

OPERATION
BAGRATION
TO THE FALL OF THE REICH



GREAT ESCAPE GAMES

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Leonidas Squadron

From January 17th, thirty five German pilots took off on kamikaze attacks against Soviet bridges over the Oder. Wild exaggerations of the effectiveness of the so-called Selbstopferinsatz, or 'self-sacrifice mission' were made but it seems only two bridges were seriously damaged. Major General Fuchs sent the names of the pilots in a special birthday message to Hitler.

Crossing the Spree

On Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front, the attack on the 16th was also preceded by an enormous bombardment. Assault troops crossed the Neisse in boats, facing little resistance; forward elements of Fourth Panzer had been annihilated. Crossings were made in over a hundred places and engineers had the first sixty-ton bridge in place just after midday for the tanks to cross. On the southern part of the attack, 2nd Polish and 52nd Army advanced to Dresden.

That evening, having reported his success to Stalin, Konev was ordered to push Rybalko's 3rd Guards Tank and Lelyushenko's 4th Guards Tank armies to the southern suburbs of Berlin with all haste.

As Thirteenth and Fifth Guards armies became involved in heavy fighting over the Neisse, the tanks raced for the Spree. With Fourth Panzer unable to reorganise a new defence, and with its operational reserve already committed, Third and Fourth Guards Tank armies forded the Spree with little opposition and headed northwards toward Berlin. The only thing between them and Berlin was OKH headquarters at Zossen.



Chaos in Berlin

The leadership of the Third Reich descended even further into fantasy. Stirring proclamations were made that had no basis in reality at all. All military logic proved that the Wehrmacht was on the verge of disintegration. Armies had collapsed before and recovered but the situation now was terminal on every front and faced every German army. The Army had a small fraction of the fuel and ammunition it needed and the only reserves were poorly armed and untrained boys and old men.

Berlin's defences, so woefully neglected by the Nazi leadership, were hastily prepared by mass civilian work units. One of their greatest crimes against the German people was to totally discourage any plans for evacuation, like in most East German cities, now overrun.

Hitler was consumed with paranoia and depression and failed to grasp the military reality facing the Third Reich. Virtually all of his military strength was concentrated in the armies facing the Soviets on the Oder; ninety wrecked divisions with a fraction of their armoured complement.

"If the war should be lost, then the nation, too, will be lost... There is no need to consider the basic requirements that a people needs in order to live a primitive life. On the contrary, it is better to destroy such things, for this nation will have proved itself the weaker and the future will belong exclusively to the stronger Eastern nation. Those who remain alive after the battles are over are in any case only inferior persons, since the best have fallen."

Hitler

The Germans on the Eastern Front were now fighting for their personal survival, not for the Führer, expecting little mercy from the Soviets. Many Nazi officials made preparations to flee as the civilian population awaited their dire fate.

Collapse of Ninth Army

The attention of OKH at Zossen was on the predicament of Ninth Army at the Seelow Heights. Heinrici had no decisive reserve, having committed 3rd SS Panzer Corps.

On the 18th, at the Seelow Heights, the Soviet artillery advanced to engage the defenders over open sights as the exhausted Red Army soldiers pressed forwards. Zhukov was determined that he would break the Germans and not be outraced by Konev to Berlin. Across the front, Zhukov's armies were halted by fanatical resistance from well dug-in German troops. On the morning of the 18th, however, Soviet armoured forces broke through at Diedersdorf, behind the main German defences. As battles raged across the front, Ninth Army began to be broken up. Some units fled in rout, some retreated in good order and some managed to hold their positions; Ninth Army was collapsing. In the afternoon, battalions of Volkssturm were deployed from Berlin to reinforce the front.

On the 19th, Zhukov's men broke through. The reconnaissance battalion of the SS Nordland Division, with troops of the broken 9th Parachute Division, mounted a counterattack against the Soviet forces pursuing them along Reichstrasse I. In the north, with Danzig captured, Rokossovsky's 2nd Byelorussian Front prepared to launch their final offensive.

