

# RIVERS IN BYELORUSSIA

RIVERS IN FLAMES OF WAR, RIVER CROSSING MISSION AND  
CROSSING THE DRUT SCENARIO



**FLAMES OF WAR**  
THE WORLD WAR II MINIATURES GAME



# RIVERS IN BYELORUSSIA

Byelorussia is criss-crossed by waterways of all sizes from small streams to major rivers. The advancing Red Army had planned for this and crossed the rivers off the march, throwing infantry across the river as they arrived.

We have devised *three* different ways of including river crossings in your games.

- **RULES:** The River Assault rules expand *Flames Of War* by giving infantry the ability to ford previously Impassable rivers in any *Flames Of War* game.
- **MISSION:** The River Crossing mission allows you to play a game centred around a river-crossing operation. This makes an ideal mission to use when attacking across rivers in *Firestorm—Bagration*.
- **SCENARIO:** The Crossing the Drut scenario is a historical battle from Operation Bagration for you to re-fight.

## RIVERS IN FLAMES OF WAR

Rivers have defined the course of campaigns throughout history. These natural defences halt advancing armies, placing them in vulnerable positions as they organise a crossing. However, bold river crossings often yield surprising results catching the enemy off guard!

Larger rivers, such as the Vistula or Dnepr require a lot of preparation and bridging equipment. Fortunately, most rivers are much smaller, often just 65 to 100 feet (20 to 30 metres) wide and relatively slow and shallow. The land around the river is often marshy and unsuitable for farming and rivers are typically bordered by trees and even small woods. Troops specifically chose crossing points where they could take full advantage of this cover.

These rivers, while still formidable, are small enough for infantry to attempt an immediate river crossing using as much cover as can be found. These are the rivers discussed in the following pages.

### RIVERS

Rivers impose major challenges for advancing armies during large operations. Their deep channels prevent trucks and tanks from moving across them, forcing the heavier equipment to find fords and bridges.

*A river that is approximately 4"/10cm to 8"/20cm wide is Impassable to all teams and must have at least a one-lane road or rail bridge or a Very Difficult Going ford for each 24"/60cm to 36"/90cm of its length.*

*Streams are Very Difficult Going and can only be forded by Fully-tracked vehicles and troops on foot. Creeks, like fords across streams, are usually Difficult Going. Make sure you define your waterways before the start of the game.*

### RIVER CROSSING OPERATIONS

There are a few tools that troops use to cross a river. Amphibious vehicles, such as the German Schwimmwagen amphibious jeep, were built specifically for water crossings. In addition, infantry received some training and equipment to get them across, leaving the bridges and fords free for guns and vehicles.

*Amphibious vehicles use the Amphibious special rule found on page 46 of the Flames Of War rulebook.*

*Infantry and Man-packed Gun teams may cross rivers up to 8"/20cm wide using the River Assault special rules.*

### CROSSING RIVERS





# RIVER ASSAULT

River assaults are tricky operations to execute. A lot can go wrong during a crossing. The troops have to contend with incoming fire as well as the river's temper. A successful river crossing relies upon careful planning, firepower support and a lot of luck!

## LANDING POINTS

When a river crossing was expected, special equipment was moved forward to assist the effort. Boats, rafts and other floatation devices helped the men get across. When a crossing was unexpected the unit would use any means available to hastily cross the river. This would include local boats, rafts, or even stringing a rope across the river. However, it takes time to get equipment forward or find and secure crossing supplies.

Once that was done and the infantry set out across the river, each was given a landing point on the opposite bank. Aiming for that landing point, the troops paddle across as quickly as possible.

*An Infantry or Man-packed Gun team that began its Movement Step adjacent to a river edge may enter the river and begin crossing. Place the team in the river adjacent to the opposite bank of the river at the landing point it is paddling towards.*

*Teams cannot be placed at a landing point closer than 2"/5cm to an enemy team that is visible to it.*

## GET ACROSS

While paddling, the men have one goal in mind—get to the other side as fast as possible. They are too busy making their way across to do anything else!

*While in the river, teams may not shoot, move, assault, or be assaulted.*

## BATTLEFIELD IN A BOX—RIVERS

The *Rivers* set from Battlefront's *Battlefield in a Box* range of ready-made terrain has 7'1/210cm of river including two fords and two bridges. It is ideal for use with the new river-crossing rules and scenarios.

