

2300AD

OPERATION HERKULES



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The Kafer's Last Stand on the French Arm

2300AD

OPERATION

HERKULES

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HEXENKESSEL

Oberleutnant Wilhelm Sandrock swore viciously as his Luki-9 shook with a crushing impact and its engines raced. He'd had three Luki-9s shot out from under him on Beta Canum and one on Aurore and now in less than half a day on Dunkelheim he faced the same fate again. The driver regained control after a vicious skid which nearly dug in the rigid plenum and risked flipping the gun sled. Sandrock tried to slew the main gun towards the pair of Deathsleds but the weapon only showed red on his displays.

The Luki almost passed between the two Kafer AFVs, but at the last moment a thrust vector died too fast for the vectronics to stabilise and it jinked into the right hand vehicle. The impact was sickening and knocked him unconscious.

The burning smell of the Luki beginning to brew up brought him round, and he scrambled to blow out the hatch. With an aching arm he reached to free his SK-19 but the weapon was mangled and trapped in the rack. He clambered out onto the smouldering hull reaching for his oversized sidearm as he did.

The Luki-9 was solidly wedged into the Deathsled with its prow just below the alien tank's turret ring. Its own remote turret and external cannon were gone. He saw movement on the top of the enemy turret as a groggy looking Kafer commander caught sight of him. Wilhelm staggered along the hull as the Kafer tried to traverse his machine gun cupola. The German tanker shot the alien commander several times at close range smashing shell, arm and head while he struggled with the secondary armament.

Wilhelm popped one of the red phosphorous grenades they used to deny their own damaged tanks and dropped it past the bleeding Kafer into the turret. The grenade detonated and he heard the barking of burning Kafers inside. Gingerly and with as much speed as his stunned body could manage he moved back onto the Luki to see if his driver was still alive.

It was his fortieth kill, only a couple of Frenchmen could claim more, but this one was definitely the hardest. This 'hexenkessel' was worse than anything else he had experienced on the Rhine, the Somme, Tanstaafl or Beta Canum. They had no choice though; they just had to hold the planethead, no matter what the cost.



INTRODUCTION

There was only one place we were going. We all knew it. There was no helping poor Hochbaden but Germany had unfinished business on Dunkelheim. There was no way we were going to let anyone take that duty from us, not our allies and certainly not the French.

Wilhelm Sandrock, Heroes of the Kafer War, NDF Documentary

The German colony of Dunkelheim in the DM+36 2436 system was one of the first victims of the Kafer assault in 2301. Hochbaden had already been destroyed in a vicious act of genocide and Dunkelheim expected much the same treatment. The Kafers however chose to occupy Dunkelheim and use it as a staging post for attacks further into the French Arm. The world fell easily with its token squadron overwhelmed and its few forces organizing to conduct guerrilla warfare.

Dunkelheim would suffer the brutal hand of Kafer occupation with almost random acts of brutality aimed at its citizens by the alien garrison. The local resistance, the Widerstand, aided by contingents of multinational special forces smuggled on world, would struggle for over a year to keep the hope of liberation alive. Information reached them only slowly but the news of the victory of the Battle of Beowulf finally reached Dunkelheim.

By November 2302 the Kafers had been routed from the Beta Canum Cluster. The ground forces of a number of nations were busy rooting out Kafer guerrillas and warships were hunting down their scattered Kafer counterparts. On the Eta Bootis Finger however Dunkelheim was still held by the aliens, The initial impetus of the Liberation was spent and Germany found significant difficulty in finding the starlift capability to retake the fortified Dunkelheim. Diplomatic pressures from Germany and her allies were finally able to ensure an offensive to free Dunkelheim could finally be Mounted.

This sourcebook aims to provide a detailed description of HERKULES which can be used as background for any campaigns being run on the Dunkelheim.

ORGANISATION

This book is divided into a number of sections in addition to this introduction.

- Situation
- Planning
- Commanders
- Order of Battle
- Kafer Forces
- Space Phase
- Interface Phase
- Landing Phase
- Breakout Phase
- Consolidation Phase
- After Action Review
- Gaming Op HERKULES
- Authors Notes

Timeline

2295 – First contact with Kafers at Arcturus.

2298 – Invasion of Aurore by the Kafers. Human counter-attack follows three months later.

Jun 2301 – Destruction of Hochbaden colony and occupation of Dunkelheim.

Jul 2301 – Op WOTAN Proposed.

Sep 2301 – 2nd Battle of BCB, system lost to Kafers and colony bombarded. Op WOTAN cancelled.

Dec 2301 – Fall of Kimanjano.

Feb-March 2302 – Fall of Beta Canum, Crater and invasion of Joi.

Apr-Jul 2302 – Vice Admiral Rochemont's counterattacks in the BC Cluster.

Jul-Aug 2302 – Liberation of Kimanjano. '3rd Liberation' of Beta Canum.

Oct 2302 – Initial phase of Op HERKULES commences.

SITUATION

The one eyed Commando officer led the intelligence briefing. His voice was soft, but his analysis was insightful. From time to time he absentmindedly rubbed at the livid scarring on his face. It had taken a great deal of resources and the loss of a starship to extract this man from operations on Dunkelheim. We hoped the knowledge he could give us about the situation on the world was going to be worth it.

HERKULES: The Real Story, GenMaj Schneider

The German colony of Dunkelheim in the DM+36 2436 system was occupied by the Kafers in June of 2301 with relatively little resistance. The defending squadron of warships withdrew and there was no coherent opposition on the ground to seriously hamper the Kafer landings. The Kafers went on to establish their main forward operating base in human territory on Dunkelheim, enabling deeper strikes into the Beta Canum cluster.

Widerstand

The *Widerstand*, or Resistance, is the force that has evolved from the plans of Governor Schmidt to lead an irregular fight against the Kafers. The original hard core of the *Widerstand* formed around Schmidt, the colonial police and a kernel of mercenaries. Other groups formed around the military garrison, which fought only desultory delaying actions against Kafer landing groups, and special forces teams. The vast majority formed almost spontaneously in the regions and cities outside Goldberg.

The *Widerstand* is a diffuse organisation with no firm chain of command or structure and widely varying capabilities. In general terms it is organised into regions, battalions and companies. There are also a number of independent units which are very capable including some elements of the pre-war garrison.

The colonial Governor Karl Schmidt had laid plans for a guerrilla resistance movement which was later reinforced by German and other allied special forces smuggled in from off-world. This forced the deployment of an increasing number of Kafer troops to Dunkelheim to maintain their control over key points on the world. Kafer units were unleashed to conduct numerous raids on the human population. The reasoning behind these raids has been often debated and Kafer sadism is commonly identified as the motive. However recently the military intelligence community believed these raids were actually some form of live training against a human enemy.

The special forces operating with guerrillas on Dunkelheim were there in support of a secret plan underway to liberate the colony, known as Operation WOTAN. WOTAN involved the preparation of two German brigades for an opposed landing in a remote area of Dunkelheim and the launching of a conventional campaign against the Kafers. Events conspired against the Germans however. The focus of French and other nations was on the relief of Eta Bootis itself and the Germans found it difficult to gather enough space naval combat power to challenge the Kafer fleets in the Eta Bootis finger. Additionally the Germans could get enough starlift from impressed merchants displaced from the Hochbaden-Dunkelheim routes to carry the two brigades, but were unable to provide for follow on forces.

Finally the defeat of the 2nd Battle of Beta Comae Berenices and the loss of the DSKM squadron there rendered the abortive WOTAN a moot point. Soon the Kafers surged forward again past the blockaded Nous Voila and on to Kimanjano and Beta Canum where the Germans found themselves locked in a massive ground battle. Virtually the whole force training for WOTAN found itself caught up in this battle including the controlling HQ, IX Korps. With the Beta Canum Cluster as a whole fighting for its life German concerns moved away from merely worrying about Dunkelheim.

A new expeditionary corps HQ, X Korps was formed, activated and dispatched up Arm, eventually fetching up at Beowulf where it coordinated with the French *Armée de Libération* and the Commonwealth Expeditionary Force. Fighting units soon followed it while the Neubayern system was prepared as another citadel should the Kafers break through at Beowulf. Meanwhile German diplomacy brought in a number of allies to fight alongside her, including a contribution from the Freihafeners.

X Korps' main planning revolved around eventually influencing the on-going battle for Beta Canum, and then reinforcing the surviving German colonies on Joi and Adlerhorst. Payback on Dunkelheim was a long way down the list of priorities, although a small planning cell based in the X Korps HQ at Heorot was involved in updating the existing WOTAN contingencies. X Korps possessed many advantages that IX Korps planning for WOTAN had not; the concentration of the entire German military effort and abundant starlift provided by German registered merchants thrown out of their routes around the cluster.

The Battle of Beowulf lifted the blockade from the X Korps forces and together with their Allies they began the counter-offensive soon after the Reserve Fleet's victory. After pausing in the Kimanjano system until the French led landing passed its most critical phase the X Korps main body pushed on to Beta Canum and a further force pressed on to Joi. The landings on Beta Canum were organised by the British onto their New African colony which was largely free of Kafers. X Korps was soon present in strength on the German Continent reinforcing the mixed bag of human forces who had won a major victory there prior to the arrival of the reinforcements at the 2nd Battle of Uethan. Further troops moved up to reinforce Adlerhorst which had so far escaped invasion.

