

BTR Endkampf Scenario 6.9 (Northern Maps)

By Chip Saltsman

Four of us gathered Oct 12-15, 2017 to play Beyond the Rhine Scenario 6.9 (Northern Map Endkampf). Russell Morse played the Northern Germans, Curtis Baer the Southern Germans, John Neblo the American forces and I played the Commonwealth. Since we were graciously hosted at John's house, we named the weekend "JohnCon".

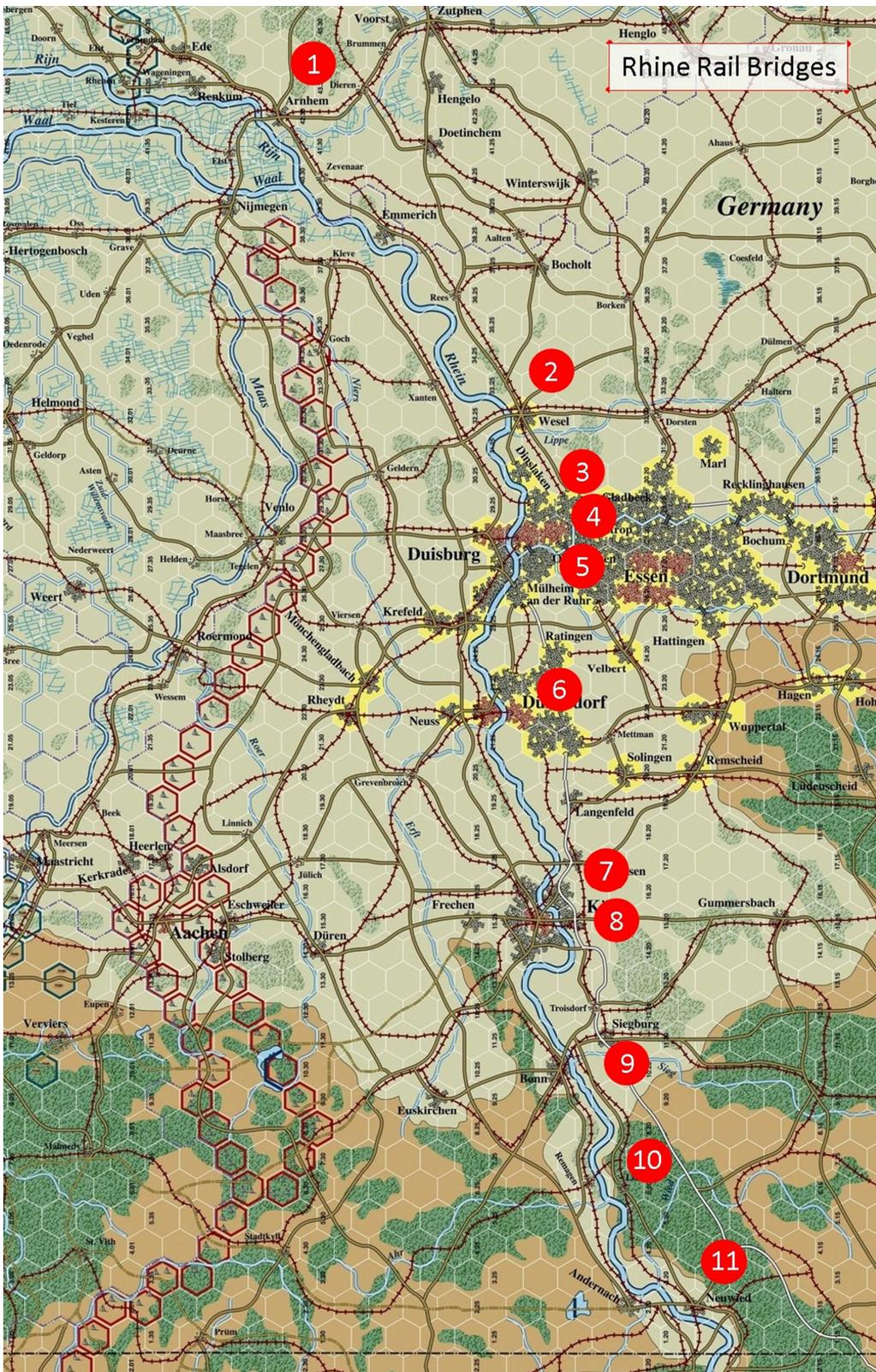
Over about three total days of gaming, we completed 12 turns, enough to have a good idea how the game would end. We scaled back our over-ambitious plan to take on the entire four-map scenario, thankfully, as the Northern Map made for a good four-player game. (Full-on BTR is ideal for 5-6 players.)