## GET OUT

As soon as the soldiers got to the other side they moved quickly to clear the bank for the follow-up troops.

*When a team begins its Movement Step at its landing point in the river, it exits the river during its movement. It uses its normal movement counting as if they started their movement in Difficult Going.*

## SITTING DUCKS

Wading in the water is not the best place to be in a fight. There is nowhere to grab cover or dodge incoming fire. So, troops worked extra hard to cross and could not concern themselves with other tasks until they are safely ashore on the other side!

*Teams cannot be Concealed or Gone to Ground while in a river.*

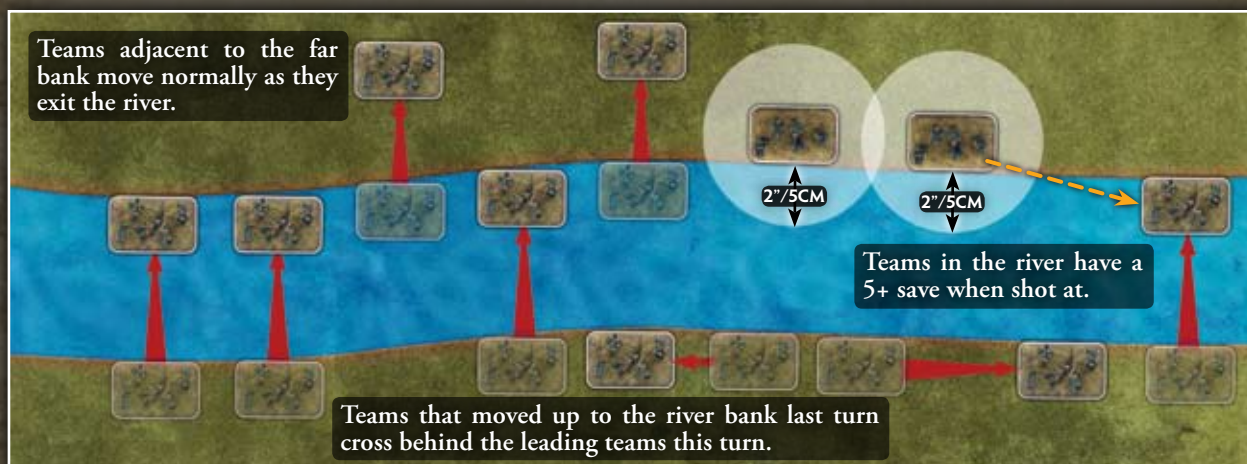
*Teams crossing a river do not have their normal Infantry Save. Instead, roll a die for each hit:*

- *If the result is 5+, the team manages to avoid any casualties despite their exposed position.*
- *Otherwise, the team has been cut down during the crossing and is Destroyed.*

## PIONEERS

Pioneers have trained extensively on crossing rivers and may have assault boats with outboard engines to carry them swiftly. They know exactly what to do when they come upon a river, crossing quickly with little difficulty.

*Pioneer Infantry teams ignore the Sitting Ducks special rule, and retain their normal Infantry 3+ save.*





# RIVER CROSSING MISSION

Battles to take and retake river crossings became a regular occurrence on both the Eastern and Western Fronts. Although some were well-planned executed operations, others became vicious ad hoc fights based on circumstance.

River Crossing uses the **Defensive Battle**, **Intense Battle**, **Limited Fortifications**, **Night Attack**, **Preliminary Bombardment**, **Prepared Positions**, **Reserves** and **River Assault** special rules.

## YOUR ORDERS

### ATTACKER

Your company has been ordered to secure a river crossing. Follow up the initial artillery barrage to secure a bridgehead across the river.