Taking stock Generaloberst Sebi Metzger, the German Theatre Commander, surveyed the situation and found the current operations were focused on mopping up Beta Canum and to a lesser extent on Joi. That left the Eta Bootis Finger, and specifically Dunkelheim, as his main area of future operations. Consequently he pulled X Korps from day-to-day control of the fighting on Beta Canum as the German Continent was largely free of Kafers and tasked it with planning the renewed attempt to liberate Dunkelheim. WOTAN was to be renamed HERKULES and given to Generalleutnant Hanno Schneider to run.

Battlespace

DM+36 2436 is a vital link in the region known as the Eta Bootis Finger between the Beta Canum cluster and the world of Aurore and onwards to Kafer space beyond Arctutus. The system is very accessible and reachable from no fewer than six systems, although access to Aurore is only through the bottleneck at Hochbaden. The nearest system is DM +35 2436 or Grosshiddenhafen which is a mere 2.5 LY allowing starships to transit there and back without discharging. The other major routes are to Adlerhorst, Beta Comae Berenices and Beta Canum as well as Hochbaden.

DM+36 2436 itself is a relatively small system with only a dim red star at its centre. There are a mere three stars in the system, all well inside the FTL shelf, which means there is no easy way to bypass the system. The inner world is Dunkelheim itself and the two outer worlds are uninhabited desert planets.

Dunkelheim

Dunkelheim is a small world, roughly half the size of Earth with a meagre population of some 1.5 million mainly Bavarian colonists. Dunkelheim is a very dry world, much of whose water is locked up in some very intricate insect analogue habitats. It was colonised in 2224 by the Bavarians as a form of penal colony which was very far on the list of priorities behind every other Bavarian enterprise. The world soon proved to be very rich in minerals although the lack of infrastructure hampered resource exploitation opportunities.

Dunkelheim has developed a strongly regional identity based around its six major settlements, although Goldberg has always been the most prosperous. The economy has been based around mineral extraction, basic refining and agriculture. The recent construction of the maglev link between Goldberg and Neue Berlin via the spaceport and catapult has greatly boosted the local economy. Transit between the settlements has been mostly by air and cargo movement by zep or large ACV.

OPERATION REGENBOGEN

Operation REGENBOGEN commenced in Sep 2301 after news reached Adlerhorst of resistance by the Widerstand. The operation saw the infiltration of several special forces teams past the blockade to work with the resistance and gather intelligence. Initially an entirely German operation it was soon reinforced by French, British, American and other teams. Casualties were often high and the infiltrations run under Operation LYSANDRE were highly risky and frequently aborted.

Kolonial Sonderverband 2

KS2 are a German special forces unit which specialises in operations on the French Arm. The unit has had elements deployed on Dunkelheim since early 2301 and more have been infiltrated since then. KS2 personnel have been responsible for gathering intelligence, providing training to the Widerstand and conducting strategic attacks against the Kafers.

OP HERKULES

The Bunker

Known as 'The Bunker' this is the fortification established by Governor Schmidt to be the heart of his defence against invasion. Initially established during diplomatic difficulties with Germany it was greatly expanded with the aid of expert miners.

The Bunker is a subterranean complex on the shores of the Wellgundesee which is capable of holding over a thousand people and was expanded throughout the occupation. In spite of the best efforts to maintain security the location of this base has become known to the Kafers although was not subjected to a major Assault.

Lubowski's Folly

Karl Lubowski was Governor Schmidt's main rival for leadership of the Widerstand during the occupation. His powerbase came from the people of Goldberg who felt abandoned by Schmidt. A fiery and eloquent lawyer Lubowski led his followers in numerous strikes against the Kafers in and around Goldberg.

After numerous confrontations with Schmidt over his cautious tactics, he led over a thousand of his guerrillas against the Zitadelle. Although he initially made good progress the Kaffer reaction became more and more ferocious until his column was overwhelmed. Only a handful of survivors escaped and Lubowski's decapitated body was later found on the battlefield.

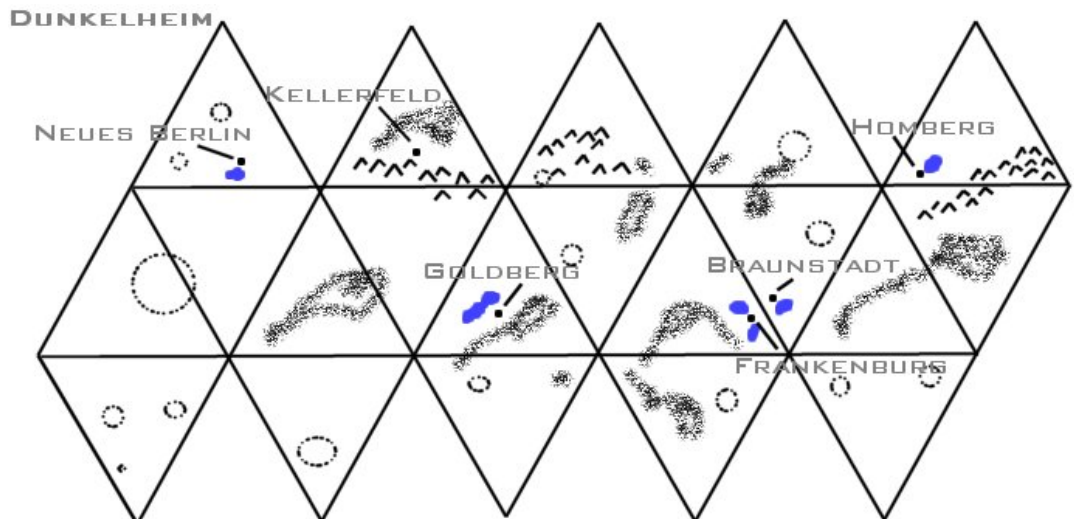
The Kaffer invasion, coming only weeks after the destruction of Hochbaden, was brutal and straight forward. The system was almost already evacuated with most shipping already departed up arm. The small DSKM presence didn't challenge the incoming Kaffer Task Force. On the ground the Governor enacted his secret plan and evacuated his staff, military and police from key locations.

The Kaffer landings followed soon after with detachments landing initially at Goldberg and the space port and overcoming sporadic resistance from security guards and some brave citizens. The Dunkelheimers were bewildered and confused by the rapid advance of the Kafers and the disappearance of their leaders. A second wave of attacks occurred as the Kafers assaulted the other settlements. The largest battle took place at Neue Berlin when elements of the local reserve battalion fought a brief and bloody action on the outskirts before retreating in small groups.

The Kafers then settled into occupation duties with small garrisons of cohort size at each of the major settlements and a larger force of several cohorts at the spaceport. The Kafers began to build fortifications, most notably at the spaceport, but also on the outskirts of all the major settlements. An orbital terminal was established by utilising a badly damaged Kaffer battleship. Additional garrison troops began to trickle onto the World.

In Aug 01 the nascent Widerstand began to launch attacks against the Kaffer garrison around Goldberg with great initial success. The response however was brutal with sweeps launched through several Goldberg suburbs and heavy civilian casualties. This set a pattern of operations but inspired new resistance in other centres. The Widerstand however would never be able to defeat the Kafers outright and in response the Kafers slowly increased the garrison.

Once the high tide of the Kaffer invasion peaked at Beowulf the Kaffer presence at Dunkelheim began to grow even more due to its role as a supply hub. The numbers of troops almost doubled in this period. Eventually Dunkelheim was the only inhabited human system left in Kaffer hands and the scene was set for Operation HERKULES.



Widerstand

The Widerstand is an organisation that it not well understood by outsiders. Most see it as a single body when in fact it is a confederation of different elements. The heart of the Widerstand is the force created by Governor Schmidt around a kernel of the military garrison and police elements. The Governor managed to create a secret base to the west of Goldberg on the banks of the Wellgundesee from which this group operated in a relatively conventional light infantry manner mounting raids and ambushes.

Elsewhere resistance to the Kafers was strictly ad-hoc and poorly organised due to the disappearance of the Governor and his cabinet. The successes of Schmidt however encouraged more groups to emerge and Schmidt dispatched small teams of trainers to assist, and so the Widerstand network began to emerge. Schmidt's tactics of ambush suited the organisation which was mostly very poorly armed. If the Kafers did respond in force the results were often disastrous for the regional groups.

When German High Command received news of the survival of forces on Dunkelheim they organised Op REGENBOGEN to send assistance to the world in the form of special forces trainers and limited equipment. These trainers were normally assigned to regional Widerstand areas and success often varied dramatically. They did excellent work in gaining intelligence on the Kafer deployments however.

The chain of command of the Widerstand was notably chaotic and some elements were barely under any sort of control, especially in towns far away from Goldberg. Many charismatic leaders resented Schmidt's command especially as they saw him as having abandoned the people of Dunkelheim in the initial invasion. Some actively rejected his leadership and in April of 2302 a major assault occurred on the *Zitadelle* that was repulsed with very heavy losses. Governor Schmidt's original core of the force remained highly capable and completely loyal throughout the campaign.

In Jan 2302 the organisation of the Widerstand had solidified into a number of regions. Region I around Dunkelheim, Region II Neues Berlin, Region III Kellerfeld, Region IV Frankenburg and Braunstadt and Region V Homburg. Each region had a number of different sub organisations that rarely followed any sort of pattern or naming convention. Of all the regions Region I remained by far the strongest, but became riven with factional infighting which lessened after the dramatic defeat of the anti-Schmidt Faction.

