

LEPKOWSKI'S PRISONBREAK



THE BRASPRATS RAID, 16 AUGUST 1944

When *Leutnant* (lieutenant) Erich Lepkowski called his 5. *Kompanie* (5th Company) together he knew the daring mission he was about to give his men had to succeed. Failure meant certain death for 130 of his fellow *Fallschirmjäger* (paratrooper) comrades in arms.

Lepkowski was determined to rescue them, for they would certainly do the same for him. He took command of the rescue mission and without a moment to lose, called for volunteers. He watched with pride as all of his men stepped forward to join him.

Lepkowski outlined the cold, hard details of the situation. Partisans of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) caught over 130 of their fellow *Fallschirmjäger* troops. A few troopers were able to escape and made the harrowing journey through the FFI and American perimeter and back to German lines.

The soldiers reported that the French were mistreating the prisoners. Unfortunately, reports of this kind were tragically common as the newly empowered French fighters exacted terrible revenge upon German prisoners for the occupation. A captured German's life expectancy in the hands of the French was only a matter of how long they fancied keeping him alive. Sometimes this was only minutes or days, if the German prisoner was lucky.

Lepkowski dismissed his men to prepare for the mission. Meanwhile he planned out how he was going to get his force all the way to where the prisoners were being held, some 30 miles (50km) away in a small village called Brasprats. Somehow, Lepkowski needed to break through the thin American perimeter and through FFI territory, rescue the prisoners before the FFI could execute them, and then get back to Brest as quickly as possible.

The force only had enough men, weapons, and ammunition for a single one-way trip if they were forced to fight on the way in and the way out. The key to success would be

to sneak their way into Brasprats, spring the prisoners, and then fight their way back to German lines.

Lepkowski ran around to all of the regimental headquarters in the division and gathered as many of the captured Allied trucks as he could. He had all of the German insignia stripped away, Allied stars painted on, and French liberation slogans scribbled on the sides. The paratroopers then put on French partisan clothing over their uniforms and mounted up in the 'Allied' vehicles.

The genius of Lepkowski was thanks in part to his divisional commander General Hermann-Bernhard Ramcke, who had won a reputation for launching daring and successful raids against the Allies in North Africa. Ramcke was also concerned for his captured men and he authorised Lepowski to use three captured American tanks to bolster the rescue mission's firepower.

Just before the vehicles departed, the paratroopers added more pieces to their disguise. American and French flags were flown from the vehicles to help trick the FFI and American soldiers, but also served to protect them from any enemy aircraft that might fly overhead.

Furthermore, false orders to release the prisoners into the custody of the Lepkowski's 'Americans' were drawn up to help persuade the FFI to hand over the prisoners. Finally, as an added security measure, French-speaking soldiers were selected to drive the vehicles in case they were stopped and questioned.

In the early hours of 16 August Lepkowski gave the order to advance. The column of 18 trucks and three tanks lurched forward to its first challenge, the American perimeter.

The *Fallschirmjäger* launched several diversionary attacks and the Americans dutifully reacted. While the Americans were distracted elsewhere, Lepkowski slipped through the lines

and into FFI territory. The column passed through several checkpoints. The FFI did not suspect anything, especially that an entire company of *Fallschirmjäger* were hidden in plain sight!

As the column neared Brasprats, the *Fallschirmjäger* in the back of the trucks pulled down the canvas coverings over the truck beds, removed their disguises, and readied their weapons. The men sat quietly as they listened to the FFI guards chat with the drivers. Soon the truck was moving again and the column entered the town.

The prisoners were being held in a small school building. Lepkowski unfolded a map with notes and directions scribbled in red pencil. He ordered the column to the school building. As they pulled up to the objective, something went wrong. A rifle shot cracked through the air and with that Lepkowski's ruse was up!

Instantly, the *Fallschirmjäger* troops leapt from the trucks and sprang into action securing the building and the area around it. The prisoners inside had heard their comrades outside and quickly overpowered the guards, which they tied up and took with them.

The two German forces were glad to see each other, but didn't waste a moment beating a hasty retreat out of the village. The highly professional paratroopers easily overcame the untrained FFI. The tanks pelted the FFI guard posts high-explosive shells, knocking out the few heavy weapons the French had.

After about 20 minutes of fighting the *Fallschirmjäger* reached the village roadblock. The French put up a fight and after a sharp battle the Germans swept aside the French partisans and broke through onto the open road.

The column raced toward Brest smashing through the first few FFI roadblocks. However, resistance grew as they got closer to the front line. The disorganised FFI finally managed to reinforce the last FFI roadblock ahead of the *Fallschirmjäger* and another short battle broke out. Once again the tanks led the way and blasted their way through the roadblock. The German troops mounted up again and pushed through.