### DEFENDER

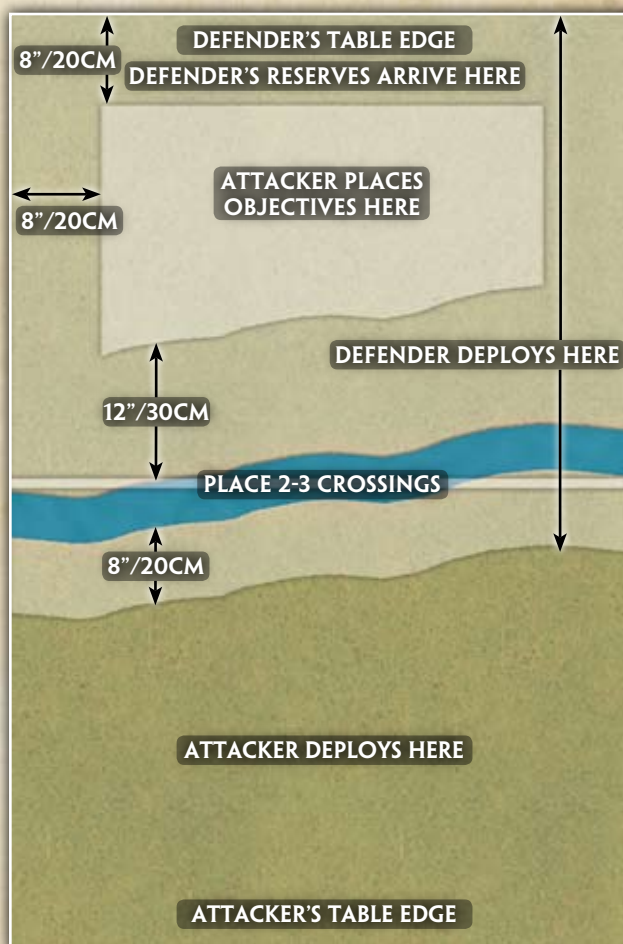
The enemy is expected to assault your positions and attempt to force a bridgehead across the river. You must hold the river line until reinforcements arrive.

## PREPARING FOR BATTLE

1. Set up the terrain with a river between 4"/10cm and 8"/20cm wide running from one long edge to the other near the centre of the table. Place a single one-lane road or rail bridge or Very Difficult Going ford for each 24"/60cm to 36"/90cm of table width and at least 12"/30cm apart.
2. Use the Defensive Battle special rule to determine who is the attacker. The defender decides which short end of the table they will defend.
3. The attacker places three objectives on the defender's side of the river no closer than 12"/30cm to the river's edge and at least 8"/20cm from all table edges.
4. The defender places at least half their platoons in Reserve.
5. The defender places their remaining platoons and Limited Fortifications on the table in their deployment area. The defender's deployment area extends 8"/20cm beyond the river's edge towards the attacker's end of the table.
6. The attacker now removes one of the objectives.
7. The attacker places their platoons on their side of the river at least 12"/30cm from any defending platoons.
8. The attacker may choose to use the Night Attack special rule on page 73.

## BEGINNING THE BATTLE

1. Both sides start the game in Prepared Positions.
2. The attacker conducts a Preliminary Bombardment.
3. The attacking player makes Reconnaissance Deployment moves for any reconnaissance platoons they have. Teams cannot enter or cross the river in this movement.



4. The attacking player has the first turn.
5. Infantry and man-packed teams use the River Assault special rules to cross the river

## ENDING THE BATTLE

The battle ends when either:

- the attacking player holds any of the objectives at the start of their turn, or
- the defending player starts any of their turns from turn six with no attacking teams on the defender's side of the river.

## DECIDING WHO WON

The attacker wins if the game ended because they started one of their turns holding an objective. They have broken the defensive position and secured a bridgehead over the river.

Otherwise the defender wins. The attack has been beaten off and the defender can now prepare their counter stroke.

Calculate your Victory Points using the Victory Points Table on page 195 of the rulebook and the Intense Battle special rule.



# CROSSING RIVERS

Securing a bridgehead across a river was crucial for Soviet offensive success. Without quickly crossing and securing bridgeheads over the numerous rivers in Byelorussia, the offensive would have been forced to follow the few good roads and bridges the Germans had heavily fortified.

For the summer 1944 offensive, a simple plan was devised, practised and instituted throughout the Red Army. Preparation began in early 1944. The infantry received specific training in river crossings which included the rapid set-up and securing of bridgeheads. Front-line infantry and mechanised units carried boats, logs, and rafts to assist them in quickly advancing across rivers. Soviet planning also shifted to utilise darkness, deception, and speed to assist bridgehead operations.

