

## A DARING COMMANDO RAID SCENARIO

# OPERATION GUNNERSIDE

*The raid on Vemork in February 1943 was regarded as the most successful SOE operation of WW2. Vemork power station was located in Telemark, Norway and was significant as it had been producing heavy water since before the War. When the Germans captured Norway, the heavy water was particularly important as it was needed for the German atomic research programme to try to develop an atomic bomb.*

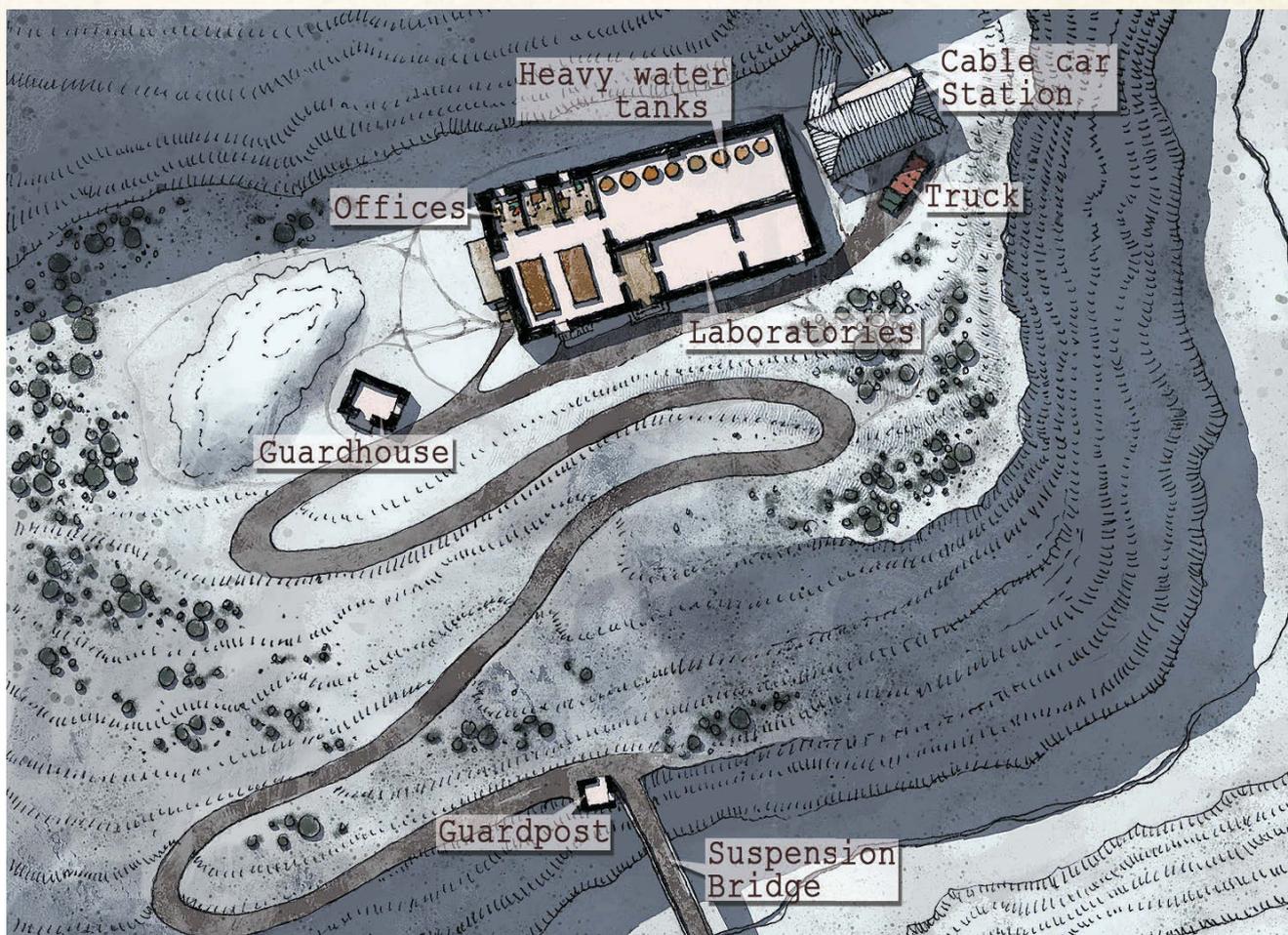
**T**he Special Operations Executive in London realised the importance of neutralising the heavy water production in Vemork and planned a commando attack in November 1942. Codenamed *Operation Freshman*, the plan was to send a platoon of commandos by glider to meet up with local SOE agents who had already been inserted close to the plant, and then to assault the factory. Operation Freshman was a complete disaster. Both of the Horsa gliders and one of the Halifax bombers on the mission crashed. The few survivors of the crash were quickly captured by the Germans and interrogated by the Gestapo before being executed. The catastrophic operation led to 41 deaths, and Vemork was still completely intact.

