

THE AMERICAN EFFORT AT OVERLOON

# TASK FORCE CHAPPUIS

The battle for Overloon is often overlooked due to Market Garden immediately before it and the Battle of the Bulge afterwards. By focussing on the cinematic it is very easy to miss out on the bigger historical picture, which, often remarkably, can show how separate and discrete actions are actually just individual threads in a tightly woven tapestry that can only be appreciated by standing back and considering the complete ensemble.

By Richard Clarke

**T**he battle at Overloon came about as a result of the drive into Holland that left disparate elements of German forces in its wake. To the east, along the river Maas, a German-held bridgehead was initially bypassed. To the Germans' advantage, being pushed

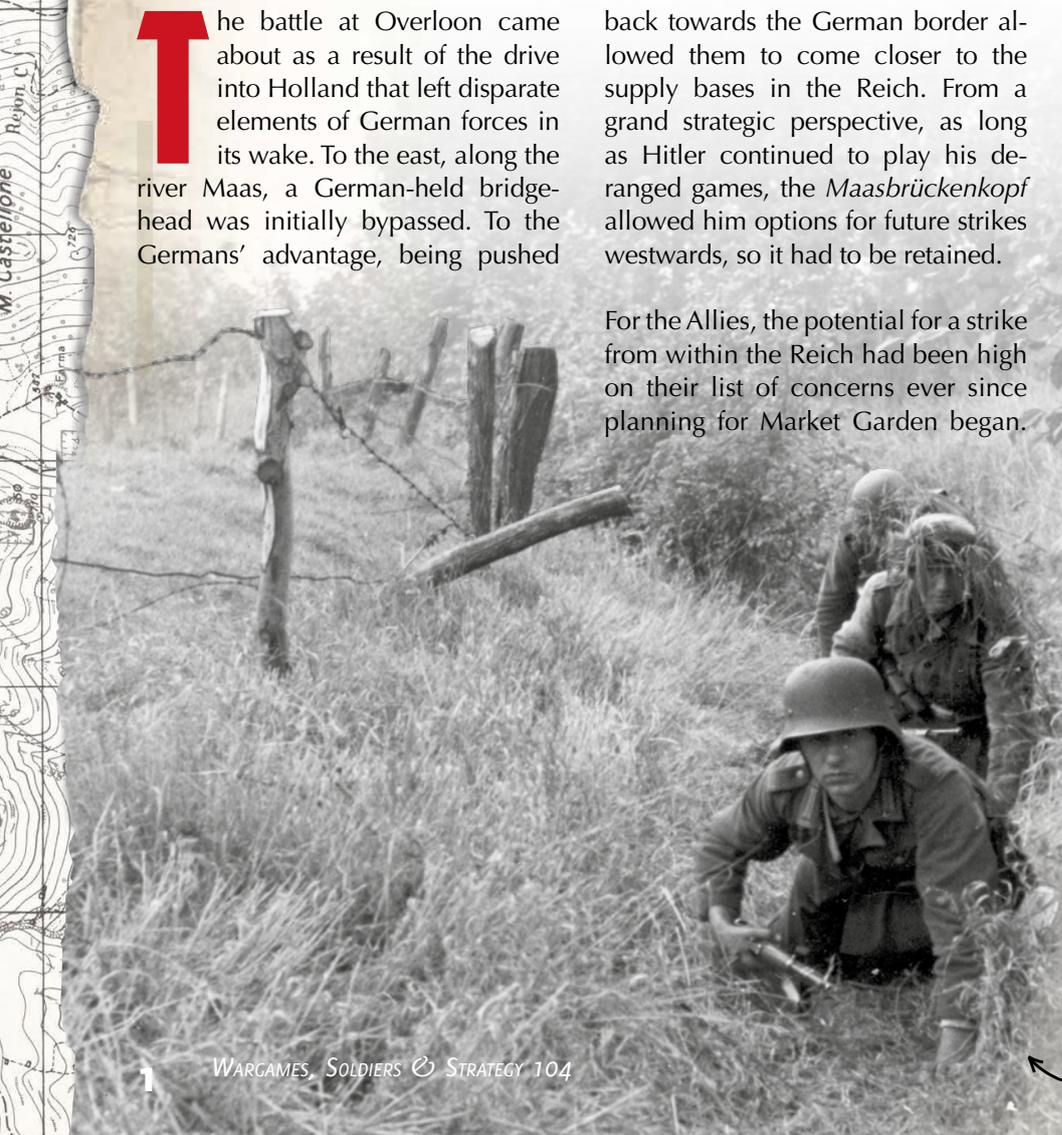
back towards the German border allowed them to come closer to the supply bases in the Reich. From a grand strategic perspective, as long as Hitler continued to play his de-ranked games, the *Maasbrückenkopf* allowed him options for future strikes westwards, so it had to be retained.

