

Operation Kleiner Bär (Operation Pooh)

Date: June 15, 1940

Location: the Rhine Valley, between Neuf-Brisach (France) and Alt-Breisach (Germany)

Type: German Amphibious Assault versus French Defense

Size: small

Turns: 35

Victory conditions:

Any result other than a decisive German victory is a French morale victory, but a Pyrrhic one...

Description

While the collapse of the French Army is about to be consummated (the Germans entered Paris on June 14) the OKH decided for some time to cross the Rhine in five places on a front over 40 kilometers, from Rhinau in the north to Neuf-Brisach in the south. The four conventional divisions (ID) in charge of the amphibious assault will be supported by four fortress divisions (*Stellungdivisionen*) poorly adapted to this task.

Historical context

SF of Colmar, sector of the 104th DIF. On the Rhine French bank, casemates, blockhouses and field fortifications are held by 3rd CEO and 1st Battalion of the 28th RIF. But for a few days static units in Alsace have lost support from the interval units and a large part of the artillery withdrawing towards the Vosges, following GQG orders. Moreover, the Maginot Line in that area suffers from flaws in conception & realization: CORF casemates in insufficient number or badly established; lack of artillery works; too protruding *cloches* GFM; blind front of the bank-situated blocks facing Germany without the usual rip-rap (stone core covered with earthwork; please look at the photo to see the effects) intended to protect the concrete from direct hits; structures located on the dyke and therefore directly exposed to PAKs' straight shots: the famous 88 were laying camouflaged less than 400m from their targets! Finally, often isolated from their superiors and even from other neighboring defenders, the French crews will have to deal with a difficult or even impossible task: a mission of sacrifice.

Right bank of the Rhine, sector of ID.554, a *Stellungdivision*. IR.623 *Pioniere* and *Landser* are preparing to cross *Vater Rhein* on all kinds of boats, both regulatory and requisitioned. The Command Staff estimates that 3 or 4 minutes should suffice to gain a foothold on the western bank. Minutes of uncertainty for "brass and cauliflower", fateful minutes for the front line soldier. The German troops whose morale is quite good, however lacked experience for that kind of assault: ID.554 remains a defensive unit despite recent specific training. Anxiety grips each soldier but all are very confident in artillery capacity to knock out *die Franzosen* before having to fight them, once the west bank was to be reached.

Notes

Scenario designed to be played on the German side versus a French AI. Also playable H2H. This historical scenario as to the facts, takes place in the southern part of assault area planned by OKH. For sake of playability the map is a modest size one but nevertheless still offers the main characteristic elements of local topography. The terrain has been disrupted since the war by the work of a wide-gauge canal parallel to the Rhine. The names of French unit leaders are those of men who actually fought (Officers, NCOs & Privates); on the German side only very few names marked with a + meet this criterion.

Abbreviations and military jargon used to name scenario units

France

Blockhaus G: "G" after General Garchery's name, a former commander of the 7th RM (Mulhouse). Small, relatively well-built MOM bank blockhouse, with two back-to-back firing chambers with 1 FM or 1 Hotchkiss machine gun in each firing chamber.

Casemate M2F: CORF work equipped with:

- two separate firing chambers (M2) and whose facade (F) is facing the enemy along an axis parallel to the river, two 7.5mm Reibel MG (twin mounted) and one 13.2mm anti-tank Hotchkiss gun in each firing chamber ("M" is for *armes mixtes*),
- a fixed GFM steel turret or *Cloche* (bell) GFM with 1 periscope, 1 50mm light mortar and 1 FM 24/29,
- a rear exit protected by 1 FM slot and a chute (*goulotte*) for throwing grenades,
- a prefabricated outdoor barracks (hut) for the crew.

Coupoles 7eRM (for 7th Military Region): small underground MOM blockhouse with a dome-shaped roof; designed to house 1 FM or 1 MG.

CEFV (Compagnie d'Engins et de Fusiliers Voltigeurs): Company of vehicles and riflemen (specific to the RIF).
CEO (Compagnie d'Equipage d'Ouvrage): Casemate crew company.
CHR (Compagnie Hors-Rang): Non-ranking company at the unit commander's disposal.
CM (Compagnie de Mitrailleuses): MG company.
CORF (Commission d'Organisation des Régions Fortifiées): Commission for the organization of fortified regions (1925-1935). The Government & Army project manager of the Maginot Line best works.
DIF (Division d'Infanterie de Forteresse): Fortress infantry division.
Elt: element(s) of a unit.
FM (Fusil-Mitrailleur): Light machine gun (LMG).
FV (Fusiliers Voltigeurs): Riflemen (light infantry).
GFM (Guetteur Fusil-Mitrailleur): Spotter & LMG.
GQG (Grand Quartier Général): GHQ.
MOM (Main d'Œuvre Militaire): Military workforce (1935-1940); the troop was charged with improvised construction of concrete or earthen bunkers, all of dubious military effectiveness.
RAP (Régiment d'Artillerie Portée): Vehicle mounted artillery regiment.
RIF (Régiment d'Infanterie de Forteresse): Fortress infantry regiment.
RM (Région Militaire): Military administrative region.
Sec. (Section): Platoon.
SF (Secteur Fortifié): Fortified sector of the Maginot Line.
STG (Section Technique du Génie): Army engineering technical section which provided the regional commanders with plans for the pre-1940 "stopgap" casemates and other MOM fortifications, known as "junk fortification".

Germany

AR (Artillerie Regiment): Artillery regiment.
Aufkl. (Aufklärung): Recon.
Bat. (Bataillon): Battalion.
Batt. (Batterie): Battery.
BrandenB.: Brandenburger. Assault troop trained in special operations.
Brig.: Brigade.
Flak (Flieger Abwehrkanone): Anti-aircraft gun.
FlamWrf (Flammenwerfer): Flamethrower.
FlkB.: Flak Brigade: Anti-aircraft artillery brigade.
GrW (Granatewerfer): Mortar.
ID (Infanteriedivision): Infantry division.
IR (Infanterieregiment): Infantry regiment.
Komp. (Kompanie): Company.
MG (Maschinengewehr): Machine gun.
OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres): High Command of the German Army.
PAK (Panzer Abwehrkanone): Anti-tank gun.
Pi.Komp. (Pionierkompanie): Company of engineers.
s.Komp. (schwere Kompanie = HMG+GrW): Heavy weapons company.
Stellungdivision: Fortress infantry division.
Teil: Element(s) of a unit.
Zug: Platoon.

Sources

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- IGN Tourist map #31 (1/100 000, 1974 edition),
- MICHELIN Road map #205 (1/200 000, 1961 edition),
- Wikimaginot (in French only but precise, exhaustive and interactive):

https://wikimaginot.eu/V70_site.php

https://wikimaginot.eu/V70_construction_detail.php?id=14494

Design

Lilian NISON – Valenciennes – France

A Tribute to "Ceux de 1940" which included my grandfathers: Eugène, the Frenchman and Karol, the Pole.

Have Fun!

[05/12/2023 version]



June 1940: Casemate du Pont de Bateau - Sud located 2 KM north of Ochsenkopf, which no longer exists.