The Widerstand operated with a typically tiered guerrilla organisation with full time units, regional units and auxiliary units to provide basic support. The full time units in Region I and II were predominantly based around the local garrison units that went into hiding with Schmidt. Most of the rest formed spontaneously or were raised by regular advisors dispatched by Schmidt or under Op REGENBOGEN. Regional units were part time combat units which could be called out to aid the full time units but were notably less well trained than the full time forces. The auxiliaries were the mass of the colonist who have various levels of support to the Widerstand including food, shelter and what meagre supplies they could share.

The Widerstand mostly operated as a light mechanised force outside of urban areas using whatever vehicles they could get their hands on, although several units notably operated with horses. There were also a number of aircraft that were operated, although very vulnerable to Snapfire and Kafer aircraft, which allowed regional commanders to meet and also transport crack units.

The Widerstand were poorly equipped with weapons on the whole, although some military units retained pre-War weaponry. The most effective tactics proved to be the use of large bombs utilising home made explosives from ambush.

Mounted Infantry

There are several units of mounted infantry in the Widerstand, either full time or part time. These highly mobile units have proven to be very versatile in raids against the Kafers, with the ability to rapidly scatter after an ambush and sometimes to draw pursuers into further killing areas. Most regions have at least one company sized element of mounted infantry.

Außerirdischejäger

The Außerirdischejäger are young Dunkelheimers who have pledged to hunt down Kafers until their last breath. Most operate within the Widerstand but many chose their own path of revenge. The young people are usually poorly equipped and trained and must rely solely on their motivation to succeed. Most common in the urban areas they made up many of those slain in Lubowski's assault on the *Zitadelle*. Some Regions have formed companies of these soldiers to use as shock Troops.

Landsknechts

The Landsknecht is the ultimate evolution of the Außerirdischejäger. They are a dedicated group of individuals who have lost everything. They will stop at nothing and are perfectly willing to lay down their lives for the cause. Having taken a formal blood oath many perform tasks that are literally suicidal. Landsknechts have carried out suicide bombings against Kafer patrols.

PLANNING

Deutsches Sternkreigsmarine

The DSKM is a relatively new service which had its baptism of fire against the French and now the Kafers. It has had a mixed experience during the war and has suffered heavy casualties. It has fought back however and is now ready for revenge.

It retains most of its heavy combat groups but has lost many smaller ships and fighters. It also has only a limited troop carrying capability.

The DSKM's crews are combat hardened and are well experienced in operating alongside other Allied contingents. The DSKM on its own lacks the capability to conduct the space and landing components of HERKULES on its own and so Germany's allies will be called up to assist.



Escadre d'Interface

The EdI is the French space navy's (MSIF) integral troop landing arm. It is the largest and most capable such service with several specialist assault craft and an array of landing craft of various types. It also is the most experienced at carrying out these operations and leads the way in developing new techniques.

For HERKULES the DSKM has used this expertise in the planning process and there are also several EdI ships and commanders involved in the operation itself.

The meeting was a difficult one. The commanders were too focused still on the final battles around Uethan and could not be coaxed on to the matter of HERKULES.

HERKULES: The Real Story, GenLt Schneider

Several key factors constrained Generalleutnant Schneider's planning for Op HERKULES. The main factor was the chronic weakness of the Deutsches Sternkreigsmarine (DSKM), which had proportionately taken the highest casualties of any human space force. While human fleets had secured most of the Beta Canum Cluster, made Eta Bootis a stronghold and scattered the Kafer Task Forces the systems of the Eta Bootis Finger were far from secure. Indeed Dunkelheim was the main Kafer supply base in this volume and given time the Kafer warships could again coalesce here into a major fleet and already substantial, if uncoordinated, forces were here. For HERKULES to succeed the Germans would need to call upon a multinational effort to secure in-system superiority, requiring a diplomatic effort in combination with military planning.

Second was the inherent difficulty with securing sufficient starlift for the forces required to liberate Dunkelheim. The massed merchant fleet that had brought X Korps from Beowulf was slowly dispersing; some moving military forces, some shifting much needed humanitarian aid and still more returning to trade to try and restart the economy of the cluster. The longer HERKULES waited the less chance it stood of getting off the ground. Indeed Schneider was aware he would increasingly need to call upon starlift capability from Germany's allies.

Closely related to starlift was interface assault capability. Germany had little by the way of assault capability, having concentrated her post-Reunification building programme on warships and certainly had nothing to match France's Escadre d'Interface. Instead she had to rely on older former-Bavarian troopships with limited interface capacity, of which only two of the larger, most capable Fast Troopships remained available. To overcome these difficulties Germany would have to mass her existing capability and call upon help from her allies who had their own operations to conduct. Schneider had plenty of troops on hand, he believed more than enough for the task, indeed two divisions earmarked for the mission would remain on other colony worlds waiting to be called forwards. His problem would be in transporting and supplying those he would deploy. Every additional soldier he brought forward would mean fewer supplies and overall less fighting capability.

Intelligence was excellent. For nearly 18 months multinational special forces had operated alongside the Widerstand resistance on Dunkelheim and there was little Schneider didn't know about ground force dispositions. Similarly warships and privateer snoops had conducted reconnaissance missions from the edge of the system and had built up a comprehensive picture of Kafer operations in-system. Germany was well placed for allies on the French Arm. They had just signed the Adlerhorst Alliance, a primarily political compact, with American and Australia to coordinate their efforts against the Kafers.

They were also supported by a number of smaller nations with military aid. Most importantly relations on a practical military level were good with other major players on the French Arm including the British, Azanians, Ukrainians and, after some problems, the Japanese. Even France, despite some personality clashes and uneasy relations on Earth had cooperated closely during the Kafer War so far and goodwill still existed between the two.

The main change in the situation from that envisioned in WOTAN was in the larger ground based Kafer garrison. Most of this had been brought in to cope with the operations of the Widerstand and other human forces. Continuous operations over the surface of Dunkelheim had raised these forces to a high general standard of competence. These forces had been reinforced by troops retreating by any means available from the debacles in the Beta Canum Cluster. These were usually forces without heavy equipment as these had been left behind in evacuations, but other well equipped strike formations were also present. In addition rumours of enhanced Kafer ASAT defences are rife. Nearly half of the Kafer force was massed in the area between Goldberg and the Kafer safe-place built around the old spaceport. Numerous other forces were found across the planet dispersed to maintain a firm hold on the civilian population. Schneider liaised closely with Général d'Armée Claude Hebert, trying to learn all he could from French experience of Kimanjano on the likely Kafer reaction to his landing.

The outline plan derived for HERKULES involved a series of preliminary space operations designed to wear down the Kafer forces and identify their defensive strategy. A major combat fleet would then be committed to destroy the in-system defences and clear the way for the invasion force. This force would be dispatched from Vogelheim and Beta Canum and move directly into the assault. Under cover of an orbital bombardment the main force was to be landed some 1000km to the south of Goldberg. Simultaneously Widerstand fighters, special forces and raiding parties from orbit would attack key locations.

Schneider intended to commit to a rapid build-up of forces, utilising techniques pioneered by the French to get his heavy forces into position rapidly. He assessed that the Kafers would intend to hit the Landing Zone as hard and as soon as possible and aimed to defeat this thrust with his mobile forces. Schneider aimed to ensure his spearhead was as heavy and well armoured as possible. He hoped that this defeat away from urban areas would ease the task of mopping up and minimise casualties amongst the colonists. He expected that most of the Kafers mobile forces would come out to oppose the landings, and this would comprise the bulk of their immediate manoeuvre capability. His forces were ordered to focus on the destruction of the Kafer vehicles, leaving the dismounted infantry to isolation many of hundreds of kilometres from their bases. He aimed to isolate approaching elements and destroy them in detail utilising his speed of action, command and control systems and massed artillery. Although outnumbered in total he believed he could gain the required superiority of combat power at a time and place of his choosing.

Once this was complete he would break out from this battle and begin his exploitation. The next objectives would be Goldberg and the Kafer *Safe Place* known as the *Zitadelle* with the rest of the liberation dependent on how these operations had gone. He was well aware that the campaign would be a long one even after these initial objectives had been seized.

Forces earmarked for HERKULES were identified and began a tailored training regime. One of the most difficult facets was conducting realistic interface assault training, most of which had to be undertaken in simulators. Most units managed at least one proper rehearsal including loading and assault from orbit. Schneider was concerned about the dispersal of his units on three different worlds and their lack of opportunity to train together especially within key divisional groupings. However given the tight timelines there was little he could do, however all the commanders at battalion level and above attended two planning and rehearsal conferences on Beta Canum 4.

Planetary Assault

Prior to the Kafer War large scale landings of troops from orbit have been very rare. Many nations routinely moved troops between colonies but there was no call for assault landings. Indeed only France conducted such operations during the Elysian War. The Kafers shocked humanity with their ability to land tens of thousands of troops on Aurore, and other worlds.

In response the existing troop ships were reinforced with appropriate civilian ships and as many landers as possible. New techniques were trailed and put to the test. Rochemont's Fleet conducted landings on Joi, Crater and twice on Beta Canum of Forces up to two infantry brigades in size. While the landings themselves were successful the numbers of troops deployed were often not enough to be decisive.

Following the Battle of Beowulf the liberation of the French Arm began with Kimanjano. This saw the use of most of the innovations trailed so far and saw several divisions conduct assault landings from a vast fleet of ships. Fighting on the ground was intense and hung in the balance for several weeks before the French led victory was ensured.

Further large scale landings were undertaken on Beta Canum but on secured planetheads. Further reinforcement missions also took place on Crater and Joi and humanitarian supplies were rushed to Nous Voilà. HERKULES will be the next big test of these opposed landing drills.