The Fall of the Reich

The 20th of April, Hitler's birthday, was another day of clear weather. The Führer even made an effort to get out of his bunker to present Hitler Youth boys with the Iron Cross. Despite the pleas of the Nazi hierarchy, Hitler insisted that he had to stay in Berlin to the bitter end. Many of the most senior party officials made their plans to flee and Himmler secretly nurtured plans to negotiate with the Western Allies. That day, Zhukov and Konev ordered their advanced armoured units to reach Berlin.



Soviet Rifle Platoon

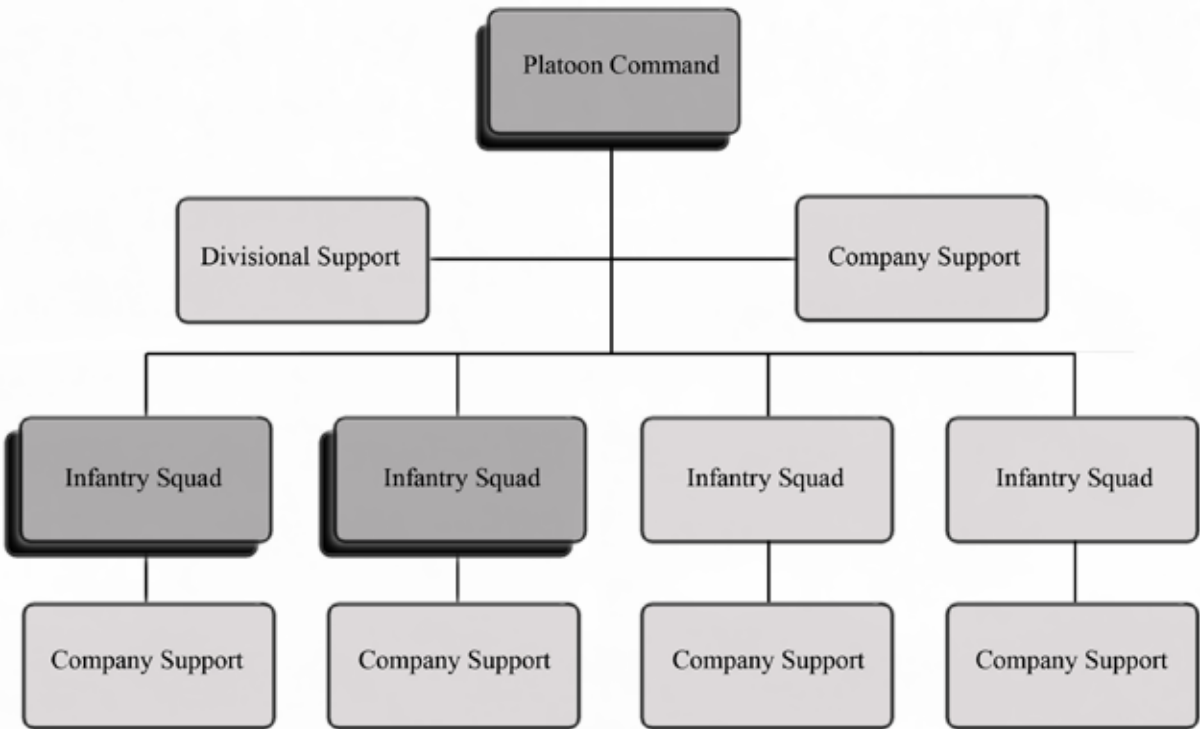
All models in a Soviet Rifle Platoon benefit from the following special rules as described below or in the Soviet Special Rules section on page 23:

Dogged
Tactically Flexible
Urrahh!

Guards: The player may wish to field a platoon of veteran soldiers, hardened by months of fighting. All troops (except Sniper Teams and Scouts) have an Experience score of 4+ instead of 5+. The Platoon has a Combat Effectiveness of 12 and may spend an extra 3RP's.

Shock: The platoon is equipped in an assault role. Each model in the Infantry Squads exchanges his weapon for a PPsH. One Infantry Squad may retain their DP LMG; others lose theirs but may take a PTRD instead. The platoon's number of Requisition Points is equal to the Combat Effectiveness of the force -9. The Platoon's Combat Effectiveness is unchanged.

