the various units. Most of these were fragmentary survivors of the failed Greek expedition with severe shortages of heavy equipment, especially artillery, and almost no air cover.

Opposing this hodge-podge of disparate elements was a German force consisting of some 23,000 men, including the 7th Fallschirmjäger Division, under the direct supervision of General Student, supported by 500 Junkers transports, 75 gliders, and approximately 600 bombers, dive-bombers, and fighters. Ten thousand troops would land by parachute in three waves, the rest by glider, transport aircraft, and small civilian vessels.

The main assault took place on May 20th at Maleme airport. It began badly, despite a heavy preparatory air-bombardment. The landing zones were thickly occupied by New Zealand infantry who riddled the Fallschirmjägers with bullets as they drifted helplessly downward. What had been planned as a massive assault quickly became a bitterly contested series of isolated individual actions. Two-thirds of one German battalion was annihilated almost immediately. Confusion was widespread. The whole operation hung in the balance until a communications failure between elements of the 22nd New Zealand Battalion led to the premature abandonment of Hill 107, overlooking the Maleme airport. This relieved the pressure on isolated and severely weakened German positions in the vicinity, allowing them to occupy and consoli-

date this important piece of high ground, which in turn, allowed reinforcements to use the airport it dominated. Though few on either side realized it at the time, the fall of Hill 107 was a pivotal turning point in the battle for Crete.

Despite suffering frightful casualties, the Germans were able to fend off a major New Zealand counterattack on the 22nd. This forced Freyberg to order his troops to fall back over the mountains from the north side of the island preparatory to evacuation by sea. Of the original 30,000 troops deployed to defend the island, fewer than 17,000 escaped by sea over the next eight nights. Crete had cost the Germans 4,000 dead, including 25% of their elite paratroops. Losses overall had exceeded 30% of engaged forces. Hitler would never again consider major airborne operations viable. Fallschirmjägers became just another elite force, much like the SS, but under Luftwaffe as opposed to Nazi Party control; another separate army within the German army as a whole, vying for its share of an ever-shrinking pool of resources.

The Struggle for Sicily

When the Allies landed on Sicily, 1st Fallschirmjäger Division was stationed in Southern France. On 11 July, it was ordered to prepare for an immediate move to Rome. Its 3rd Regiment (Heidrich), the 1st & 3rd Battalions of the 4th Regiment, and the Divisional Fallschirm-MG Battalion were immediately airlifted there. The 4th Regiment and the MG Battalion next boarded Gliders and JU-52's and dropped around Syracuse and Catania. The 3rd Regiment followed a few days later. Other Army units were meanwhile being ferried across the Messina Strait by sea.

The Fallschirmjägers immediately went to work preparing defensive positions around their landing zones, and the MG Battalion under Major Schmidt went to defend Primasole Bridge over the River Simeto. This bridge dominated the only good road through the mountainous eastern end of the Island to the German bridgehead at Messina. On the night of 12-13 July, those Paras already on the ground were joined by two companies of Witzig's

Fallschirm-Pioneers as well as some Anti-Tank and Artillery units. These were followed a few hours later by men of the British 1st Parachute Brigade who jumped on Catania with the aim of capturing the airfield there for the Allies. The Germans managed to contain them, however, inflicting heavy casualties.

On 14 July, the 3rd Regiment jumped onto Catania airfield themselves. The place was under heavy fire from Allied aircraft and Naval Gunfire, but the jump was successful. Two hundred British Paratroopers jumped on the southern side of Primasole Bridge the next night and surprised the German garrison, capturing it with little resistance. Confusion reigned. The Fallschirmjägers made repeated attacks on the bridge during the next few hours and the British were forced to withdraw after running low on ammunition.

Next day, the sixteenth, the British attacked, supported by armor. They were beaten back by anti-tank weapons, concentrated machinegun, and mortar fire. It was not long before they returned. This time unsupported, but reinforced. This attack fared no better. The British withdrew after taking heavy casualties. Heavy British artillery fire followed, inflicting many casualties among the Germans. After this, they could not hold the bridge any longer. Late in the afternoon, British forces attacked a third time and forced the Paras to withdraw. The Germans retook the bridge two days later and lost it again on the 19th, this time for good. The remnants of two Pioneer companies, joined by the 4th Regiment, withdrew further east, fighting a rearguard action along the way.