For the Allies, the potential for a strike from within the Reich had been high on their list of concerns ever since planning for Market Garden began.

Indeed, one could argue that the US airborne failure to seize the bridge at Nijmegen was largely due to an overemphasis on diverting troops to block the threat of an attack from the Klever Reichswald at Groesbeek. As a result, when Market Garden ended on 25 September 1944, the emphasis shifted to consolidating gains and mopping up the remnants of German forces where they still posed a threat. The Maas bridgehead was one such example, and it was at Overloon that the main strike was to be delivered.

The US 7th Armored Division was selected to make the attack that would crush the bridgehead in one swift and highly mobile operation. As early as 23 September it was being shifted from the area around Metz to Holland, ready for its next major operation.

The plan settled upon by General Hodge, XIX Corps' commander, was for the 7th Division to assemble around Oploo, Sint Anthonis, and Boxmeer and to strike down to the south-east. Phase One of the operation, launched on 30 September, focussed on Overloon as its first phase-line objective. Then, with German defences there overcome, the division would drive for



Grenadiere using a Dutch drainage ditch to advance on the enemy unseen.

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A 57mm A/T gun protects the US infantry.



The infantry at Overloon consisted of Heer, Fallschirmjäger and other Luftwaffe troops, and some SS.

## THE GERMANS

The Germans are an unusual crowd as the range of units present was so varied in quality. However, the organisational structure should be as below:

### PLATOON HEADQUARTERS

Unterfeldwebel: senior leader armed with a machine pistol

Panzerschreck team: two-man crew

### SQUADS ONE TO THREE

Obergefreiter: junior leader armed with a machine pistol; one Panzerfaust

LMG team	Rifle team
MG34 or MG 42 Two crew One rifleman	Six riflemen

To reflect quality, the player can select a regular unit, which would represent some of the SS Panzergrenadier units or Fallschirmjäger within the Kampfgruppe, or they may select what we can call impromptu units of less experienced troops. The latter we class as regulars but to represent their more brittle nature we increase the effect of Shock: remove one firing dice for every point of Shock on the unit.

The Germans may use the following support lists:

### GERMAN SUPPORT LISTS

#### List One

Medical orderly

Adjutant

Minefield

Barbed wire

Additional MG42 for one squad

Entrenchments for one team

#### List Two

Roadblock

Panzerschreck team: two men

Panzerknacker team: four men

Senior leader

Pre-game bombardment

#### List Three

Sniper team

#### List Four

Regular infantry squad

Regular MG 42 on tripod mount; five crew

LeIG18 with five crew and junior leader

#### List Five

Pak 38 anti-tank gun with five crew and a junior leader

#### List Six

Forward observer and 8 cm mortar battery

Sd.Kfz. 251/21 'Drilling' (Armour 2, AP 4, HE 10, No secondary, Fast, open top)

#### List Seven

Pak 40 with five crew and a junior leader

#### List Eight

Jagdpanzer IV/70 (V) with junior leader

Pak 43 anti-tank gun: five crew and junior leader

#### List Ten

Panther with junior leader

Venlo, which, as the Phase Two objective, was due to fall that evening. On the following day the division would swing south-west, with the Maas on their left, and end Phase Three (and the whole operation) in the vicinity of Roermond, where they would link up with the 1st Belgian Brigade who were to be attacking eastwards across the Zuid-Willemsvaart canal.