The attack would begin with a pre-dawn artillery bombardment. Before daybreak, the specially-trained Shock companies would probe German defences along the river. If the assault found a weak point across a fordable stream or river,

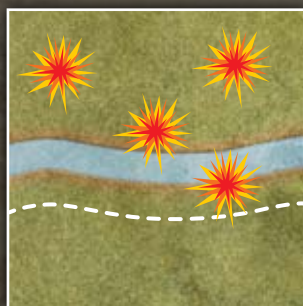
it would immediately cross and call forward the follow-up echelon to reinforce them.

Obviously, if a bridge could be taken intact the job would be much easier. But even if the Germans destroyed the bridge, the Red Army kept the offensive rolling by securing numerous small bridgeheads with infantry and then immediately reinforcing them with anti-tank guns and mortars floated across the river in rafts and small boats.

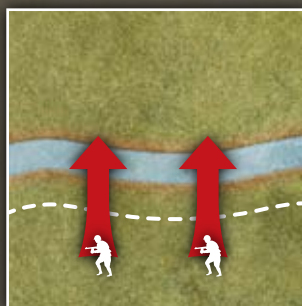
Once a small bridgehead had been formed, mobile artillery and assault guns would then be brought up behind the river line to provide support while the infantry dug in and began to expand its presence in enemy territory. Once secure, bridging would commence to provide a route into the German rear areas for the armoured troops.

This combined-arms operation was repeated over and over again as the Soviet Army covered over 400 kilometres through river valleys and marsh land in less than two weeks.

## SOVIET RIVER CROSSING TACTICS



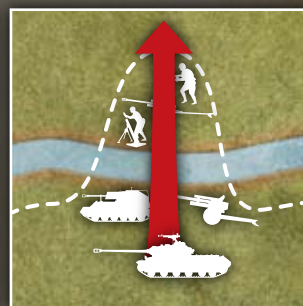
Pre-dawn artillery bombardment of enemy positions.



Shock assault probing for weaknesses.



Small bridgehead established and reinforced with anti-tank, mortars, assault guns and artillery



Heavy bridging commences for armoured breakthroughs.

## BYELORUSSIAN TERRAIN

Byelorussia is a vast low-lying plain with innumerable rivers and lakes. The rivers and lowland marshes are separated by gentle slopes that are barely higher than the marshes they divide. The gentle river valleys sport marshes along their banks that can best be described as a combination of woods and swamp.

Any elevations found in Byelorussia consist of low hills and plateaus of modest height and gentle slope. These elevations do not complicate movement but actually facilitate it. Any developed roads to be found meander along the elevated terrain. Their drainage is good, so that even after heavy rains the roads dry quickly and become completely trafficable. In general, the elevated areas are favourable for troop manoeuvres.

The larger rivers are around 300 to 1000 feet (100 to 350 meters) in width, with a depth of between six and twelve feet

(2 to 4 meters) and require major operations to cross. Smaller rivers are only 60 to 120 feet (20 to 40 meters) wide and can be crossed by immediate assaults off the march. River banks are predominantly low and swampy with ground water close to the surface. The lowlands are sparsely populated with a very limited road network. This makes it very difficult to move large formations, particularly mechanised, through the marshes.

The woods are not a particularly serious obstacle for troop movement. They are not very dense and if located on the higher elevations pose little problem to mechanised troops. In fact, they offer good camouflage from enemy land and air surveillance. It should be kept in mind, however, that the principal mass of forests is located predominantly in the lowlands, along river valleys, and in the lake and swamp regions, which increases the inaccessibility of these areas.



# CROSSING THE DRUT

The Drut River was just 40 miles/60 km behind the German front line when Operation Bagration began. As the Soviet spearheads pushed deeper, crossing the Drut became essential to the continuation of their deep operational plans.

Today the leading 'Shock' troops follow the inevitable artillery barrage seeking weak points in the German lines to secure a bridgehead. A successful river crossing now, before the Germans can consolidate their defences is well worth the sacrifice of an entire battalion. Once secured, the bridgehead will be immediately reinforced with anti-tank guns, assault guns, and artillery. Then the tanks will roll again, thrusting towards Bobruisk, their objective.