On 25 July, Mussolini was forced to resign and was replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio. Many Italian units immediately laid down their arms and surrendered to the Allies. By the first week in August, the Germans were desperate. Allied troops were advancing from the west (US) and from the south (UK). Italian forces were now only a token presence. The German High Command decided to evacuate the island, under "Operation Lehrgang" (Course). Fallschirmjägers were used to plug gaps in the weakly held line, while German forces were ferried back across to

the mainland. Some parts of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division were evacuated on 11 August. Witzig's Pioneers provided the rearguard, destroying ammo dumps and fuel storage tanks before they too were ferried across the Messina Strait by 17 August.

The Canadians and Ortona

Ortona is practically the only proper port on Italy's Adriatic coast. At the end of 1943, it was where the Germans chose to make their stand against the Allied advance up the East side of the Italian boot. The men of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division were ordered to hold. Canadian troops from the 1st Infantry Division met them at the Moro River, just outside Ortona and fought their way into the town during eight bloody and tragic days around Christmas of that year.

"At dawn, under a gray, overcast sky (12/20/43), the Edmontons went into the attack. They advanced on a two-company wide front, with 'D' Company on the left and 'B' on the right. 'B' Company made good progress through a cluster of small vineyards, olive groves, and vegetable gardens to establish a position inside some buildings on Ortona's edge.

'D' Company had no such luck. Stone's men advanced in a line across an open field. Seventy-five to one hundred yards away stood the houses of Ortona.

The Company was immediately taken under fire by machinegun-armed paratroopers hidden in slit trenches fronting the buildings. Snipers, firing out of upper-story windows and from the roofs, added to what Stone later described as 'murderous fire'. Men fell in droves, killed or badly wounded. 'D' Company was forced to withdraw, leaving many of the wounded on the field. They tried again a few minutes later with the same result. The company had gone into the first attack about a hundred strong. After the second failed attempt, only seventeen riflemen were still on their feet..."

"A Canadian intelligence summary written by Major N.L.C. Mathers on December 22 cited the most noteworthy characteristics of the 1st Parachute Division's tactics as exemplifying 'dogged tenacity', extreme economy in manpower (evidenced by their reluctance to counterattack), skill in timing a withdrawal, and skill in concealment...Often they are thrown in to help restore a critical situation. This manner of employment has largely governed the organization and equipment of (German) parachute troops: They are well supplied with machineguns, mortars and antitank guns, but generally operate without their own artillery....The fact that these 'specialists' have appeared on our front.... gives us a clue to the enemy's intentions and fears."

Note: The quotes above are from the book "Ortona" by Mark Zuehlke, 1999, Stoddart Publishing Company Ltd, Toronto.

Ortona marked the first time the 1st Fallschirmjägers had ever fought as a complete division. They were usually committed only in groups of regimental or battalion size. The Ortona campaign brought out the best in this fine unit. Conditions here were perfectly suited to its weaponry and training. After the fall of Ortona in January, 1944 the division was sent to the Cassino Front where it further distinguished itself, but Ortona was to be its "finest hour".

German Fallschirmjägers exemplified everything that was right and wrong with the Nazi regime and its military doctrine. Personnel were of the highest quality, splendidly armed, and possessed of high morale and fighting spirit. However, as with the Waffen SS, it is believed by many that men who served as privates and corporals in the Fallschirmjägers would have been much more useful and effective as sergeants or even lieutenants distributed among regular Wehrmacht units. By concentrating men with superior skill and leadership potential in elite formations, the Nazis reduced the effectiveness of their forces overall. They paid the price for it.