COMMANDERS

Governor Karl Schmidt

Karl Schmidt is the Governor of Dunkelheim. At first glance a rotund, ageing and homely man he is an astute and intelligent operator. It was Schmidt who first realised that in the event of a Kafer invasion Dunkelheim would have little in the way of conventional defences.

Schmidt laid the ground for the Widerstand resistance force, although he has not been able to maintain control over all of it. Schmidt has some limited previous military experience but he has had frequent clashes with his advisors and some have begun to question his leadership.

Generaloberst Metzger

GenObst Sebastian Metzger is the theatre commander for all German military operations in the lower French Arm. Currently he directs the operations of IX and X Korps and oversees DSKM operations. He is based on Beta Canum with his HQ having moved forward from Beowulf.

Metzger was born on Tirane and served originally with the Bavarian army and was a prominent supporter of Reunification. He is rumoured to be in failing health but maintains a firm grip on all operations and is a master of German military bureaucracy.

The first planning conference for Operation HERKULES on the estate outside Uethan did not go well. None of the space force commanders were present, there was confusion about which units would be assigned to the mission and fighting was still progressing almost within earshot. In the centre of this mess sat Generalleutnant Schneider in perfect control, he was the only thing about the whole affair that gave people hope that it would actual get off the ground.

The Dunkelheim Campaign: An American Victory, Col. Forbes L. Harrison III, USA ret

Hanno Schneider

Generalleutnant Hanno Schneider, commanding X Korps, was appointed as the commander of Operation HERKULES in the summer of 2302. In addition X Korps was to be the controlling headquarters for the mission. Hanno Schneider was a Bavarian officer of the old colonial school, with significant experience training armoured forces on Garten and Nibelungen as well as serving as a Jäger officer on Heidelshemat. He had seen active service in the Central Asian War as a junior office with both Terran Bavarian and Gartener units. Strongly pro-Reunificationist, he commanded a Bavarian Panzergrenadier Division in the Black Forest in the war with France. Since the war he has been used in a diplomatic capacity leading an ultimately fruitless mission to Freihafen, subsequently as commander of IX Korps and then as Inspector General of Colonial Forces. When IX Korps was mobilised Schneider was called upon to organise X Korps as its replacement, and then to lead the new corps onto the French Arm. Avuncular, cosmopolitan, professional and highly experienced Schneider proved an ideal appointment. He has fallen foul of some politicians in Berlin who complain about some of his decisions, but remains popular with the troops and with his allies.

Wilhelm Lutke

Command of the space element of HERKULES was significantly more difficult to arrange. Dunkelheim lay within the sphere of influence of all three of the major human fleets. Borodin's Fleet had outposts in the Hochbaden system but was concentrating its efforts on interdicting the routes to Kafer space and protecting Aurore from raiders. Rochemont's Fleet was still based on Adlerhorst and operating strongly against the Eta Bootis Finger. Graham's Reserve Fleet was operating mainly in the area between Beowulf and Beta Canum but was sending some forces into the Eta Bootis Finger. All three fleets were under strength and in need of rest after months of operations and combat.

Human military space operations had been placed under the overall command of the newly promoted and ennobled British Admiral Lord Graham of Beowulf in September 2302. However operations of Rochemont's Fleet, now predominantly French, were poorly coordinated with the rest. Yet the fact remained that Rochemont was best placed to provide the required space force power to the Dunkelheim, an unpalatable fact for Germany. Consequently it was arranged for Graham to be in overall command with Rochemont as area commander, actual operations would be under the command of Germany's veteran and massively experienced commander Konteradmiral Lutke. Thus honours were even throughout the command structure.

Wilhelm Lutke is a living legend, his partnership at Aurore with the Ukrainian admiral Borodin is one of the great epics of the Kafer War. His hard working and forceful energy was the perfect compliment for the brilliant, but diffident Borodin, yet was no tactical novice himself. However the ageing Lutke is on the verge of burn out after five continuous years at the front, yet still no other DSKM commander even came close to his abilities, reputation, or perhaps more importantly his ability to stand up to Rochemont.

ORDER OF BATTLE

The lesson General Hébert had most impressed on me was the need for heavy armour and maximum combat power in the first wave. I needed at least an armoured division rather than the infantry division that was being pressed on me. In the end we were able to group a division together although I worried about the lack of collective training it had. Our allies were bringing another mixed division to the battle, which most importantly came with its own starlift, and which needed to be found a worthwhile mission.

HERKULES: The Real Story, GenMaj Schneider

Op HERKULES was a massive undertaking: a deliberate assault on a world entirely occupied by the Kafers, a task overmatched only by the massive French-led Liberation of Kimanjano. To accomplish this task a substantial space and ground force was massed. This force was primarily German but also included forces from the other Adlerhorst Alliance nations, American and Australia. Further fighting contingents came from Freihafen, Britain and Austrovenia while other nations contributed support elements.

Space Forces

The space forces required for HERKULES were drawn from all three main Fleets, but were controlled and supplied through Rochemont's Fleet HQ at Vogelheim. The operational commander was Konteradmiral Lutke with his flag in the famous battlecruiser *Bismarck*. The Task Force was task organised into three groups, one to conduct scouting and raiding operations to shape the battlespace, one to conduct the main combat operations and finally the assault group.

Task Force Herkules

Gruppe H1

Staffel H11 *Admiral Scheer* (CG-Ge), *Kassel* (FF-Ge), *Schleswig* (FF-Ge)

Staffel H12 *Bushranger* (DD-Aus), *Canberra* (DD-Aus)

Staffel H13 *Indefatigable* (DD-UK), *Illustrious* (DD-UK), *Seydlitz* (DD-Ger)

Gruppe H2

Staffel H21 *Bismarck* (BC-Ger), *Bayern* (BB-Ger), *Montrose* (CG-UK), *Rotterdam* (DD-Ger) *Fulda* (DD-Ger)

Staffel H22 *Richelieu* (BB-Fr), *Colbert* (CG-Fr), *Gloire* (CG-Fr), *Marechal Ney* (DD-Fr), *Lansquenet* (DD-Fr), *Imperieuse* (FF-Fr)

Staffel H23 *Jefferson* (CG-US), *Kennedy* (CG-US), *Brisbane* (DD-Aus), *Cayuga* (FF-US), *Sioux* (FF-US)

Staffel H24 *Graf Zeppelin* (CV-Ge), *Ark Royal* (CV-UK), *Westfalen* (FF-Ge), *Ajax* (FF-UK)

Gruppe H3

Staffel H31 *Ramcke* (Ger), *Von Lettow-Vorbeck* (Ger), *Altmark* (Ger), *Rand der Unbegrenztheit* (Frei), *Blauer Traumer* (Frei)

Staffel H32 *Iwo Jima* (US), *Blue Ridge* (US), *Tobruk* (Aus), *Arnhem* (UK), *Hollis* (UK)

Staffel H33 *Bir Hakeim* (LPA-Fr), *Dien Bien Phu* (LPA-Fr)

Staffel H34 8 x STUFT

Staffel H35 7 x STUFT

Staffel H36 *Hannover* (FF Ger), *Holstein* (FF-Ger), *Brandenburg* (FF-Ger), *Castiglione* (FF-Fr), *Austerlitz* (FF-Fr)

Bavern

The veteran *Bayern* is Germany's only true battleship. A Bavarian evolution of the French De Gaulle class it is nearing the end of its service life in spite of several refits. Although slow by modern standards it still packs a respectable broadside. It was disabled by a French commando raid in 2292, outmanoeuvred at Kimanjano but finally redeemed itself at 64 Ursae Majoris.

Dien Bien Phu

The *Dien Bien Phu* is a modern French assault ship which saw service with Rochemont's Fleet throughout 2301-2. It is capable of landing a whole battalion in a single wave of landers. Perhaps most importantly are those very landers which can also interface with other ships and land huge quantities of men, vehicles and materiel.

Indefatigable

HMS *Indefatigable* is a British destroyer assigned to squadron H13. This ship is a fast and powerful warship which has seen action at 2nd BCB, Joi, Beta Canum and raiding out of Grosshiddenshafen. The *Indy* has operated around DM+36 2436 on numerous occasions and knows the system very well. The ship is also home to the squadron commander newly promoted Commodore Campbell

Commodore Shane

Alexander 'Sandy' Shane is Australia's most experienced space force commander having led his small squadron for several years in the Aurore Fleet. An aggressive and competent light force commander he is also a confident of Lutke and has been appointed to lead the H1 group. Shane's relaxed approach has worked well so far with the other commanders in the group.

Contre amiral Doumer

Vice amiral Josephine Doumer from Nouvelle Provence commands the French 1e DdD and as the most experienced interface operations commander also leads the H3 landing group coordinating the descent of troops for HERKULES.

Doumer is the leading French naval interface commander. Highly intelligent and a gifted staff officer she has planned or commanded interface operations on Kimanjano, Beta Canum and Joi.

She is the antithesis of Vice amiral Rochemont, being reserved, thoughtful and working highly effectively with his allies. Lutke's initial caution has been replaced with great trust in this woman's ability.

Gruppe H1

Gruppe H1 is the designation given to the force assembled to scout and raid the Dunkelheim system prior to the main operations of Op HERKULES. It includes three squadrons of ships and is under the command of the Australian Commodore Sandy Shane. Two of the squadrons are highly experienced; Shane's Australians won their spurs at Eta Bootis and Commodore Campbell's Anglo-German force raided out of Grosshiddenshafen. The third squadron is comprised of elements of the old *Bayern* group and a German frigate from Rochemont's Fleet with wide experience of the region.

