

The fall of The Keltsono Redoubt

A 1946 Storm of Eagles© Article by S. Pearson for C-P Models.

“We followed up quickly behind the creeping Artillery barrage, but as soon as we emerged from the dust and smoke; the Germans threw away their weapons and surrendered. There was really no fight for Keltsono. I think the German’s were looking for an opportunity to surrender to our troops?”

One of the prisoners gave me a can of bread, I think he was grateful he was now a prisoner and had not been killed? I did not know any German to thank him, I waved him away. Three days later I was taken prisoner myself by your men”.

Feldpolaizeigruppe 609 secret interrogation report taken from a captured Red Army Sergeant.

Introduction

It is May 16th 1946 and Oberst i.G Arter Bremner’s 11th StellungsGruppen occupies a defensive position around the small Belorussian town of Keltsono, 34Km south-east of Minsk, forming part of the Second Feld-Armee’s 23rd FeldKorp, (Gen. K. Loffelholz).

The dominating German positions consist of trenches with interlocking fire points, MG nests and Festungshohne or fortified hill position. Defending the Gomel to Minsk highway, this is a critical sector of the Central front and is under constant pressure from Lt. General Gugarin’s elite 8th Guards Army, (1st Belorussian Front).

The Soviet 29th Guards rifle corp. with its 27th and 96th Guards Rifle Division supported by the 338th rifle Division are ordered to attack and capture Keltsono, its capture will create an essential spring board for a renewed summer assault on the Minsk sector.

Within the 11th StellungsGruppen’s main battle line lay position 117, a fortified hill 2Km south of the town, defended by units of Hauptmann Klaus Brinkman’s 23rd StellungBrigaden and the 3rd Sturm the 11th Pioneer Waffengruppe.

The Germans have re-enforced this position with armour and construction units. This is the sector that the 29th Guards Rifle Corp will assault and capture at all costs!

“Major V. Trout, officer commanding the 11th Pz-Jg Waffengruppe, was suffering from a want of sleep and rest and, in my opinion was not in a fit state to handle the rapidly deteriorating situation around point 117, I therefore, during the late afternoon, I as Gruppe commander ordered his second in command Sturmofficer cadet Hellfrich to take over the Battalion and relived him of duty immediately”

Court-martial 7, Munich, May 30th 1946

Suggested Rules

This scenario has been written with the 6mm wargamer in mind, enabling them to ‘play’ the big battle. Obviously if you choose to game with 20mm scale miniatures then this scenario can be played at a 1:1 scale with the 1946 Storm of Eagles© Rules of engagement, or with any sets of skirmish rules that you are familiar with would be suitable.

You can download a PDF copy of the rules on the TQD Castings side of the web site.

Terrain

A flat table with scattered forest and patches of rough ground dominated by a centrally placed gently sloping hill is the order of the day on a table at least 4Ft by 6Ft in size.

The hill should have two belts of trenches, with at least four MG fire points and a mortar pit. You may also place no more than two wooden bunkers on the hill. Two minefields are permitted, these must be placed before the game commences.

Soviet Briefing

You command the elite 1/295th Guards Rifle Regiment, composed of battle hardened Soviet Guardsmen with three supporting Sapper Companies, a tank Company and Divisional Artillery in support.

Your primary objective is to capture point 117 overlooking the town of Keltsono at all costs. Its capture will enable your follow up forces to break through the German front line and capture Minsk later in the year.

Soviet Initial Deployment

The Three independent breakthrough Sapper Companies and tank support deploys on the eastern edge of the game table on turn one. The 1/293rd Guards Rifle Regiment follows on turn three.

Soviet Victory Conditions

Capture the German held position atop hill 117 in 20 moves or less.

Soviet Special Rules

Part of the game should take place during the pre dawn period, so night fighting rules will apply. All men carry 3 fragmentation grenades and 1 smoke grenade.