The 1st Fallschirmjäger Division 1944

Parachute Infantry Company :	3x Parachute Infantry, 1x 81mm Gr-34 Mortar(1)	Parachute Regiment:	1x Infantry "GHQ", 3x Parachute Infantry Battalion, 1x Anti-Tank Company
Support Company :	1 x81mm Gr-34 Mortar(3), 2x Infantry Support	Fallschirmjäger Division:	3x Parachute Regiment, 1x Engineer Battalion, 1x Machinegun Battalion, 1x Anti-Tank Battalion, 1x Panzer Jäger Company, 1-3x Recon Company, 0-1x Mountain Artillery Battalion, 1-3x Artillery Battalion, 1x Mortar Battalion, 1x Heavy Artillery Battalion, 1x FlaK Company, 1x Heavy FlaK Company
Machinegun Company :	3x Infantry Support		
Engineer Company :	3x Engineer		
Engineer Support Company :	1x 81mm Gr-34 Mortar(3), 1x 20mm FlaK38, 1-2x Infantry Support		
Recon Company :	3x Motorcycle or Bicycle Infantry, 1x 81mm Gr-34 Mortar(1) / Motorcycle		
Anti-Tank Company :	1x 75mm PaK40 or 50mm PaK38 or 37mm PaK35/36		
Panzer Jäger Company	1-3x Marder II (SdKfz 131)		
Gun Company :	1-2x 120mm Gr-42 Mortar(2) or 1x 75mm IG-18(1)	Notes:	1) The 150mm sFH18 equipped artillery battalion may only be present if no "Mountain" artillery is present.
Mortar Company :	1x 120mm Gr-42 Mortar(2)		2) Infantry Stands may be replaced with SMG Stands.
FlaK Company :	2-3x 20mm FlaK38/Truck, 1x 20mm FlaK38		3) Machinegun Companies may possess organic truck transport at your option.
(Quad)/SdKfz 7/1 Heavy FlaK Company :	2-3x 88mm FlaK37/SdKfz 7		4) Engineer Support Companies may possess either pack mules, horse-drawn wagons, or trucks, at your option.
Parachute Infantry Battalion:	1x Infantry "HQ", 3x Parachute Infantry Company, 1x Support Company		5) Towed weapons must either all be equipped with horse or truck transport. You may not mix types within a force.
Machinegun Battalion:	1x Infantry "HQ", 3x Machinegun Company		
Mortar Battalion:	3x Mortar Company		
Engineer Battalion:	1x Infantry "HQ", 3x Engineer Company, 1x Engineer Support Company	Selected Bibliography	
Anti-Tank Battalion:	3x Anti-Tank Company	Bohmler, Rudolf. <i>Fallschirmjäger: Bildband und Chronik</i> . Bad Nauheim: Podzun, 1961.	
Artillery Battalion:	3x 105mm LG42(2)	Kesselring, Albert. <i>Kesselring: A Soldier's Record</i> . NY: Morrow, 1954. 381 p. DD247K45A33	
Mountain Artillery Battalion:	2x 75mm GebG-36 "Mountain Gun"(2)	Senger und Etterlin, Frido von. <i>Neither Fear nor Hope</i> . NY: Dutton, 1964. pp. 212-14. D811S4.	
Heavy Artillery Battalion:	3x 150mm sFH18(2)		

Torre Muchia - 4 January, 1944

"Torre Muchia" is a town on the coast just North of Ortona and was the final battle of the Ortona Campaign. It was a must win situation for the Canadians as they really needed a secure position on the Riccio River after taking Ortona or they would have no opportunity for rest or reinforcement before the advance began again in the Spring. After taking Ortona, the Canadian 1st Infantry Division was spent, and a long rest behind a secure front was vital for the division's survival. The German enemy was part of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division (One tough bunch!).

scenario length: 20 turns

initial deployment:

German forces set up first. Place forces no further south than a line drawn between the Southernmost tips of the 2 hilltops. German indirect fire may be plotted on **turn 1** to arrive on **turn 3**.

Canadian forces enter the map along its Southern edge on **turn 1**. Indirect fire may be plotted beforehand to arrive on **turn 1**.



Germans

Cohesion

14

(Kampfgruppe) 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment, 1st Fallschirmjäger Division: 1x Infantry "GHQ"(+) & Light Truck

No.1 Company/1st Battalion(-) 3x Infantry'43
No.2 Company/1st Battalion 3x Infantry'43, 1x 8cmK mortar[1]
No.3 Company/1st Battalion 3x Infantry'43, 1x 8cmK mortar[1]

Heavy Company/1st Battalion(-) 1x 8cm mortar[3], 2x Infantry Support

Regimental Support:

Anti-Tank Platoon 1x 75mm PaK-40/SdKfz-10
Gun Company 2x 120mm mortar[2]/Wagon

Division Support:

Machinegun Company 3x Infantry Support
Anti-Tank Company 3x 50mm PaK-38/Cart

Fieldworks: 3x Medium Improved Positions,
5x Light Improved Positions & 2x Roadblocks

GERMAN SPECIAL RULES

1. Due to recent heavy rains, movement is severely limited for all types of vehicles and infantry. In addition, Allied air power had practically every inch of the battlefield under surveillance. Therefore: There is a +2 die roll modification to all German cohesion rolls for movement purposes.

2. Before play begins, the German player must establish the location of two hidden fords along the Riccio River.

VICTORY CONDITIONS:

The Germans must maintain at least one of two "bridgeheads" on the Southern bank of the Riccio. These "bridgeheads" consist of semi-circles of 5" radius centered on the hidden fords. There may be no Canadian stands occupying ground anywhere within one of these two bridgeheads for a German tactical victory, both bridgeheads for a German decisive victory.