Strategy Rating: 4
Combat Effectiveness: 9



- A platoon must include a Platoon Command and at least 2 Infantry Squads
- A platoon may include 1 Divisional Support choice
- A platoon may include 1 Company Support choice for each of its Infantry Squads and Platoon Command
- No more than 1 of each Company Support choice may be selected, except for HMG/Mortar Teams (up to 2 may be taken)

Additional Equipment

The Leytenant may distribute the additional equipment amongst the Platoon as detailed in the Soviet Rules section on page 23. The number of Requisition Points is equal to the Combat Effectiveness of the force in the scenario -3.

Volkssturmann

The war had placed a tremendous strain on German manufacturing capabilities. By the time that the Volkssturm had been formed Germany was fighting a losing battle in both the east and west. There were little enough supplies for regular formations and the Volkssturm were very low down a long list of priorities. Fearing that the Allies would treat members of the Volkssturm fighting as guerrillas and shoot them out of hand, the Volkssturm armband was introduced. Shortages were also tackled with the introduction of the “*Volksopfer*”, the People’s Sacrifice, where citizens were encouraged to donate spare uniform parts and any equipment to help clothe the Volkssturm.

There are a good number of specific Volkssturm miniatures available. It is very easy to add to the ranks of your Volkssturm with any other irregular type miniatures, such as Maquis and Spanish Civil War miniatures to name but a few. Simply add a thin strip of two part epoxy putty, green stuff or other modelling material that will dry hard and not be brittle to the model’s left upper arm. This will signify the Volkssturm armband. The same technique can be used with German miniatures wearing greatcoats. Although there was little in the way of standard uniforms available for the Volkssturm they were given large numbers of Heer greatcoats. Using this method it is easy to create a large, diverse and unique Volkssturm force.

The miniatures opposite both demonstrate the “armband” technique in action. The top miniature is a Maquis model and the bottom is a standard German infantryman in a greatcoat.



The two scenes below show Volkssturm members preparing to defend a ruined city against the advancing Soviets.

The Volkssturm spent large amounts of time preparing the areas around their homes for defence against the Soviets. Barricades were prepared along with trenches and firing positions. In Berlin the numbers of civilians and Volkssturm involved in the preparations for its defence were vast, with up to 80,000 men being involved every day.



The armband was very simple; black with a red band at the top and bottom with “DEUTSCHER VOLKSSTURM WEHRMACHT” written in white stitch, a German eagle embroidered on each side of the writing and a thin white line of stitching above and below the writing.

Painting the armband on your miniatures is easier than it first appears. Paint the armband black then add the red bands at the top and bottom. For the writing simply add a thin squiggle of white paint and then, if you want, add the white line above and below your “writing”.



Below are two examples of Volkssturm miniatures. Each has the Volkssturm armband clearly visible. The figure on the left has simple civilian clothes and is armed with a Kar 98k rifle. The figure on the right is wearing a German great coat and carries only a satchel.

The miniatures to the left are, firstly, a veteran soldier and then a Hitler youth member armed with a panzerfaust and MP40. Members of the army who had been invalided from the front provided great experience to any Volkssturm formations which they served with.



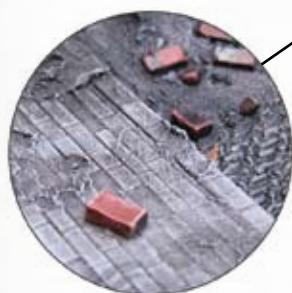
The devastated urban areas of Germany make different and exciting settings for wargaming. We wanted to make a gaming area to represent the Breslau "fester platz", the ruins of Kolberg or the suburbs of Berlin. The boards and buildings were all made to withstand lots of use and facilitate easy transportation. Therefore, all of the buildings were made to be detached from the gaming surface and built with hard-wearing MDF.