Crossing the Drut uses the **Intense Battle**, **Limited Fortifications**, **Preliminary Bombardment**, **Prepared Positions**, **Reserves**, and **River Assault** special rules.

## YOUR ORDERS SOVIET

Your battalion has been selected to lead this glorious assault for the Motherland against the Nazi beast. You are to follow up the initial artillery barrage to secure a bridgehead across the river. This can be achieved by either securing an intact bridge or forcing your way across the river and securing a bridgehead on the other side.

## GERMAN

The red hordes are upon us! To survive relies on your tenacity in holding them at bay. Deploy your *Soldaten* wisely for the Bolsheviks will attack at many points. You must destroy their initial assaults and hold the defence line. You must stop the Soviet advance at the river. There is no retreat.

## PREPARING FOR BATTLE

1. Set up the terrain as shown on page 71.
2. The Soviet player places three objectives in the German deployment zone not closer than 12"/30 cm from the river edge on the German side and at least 8"/20cm from any table edge.

3. The Germans place their main force and Limited Fortifications on the table in the German deployment area which extends to 8"/20cm on the Soviet side from the river's edge. The remainder of their force is in Reserve.
4. The Soviet player now removes one of the objectives.
5. The Soviet player places their starting forces on the Soviet side of the river more than 12"/30cm from any German forces. Soviet Infantry and Man-packed Gun teams can use the Maskirovka special rule to deploy closer, but risk giving the German player the first turn.

## BEGINNING THE BATTLE

1. Both players start the game in Prepared Positions.
2. The Soviets conduct a Preliminary Bombardment.
3. The Soviet player makes a Reconnaissance Deployment move for the reconnaissance platoons they have. Teams cannot enter or cross the river in this movement.
4. The Soviet player has the first turn.
5. Infantry and man-packed teams use the River Assault special rules to cross the river.

## ENDING THE BATTLE

The battle ends when either:

- the Soviets hold either objective at the beginning of their turn, or,
- the Germans start any of their turns after turn six with no Soviet forces on the German side of the river.

## DECIDING WHO WON

The Soviet player wins if they start their turn holding an objective. They have breached the German defence and secured a bridgehead over the Drut River.

Otherwise the German player wins. The Soviet assault forces have been beaten back and failed to establish a bridgehead across the Drut.



## TERRAIN

When the Red Army is confronted with a river obstacle they try to force a bridge crossing 'off the march', that is without waiting to bring up specialised bridging or river crossing equipment.

The river is an Impassable obstacle. However, Infantry and Man-packed Gun teams can use the River Assault rules to cross the river.

The two bridges (road and rail) are only wide enough for one vehicle to cross at a time and count as defiles in terms of vehicles passing each other or a wreck.