A few observations about the scenario to start with:

- We are big fans of the excellent job done by Roland LeBlanc in designing the game – the level of detail and degree of careful playtesting is evident throughout. Using only Maps A & B cuts the action in the middle of the Ardennes. Unfortunately, this puts the road from Bitburg to Koblenz out of play, forcing a German withdrawal through difficult terrain along the map edge while harried by the US forces. This edge-of-the-world situation is a knotty challenge for the Germans to escape an American full-court press which probably wouldn't happen if the other map were in play. It took the German players 11 turns to get the last of their forces out and retreat across the Rhine. It is an interesting tactical conundrum, though!
- Play opens with the February 8, 1945 Turn, where the Commonwealth army is set for a push along the western bank of the Rhine, towards the Ruhr. The Americans are hampered for 3 turns by the Roer River, where the dams have been breached. Once the 15-hex watery wall subsides, the terrain is open until the Rhine at Cologne and Dusseldorf. South of the Roer barrier is a slog through difficult terrain to Bonn, Remagen and Neuwied.
- The Allies have the strategic initiative, and the campaign tends to have four phases: getting to the Rhine, crossing the Rhine, expanding the bridgehead and the breakout. The Germans must hold off the Allies, set up a Rhine defense, and hold off the Allied assault, which feels a lot like holding off an avalanche.
- Victory for the Allied forces consists of avoiding a sudden death loss by having an HQ east of the Rhine, in Germany, in a detrainable hex before the end of March (not an easy task!), then winning by surrounding/capturing the Ruhr hexes, cutting off/capturing major city hexes in Holland and exiting units off the northeast corner of the map.

Allied Play Tips:

- The US player and CW player have two pontoon units each. These may create Ferries (costs "all" for a Leg Move unit to cross), work with another Pontoon to build a bridge (provided no Axis forces are adjacent) or repair a blown bridge. It is possible, but unlikely, to capture a bridge. Building Ferries or Bridges requires a die roll, which can cause you to tear your hair watching your Engineers who seemingly can't figure out which end of a Bailey Bridge is up.



- Carefully plan. Note that the HQ on a detrainable hex requirement to avoid sudden death means getting a Rail bridge. Road bridges are great, but you need at least one Rail. There are only eleven, so check them out:
 1. **Arnhem** (B42.31-42.32) – This crossing requires two other hexes be cleared of Axis forces before your Pontoon can start Bridge Repair (they cannot repair bridges if an Axis unit is adjacent). It is also a few more hexes from Arnhem to actually enter Germany, but the task of cutting off Holland is much easier. It would be very interesting for the CW player to make a play for this crossing on the first game turn.
 2. **Wesel** (B32.24-32.25) – Requires clearing 4 hexes to repair the rail bridge, plus you are crossing out of clear terrain.
 3. **Dinslaken** (B29.24-29.25) – Need to clear 3 hexes to repair the rail bridge, plus a clear terrain crossing hex.
 4. **Duisburg 1** (B28.24-28.25) – Duisburg gives a protected crossing hex, but the defending hex is Extremely Close terrain. Ugh. However, you can cross at Dinslaken one hex away and then capture this hex, which is what I did. The big advantage of Duisburg 1 is that no other hexes must be cleared before you can start to repair the rail bridge.
 5. **Duisburg 2** (B28.24-27.25)
 6. **Dusseldorf** (B22.24-22.25) – Consider attacking across the road bridge into B23.35, then attacking the Extremely Close terrain, a tough but not impossible scenario.
 7. **Koln 1** (B17.24-16.23) – Either bridge needs only two hexes cleared, and they can be easily defended. This site is well worth consideration.
 8. **Koln 2** (B15.23-15.24)
 9. **Bonn** (B11.23-10.23) – This is the one crossing site with Clear Terrain in the target hex, which makes it easier by far to attack, but rougher to hold onto.
 10. **Remagen** (B7.22-6.22) – The Ludendorff Bridge is where Team US crossed in our game. Only two hexes to clear, but the breakout is through difficult terrain.
 11. **Neuwied** (B2.19-1.19) – Not an attractive choice, since the Allies must travel farthest to reach it and then clear three hexes in order to build a bridge. Then the terrain is hard (it is 7 hexes to the nearest Clear Terrain). It might be possible to do a surprise crossing against an unwary opponent
 12. (There are two other Rail crossings in Holland, nearly impossible to use as they require crossing the Rhine twice through Polder terrain, and then you must travel a long way to enter Germany.)
- Leg move units can attack across a Ferry/Blown Bridge at $\frac{1}{4}$ strength. Some hexes have several bridges, allowing attack from multiple hexes. This means Infantry Divisions.
- Should you get across, your opponent will position their mobile formations for counterattack. Leg units (i.e. Infantry Divisions) face grim going in clear terrain.
- You need supply, 20+ SP to power a full assault. Set up a layered attack: Combat, Exploit, then hopefully a double turn where you can repeat. Don't execute your Rhine crossing without "The Hammer" (moving second). Plan it out carefully, using every advantage of the "Rich Man's War": Aircraft, Artillery Markers, big artillery units, Airborne units (transport these to England pronto), Weasel Transport (for their Leg Move), Reserve markers and lucky dice. Try a diversion—we built a Ferry north of the intended Commonwealth crossing site and sold it as a