When planning large modelling projects it is wise to consider how you will paint it and what paints you will need. Masonry paints from DIY Hardware stores offer a good range of colours, are hard-wearing and cheap compared to using modelling paints. We use Bitter Chocolate masonry paint as the base for all of our terrain projects and a 1L tin goes a very long way! Tester pots are cheap but big enough to supply all the paint you need for a single terrain project.

From a black undercoat, the terrain was given a dark brown basecoat. Since we were going to use a lot of it, we purchased a 1L tin of Homebase Bitter Chocolate masonry paint. Stage 2 was to heavily drybrush with a grey-brown to bring out the texture. Again, since a lot was needed, we bought a 125ml tester pot of matt Charcoal Grey from Homebase's Sanctuary range. Stage 3 was a drybrush with a mid-grey model paint and stage 4 was a light drybrush with light grey modelling paint.

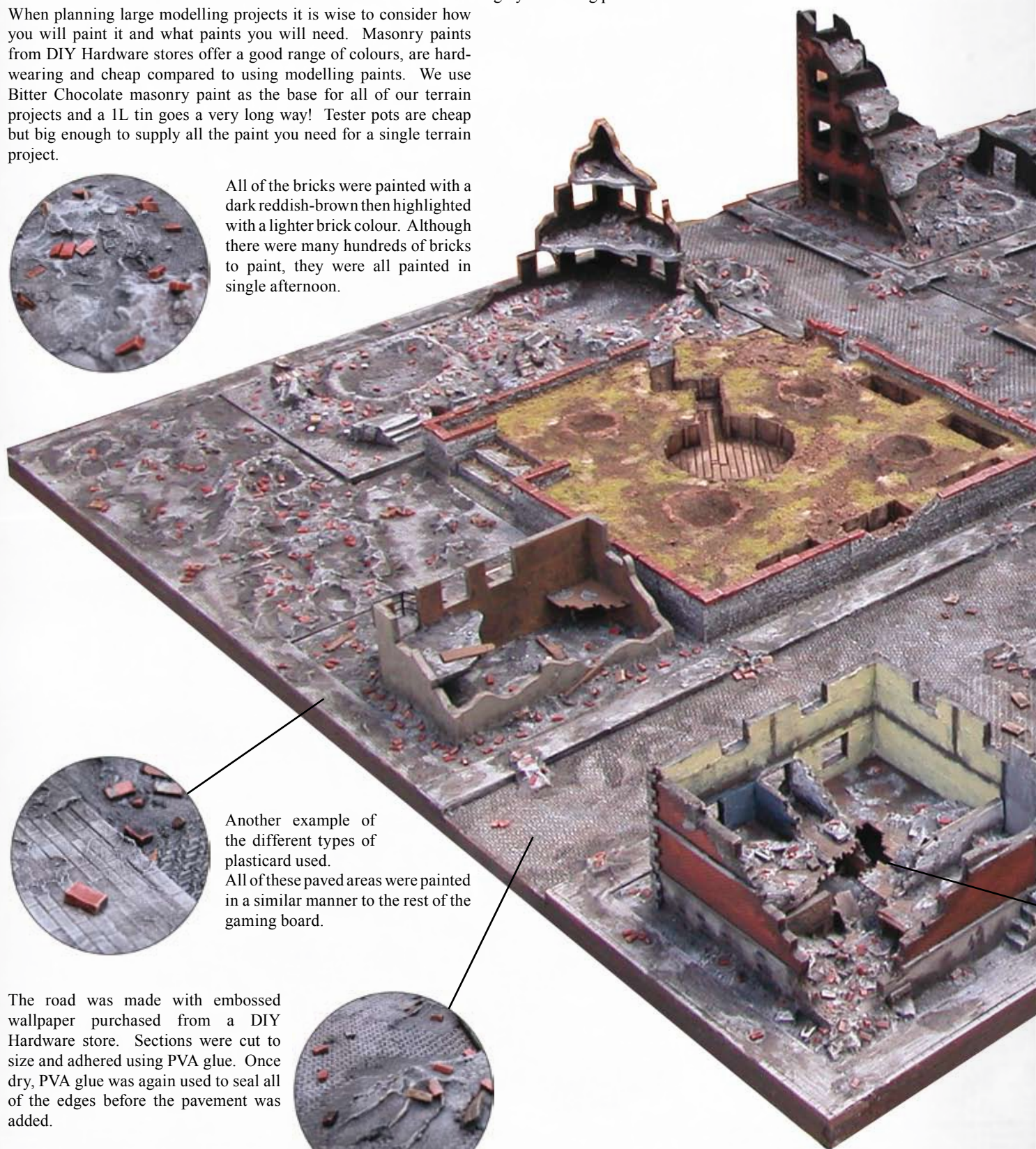


All of the bricks were painted with a dark reddish-brown then highlighted with a lighter brick colour. Although there were many hundreds of bricks to paint, they were all painted in single afternoon.



Another example of the different types of plasticard used. All of these paved areas were painted in a similar manner to the rest of the gaming board.

The road was made with embossed wallpaper purchased from a DIY Hardware store. Sections were cut to size and adhered using PVA glue. Once dry, PVA glue was again used to seal all of the edges before the pavement was added.



Order of Battle

PLATOON COMMAND

A Volkssturm Platoon must include a Platoon Command.

PLATOON COMMAND

Qty	Soldier	Move	Shoot	CQ	EXP	Discipline	Weapons	Notes
1	Zugführer	20cm	5+	+2	5+	4+	MP40 and/or Pistol	Officer 15cm
1	Gruppenführer	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	MP40 AP Grenades	NCO
2	Volkssturmmann	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	Volkssturm Rifles	
2	Volkssturmmann	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	Volkssturm Rifles, Panzerfaust	

One of the Volkssturmmann may be replaced by a Medic (see General Special Rules on RoE page 39). Medics are armed with a pistol.