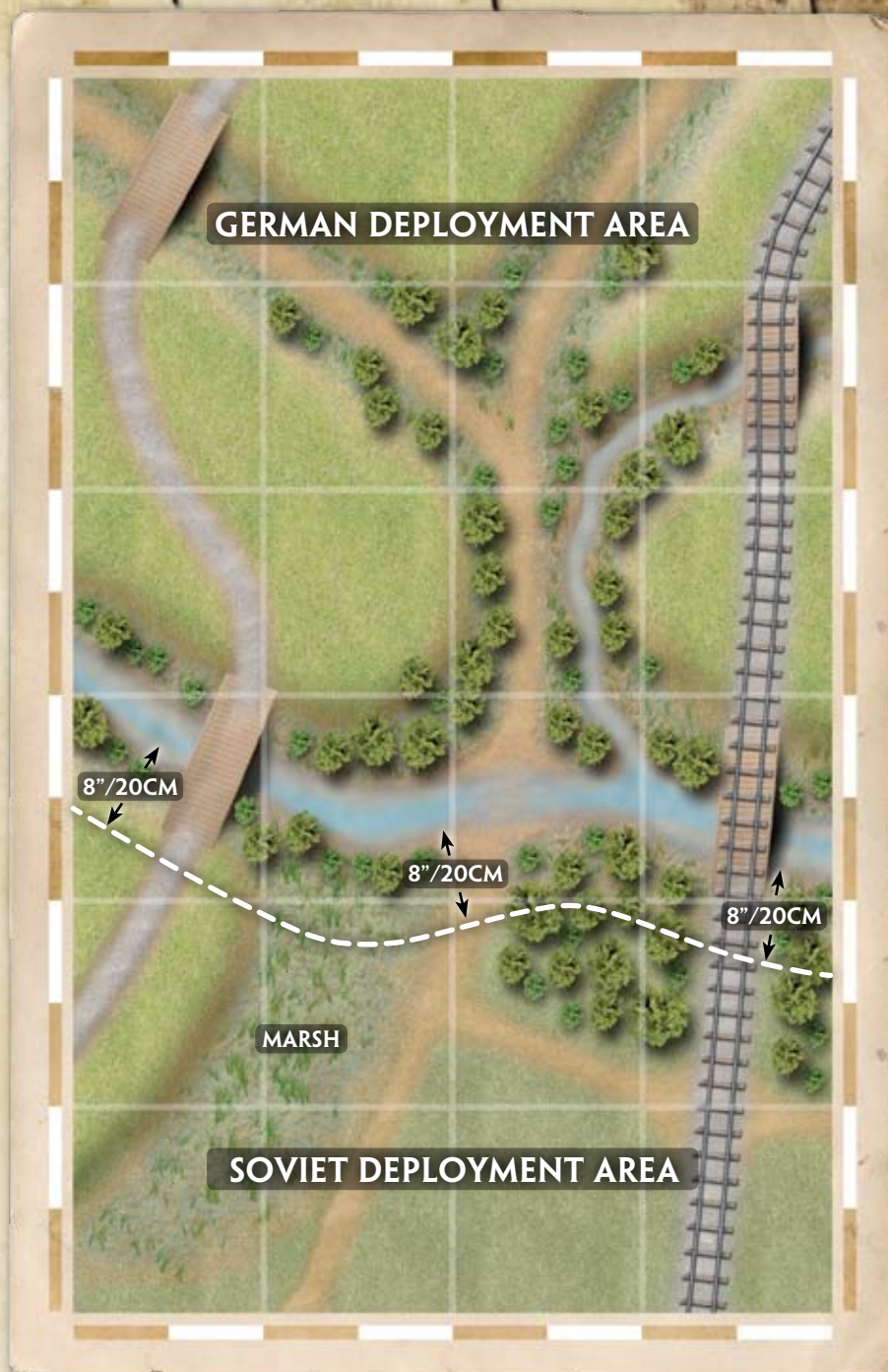
The rail line is Easy Going, although you cannot move At the Double along it.

The ford across the Drut is deep, requiring a great deal of skill to cross, making it Very Difficult Going and only trafficable by Fully-tracked vehicles.

The stream running off the river through the German deployment zone is also Very Difficult Going.

The woods and marshes that line the river and stream are Difficult Going. The woods provide Concealment making them useful for the attackers to advance unseen to the river edge.

The hills on the German side of the river offer good vehicle movement. They are considered Easy Going.





# 71<sup>YA</sup> GVARDEYSKAYA STRELKOVAYA DIVIZIYA

Soviet assault battalions were rarely at full strength by 1944. However, their effectiveness was greatly enhanced with a full complement of anti-tank rifle, scout and sapper platoons. Additionally, regimental support included anti-tank companies, assault guns, and flame-throwers for digging out German infantry and securing the bridgehead.

Nearly every assault was preceded by a half-hour to hour-long artillery bombardment with the actual assault beginning a few hours before dawn as the troops crept into position.

Initial Soviet assaults were expected to take heavy casualties as their objective was to cross the river and secure a bridgehead thus enabling a rapid breakthrough into the German rear area.

## 219<sup>YA</sup> GVARDEYSKIY STRELKOVY POLK

Shtab



1<sup>ya</sup> Rota Strelkovaya

2<sup>ya</sup> Rota Strelkovaya

1<sup>y</sup> Vzvod Razvedki

1<sup>ya</sup> Rota Protivotankovaya

2<sup>ya</sup> Rota, 1489<sup>y</sup> SU Polk

3<sup>ya</sup> Rota, 333<sup>y</sup> Tyazhelyiy SU Polk

3<sup>y</sup> Vzvod, 174<sup>ya</sup> Ordyelnaya Rota Ognymyotov

## GUARDS STRELKOVY BATALON (FEARLESS TRAINED)

Battalion HQ (with Anti-tank Rifle and Sapper Platoons).