crossing-to-be, which attracted defenders and artillery ammunition aplenty. We loudly announced failed Ferry rolls (even when we didn't make them) to keep our opponents on edge.

- Consider the terrain you are attacking from (Barrages are tough on overstacked Clear Terrain), and attacking into (Clear terrain is a better attack but allows fierce Axis counterattacks, versus Close/Very Close that is harder to take but easier to hold).
- The Allies need to carefully conserve Infantry steps—attacks should have an armor unit as the lead to take losses if at all possible. Eq Replacements are more readily available, and it requires two Pax to rebuild an infantry RE. The Commonwealth Player only starts with 7 full-strength Infantry Divisions, and it is entirely possible to burn out the British infantry force leaving it too weak for a Rhine crossing.
- Supply? Woo-hoo! The Commonwealth AND the US armies start the scenario with a seemingly inexhaustible 40+ SP. For each! Believe me, it's exhaustible. Get to the Rhine on the "Economy" setting, because you need supply for the river assault. This is very easy for me to say, and I said it at the start of the scenario, and still I arrived at the Rhine with about 4 SP remaining.
- My own crossing plan included avoiding Air Barrage so as not to telegraph my intentions (the Airborne drop wasn't subtle, but the exact crossing hex was still a guess). We launched it on the bottom half of a turn (and then didn't win initiative for the double turn). I put two divisions initial attack into the Dinslaken crossing and had three more in reserve. I fired maximum-sized Artillery Barrages in both Move and Exploit, hoping to kill steps each phase.
- The attack reduced the defender to 1 step, and then I realized there were 8 steps sitting in the assault hex. I could only bring in 2 Breakdown units for Exploit. The result was Ao1/DL1o1, and the surviving Breakdown unit crossed the Rhine. The US fared better, getting several divisions across with an opportunistic attack at Remagen where only an HQ and one-step unit were positioned. The next turn was Mud and No Flight (Mud was good, as it slowed German reaction), but we lost the Initiative Roll. This gave the Germans a chance to counterattack the bridgeheads—the American one held easily, but the one-step Commonwealth hex was in trouble. The Germans hit the single step with a Barrage, which killed the unit—meaning they couldn't attack it and advance after combat! They had only 3 small Armor units in Move Mode that could get into the hex in Exploit, which the British then DG'd and threw out, packing the hex with two Infantry Divisions. The next turn, the Commonwealth rolled well to clear out the Major City hex (Duisburg 1-2) and set themselves up to stay. My pontoon was ready to roll for the RR bridge into Duisbur, though it took several turns for them to complete the task. I used a Weasel to get SP over to my surviving Airborne units.
- We played through the March 19 turn. At that point, the Commonwealth had broken out of their Rhine bridgehead, and the open-field end game was about the start. The Americans were at the expand-the-bridgehead phase, as they were facing a larger portion of the Axis forces, but the defenders were going to need to depart immediately to attempt a defense of the Ruhr. The Commonwealth ended the turn with 6 SP, and had lost about 12 Infantry steps (I got enough Pax to rebuild three). The US had 6T and had lost 19 Infantry steps. The Germans had just over 8 SP.