RIFLE SQUAD

A Volkssturm Platoon must include at least 2 Rifle Squads.

RIFLE SQUAD

Qty	Soldier	Move	Shoot	CQ	EXP	Discipline	Weapons	Notes
1	Gruppenführer	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	MP40 SMG & AP Grenades	NCO
5	Volkssturmmann	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	Volkssturm Rifles	
2	Volkssturmmann	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	Volkssturm Rifles, Panzerfaust	
1	Volkssturmmann	20cm	5+	+2	5+	5+	Volkssturm LMG	

Order of Battle

PLATOON COMMAND

A Romanian Rifle Platoon must include a Platoon Command Section.

PLATOON COMMAND

Qty	Soldier	Move	Shoot	CQ	EXP	Discipline	Weapons	Notes
1	Locotenent	20cm	4+	+3	4+	4+	Pistol, Orita SMG, AP Grenades	Officer 20cm
1	Sergeant-Major	20cm	4+	+3	4+	4+	Orita SMG, AP Grenades	NCO
2	Soldats	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	ZB24 Rifle, AP/AT Grenades	

One Soldat may be upgraded to a Medic (see General Special Rules on page 39 of the RoE rulebook). Medics are armed with a pistol.

RIFLE SQUAD

A Romanian Rifle Platoon must include at least 2 Rifle Squads and a Mortar Squad.

RIFLE SQUAD

Machine Gun Section

Qty	Soldier	Move	Shoot	CQ	EXP	Discipline	Weapons	Notes
1	Sergeant	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	Orita SMG, AP Grenades	NCO
1	Gunner	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	ZB30 LMG, Pistol	
4	Soldats	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	ZB24 Rifle, AP Grenades	

Rifle Section

Qty	Soldier	Move	Shoot	CQ	EXP	Discipline	Weapons	Notes
1	Caporal	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	Orita SMG, AP/AT Grenades	NCO
4	Soldats	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	ZB24 Rifle, AP/AT Grenades	

MORTAR SQUAD

Qty	Soldier	Move	Shoot	CQ	EXP	Discipline	Weapons	Notes
1	Sergeant	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	Orita SMG, AP Grenades	NCO
1	Mortar Gunner	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	60mm Mortar, Pistol	
1	Mortar Loader	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	ZB24 Rifle	
1	Observer	20cm	4+	+3	4+	5+	ZB24 Rifle or Orita SMG	Observer