

# PARA-LEADER

## Adding Paratroopers to PANZER LEADER

By Oscar Oates

World War II saw the first use of large, elite combat forces dropped from the air. Their deployment was both decisive and disastrous, with success and failure on grand scales not confined to either the Allies or the Axis.

General Kurt Student, the founder of the German airborne corps, felt that his *Fallschirmjaeger* were responsible for the quick defeat of Holland and Belgium in 1940. Following their limited role in the conquest of Norway, nearly 4000 men were dropped to capture key bridges in the Lowlands, necessary for the rapid advance of the main invasion force; casualties were light, only 180 paratroopers fell—an auspicious debut. And, in one of the most amazing *coups-de-main* in military annals, a small force of German paratroopers neutralized the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael. The German parachute corps had no little reason to bask in the honors heaped upon it by Hitler and the Fatherland. The result was far different in the 1941 airborne invasion of the island of Crete. Losses were of such magnitude (over one-third of the 22000-man force) that all future operations were forbidden. Thereafter, the German paratroopers were used in an elite infantry role, with the exception of defensive drops in Sicily and the Balkans and the abortive drop in the Ardennes in December 1944.

The Allies likewise had their coups and misadventures with airborne forces. In July 1943, British and American forces were landed in Sicily to begin the reconquest of the Continent. More than a third of the gliders carrying the British 1st Air Landing Brigade were released too soon, causing them to crash into the Mediterranean with much loss of life. The rest were scattered over southeastern Sicily; only twelve gliders arrived at their objectives. The American landings were likewise widely dispersed; however, the damage and confusion which was created alarmed the Italian and German forces facing the invasion.

The invasion of Italy at Salerno was accompanied by a paratroop of a slightly different nature. On the nights of September 13, 14 and 15, 2200 troopers of the US 82nd Airborne Division were dropped. The first night only one man in 600 dropped was injured; the second night 1000 more were dropped into the same zone without loss. The third night's drop met with less success due to the mountains at Avellino—only fifteen of the forty transport planes found the drop zone. The rest were widely scattered and most of the troopers captured.

The Normandy invasion was to be the "show-piece" of the Allied airborne formations. Approximately 18000 Allied troops dropped into battle. Although many of these drops were off target, most of the forces were able to achieve their objectives and contributed greatly to the success of the D-Day landings.

On 17 September 1944, the largest airdrop to date occurred when three Allied divisions were simultaneously committed to battle from the skies. In an unprecedented daylight assault, an entire Allied airborne army, complete with vehicles and equipment, was dropped behind German lines in occupied Holland. Though well-conceived and planned, a loss of surprise and the presence of unsuspected German forces caused the cancellation of the ultimate objective: the invasion of Germany. Operation Varsity was the last great para-operation of the war; two Allied airborne divisions were dropped into Germany to pave the way for Montgomery's crossing of the Rhine. Thereafter,

the airborne troops of the Allies were used as standard infantry formations, as were their German counterparts.

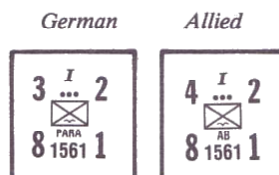
From this brief history, it can be readily seen that paratroop actions were an important increment of overall military planning, both in the German *Blitzkrieg* and the Allied liberation of Europe. It has often been said that tactical simulation of these actions would be difficult at best. The primary obstacles cited in the "Designer's Notes" section of *PANZER LEADER* center around the fact that most paratroop assaults were made at night and the resultant problems of intelligence (on both sides). Defense commanders had the dual problem of determining that a landing had occurred and, once he had confirmed that it had come to earth, where. On the other side, even with the knowledge that specific enemy units were in an area, their actual deployment—as well as his own—were equally unknown by the paratroop commander. That this confusion would require complicated restrictions to be built into the game's design or that such be ignored was the final avowed reason for not including the actual drops in the game; instead, by simply beginning the parachute scenarios several hours later, both sides were assumed to have been able to become oriented and organized and play could proceed smoothly. However, the basic design of the *PB/PL* family negates this very confusion somewhat since every piece on the mapboard is in open view to both players (unless one of the several variants for "blind" play is opted for) in every scenario anyway. Therefore, this argument is not completely valid. To introduce this important aspect of combat on the Western front is the purpose of the following variant rule format and scenarios, based on the historical operations previously summarized.



### Para Units

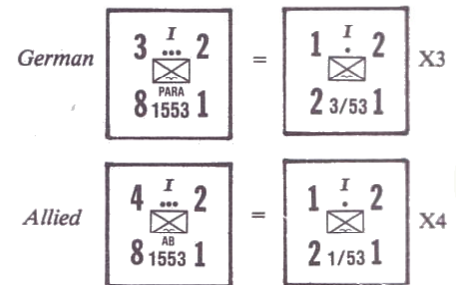
The units of *PANZER LEADER* are in need of only slight modifications for use as paratroop units.

The primary units paratrooped were infantry, so modifications will be made to these to represent the elite status enjoyed by airborne forces. Using the standard values of the attack and defense strengths put forth in *PANZER LEADER* and *PANZER LEADER 1940*, the following platoon configurations would appear to be appropriate:



Artillery support was also provided in the form of various small howitzers, anti-tank guns and other specially-designed light weaponry. Both the Allies and the Germans used gliders; therefore, these units can be assumed to require that mode of transportation in all scenarios.

In addition, to more accurately simulate the paratroops, these units should be further divided into "sticks" or units of ten to twelve men. Christopher Chyba provided a simple method for this (Vol. 11, No. 4). For our purposes, this method would yield the following units:



Finally, the transport of the paraforces must be considered. Two basic game design approaches could have been taken. The first would utilize a highly abstract method of paratrooping units by matching the "sticks" or glider units assigned with hexes landed in successfully. The second method, still somewhat abstract, would introduce actual aircraft counters. The second method was chosen. In the case of the gliders, one concession was made in that it must be assumed that these have been already released by their tow planes at the moment they enter play. Below are the transport units, each of which represents an individual craft:



Each aircraft and glider unit is assumed to have the capacity to carry one full platoon or battery. The glider units represent various types of craft used by their respective sides to transport combat forces.

### Special Rules

In a variant such as this, a few new rules and charts are inevitable. Hopefully, those presented here are straightforward and logical. In all other areas, the general rules of *PANZER LEADER* (whether standard, optional or experimental as agreed upon by the players) are the basis for the scenarios.

#### I. GENERAL RULES

##### A. Preparation for Play

1. Airborne player selects landing hexes and turn(s) of entry for his forces, secretly noting this information for future reference.
2. Defending player sets up his on-board forces.
3. Parachutes occur in the Air Phase (see Turn Sequence, below).
4. Paraforce units move first, unless otherwise specified by the scenario in play.
5. Turn Sequence (Modified):

a. Wind Direction and Wind Speed Determination

b. Combat Phase (as per *PL* Rules)

c. Air Phase:

1. Movement of all planes to positions over target hexes.
2. Anti-aircraft attacks.
3. Parachutes and glider landings are executed, including resolution of scatter, survival and attacks by enemy units in the same hex.
4. Air-to-ground combat by fighter-bombers.

d. Movement Phase