Gruppe H2

Gruppe H2 is main space combat force tasked with the destruction of Kafer forces within the Dunkelheim system. Commanded directly by Lutke it is drawn from each of the major Fleets and is a powerful strike force divided into four squadrons. The German squadron is built around the capital ships *Bismarck* and *Bayern*. The French squadron is drawn from the French 3rd Fleet, the core of Rochemont's fleet, and is built around his flagship *Richelieu* with two powerful *Suffren*-Class cruisers and is the strongest squadron. The American Squadron is built around two Fast Missile Cruisers and a capable Australian destroyer but is somewhat hampered by the presence of two slower frigates. The final squadron has two fighter carriers, the German *Graf Zeppelin* and the British *Ark Royal* together with their goalkeepers and embarked fighter squadrons.

Gruppe H3

Gruppe H3 is the interface assault group comprising 3 assault squadrons, 2 transport squadrons and an escort squadron. One assault squadron includes three German fast troopships and a pair of Freihafener armed merchants and is tasked with landing 4.Lk.PzGren.Div and lead assault troops. The French 1e Division de Debarquement (1e DdD) is also present to land the bulk of 4.Lk.PzGren.Div's heavy equipment and rear echelon and then assist in the landing of follow on troops and supplies. The final squadron includes American, Australian and British assault shipping whose role is to land 1 MARDIV.

The two transport squadrons are made up of impressed merchant ships, seconded colony ships and liners. One squadron carries the follow on troops for who there was no room on the assault ships. The other squadron carries the supplies vital to the success of the operation and includes massive Metal and Asterie Class vessels. The small escort squadron of frigates is tasked with close defence of the ships whilst disembarking troops.

Land Forces

The land force for HERKULES is built around a Corps of three combat Divisions. Two are predominantly mechanised formations tasked with the bulk of the initial combat against the Kafer manoeuvre forces and exploitation against them. The final force is an infantry heavy division which is tasked with consolidation taskings, mopping up the Kafers especially in urban areas. There are also a substantial group of special and raiding forces tasked to the corps.

X Korps

Elements of Kolonial Sonderverband 2
Elements of Kommando Abteilung 391 'Braunschweig'
Kommando Abteilung 393 'Steiner'
Jäger Abteilung 381

Luftgeschwader 53

I Gruppe
II Gruppe
III Gruppe
IV Gruppe

4 Kolonial Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Division

Luftkissenpanzeraufklärungs Abteilung 4
 Luftkissengefectspanzergrenadier Abteilung 4
Panzer Kavallerie Regiment 11 (Freihafen)

1 Luftkissenpanzer Brigade 'Lehr'

Luftkissenpanzer Abteilung 11
 Luftkissenpanzer Abteilung 12
 Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Abteilung 13
 Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Abteilung 14

14 Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Brigade

Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Abteilung 141
 Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Abteilung 142
 Luftkissenpanzer Abteilung 143
 Luftkissenpanzer Abteilung 144

9 Kolonial Jäger Division**29 Fallschirmjäger Brigade**

291 Fallschirmjäger Bataillon
 292 Fallschirmjäger Bataillon
 293 Fallschirmjäger Bataillon

36 Jäger Brigade

Jäger Bataillon 361
 Jäger Bataillon 362
 Jäger Bataillon 363

50 Gebirgsjäger Brigade

Bayerische Gebirgsjäger Bataillon 231
 Sächsische Grenzschutz Bataillon 3
 Österreichisch-Slowenisch Bundesgebirgsjägerbataillon

1st US Marine Division

1st Marine Reconnaissance Battalion (elements OPCON X Korps)
 3rd Marine Raider Company
 101st Marine Raider Company

4th Marine Interface Brigade

1-6th Marine Regiment (6th MIU)
 1-7th Marine Regiment (7th MIU)
 2d Tank Battalion (+)

173rd Airborne Brigade (Transorbital)

1-503d Airborne Infantry
 1-508th Airborne Infantry
 1-509th Airborne Infantry
 E/17th Cavalry
 1-158th Infantry (Mech) (Ellis ARNG)

37th (Commonwealth) Brigade

18th Squadron, Cavalry Regiment of Australia
 38th Squadron, New Canberra Guides
 1st Battalion, Wundurra Regiment
 1st Battalion, The Gordon Highlanders Battle Group

X Corps

X Corps is Germany's dedicated operational deployment corps for the French Arm. It was formed from the remaining HQ elements of IX Korps on Earth and individuals from the other regular corps and has been responsible for German liberation operations on Beta Canum and Joi. It has been the lead agency in planning Op HERKULES following on from the stillborn Op WOTAN. X Corps consists of a mobile Tac HQ commanded by General Schneider and a Rear HQ currently based on Beta Canum.

Generalmajor Richter

GenMaj Karl-Heinz Richter leads the 4th LkPzGren Division, the hovermobile spearhead of the invasion force. Richter is a highly experienced ex-Bavarian officer who has seen combat against Manchuria, Germany and the Kafers. He has been posted from his role as Chief of Staff of IX Korps on Beta Canum to lead the division. He has a reputation as an astute tactician and a hard taskmaster.

Generalmajor König

GenMaj Günter König leads the 9th Jäger Division. König is a young, up and coming Saxon officer. He has yet to see combat, seeing out the Re-unification War on the Polish frontier, but has a reputation for intelligence and strong leadership.

Major General Martín

MG George P. Martín is the commander of the US 1st Marine Division. This is a highly prestigious command for Martín who has raised the Division HQ from scratch. Martín has almost three decades of experience in the Corps and saw combat in the Central Asian War under French command. He has a reputation as being more of a manager than a leader and an effective diplomat.



Luftgeschwader 53

LG 53 is the only air element assigned to the first wave of HERKULES. It includes strike aircraft, air defence UCAVs and SAMs as well as two heavy lift squadrons. There are also support elements for force protection and to create landing areas. LG 53's aircraft are modified for efficient operation in Dunkelheim's atmosphere and gravity and will provide vital support to the ground troops.



3d Marine Raiders

The 3d Raiders are a crack company of volunteers from regular US Marine Corps units. Lightly equipped commandos landed from orbit the 3d Raiders have fought in the two campaigns on Kimanjano including a daring raid on a prison camp. This unit has been hand picked for a vital mission in the early days of HERKULES.



PKR11

Panzer Kavallerie Regiment 11 is a famous Freihafen reconnaissance unit. A highly flexible organisation it includes 4 reconnaissance companies, as well as support, air, commando and artillery companies. They can expect to see intense action identifying enemy units for attack by heavier units.

Troops under the direct command include special forces troops from KS.2 (many of whom have already spent a year or more on operations on Dunkelheim), elements of Kdo.Abt.391 and the whole of Kdo.Abt.393. In addition to this for HERKULES X Korps would have assigned elements from USMC Force Recon, Australian SAS and British SPS. They also have the orbital assault specialists of Jäger Abteilung 381 under command.

The main fighting power of the corps lies in its three combat divisions described below. In addition a further two German divisions are in reserve in the Beta Canum Cluster, many of whose soldiers are forward deployed as battle casualty replacements. In addition there is a number of Allied forces in reserve, including a US Army contingent due to replace the US Marine element.

Luftgeschwader 53

Luftgeschwader 53 is the Luftwaffe's contribution to HERKULES. It is a mixed interface operations group which has been tailored for the support of HERKULES and little resembles any other German formation of similar size. Interface operations have consistently proved difficult during the liberation operations and a large tranche of shipping has been given over to make LG 53 and allied air elements a useful part of HERKULES. I Gruppe consists of 36 manned *Donnerschlag* fighter-bomber aircraft, these are versatile and robust aircraft with veteran pilots are divided into three squadrons. II Gruppe is the air defence element equipped with 54 *Wirbelsturm D* UCAVs and also has three squadrons. While the *Wirbelsturm* is optimised for air defence it has a secondary ground attack capability. II Gruppe also contains a group of hypervelocity SAM system. III Gruppe is tasked with air transport and includes a squadron of the ubiquitous Loadmaster IIIs and a squadron of Vampyr heavy X-Wing transports. Lastly IV Gruppe is tasked with supporting the other parts of LG 53 and includes AEW and AAR drones as well as engineering and ground defence assets.

4 Kolonial Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Division

4.LkPzGren.Div is one of IX Korp's standing formations, and is usually stationed on Earth as a reserve for operations in the Core, American and Chinese Arms. Mobilised as part of IX Korps the division was brought forward to Neubayern and one of its brigades was sent forward to the Beta Canum Cluster. Following the fall of Kimanjano the division was brought up to Beowulf where it trained both for defensive and liberation operations. It was in the latter role that the division saw action on Beta Canum reinforcing the remnants of 8.Lk.PzGren.Div. Since the Liberation the division has undergone a substantial change having its original brigades re-assigned and taking new formations under command. It has been specifically tasked with the liberation of Dunkelheim and has been involved in dedicated training and planning for HERKULES. The division is assigned two German heavy manoeuvre brigades and a Freihafener reconnaissance regiment.

Panzer Kavallerie Regiment 11

PKR.11 is a Freihafener unit with a unique history, having served three different nations during its existence. Raised by the US as a horsed cavalry unit it passed into the control of Bavaria following the 3rd World War. After nearly three centuries of service the regiment objected to the incorporation of Bavaria into the new Germany and was disbanded, reforming in the former Bavarian colony of Freihafen. Ironically given its opposition to the reunification of Germany it now finds itself serving in a German division, a sign of the growing rapprochement between Germany and Freihafen. PKR.11 is a brigade (-) sized armoured reconnaissance formation packing a substantial punch and well used to covering huge areas of ground. It is a mobile combined arms formation including armoured, reconnaissance, infantry, artillery and air elements in its composition. The unit has seen only minor action on Beta Canum but has key leaders with combat experience reaching back to the Central Asian War.