The failure of the raid in November meant that the Germans were now alerted to the possibility of future attacks on the factory and stepped up their defences. More soldiers were posted to the site and additional minefields and spotlights were placed around the factory. The inaccessible location further strengthened the factory's position. Built on a small plateau and surrounded by a 200 metre ravine on several sides above the River Mane and with a steep cliff behind it, it appeared that the only access point was a 75 metre bridge. SOE, however, were confident that these defences could be breached, and were assisted by a few locals who worked inside the factory, who supplied them with information about the layout of the facility.

In the following February, a second attempt to destroy the heavy water in the factory was carried out. Codenamed *Operation Gunnerside*, six Norwegian SOE agents were parachuted in and rendezvoused with a further four agents who had already been dropped in the previous failed operation. The team then moved into position to sabotage the factory on the night of the 27th February 1943.

Avoiding the heavily guarded bridge, they scaled up the steep ravine to insert themselves into the factory. Despite the sentries, they were able to gain access to the factory through a cable tunnel and window without raising the alarm. The only person they encountered in the factory in the early hours of February 28 was Johansen, the Norwegian caretaker, who was happy to co-operate with the Allied troops rather than setting off the alarm. Explosives were placed on the heavy water tanks ready to light the fuses, but there was a bizarre delay while they attempted to find Johansen's glasses which he had somehow misplaced in the room! Once found, the fuses were lit with a timed delay and the team were able to evacuate in the same way as they had entered.

The following explosions destroyed the German supplies of heavy water and delayed further production in the factory. The SOE agents separated, with some skiing to neutral Sweden while others remained in the region and went to Oslo. While the factory was re-



**A map of the heavy water facility for your game - don't get caught!**

paired and production continued in April 1943, the German heavy water project had suffered a significant blow. Allied bombing in November that year forced the Germans to remove heavy water production from the plant and transfer all remaining stock back to Germany. This batch was controversially sunk by Norwegian agents sabotaging a ferry in February 1944.

## THE SCENARIO

The raid on the factory at Vemork was famously recreated in the 1965 film *Heroes of Telemark* starring Kirk Douglas, although the producers took certain liberties with the historic story. The mission served as inspiration for a scenario I played recently using Osprey's *Black Ops*, although, much like the film, I took a few liberties with historical details to make it into a playable game. What follows, therefore, are a few suggestions to turn this into a playable scenario that will entertain and challenge you.

## The boards

The terrain for the map of the factory should consist of one main factory unit building and a minimum of one outbuilding to represent a guardhouse, as well as a cable car station at the opposite end. Additional buildings can be placed depending on what you have available, along with additional 'clutter' such as trucks, crates, and a scattering of trees.

The table should be covered in thick snow, and some attempt should be made to simulate the steep slopes of the ravine and the cliffs behind the factory. While a finely crafted terrain board might look spectacular, I used some polystyrene terrain tiles to create the main plateau draped over with a white tablecloth to create a representation of the severe undulations. The edge of the bridge should be represented on the table, although showing the whole structure shouldn't really be required.

## Starting positions

The SOE agents start deployed at the bottom of the ravine. The steep ravine side counts as difficult terrain and the agents are assumed to be using climbing ropes. The game is played at night.

One half of the German defenders may be deployed on duty in and around the factory; the rest will be resting in the guard house. One guard must be placed in the guard post and another two at the cable car station. All other guards on duty should be placed within 18" of the factory but not inside it, although they can be placed in the guardhouse. In the factory should be Johansen (treat him as a civilian). The other German defenders and commanding officer should be deployed off table and arrive via the bridge if the alarm is raised. Optionally up to six may arrive via the cable car station.