German Play Tips:

- We would suggest putting the more experienced players on the German side. Active Defense is one of the hardest things to learn in OCS, and defense at this stage of the war is a real challenge.
- You just plain cannot allow the Allies an easy shot at a Rail crossing on the Rhine. Each hex needs 5-6 steps as a garrison without fail, because it needs to survive a double turn of Allied onslaught. Back it up with some Reserve units. Then fill out the shoulders. Force the Allies to cross at a Ferry site and fight their way to the Rail crossings. Study the map: every Rail Crossing hex is difficult terrain except the one at Bonn (B11.23), the one location where you should invest in a Hedgehog.
- You may not think so at first, but you will find yourself desperately short of supply about the time the Allies start their breakout. Be exceedingly thrifty from the start: move mobile formations as rarely as absolutely possible, and use artillery only to break up attacks or pummel over-stacked hexes. This is really hard to discipline yourself to do—judging which expenditures are critical and which aren't are tough decisions.
- Even after careful conservation, late in the game the easiest way to move your Panzers is by rail to a hex where they are going to park, probably for the rest of the game. The Leg Move units can at least move under their own power, but the Allies will run rings around you in the open terrain north of the Ruhr. At that point, you are in a "prevent defense" running battle.
- Emergency Rules: Read BTR Rules 2.3a Airdrop Alarm and 2.3b Gotenbewegung carefully. We think the right time to invoke their sudden transfusion of units is when you are assembling your Rhine defensive line. By that point, this will be a much larger force than you would get from the Replacement Table for the rest of the game. Some of those units should garrison Close Terrain hexes in your Rhine backfield, where they can slow a breakout.
- Your Luftwaffe seems larger than you would expect at this stage of the war. It won't get larger. The Allies usually wage a constant attrition campaign, and by the point we stopped (March 19), the Germans had only one Fighter step remaining.
- Create a screen and start Strat Moving the units which start in the Ardennes out towards the Rhine as soon as possible. Approximately 60 steps begin south of the Roer River. Extracting them is a thorny problem, especially if the Americans are pressing you hard (they should be, and they should be trying hard to cut the group off).

Action Photos:



Scenario Start: Feb 8. Commonwealth forces after Turn 1. They start the scenario with ample supply and are poised to advance down the Rhine towards the Ruhr (or try for Arnhem?)



American Offensive: Feb 8. US positions after Turn 1. The Roer River prevents advance on the left, but the units on the right are pushing to cut off the German forces strung out in the Ardennes along the map edge (the dotted line).



Rhine Assault prepared: Feb 26 Turn. The Commonwealth have a Ferry at 35.27, but that is solely intended to distract attention from where the planned crossing will be into 29.24. Several advance Air Bases have been constructed to give Fighter Bombers a proximity bonus to their Barrages. The armor, useless until a bridge is repaired, serves to mask six Infantry Divisions and five 72-Barrage Strength Artillery units.



Remagen Bridge: March 5. American forces are across the Rhine at Remagen (under the DG), having taken advantage of a light defending force. Note the “Conga line” of German units still trying to extract themselves from the Ardennes. The American paradraps (around 13.22, 8.20 and 4.20) were planned to block the roads and isolate Remagen from reinforcement. The Airborne forces suffered heavy casualties, but did their job.



Rhine Crossing: March 5. Commonwealth forces are across the Rhine . . . with 1 RE. The Germans blasted it away with an Artillery Barrage kill (unexpectedly, so no attack was possible into the hex), but only had a few small tank units in reserve to reach the hex and occupy it. Don't let this happen to you, as the Allies easily recaptured it the next turn. A Weasel is stationed in 29.25 to deliver 1 SP to the Airborne forces.



Expanding the bridgehead: March 19, last turn we played. The Americans succeeded in building their bridge a turn or two ago, the US HQ is across the river (avoiding a sudden death loss), and the bridgehead is expanding against stiff opposition. Most of the German units which started in the Ardennes have made it out and joined the defense, but more bulk ended up facing the Americans than the Commonwealth, which contributed to . . .



The Expanding Torrent: March 19 Commonwealth breakout. The rail bridge was finally completed this turn (you can see the Pontoon unit). Allied armor units have been unleashed, and are flooding into the open terrain.