1 Luftkissenpanzer Brigade 'Lehr'

1.LkPz.Bde is a regular Bundesarmee brigade normally assigned to 1.LkPz.Div. Originally formed in the 2280s to test a new generation of pan-German armoured vehicles it formed the kernel of the expanded division. 1.LkPz.Bde is manned by conscript troops on extended contracts and is one of the first such German formations to be deployed to the French Arm. The brigade has been dispatched to Beta Canum specifically to take part in Op HERKULES. It has four mixed armour and armoured infantry battalions.

14 Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Brigade

14.LkPzGren.Bde is a regular IX Korps brigade comprised of long service professional soldiers. The brigade has been deployed on Vogelheim for nearly a decade and was equipped with near obsolete equipment as a consequence of part of the Treaty of Darwin accords. It did not see action during the invasion, although it trained very hard and has since been re-equipped with modern equipment. The brigade still carries the famous greyhound insignia of the 8.LkPzGren.Div although it has been assigned to 4.Lk.PzGren.Div for Op HERKULES. It has four mixed armour and armoured infantry battlegroups.

9 Kolonial Jäger Division

9.Jg.Div is the renamed Jg.Div.zvB which played such a role in the campaign for the German Continent of Beta Canum. The division has immense experience of light role combat with the Kafers and is well drilled and efficient formation. It has been brought in to HERKULES primarily to reinforce the anticipated mopping up operations. The division has left two of its Beta Canum raised brigades at home and retains only the battle hardened 36.Jg.Bde of its original complement from the defence of Beta Canum. It has been reinforced by a brigade of paratroopers and a brigade of mountain troops from Earth, both with counter-Kafer experience on Beta Canum.

29 Fallschirmjäger Brigade

29.FJg.Bde is one of the regular airborne 'green devil' brigades of the Bundesarmee on Earth. It was one of the first core-based German formations to be sent to the French Arm in anticipation of Op WOTAN. However the continued Kafer assault caused the unit to relocate to Adlerhorst where it languished until becoming involved in the 3rd Liberation of Beta Canum. Although a conscript formation it is well regarded as a professional and well drilled brigade, it has three light mechanised airlanding battalions.

36 Jäger Brigade

36.Jg.Bde is one of the most colourful and toughest brigades in the German Army. A long service IX Korps unit originally formed prior to the War of German Reunification around German ex-Legion Etrangere soldiers and is still manned with a large number of ex-mercenarys and colonials. The brigade saw severe fighting in the invasion of Beta Canum and gained a reputation for hard fighting even after relocating to New Africa. The brigade is somewhat talismanic for the German people and its presence in Op HERKULES is a major morale boost. The brigade has three light role battalions which have recently been reinforced to replace combat losses.

50 Gebirgsjäger Brigade

The 50.GJg.Bde is a new formation raised from 1.GJg.Div which is nominally a reserve division assigned to the mainly Saxon V Korps on Earth. It has been sent to the French Arm to assist in the clearing of Beta Canum's Ludwigberge mountains and has now been assigned to HERKULES. The brigade consists of Bavarian, Saxon and Austrovenian light role mountain infantry battalions. The brigade some minor actions on Beta Canum.



14 Lk.PzGren Brigade

This brigade is the most experienced of the two German mechanised formations and despite its name is organised almost identically to 1 LkPz Bde. This regular brigade sat out the war so far on Adlerhorst and is itching to get into the action. The brigade has been tasked to be the first onto the ground in HERKULES.



29 Fallschirmjäger Brigade

29 FJg Bde is a light mechanised air landing force which matches the close combat skills of paratroopers with support from light armoured vehicles and combat walkers. The brigade is capable of keeping pace with the fully mechanised brigades, although lacks some of their firepower.



Österreichisch-Slowenisch Bundesgebirgsjäger-bataillon

This Austrovenian mountain infantry unit was formed from volunteers from existing Austrian and Slovenian units specifically to deploy to the French Arm. The battalion has earned a fine reputation so far in service on Beta Canum. It has three rifle companies, a support company and a HQ company. 3. Kompanie is entirely Slovenian and the rest of the unit is predominantly Austrian.



1-158th Infantry (Mech)

A reserve American battalion from the Ellis National Guard which has been assigned to the 173d Airborne Brigade as a mechanised infantry element. The 1-158th were in the Sol system as part of a rare training rotation when they were sent instead to the French Arm.

The battalion is distinguished by its large number of soldiers with Central Asian Republic refugee heritage. Although a reserve formation it has been mobilised for almost two years and has trained and fought as part of the 173d that they have become an integral part of the Brigade.

38th Squadron, New Canberra Guides

The New Canberra Guides were the first local force raised by Australian on Tirane for the Duffer's Strip Confrontation. They remain a prestigious and glamorous regiment and are strongly recruited. 38 GUIDES is a battalion sized unit with four mixed armour and infantry companies along with support elements. It is regarded as being the strongest and most capable unit in 37 Bde.

1st Marine Division

The United State Marine Corps' 1st Marine Division represents the commitment of the other members of the Adlerhorst Alliance to Op HERKULES. The 1st Marine Division is the tactical HQ of the Marine Extra-Solar Contingency Force and as such it is its first mission as an operational entity. Previous USMC operations in the war have been at brigade level under French higher command. However the division has been planning for this operation for several months.

1 MARDIV consists of three brigades; one US Marine, one US Army airborne brigade and one Australian. It also has its own recon and raider elements and is well provided with interface assault assets.

4th Marine Interface Brigade

The US Marines' 4th MIB is a highly experienced brigade with many significant high intensity counter-Kafer operations. The brigade was assigned to the mainly French 3rd Fleet of Admiral Rochemont and operated out of Adlerhorst. It was heavily involved in the 1st Liberation of Beta Canum alongside the French Foreign Legion paratroops, but was forced to retreat to New Africa where it was based until recently. Rebuilt, the brigade has been training specifically for HERKULES and has its original two mechanised infantry battalions who have been strongly reinforced and one armoured battalion transferred from 1st MIB which has been in action twice on Kimanjano. This action is likely to be the brigade's last before rotation however its skills and experience in opposed orbital assault have resulted in its inclusion.

173d Airborne Brigade (Transorbital)

The 'Herd' is one of the US Army's key intervention brigades, trained for operations anywhere in human space. It has recently been deployed to the French Arm partly to replace some played out US Marine formations. The brigade saw action in the closing stages of the Battle of Fromme on Kimanjano and has undergone specific counter-Kafer training on Beowulf, including training in clearing *safe places*. The 173d Abn Bde is powerful force and has three light role infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron and, unusually, a mechanised infantry battalion from the Ellis National Guard.

37th (Commonwealth) Brigade

37 Bde is a regular Australian brigade normally assigned to the 1st Division on Earth, it was the third and last of three Australian brigades dispatched to the French Arm. It was deployed initially to Adlerhorst and has not yet seen action against the Kafers, and it will be returned home with the conclusion of HERKULES. Consequently the brigade is eager to see action and has been training hard. 37 Bde did not deploy from Earth with its usual complement, instead mixing two armoured battalions with an airmobile infantry battalion from another division. It has been reinforced for HERKULES by a British armoured infantry battalion brought forward from Beowulf and so qualifies for the Commonwealth identifier. The brigade is a lively mixture of New Canberran, Aboriginal, Queenslander and Scottish soldiers.

KAFER FORCES

We spent some days in a cramped and dusty OP observing the Kafer force manoeuvring outside the Zitadelle. This wasn't a counter-guerrilla sweep but a full scale exercise and rehearsal to fend off a major assault. There were thousands of troops and hundreds of AFVs involved together with close air support. I was impressed; the new troops that had been arriving were being integrated into powerful formations. I just hoped the planners off world were taking this all into account and reading the reports we were sending.

Into The Dark: A Marine's Story , J Santiago

Space force

The Kafer space forces present in the Dunkelheim system were a mixture of remnant forces left over from all three Task Forces and other reinforcements that had accreted in the system. Most of the ships have significant combat experience but their leadership structure was initially very confused until finally one commander came out ahead of the rest. Unfortunately this commander is from a different group than the ground force commander and one still loyal to the now fallen Kafer warlord *Triumphant Destiny*.

Human intelligence has designated this fleet Task Force *Tango*. The main combat power of the force includes 4 BBs, 3 BCs and no fewer than 7 CGs. In addition to this there are five fighter squadrons. There are over 20 Oscar class transports operating as auxiliaries, some used as piquets, and four giant Omega Class troop transports.