Strelkovy Company (with two platoons and two Maksim HMG teams).

Strelkovy Company (with two platoons and two Maksim HMG teams).

Scout Platoon (with two Scout Squads).

Anti-tank Company (with two Anti-tank Platoons).

Assault Gun Company (with five SU-76M assault guns)

Heavy Assault Gun Company (with three ISU-152 assault guns).

Flame-thrower Platoon (with two Flame-thrower Sections).

# 246. INFANTERIEDIVISION

German forces normally deployed with two companies forward and one company back when defending. Trenches and light fortifications were built along likely avenues of approach with minefields and barbed wire used to channel

the enemy to their strongpoints. Whenever possible the German defence against river crossings would have small elements dug in on the far side of the river to keep the enemy from closing quickly on the obvious crossing points.

## II. BATAILLON, 313. GRENADIERREGIMENT.

Kompaniegruppe



1. Grenadierzug

2. Grenadierzug

2. Pionierzug

3. MG Zug, 4. Schwerekompanie

1. Panzerjägerzug, 13. Panzerjägerkompanie

3. IG Zug, 14. IG Kompanie

1. Batterie, II. Bataillon, 337. Artillerieregiment

## VERSTÄRKUNGEN

4. Panzerzug, II. Bataillon, 31. Panzerregiment

2. Flakzug, 3. Flakkompanie, 337. Panzerjägerabteilung

## GRENADIERKOMPANIE (CONFIDENT VETERAN)

Company HQ (Command teams equipped with Panzerfaust, Anti-tank and Mortar Sections).

Grenadier Platoon (with three squads, Command team equipped with Panzerfaust).

Grenadier Platoon (with three squads, Command team equipped with Panzerfaust).

Pioneer Platoon (with three squads, Command team equipped with Panzerfaust).

Machine-Gun Platoon (with two sections, Command team equipped as Panzerknacker).

Anti-tank Platoon (with three 7.5cm PaK40 guns).

Infantry Gun Platoon (with two 7.5cm leIG18 guns).

Artillery Battery (with four 10.5cm leFH18 howitzers).

## RESERVE

Panzer Platoon (with three Panzer IV H tanks).

Light Anti-aircraft Platoon (with two Sd Kfz 10/5 (2cm) half-tracks)



# SPECIAL RULES

## MASKIROVKA

*Maskirovka*, the Russian term for deception and camouflage, was utilised greatly in the summer 1944 offensive. The Soviets went to great measures to give the impression that they were digging in for the defensive before launching their assaults. They would keep their assault troops hidden until they moved them up the night of the offensive.

*All initially deployed Soviet infantry and man-packed gun teams may set up within 8"/20cm of German teams. If they are not concealed by terrain they are automatically detected. If you do deploy forward in this way and the troops are not automatically detected, roll a die:*

- *On a roll of 2+, they have infiltrated undetected.*
- *On a roll of 1, they are detected.*

*If any of the infiltrators are detected, the infiltrating player gives the first turn to the opponent.*

## NIGHT ATTACK

Another tactic the Soviets incorporated into their river assaults was to start the offensive several hours before daybreak. This gave them the additional cover of darkness to enhance the prospects of a successful assault.

*The River Crossing mission uses the Night Fighting rules (located on page 154 of the Flames of War rulebook).*

- *At the start of the defender's turn three, the defender rolls a die. On a score of 5+, morning has broken.*
- *If the roll is unsuccessful, at the start of the attacker's next turn they roll two dice with morning breaking on any roll of 5+.*
- *If it is still dark at the start of the defender's next turn, they roll three dice, and so on until any roll of 5+.*

