

DESIGN NOTES FOR THE BATTLE OF KHAN YUNIS 1967

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In the game Divided Ground, there is a scenario entitled “Red Sheet”. It is about the initial battle for town of Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. Like all of the scenarios in Divided Ground it was done in a hurry and without much research into the actual battle. In my program to update the Divided Ground scenarios I came upon “Red Sheet” and found a flawed product. Oh the scenario set up generally follows the historical one, but the unit designations for the Arabs were way off. Not only that, I found also found that there were four separate engagements to take the town during the first three days of the 1967 War. Instead of just updating the original scenario, I decided to expand it into four separate scenarios, one of each engagement.

The Map

The map was based on the maps from the British War Office 1960 map series. While most of the maps from that series were made during World War Two, it seems that maps made of the Gaza Strip and adjacent areas were made post war, as they include the coastal railroad that was laid down post war. The original map in Divided Ground had the wrong directions, which I subsequently corrected. Other than that I made no other changes.

The Orders of Battle

There are really two different kinds of orders of battle here. The Israelis had a different one for each battle, while the Arabs had the same one, albeit ever shrinking as the cumulative assaults were wearing them down.

The Israelis

The Israelis had a different order of battle for each battle as there were different units at each battle, except the last one where two previous units returned for a final go at the Arabs.

7th Armored Brigade: The 7th Armored Brigade was the first unit to attack Khan Yunis. It consisted of the 79th and 82nd Armored Battalions, the 7th Mortar Battalion (SP), and the 7th Scout Company. Absent from the brigade was the 75th Armored Infantry Battalion which was being held back as the divisional reserve and one company from the 79th Battalion which was attached to the 202nd Paratroop Brigade. Also accompanying the 7th Brigade was Granit Force, a small force consisting of the 45th Armored Battalion and a scout company.

11th Infantry (Mechanized) Brigade: The 11th Infantry Brigade was only recently converted to a mechanized brigade of two armored infantry battalions and one armored

battalion. However it was temporarily stripped of its halftracks and self-propelled mortars just before the war so its infantry units became regular infantry again. This is why rifle units are used instead of armored infantry to represent the line platoons. One of the infantry battalions (the 111th), accompanied by a tank company from the brigade's armored battalion, made the second attack on the town and returned to participate in the final attack, though the tank company was absent.

202nd Parachute Brigade: The 202nd Parachute Brigade consisted of two parachute battalions (the 88th and 202nd) and C Company from the 79th Armored Battalion. The brigade was equipped with halftracks and self-propelled 120mm mortars in place of their 81mm mortars just before the war, thus making them mechanized paratroopers. (They did attach their dismounted 81mm mortar platoons to the 11th Infantry Brigade though.) Only the 88th Battalion, plus the tank company made the third attack on the town. In the final attack, both parachute battalions plus the tank company participated in the attack.

The Arabs

The main Arab unit in Khan Yunis was the 108th Palestinian Infantry Brigade. It had the 84th and 87th Palestinian Infantry Battalions and 27th Infantry Battalion (from the Egyptian 9th Infantry Brigade at Rafah). Attached to the brigade were two tank companies, one was the 3rd Company of the Egyptian 311th Tank Battalion (also from the Egyptian 9th Infantry Brigade) and C Squadron of the 53rd Independent Armored Battalion. The 53rd was one of the two tank battalions in the Egyptian Army still equipped with Sherman tanks and it was still using its old British unit designations. The 108th also had the 91st Palestinian Artillery Battalion of twelve 25 Pdr Howitzers as well as the composite 103rd Palestinian Anti-Tank Battalion which had an assortment of AT guns and the 119th Anti-Aircraft Battalion.

The Arabs were supplemented by ad-hoc civilian militia groups that formed during the battle from the town's populace who equipped themselves with weapons from dead Arab soldiers. The destruction of regular units also caused the survivors to form ad-hoc sniper teams which hindered the Israelis not only during the battles, but for days afterward, even past the end of the war.

The force was received long range artillery support from the Egyptian 24th Field Artillery Battalion, which was stationed just west of Rafah. But the support was only during the first attack, by the time the second attack occurred the 24th was busy defending itself from the Israeli 7th Armored Brigade and by the end of the first day of battle it was destroyed.