Task Force Tango

Alpha-08 (*Inevitability of Triumph*) - BB
 Alpha-66 (*The One Who Survives*) - BB
 Alpha India -03 (*The Glorious Struggle for Enlightenment*) - BB
 Alpha India -17 (*Disciple of Triumphant Destiny*) - BB
 Beta-01 (*Strength of the Vah*) - BC
 Beta-15 (*Honour of the Vah*) - BC
 Beta-17 (*Enlightenment of the Vah*) - BC
 Epsilon-04 (*Fearless Revenge on the Barbarians*) - CG
 Epsilon-08 (*Hatred of the Barbarians*) - CG
 Epsilon-11 (*Throttles the Barbarians with Prey Gut*) - CG
 Epsilon-18 (*Unseen Stalker of the Barbarians*) - CG
 Epsilon-22 (*Defiler of Barbarian Graves*) - CG
 Epsilon-78 (*Evicerates the Barbarians with Claws*) - CG
 Epsilon-89 (*Merciless Hunter of the Barbarians*) - CG
 KFS641 (Foxtrot fighter squadron)
 KFS642 (Foxtrot fighter squadron)
 KGS643 (Golf fighter squadron)
 KHS644 (Hotel fighter squadron)
 KHS645 (Hotel fighter squadron)

Alpha 66

Alpha-66 is the human designation for a Kafer Alpha Class Battleship which has featured in several major battles and been responsible for the destruction of a number of human warships including the German cruiser *Admiral Hipper*. Alpha-66 is unusually well handled for a Kafer warship and some of its tactics are similar to those of the raider 'Lone Wolf'. This ship has avoided several serious attempts to destroy it in actions at Beowulf and Kimanjano and it has a reputation as a survivor and has earned the nickname of the 'Cornered Wolf'.

'Fighter of All'

Fighter of All is the Kafer commander of Task Force Tango. As its name suggests it is extremely pugnacious and aggressive. It commands from the Alpha India -17. The limited intelligence humans have been able to obtain on this individual suggest that this Kafer is a loyalist of *Triumphant Destiny*.

Omega Class Transport

The Omega Class is a huge and slow moving Kafer transport which seems to be designed as a pure troop transport, although it can be used to move cargo. It is estimated to be up to 50000 tons in mass and hold several thousand Kafer troops. It is assessed to hold around a dozen Lima class landers and so land over 600 troops in a single wave. It is significantly larger than the French Verdun Class which is the nearest human equivalent.

Land Force

Kafer land forces total around 40000 troops but are a heterogeneous force drawn from numerous contingents that have fetched up here. Consequently the force lacks coherence, a comprehensive task organisation, logistic support and command structure.

Most numerous are the garrison forces used to control the local population and suppress the Widerstand. Next most numerous were the assault troops stationed on Dunkelheim in readiness for moves further up in the Beta Canum cluster. There are also infantry forces that have been evacuated from the Beta Canum Cluster following the human counteroffensive. In addition there are also a number of specialist fleet assault troops present who have been disembarked from ships. Lastly troop reinforcements have continued to slip through the blockade from beyond Hochbaden.

The garrison for Dunkelheim eventually climbed to 20 000 soldiers who were widely dispersed, but well armed and equipped. The garrison force has been in frequent contact with the human colonists and its soldiers are becoming increasingly attuned to the tactics used by the resistance. Consequently the garrison force is fairly competent and is not an easy mark by any means.

There are some 10000 Kafer soldiers present in depot on Dunkelheim who were earmarked as assault troops or reinforcements for the Beta Canum Cluster. They were engaged in training activities during their stay on Dunkelheim although some would reinforce the garrison in response to resistance activities. Indeed much of the garrison was provided through transfers from the depot. These soldiers are fairly inexperienced, almost blank slate Kafers, but are well trained on their own kit and are well equipped. The soldiers comprise much of the main counter-attack force and reserve.

There are 4000 soldiers present who have been evacuated from various worlds in the Beta Canum Cluster. They are experienced but lacking in equipment. Some has been procured but these units are far from being up to full equipment scales. They will form part of the reserve and have been tasked with defending some of the major urban centres. Since the disaster at Beowulf no fewer than 3500 Kafer soldiers have been landed on Dunkelheim from the Kafer sphere, some were due for the depot and others as direct reinforcements for captured worlds. They are inexperienced and patchily equipped; some are up to scale, but others have nothing but Thudguns. They will also be tasked with urban operations.

There are some 960 elite ship's troop compliment soldiers present. These are lightly equipped but the most highly trained soldiers in the Kafer order of battle. They are very experienced soldiers in fighting against Kafers and humans. They form the closest the Kafers have to human commando forces and will be held in reserve for specific operations.

Kafer forces have a wide variety of equipment available including examples of all the major types of AFV have been reported. Indeed the Kafer commander has been able to assemble several powerful armoured battlegroups some of which include the formidable CCC-1 Behemoth heavy battle tank. The Kafer force also has perhaps the best developed air wing deployed to any human world. Initially formed to provide extra mobility to Kafer troops suppressing human resistance it has also developed a strong ground attack capability.

A key component of the Kafer defence is the extensive use of fortification. Most notable is the massive *Zitadelle* built around the space port nearly 1500km north of the capital of Goldberg. The *Zitadelle* is unusual for a Kafer *Safe Place* in that it is largely above ground; however Widerstand reports that substantial subterranean excavations have been ongoing since the occupation. This complex operates as a command centre and base for interface operations with both aircraft and Hotel-Class stutterwarp capable fighters. It is heavily armed with an array of missiles, including ASAT, and numerous powerful energy weapons. While the *Zitadelle* is the most notable defended locality there are many others ranging from supply depots to temporary patrol bases to major fortifications. Of special importance is the *Safe Place* built under Goldberg using that city's underground travel system and sewers as its base. Experience on Beta Canum, Crater and Kimanjano has shown that reducing these bases will be costly in both time and manpower.

Kafer Infantry

The Kafer infantry soldier is much misunderstood by those who have not faced him in combat. Stereotyped as a plodding animal herded into battle and beaten into a fighting fury, the truth is somewhat more complex.

The Kafer infantry soldier has forgotten nothing he has been 'taught'; his use of weapons and equipment is exemplary. Once aroused into intelligence they have a fantastic ability to use ground which they retain until the end of the stressful situation.

The Kafer soldier has fantastic morale. They are essentially unbreakable and will never surrender. There is no such thing as a Kafer rear echelon soldier, all will fight at the drop of a hat. The Kafer soldier is also highly trained in unarmed combat due to the social role of fighting in their culture. They revel in close combat.

Ground Forces Order of Battle

1st Dunkelheim Legion (CL-DI)

- Division A (CDI DI-A) (3000 garrison troops - Goldberg)
- Division B (CDI DI-B) (3000 garrison troops - *Zitadelle*)
- Division C (CDM DI-C) (3000 depot troops - Goldberg)
- Division D (CDM DI-D) (3000 depot troops- *Zitadelle*)
- Division E (CDI-DI-E) (2000 replacement troops - Goldberg)
- Regiment F1 (CR DI-F1) (1000 ships troops- *Zitadelle*/Goldberg)
- Air Division G (CDAir DI-G) (7 CCAir)

2nd Dunkelheim Legion (CL-DII)

- Division A (CDI DII-A) (3000 garrison 1000 replacement troops - Neue Berlin)
- Division B (CDI DII-B) (2000 garrison 1000 evacuated troops - Kellerfeld)
- Division C (CDM BII-C) (2000 depot troops - Neue Berlin)
- Air Cohort G3C (CCAir DI-G3C) (1 CCAir)

3rd Dunkelheim Legion (CL-DIII)

- Division A (CD DIII-A) (2000 garrison, 1000 evacuated, 1000 depot troops - Frankenburg)
- Division B (CD DIII-B) (2000 garrison, 1000 evacuated troops - Braunstadt)
- Division C (CD DIII-C) (2000 garrison, 1000 evacuated, 1000 depot troops - Homburg)
- Air Regiment G3 (CRAir DI-G3) (1 CCAir)

CL-DI

The 1st Dunkelheim Legion, or Delta One, is the main Kafer combat force on Dunkelheim which is responsible for the area around Goldberg and the *Zitadelle*. It has over 15 000 Kafer soldiers under its command and most of the mechanised and air combat power present on the world. It is assessed the legion masses over 400 CAC-1s and 800 other AFVs. The force includes no fewer than five ground divisions including garrison divisions for the Goldberg and the *Zitadelle* areas and a small division of recently arrived Kafers tasked with defending Goldberg urban zones. There are also two powerful combined arms divisions each fully mechanised and with armoured and artillery support. There is also a regiment of crack ships troops.

CL-DII

The 2nd Legion, Delta Two, is the force stationed around the area of Neue Berlin and Kellerfeld. It has two garrison divisions operating around the two major towns and an under strength mechanised counter attack division near Neue Berlin and a total strength of just under 9000.

CL-DIII

The 3rd Legion, Delta Three, operates in the eastern hemisphere and is responsible for the towns of Frankenburg, Braunstadt and Homburg. There are three divisions of mixed troops each assigned the area around one of the towns. Divisions A and C also include mechanised regiments for counter attack duties. Total strength is around 11 000 although intelligence is unsure if Division C is actually attached or an independent formation responsible for Homberg.

ESA Standard Designation

ESASD for Kafer organisations have been introduced to try and ease the problem for intelligence to track Kafer units. The levels of organisation are outlined below although it must be noted that Kafer organisations are rarely this simple.

Legion – CL – 15 000
 Division – CD – 3000
 Regiment – CR – 1000
 Cohort – CC – 300
 Band – CB – 42
 Section – CS – 13
 Hand – CH – 3

Legion level organisations are designated by planet and order of identification. Sub-units below this level are further identified by alpha numeric code.

CC-DI-A2B

'Alpha Two Bravo' is the ESA designation given to a Kafer garrison cohort of around 300 soldiers tasked with pacification operations on the Strauss Ridge south east of Goldberg. It is the second cohort of the second regiment of the 1st Legion's Division Alpha.

This unit has been in frequent if fleeting combat with Widerstand elements on the ridge but has never fully controlled the area. Intelligence on this unit is relatively good and it is believed to be equipped with its own AFVs.