## The forces

The attacking SOE agents should be represented by ten professional soldiers. Two should be professional aces, and four should be classed as veteran professional specialists and carry the demolition charges. The remaining four should be classed as professional soldiers with the 'tough' ability. They may be armed with rifles or SMGs in ratios of your choice. All have some sort of melee weapon – either a knife or a blackjack – and a couple of grenades. Nobody is equipped with body armour.

The defending German troops should be represented by 25 German conscript soldiers. One may be the commanding officer, represented by a conscript ace with SMG. Two NCOs should be represented by conscript soldiers with SMG. Twenty conscript soldiers with rifle and bayonet and two soldiers with LMG should make up the rest of the garrison.

## Objectives

The SOE agents must set charges on the heavy water tanks and escape, either back down the ravine or, if they are feeling very bold, over the bridge. Once the charges are set they must decide how long to set the fuses for and must write down the number of turns the fuses will burn for before they blow up. If they manage to detonate the demolitions on the water tanks then this is classed as an SOE victory regardless of casualties received or caused. If the Germans manage to stop them from doing this they win the game. The mission must also be aborted if the SOE sustain eight casualties or more, with any SOE agents being captured counting as two towards this total.

## Special rules

**Snow** – walking in the snow leaves footprints which will remain for two turns until continued snowfall covers them over enough to disguise them. If a guard encounters footprints he will take a guard reaction test at +2 to the roll. If a roll is made for a movement he will follow the direction of the footprints rather than the random direction suggested by the dice roll.

**Snowdrift** – The snowdrift blocks line of sight and is noisy to move through. Add +1 noise tokens for anyone moving through it.

**The Ravine** – The ravine requires specialist climbing equipment to move up at a 3" move per activation. It should take three turns to reach the top. Roll 2d6 per figure every time you try to climb it. On a roll of '12' something bad has happened.

Something bad... roll 1d6

- 1-2 – Dislodged a rock that falls down the ravine making a very loud noise! Add +1 noise token to the moving figure.
- 3-4 – Small slip! Add +2 noise token and take a saving throw to the moving figure. A failure indi-

cates a twisted ankle or other non-lethal damage. The figure may only move at half speed with assistance from another friendly figure.

- 5-6 – Snap! The figure slips, falls or some other nastiness. Remove the figure as a casualty and add +3 noise token for the loud crashing sound as his body hits the ground at the bottom of the ravine. Now hope the guards don't hear anything!?

**It's cold!** – It is a cold night and the guards would really prefer somewhere warm to go to rather than standing around exposed on the mountainside. If a guard reaction is a 'yawns and stretches' or 'looks around', replace the result with a turn towards the warm guardhouse and moving 6" towards it.

**Entering the factory** – The front doors to the factory are locked. Keys to the factory are carried by all German NCOs, Johansen the caretaker, and the Commanding Officer. They can also be obtained from inside the guardhouse. The factory can also be entered by a tunnel and window anywhere from along the offices side of the factory building. While the SOE know of this entrance, they will need to spot the concealed entrance. Roll 1d6 when a figure is next to a wall per turn. On a roll of 4+, they may enter here using a cautious move.

**Minefield** – The Germans had placed mines around the factory after the initial failed raid in 1942. If a red Joker is followed by a black joker as the next card, the German player can use this instead to activate a mine to interrupt the move of the last SOE figure to have moved, so long as he was outside of 18" of the factory and not on the main road or bridge. This counts as a HE +3 explosion. If no figures are within this area than the additional activation card is wasted.

**Johansen the caretaker** – He counts as a civilian. He should roll on the civilian loyalty table if he discovers the intruders. If a '1' is rolled on the reaction table he is favourable but has lost his glasses. The SOE may not blow the heavy water tanks until they have been found! They will be delayed 1d3 turns looking for the blasted things! They will be impossible to replace in wartime otherwise!

## FOLLOWING ON...

If the SOE agents manage to blow up the heavy water, an exciting scenario might be made of them escaping on skis chased by German mountain troops. Further scenarios might cover attempts to plant explosives on the ferry carrying the remaining heavy water back to Germany...

If the Norwegian WW2 setting is a little too tricky you could transfer the scenario to somewhere completely different, even a fictional setting. How about US special forces infiltrating a North Korean nuclear research facility or James Bond with ninja assistance attempting to destroy an evil mastermind's drug production laboratory? **WS&S**