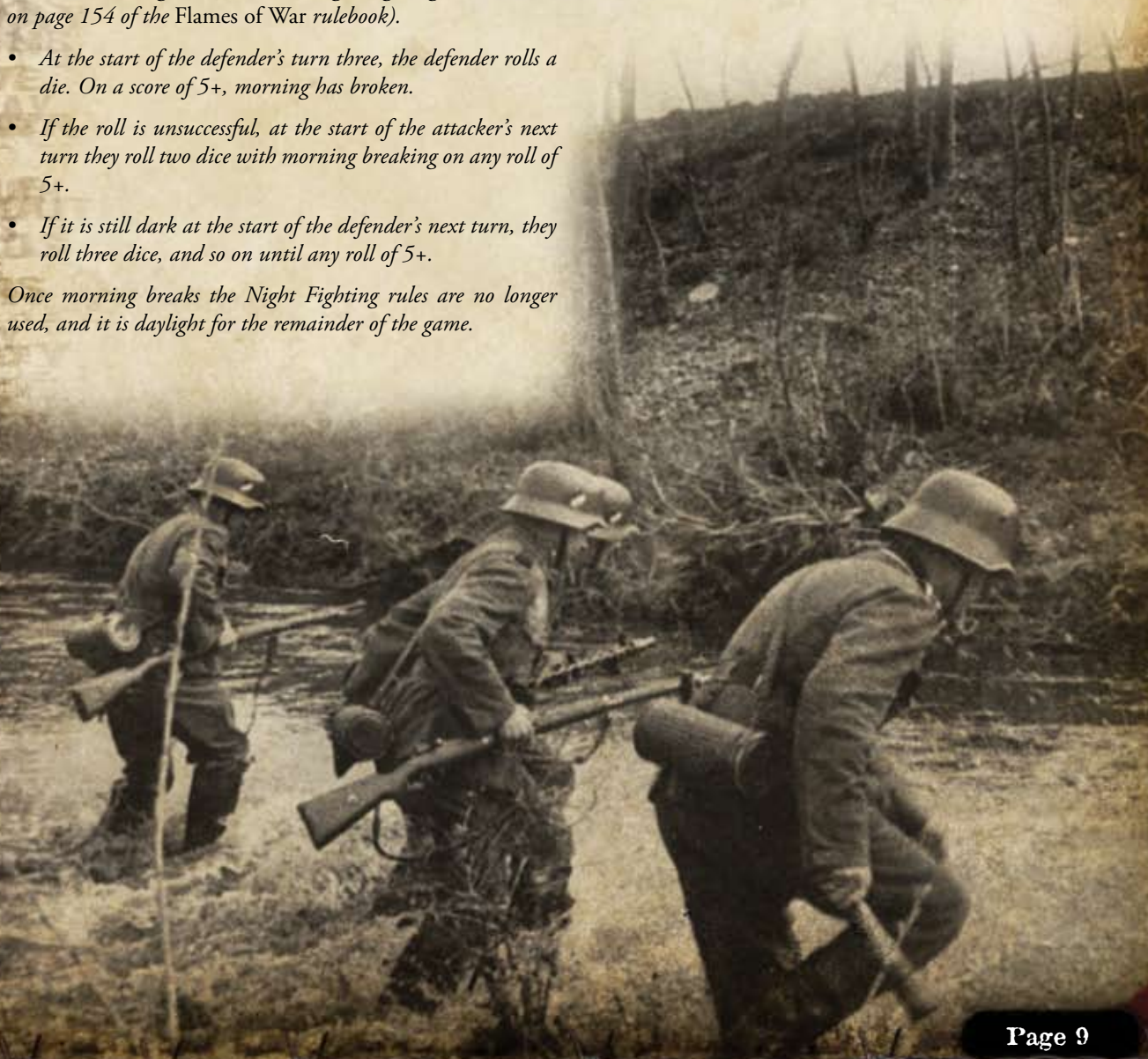
*Once morning breaks the Night Fighting rules are no longer used, and it is daylight for the remainder of the game.*

## HISTORICAL VARIANTS

Historical variants provide insight to how forces faced different scenarios. These scenarios are not balanced games but allow you to experience historical events from the troops' perspective.

You could turn the scenario around and see what happens with the Red Army on the defence. The Germans frequently launched hasty counterattacks to push Soviet bridgeheads back across rivers, almost a mirror image of the initial Soviet river crossings.

River crossings like the crossing of the Drut were as common on the Western Front as they were in the East. You could play this scenario for the Seine crossings with an American or British force. Here the Maskirovka special rule wouldn't be appropriate, but you might want to experiment with using the Night Attack rules instead, although this can cut down on the effectiveness of your firepower in keeping the defenders busy while your infantry cross the river.







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