As the column reached the American perimeter they were pleased to discover that the Americans were still occupied by Ramcke's diversionary attacks. The column slipped back into Fortress Brest without any more trouble.

Lepkowski's raid was a terrific success. The column had travelled 75 miles (120 km) round trip. They had rescued all 130 prisoners and even captured 15 FFI soldiers. Lepkowski was impressed by the French fighters and successfully argued to have them interred as regular Prisoners of War, sparing them from the firing squad as guerrilla fighters. Even more amazing was that the German casualties were only three lightly wounded soldiers despite all of the heavy fighting.

Erich Lepkowski was an instant hero. Ramcke promoted him to *Oberleutnant* (1st Lieutenant) and he was awarded the Knight's Cross. He continued to provide excellent service to his beloved *Fallschirmjäger* until he was horribly wounded in the closing days of the battle for Brest. Lepkowski, a breath or two away from death, was rescued from a pile of corpses by a German doctor and treated. In time Lepkowski made a full recovery and went on to serve in Germany's post-war paratrooper force.



SCENARIO FORCES

The Big Lepkowski scenario uses forces from the Normandy books, *Atlantik Wall* and *Overlord*. You can find the *Fallschirmjäger* force used in this scenario on page 158 in *Atlantik Wall*. You can find an FFI Company in *Overlord* on page 287.

LEPKOWSKI'S RAIDERS

FALLSCHIRMJÄGER KOMPANIE (FEARLESS VETERAN)

Company HQ:

Company Command and
2iC Command SMG teams

Fallschirmjäger Platoon:

1x Command SMG team, and
9x Rifle/MG teams

Captured Tank Platoon:

1x captured Command Stuart tank, and
2x captured M8 Greyhound Armoured Cars

Captured Truck Platoon: 4x captured 2½-ton trucks

PRISONERS OF WAR

Fallschirmjäger Platoon:

1x Command SMG team, and
9x Rifle/MG teams

THE FREE FRENCH FORCES

FFI BATTALION (CONFIDENT CONSCRIPT)

Battalion HQ:

Company Command and
2iC Command SMG teams

FFI Company:

1x Command SMG team,
15x Rifle teams,
1x Captured HMG team, and
1x Captured Anti-tank gun

RESERVES

FFI Company:

1x Command SMG team, 4x Rifle teams, and
4x SMG teams

FFI Company:

1x Command SMG team, 4x Rifle teams, and
4x SMG teams

SCENARIO SPECIAL RULES

RESERVES

You can find the Reserves special rule on page 268 of the rulebook.

RESERVE CHECKPOINT

There are three Reserve Checkpoints along the road marked **X**. French platoons arrive from reserve randomly at one of of these Checkpoints. Roll a dice and look at the scenario map to determine at which Reserve Checkpoint your company will arrive.

Arriving platoons must be deployed within 12"/30cm of the Checkpoint, and more than 10"/25cm away from all enemy teams.

RUSE

The Fallschirmjäger have completely fooled the FFI with their ruse and caught them completely unprepared to deal with the elite troop's attack. As such, FFI platoons cannot attempt to Dig In during the course of this scenario.

CAPTURED VEHICLES

Lepkowski commandeered and used several captured Allied tanks to add some firepower to his mission. These were likely M5 Stuarts and M8 Greyhound armoured cars. They were used as assault guns to blast any enemy guns and strong-points the convoy might encounter.

The M8 Greyhounds in the Captured Tank Platoon are not Reconnaissance teams.

The Captured Truck Platoon follows the rules for Transport Platoons found on pages 17, 47, and 48 of the rulebook.



THE BIG LEPKOWSKI

German paratroopers are being held as Prisoners of War in the village of Brasprats by Free French forces. Past experience has shown that the French are not particularly kind toward their former occupiers, and its only a matter of time before they take their revenge!

The Big Lepkowski scenario uses the **Reserves**, **Reserve Checkpoint**, and **Ruse** (see page 82) special rules.

YOUR ORDERS

GERMAN

Your comrades are being held in a small school building in Brasprats. You have reached them and as you begin loading them into the trucks, the alarm is sounded. Now you've got to get them back to friendly lines!