Players will notice one important difference between the Divided Ground and Middle East version of these scenarios. The medium trucks in Middle East leave wrecks while those in Divided Ground do not. Therefore there are additional wrecks in the Middle East version to account for the destroyed medium trucks.

The Scenarios

There are four scenarios, each which depict the four separate attacks on Khan Yunis during the war. These will be looked at separately.

Day 1, Part 1: In the first scenario we have the Israeli 7th Armored Brigade making its pass through the town. It enters on the east side of the board and must exit off of the south side, while destroying as much of the 108th PLA Brigade as it can in the short amount of time in the game. Historically the Israelis were not expecting much more than an infantry battalion and were quite surprised to see artillery and tanks in the town. Still they felt out of their depth here as they had no infantry to clear the town with. While they took out half of the artillery battalion and a good chunk of the Arab armor, they had to leave so as to keep with their schedule. Besides there was a lot of anti-tank rocket toting infantry hiding in the houses, taking pot shots at the tanks as they passed by. Seven knocked out tanks and a handful of wrecked halftracks were testimony to the effectiveness of this anti-tank fire.

Day 1, Part 2: The second scenario historically started about an hour after the first one ended. The 111th Infantry Battalion of the 11th Infantry Brigade, supported by a company of AMX-13 tanks, attacked from the northeast. While they made good progress through the outskirts of the town, once they got towards the center of Khan Yunis, Arab resistance sharply increased. Not only was the 108th shifting troops around to meet the most immediate threats, the town civilians were arming themselves with weapons from the dead Arab and Israeli soldiers and forming ad-hoc militia units. Four AMX-13 tanks were quickly knocked out by anti-tank fire from the surviving Arab tanks in the town and the Israeli commander realized that his unit was in over its head and withdrew after about an hour.

Day 2: After the second battle the Arab defenders pulled in their defenses to make a smaller, more manageable perimeter. Using a small supply of mines that were located in the town, the 108th planted some hasty minefields around their perimeter. Bolstered by the success of resisting two attacks the day before, the town's populace formed more ad-hoc militia units and sniper teams, which the 108th's commander used to fill in gaps in the defense. However, ammunition was in limited supply and so the artillery had to be used more sparingly. The next attack did not come until the late afternoon of the 6th of June. It was performed by the 88th Parachute Battalion of the 202nd Parachute Brigade, called away from their mopping up missions around Rafah Junction. They were supported by a company of Patton tanks from the 7th Armored Brigade. They attacked from the southwest and never really got through the outer defensive perimeter due to receiving a lot of heavy fire in a short amount of time. The Israelis withdrew to the beach to the west after an hour to rest and regroup.

Day 3: During the night following the third attack the Israelis decided to attack again, only this time with more units and from multiple directions. The rest of the 202nd Parachute Brigade became available during the night and actually linked up with its lone battalion on the beach. In the morning just before dawn, the 202nd split up and each battalion moved to its attack position, one attack coming from the beach to the west and

the other coming from the southwest. The Israelis also got the 111th Infantry Battalion from the 11th Infantry Brigade, which had just completed taking the rest of the Gaza Strip, to attack from the northeast. The Arabs on their part were girding themselves for what they thought would be the final battle. Their ammunition for their tanks and heavy weapons was very low. While a few more ad-hoc militia units were formed, for the most part they were nothing but armed rabble. At dawn the three prong attack commenced and quickly broke through the outer defensive perimeter. Within an hour all three prongs of the attack met in the center of Khan Yunis. Once this happened most of the Arab defenders threw down their weapons and surrendered. By noon the town was secured and the 202nd Paratroop Brigade, along with its attached tank company, moved out to the west into the Sinai to join in the pursuit of the Egyptian Army. For the 11th Infantry Brigade which remained behind, the days ahead would be busy, routing out the last of the Arab sniper teams that refused to surrender.

Conclusion

I hope that these scenarios give better insight to the actual battle for Khan Yunis during the Six-Day War in 1967.

Errata

Just when I thought that I got the Battle of Bir Gifgafa scenario corrected in my last new scenario posted on Games Depot, someone pointed out to me that I got the lone self-propelled mortar in the 19th Armored Battalion wrong. I had given the Israelis a self-propelled 81mm Mortar, seems it should have been a self-propelled 120mm Mortar. Well I corrected it and included are the corrected (again) order of battle and scenario files for Bir Gifgafa.