By this stage of the war, the Allies were showing signs of mastering the combined-arms tactics and, more importantly, the combined combat groups that the Germans had used so successfully. Within a US armoured division, armour, infantry, and other support units would be divided into combat commands. Within each such com-



mand, two task forces would typically be formed, one under the command of the senior armoured officer and the other under his infantry counterpart.

At Overloon, Combat Command A under Colonel Dwight A. Rosenbaum was split into Task Force Brown and Task Force Chappuis. As was typical, these were not perfectly symmetrical. Major John Brown of the 40th Tank Battalion commanded B and C Companies from that unit as well as B Company of the 48th Armored Infantry Battalion and one platoon of A Squadron, the 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Chappuis had A and D Companies of the 40th Tank Battalion under his command, as well as A, C, and D Companies from his 48th Armored Infantry Bat-

talion and two platoons of the 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Both benefited from the support of a battery of self-propelled artillery. As we can see, both were well-equipped all-arms battlegroups, and the men were trained to function as such.

On the German side, Kampfgruppe Walther looked far more chaotic in what can only be described as a rag-tag force made up of partially trained men from replacement training units scraped together from all over the Reich: pilots with no planes, ground crew with no airfields, partially recovered men brought in from convalescence, and a leavening of veteran NCOs and officers with experience gained in all corners of Europe, Russia, and the Mediterranean. Truly, the glory

## THE AMERICANS

The following organisational structure should be used for the US forces:

PLATOON HEADQUARTERS
Lieutenant: senior leader armed with carbine
Platoon sergeant: senior leader armed with SMG
HEADQUARTERS SQUAD
Sergeant: junior leader armed with M1 Garand
Rifle team
<b>Option:</b> Two men may be equipped with a bazooka instead of the Garand to form a team.
SQUADS ONE AND TWO
Sergeant: junior leader armed with M1 Garand
Rifle team
Ten riflemen with M1 Garand One man with SMG
<b>Option:</b> Two men may be equipped with a bazooka instead of the Garand to form a team
MORTAR SQUAD
60 mm mortar with five crew

MACHINE GUN SQUAD	
Sergeant: junior leader armed with M1 Garand	
LMG team	LMG team
One tripod-mounted 0.30 MMG & five crew	One tripod-mounted 0.30 MMG & five crew
The Americans may use the following support lists:	
AMERICAN SUPPORT LISTS	
List One	
Medical orderly	
Adjutant	
Engineer mine-clearance team: three men	
Engineer wire-cutting team: three men	
Engineer demolition team: three men	
Jeep: no crew	
List Two	
Bazooka team: two men	
Senior leader	
Pre-game bombardment	
List Three	
Sniper team	

60 mm mortar team: five crew
M3 halftrack: no weapons or crew
List Four
Armoured infantry squad
Engineer squad with junior leader
0.30 MMG on tripod mount; five crew
List Five
Engineer squad in M3 with junior leader
57 mm anti-tank gun with five crew and junior leader
List Six
Forward observer and 81 mm mortar battery
76 mm anti-tank gun with five crew and junior leader
M10 GMC with junior leader
M4 Sherman with junior leader
List Seven
M18 GMC with junior leader
List Eight
M4 Sherman 76 mm with junior leader



Heavy mining requires engineers to clear the way.

days were just memories for these men, who clung only to the thin diet of hope provided by the talk of 'V-weapons'. However, Walther did have the armoured remnants of his Panzer and Jagdpanzer force, made up of Panthers and Jagdpanzer IV/70s along with the rare but very effective Sd.Kfz. 251/21 'Drilling' with its triple 20 mm Luftwaffe cannon on a Kriegsmarine mount.