Canadians

Cohesion

14

(Canadian)Battle Group / 3rd Infantry Brigade / 1st Infantry Division : 1xGHQ(+0), 1xMedium Truck

The Carleton and York Regiment;

Headquarters Company- 1x Headquarters & Signals Platoon
Support Company- 1x 6 lbr ATG/Carrier, 1x 3"mortar[3]/Carrier, 1x Engineer, 1x Carrier[R]

A Company 3x Infantry '43 Platoon
B Company(-) 2x Infantry '43 Platoon
C Company 3x Infantry '43 Platoon
D Company 3x Infantry '43 Platoon

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment:

Headquarters Company 1x Headquarters & Signals Platoon
Support Company(-) 1x 6lbr ATG/Carrier, 1x3" mortar[3]/Carrier, 1x Carrier[R]

A Company(-) 2x Infantry '43 Platoon
B Company(-) 2x Infantry '43 Platoon
C Company(-) 2x Infantry '43 Platoon
D Company(-) 1x Infantry '43 Platoon

Saskatoon Light Infantry Regiment(-):

1st Company(-) 2x Infantry Support
2nd Company 2x 4.2" Mortar[2]/Truck

Division Support:

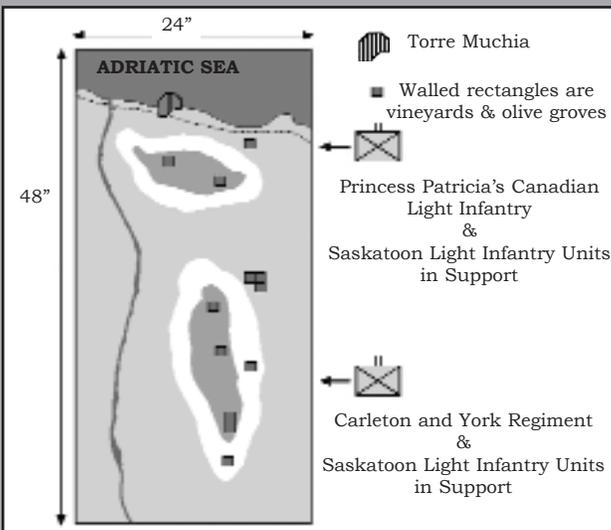
1st Field Regiment (RCHA)- 3x 25lbr Gun / Howitzer Battery (OFF MAP) 2x 25lbr[2]
B & C Squads/12th Armored Regiment
(Three Rivers Tanks)- 8x M4 "Sherman"

CANADIAN SPECIAL RULES

1. Each Canadian "Off Map" artillery battery may fire for a total of 9 turns. "Smoke" missions by each battery may total 3 turns.

2. Due to recent heavy rains, movement is severely limited for all vehicles and infantry. In addition, the Germans had thoroughly mined and booby-trapped practically every inch of the battlefield. Therefore, there is a +2 die roll modification to all Canadian cohesion rolls for movement purposes. In addition, a given stand will panic on a "natural" 19 or 20, rather than the usual 20. (See "Marker Removal").

VICTORY CONDITONS:(Marginal) No German stand may occupy any part of Torre Muchia. (Tactical) No German stand may occupy any part of either of the two hilltops.



General Special Rules: **1.** Due to low clouds and prevalent fog, the maximum sighting distance is 12" regardless of elevation.

2. Due to the rain soaked ground, the movement effect of all hillside "slopes" is increased by +1 for all types of stands. (+2 for tracked and foot movement, +3 for wheeled.)

3. Torre Muchia consists of "Light Buildings".

4. The Riccio River is unfordable throughout its length.(See German special rules.)

5. The vineyards and olive groves are considered "Grove" terrain. The walls modify any attacker's combat die-rolls by +1 whenever a line of sight passes through them. The buildings in the "Groves" have no additional effect.

6. The highway is a "Good" road. It is broken at the Riccio River. The bridge has been blown!

7. The two "roadblocks" may be placed anywhere on the map. Being booby-trapped, they may not be removed. Any stand may end its movement on the roadblock markers. In order to move off the roadblock markers, the stand must make a successful cohesion roll with an additional +4 cohesion penalty. Roadblocks do not block line of sight.

8."Medium" improved positions may be fired upon using a stand's AP or HE value whichever the player prefers.