Soviet Forces

1/293rd Guards Rifle Regt, (550 men)
1197th Sapper Company, (80 men)
1127th Sapper Company, (80 men)
1338th Sapper Company, (80 men)
3/231 Tank Company (6 x JS VII tanks)
896th Artillery Battalion, (12x 122mm howitzers)

Neu-Heer Briefing

The clock is in the piss pot! You command a Feldinfanterie Battalion of the defensive 23rd StellungBrigaden, supported by an experienced close combat trained Pioneer Sturm.

This position dominates the main highway to Minsk and is important to the 23rd FeldKorps defence of the sector. Your units hold a series of trenches with interlocking wooden bunkers protecting anti-tank guns and heavy support weapons atop Hill 117.

The Soviet offensive against your hill top position is coming; you must hold your position at all costs, using every man under your command!

Neu-Heer Initial Deployment

All forces except your armour and pioneer support must be deployed within the defence position atop the hill and not outside.

Armour support is available on turn two and must deploy on the western edge of the table.

Neu-Heer Victory Conditions

Hold position 117 within 20 turns; if all your units are routed by the end of the battle you have lost the battle!

Neu-Heer Special Rules

All infantrymen are permitted one grenade each. As soon as the Soviet attack is spotted, German re- enforcements may be called; these take 2 turns to arrive on the western edge of the battle.

The German player is permitted three 1

inch by 3 inch marked minefields of mixed types around the hill position.

Neu-Heer Forces

2/23rd StellungBrigaden, (480 men in four sturm)
6/1107 SpeerKorp Batalione, (60 men)

Neu-Heer Re enforcements

1/11th Panzer-Jäger Waffengruppe, (4 Hetzer)
3rd Sturm / 11th Pi- Waffengruppe, (100 men)

Notes

Consult the 1946 Storm of Eagles© for a more detailed TOE of the forces engaged in the defence of Hill 117.

Blood, flames and the screams of wounded men filled the cordite heavy air round the dying hill, Ahlfeldt stumbled over the body of a dead Russian Lieutenant oblivious to the death and destruction around him he staggered on a few more steps until he falls against a patrolling muscular FeldJager NCO.

"Papers" he unsmilingly asked coldly aiming his MP45 at the confused Pioneer's chest. Alfeldt shrugged his shoulders wearily, "I have no papers" The FeldJager, the scourge of deserters, nods to his patrol, who cock their storm carbines and fire a short burst of fire in to his unarmed body.

Leaving his body on the ground the FeldJager continue their patrol bringing death quickly to those who no longer wish to fight for the Neu Germany!

Conclusion

The Soviet 29th Guards rifle corp. with 27th, 96th Guards Rifle Division and 338th rifle Division fought for three bloody days to capture hill 117. Against the odds the German defenders armed with PAK40 anti-tank guns and a handful of Hetzer, held on to position 117. Desperate to achieve some kind of victory, the Soviet commander switched his main attack on Koltsono itself, isolating Hill 117.

The unexpected move resulted in the loss of the town, the FeldGruppen unit holding it was annihilated to a man in the sudden attack.

The commander of the 11th StellungenGruppen himself was forced to lead a battle group composed of rear echelon troops and a reserve training unit to re-capture the town on the 20th of May 1946 during a sudden down pour of rain.

His attack ground to a halt with heavy

losses, support from the Gruppen was non-existent, pressure along the whole of the front prevented re-enforcement. Accepting the town was lost, Oberst i.G Arter Bremner, (ex Waffen SS officer) received permission from his superiors and ordered the abandonment of Hill 117 two days later, the survivors of Hauptmann Klaus Brinkman's 23rd StellungBrigaden escaped the ravaged hill.

General Loffelholz's 23rd FeldKorps front line had been seriously weakened by the hills loss and the Red Army now had a spring board for a summer attack on Minsk.

StellungsGruppen

A 1946 StellungsGruppen or 'defensive group' is a Neu-Heer unit that has little mobility, extra MMG, enlarged pioneer unit and an extra Artillery Battalion.

The 11th FeldGruppen was 'converted' and its specialist sub-units enlarged to a StellungsGruppen during the spring of 1945.

StellungsGruppen are expected to defend a position of critical importance until mobile reserves move up to counter-attack or relieve them.

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