To say that the plan of attack did not go well is an understatement. Arriving at their jump-off points from column of march, Combat Command A arrived on time but was delayed while

Combat Command B had to move further to the east. The concentration of vehicles massed for the attack could not fail to be noticed by the Germans, who brought down concentrations of artillery and Nebelwerfer fire onto the assembled Americans. It was 1630 before the attack could commence, far too late to be able to achieve their set objectives, and, from their positions in the woods north of Overloon, the Germans blocked the attacks at all points. Resuming the attack on the next day, the Americans began pushing their way through the woods in fierce close-quarter fighting, with attack being met with counterattack.

Task Force Chappuis was initially successful on the morning of 1 October, making rapid progress on the US right and driving in towards Overloon itself. However, Walther's mobile panzer reserve bought this deep penetration to an end and a stalemate ensued, with Chappuis men gaining a toehold in the woods to the west of the town.

The following day, 2 October, saw continued fighting, with the woods to the north at last being cleared. German counterattacks against Chappuis were repulsed on this day and the next, but the impetus had gone from the attack. On 5 October, the Americans tried once more but were again repulsed. The battle for Overloon had begun – but it was a long way from ending.

### GAMING THE BATTLE FOR OVERLOON

Overloon is a fantastic action to fight, as the range of German troops involved and the all-arms approach of the allies make for some very nice force options with *Chain of Command* or indeed any platoon-level game that takes your fancy.

It is possible to focus on some of the more open and flowing actions, such as Task Force Chappuis on 1



An SS squad prepares its position against the oncoming Americans, under the watchful eye of an NCO.



Any and all possible reinforcements were brought into the Netherlands to deal with Operation Market Garden, both the outmoded and the brand new.

October, but for me the iconic encounter would be a series of linked games seeing the Americans attacking through the woods north of Overloon. That three-day slog allows us to follow the actions of one platoon on each side in what might best be described as a half-pint-sized campaign.

## THE FORCES

The forces shown in the tables on pages two and three are used in the campaign. Personally, I am not a fan of messing about with unit organisation. You can, of course, decide that troops would reorganise in whatever structures they wish as they take losses, and that is precisely the approach that will be required as the campaign progresses. However, as a starting point the correct platoon organisation does reflect the way that units were equipped and trained to fight.

## PLAYING THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign sees the US forces attempting to advance through the

woods to the north of Overloon and covers three actions as part of that.

### Terrain

The terrain in the area was heavily wooded, with numerous roads, tracks, and rides dissecting it in a somewhat haphazard manner. In the first game, the US forces should be attacking across a table 6' wide by 4' deep. We use the "Attack & Defend" scenario from the *Chain of Command* rules, and I presume most rule sets will have a similar setup that one can use as a blueprint. The German half of the table should have two 2' by 2' areas covered in woods, the other area having a garden and some agricultural land, while the northern 6' by 2' half is open farmland with one building. These can be placed randomly to add variety and allow the scenario to be played multiple times. Two roads should run north to south and one east to west. Again, dicing for where these roads begin and end allows almost infinite replay options.

When the Americans break through Table 1 with a victory, the play shifts into the woods itself, with a table now with four areas of 2' by 2' covered in trees and again with

two roads north to south and one road east to west. The two open areas should be either a farmhouse with garden and field, as above, or a sandy area of undulating dunes that break line of sight and provide some hull-down cover for tanks. The table set up should be used twice to represent the Americans attacking into the centre, and then the southern parts, of the woods.

For each scenario the German player should roll 1D6 +6 for the number of support points available. For impromptu units, add a further four points. The US player should roll 2D6 +6 for support points.

To win the campaign, the US player must defeat the Germans on Table 3 by the end of five games. At the end of each game, halve the number of casualties on the loser's side and return them to their unit. The winner of the game may return two-thirds of his casualties to their unit.

The US player may introduce ten replacements to his platoon during the actions. The German player may introduce three replacements. This will only replace men who have been killed. **WS&S**