FRENCH

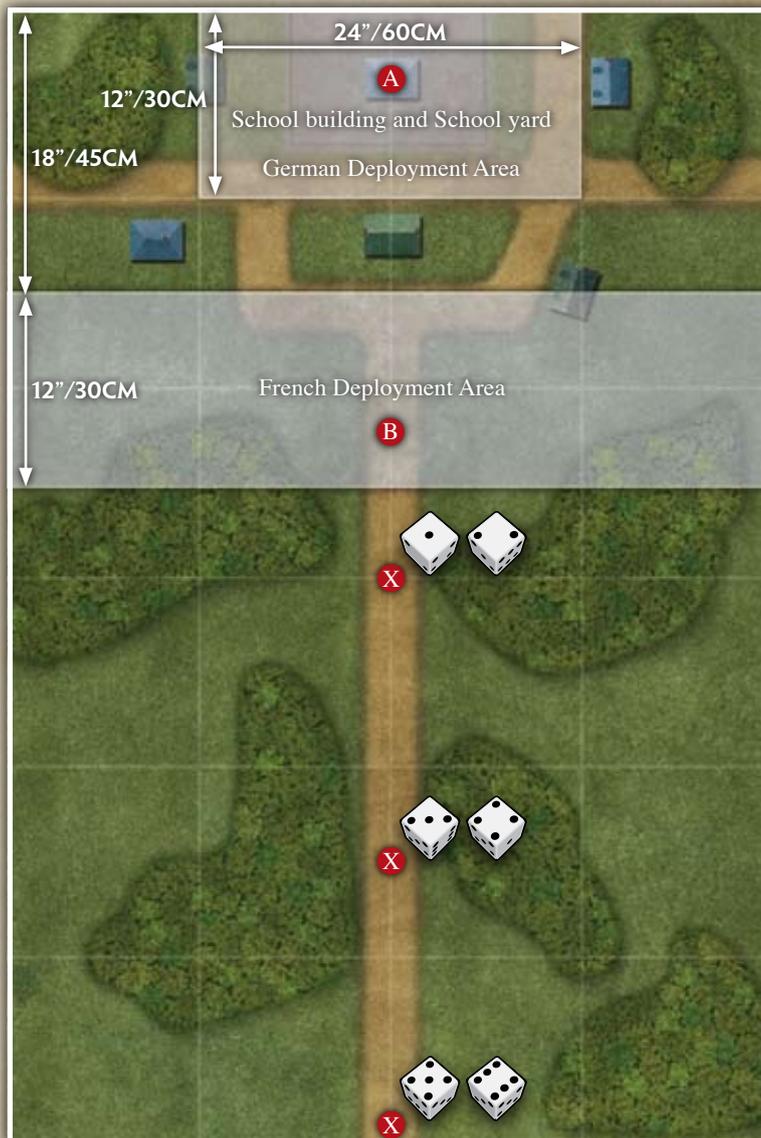
You have captured a large number of German paratroopers. As you decide what to do with them a convoy of American vehicles arrive apparently with orders to take the prisoners. Turns out its a ruse and the Germans are trying to escape with the prisoners. You must stop them before they can escape!

PREPARING FOR BATTLE

1. Set up the terrain as shown. Place the prisoner of war Fallschirmjäger Platoon inside the School building or School yard found in the area marked **A**.
2. Set up three Reserve Checkpoints at each point marked **X**.
3. The French player now deploys an FFI Company and their independent teams in the area defined by the scenario map marked **B**. The remaining two FFI Companies are held off the table and placed in Reserve.
4. The German player now deploys their entire force in the area defined by the scenario map marked **A**. The Fallschirmjäger Platoon that is not the prisoner of war platoon may begin the game mounted in the Captured Truck Platoon.

BEGINNING THE BATTLE

The German force has the first turn.



German Platoons must escape off this table edge.

ENDING THE BATTLE

The battle ends:

- At the start of the French turn six, or
- When there are no German platoons left on the table.

DECIDING WHO WON

The German player wins if they manage to escape off the German table edge with the prisoner of war Fallschirmjäger Platoon. See the next page to determine how successful your raid was. Otherwise, the French player wins, having stopped the raid cold and inflicted an embarrassing defeat on one of Germany's elite units.





The imprisoned Fallschirmjäger are relieved to see thier comrades and rush the gates.





The alarm is set off and the FFI springs into action to halt Lepkowski's column.

RAID RESULTS

10 POW teams evacuated:

You have rescued all of the POWs from the French partisans. You have been awarded the Knight's Cross for your bravery and a promotion to *Oberleutnant* for your leadership.

8-9 POWs Evacuated:

You have rescued your comrades from a dim future and for your actions have been recommended for a Knight's Cross.

5-7 POWs Evacuated:

The rescue was difficult, but you still managed to evacuate a good portion of the POWs being held. No doubt these reinforcements will be helpful in the battle to come.

0-4 POWs Evacuated:

The rescue turned into a disaster! You have been defeated by second-rate soldiers and tarnished the name of the *Fallschirmjäger!*



Lepkowski smashes through the FFI outposts and speeds away toward friendly lines and safety.