It is believed that the unit is called the '*14th Defiance of the Sense of Race Battle Association*' in Vah.

Kafer unit sizes

It should be noted that humans designate Kafer units as one level higher than their human counterparts. i.e. a Kafer division is roughly the same size as a human brigade.

This is because of the much higher proportion of combat troops in the Kafer formations. A Kafer division will have around 9 manoeuvre units, roughly the same as its human namesake, although these are smaller than their human equivalent.

CDAir DI-G

Air Division G, Delta One Golf, is assessed to be nominally attached to the 1st Legion, although it has three air cohorts assigned to the two other divisions. The bulk of the force is VTOL support for troops in addition to two light strike and two heavy strike cohorts. In total the division masses over 200 aircraft.

CDM DI-C

Division C, Delta One Charlie, is one of the two mechanised counter-attack forces assigned to the 1st Legion. It is compromised almost completely of 'depot' troops who were assigned to Dunkelheim only as a staging point for possible operations further up Arm which never occurred. The units have been gathered, organised and rehearsed in mobile operations to counter any invasion. They have also participated in many operations conducted against the Widerstand in support of the local garrison force Delta One Alpha.

The division has no fewer than eleven cohorts including three powerful CAC-1 units, five infantry cohorts, two APC transport cohort and a support cohort including artillery and sappers. In total it possesses around 3000 troops with over 200 CAC-1s and more than 400 AFVs.

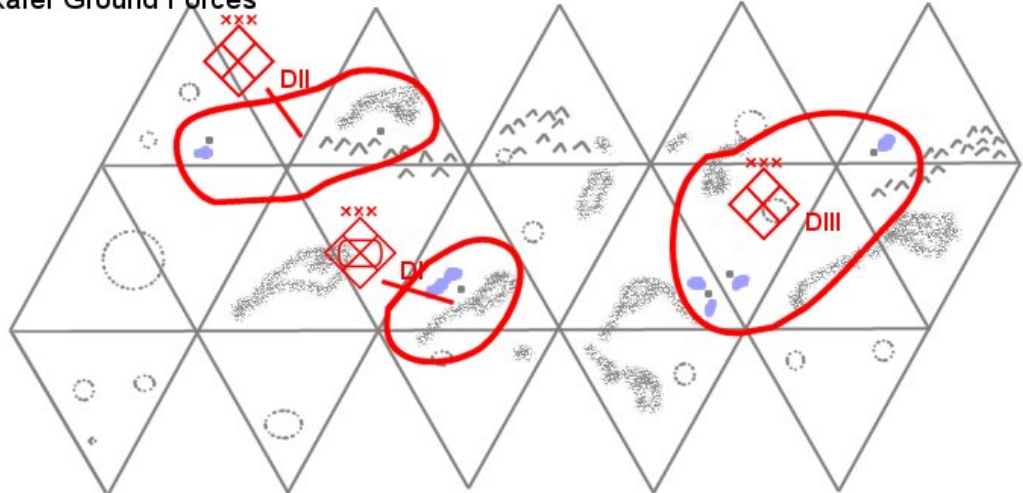
CDM DI-D

Division D, Delta One Delta, is the other mechanised counter-attack force of the 1st Legion. Its organisation and background is very similar to that of Div C except that it has only two cohorts of CAC-1s but has a cohort of 21 CCC-1 Behemoths in addition to around 140 CAC-1s. Div D is more recently formed and has seen less action and training than its sister division.

CR DI-B3

Regiment B3, Delta One Bravo Three, is the Kafer force assigned to the protection of the *Zitadelle* and with counter Widerstand operations in the nearby area, especially on the vulnerable railway line. The unit has rarely been challenged and its cohorts rotate through the task of guarding the human slave labour inside the *Zitadelle* itself.

Kafer Ground Forces



SPACE PHASE

DM+36 2436 is a close, dark system with little real room for manoeuvre. There was no discharge point in the outer system so transit through there was always a risk. Operating from Big H however allowed us to make the system and return without discharge. We had up to eight veteran ships in system at any given time lurking at the shelf covering the entry vectors, tracking and waiting for an opportunity to pick off any stragglers.

Indefatigable, BBC Documentary

The opening moves of Op HERKULES were unspectacular and little more than a continuation of previous efforts against the system run by the three major Fleets. The major change however was that command of the operation had shifted to Admiral Lutke and Task Force HERKULES.

The three squadron commanders of Gruppe H1 had already met at Grosshidenhafen and a plan of action for the interdiction and reconnaissance of DM+36 2436 put into place. All operations would work out of Grosshidenhafen allowing the ships to deploy to DM+36 2436 and return without needing to discharge their drives. This would give H1 significant tactical flexibility although Grosshidenhafen was never a totally secure system.

Commodores Shane, Campbell and Kershner would provide interdiction and reconnaissance on the three major vectors into the system. In addition one of the squadrons would provide a QRF to attack targets of opportunity, while a squadron drawn from Gruppe H2 would be on stand-by to provide heavier support. This part of the mission was underway by the last week of October 2302.

It quickly became obvious that the interdiction task was one that could only be totally effective if more striking power was available. A complete blockade of the system was impossible but a toll could be taken on the Kafer ships entering the system. The *Gloire* and the *Marechal Ney* notably picked off a damaged *Beta* class, the *Marechal Ney* and *Lansquenet* ambushed a large supply convoy and the British squadron accounted for a careless *Epsilon*. However from three weeks of action it was clear to Shane that the enemy's fleet was only growing stronger in the system. Consequently he advised Lutke that major combat operations should begin sooner rather than later.

Shane stepped up the pace of raiding operations, especially targeting isolated piquets. This backfired when Campbell's squadron became involved in a running conflict with a squadron of *Epsilons* after engaging a group of *Oscars*. Campbell extracted his squadron but both the *Illustrious* and the *Seydlitz* were damaged in the encounter. Shane's operations also provoked Task Force Tango into an operation against Grosshidenhafen. Weakened by the withdrawal of Campbell's ships for running repairs Shane was fortunate that the fast privateer *Kingfisher* tracked the departure of the strong Kafer squadron built around two *Alphas*, a *Beta* and three *Epsilons* allowed him to recall the Anglo-German squadron and alert Lutke.

The 2nd Battle of Grosshidenhafen

The 2nd Battle of Grosshidenhafen was an unambiguous victory for Lutke. Campbell's battered squadron, in combination with the always willing *Lansquenet* and *Ney*, acted as the bait for the Kafer squadron to become embroiled in the often fought over battleground of Grosshidenhafen. The powerful Gruppe H2 sortied from Vogelheim as soon as news reached them of the Kafer move with every major warship bar the *Richelieu*.

Operation LYSANDRE

Op LYSANDRE is an Anglo-French operation implemented in June 2301 to run Kafer blockades and gather intelligence on worlds behind Kafer lines. LYSANDRE was responsible for the infiltration of spies and special forces teams onto occupied worlds which was often a high risk mission.

The operation was joined by Germany, Azania, America and Australia although France and Britain remained the most active members. LYSANDRE utilised regular, reserve and privateer ships to conduct its missions. The most famous being the fast couriers *Kingfisher* and *Rillfisher*.

Commodore Campbell RSN

Sir Colin Campbell is the British commander of squadron H13 and also commander of the *Indefatigable*. A Scot from a family with centuries of military tradition he mixes immense tactical flair with firm discipline.

He successfully commanded human raiding operations from Grosshidenhafen during the war and has in depth knowledge of the region. There is creative tension between himself and Commodore Shane but so far they are working well together.

Fighter Combat

For many years stutterwarp capable fighters have been used only as short ranged scouts, piquets or for customs tasks. Recent advances in armour, sensors and armaments, including missiles and sub-munitions, have dramatically increased their capability.

In the initial Kafer invasion isolated groups of fighters proved easy to overwhelm. However at Kimanjano massed French heavy fighters operating from secret bases were able to contest the system for several weeks.

Then at Beowulf the fighter came of age in combination with carriers that could replenish their weapons and get them close to the action and deliver killing blows against the large Kafer warships.

Sternjagdgruppe 25

SJG 25 is the embarked fighter wing on the German carrier *Graff Zeppelin*. It has three staffels I/25 with 8 Gustavs, II/25 with 5 Wespes and III/25 with 7 Udets. The wing has only seen some minor operations so far since arriving on the French Arm after the Battle of Beowulf. There are a number of veteran pilots in its ranks, some of who were shot down in the initial stages of the war and subsequently rescued.

While the Kafer squadron was in pursuit of Campbell the main body of Lutke's striking force had already arrived and Lutke divided the Gruppe in three; keeping the *Bismarck's* squadron as one and unleashing the French cruisers to reinforce Campbell, the remainder would remain in reserve and discharge their drives. The arrival of *Colbert* and *Gloire* allowed Campbell to switch on to the offensive in combination with insystem minefields and the standing fighter force. He drew the Kafer squadron into ambush, destroying an *Epsilon*, but alerting the alien commander to the danger he was in. The battle then became a pursuit with the heavy human forces pounding the Kafers as they ran for the FTL shelf, losing the *Beta* to a rearguard action.

However when the Kafers ran for DM+36 2436 they were unknowingly shadowed by the other half of Lutke's fleet, including the fast striking American-Australian squadron as well as the British and German carriers and the veterans *Bismarck* and *Bayern*. At DM+36 2436 Kershner's squadron intercepted a Kafer courier running in front of the retreating squadron denying the Kafers advance news of the debacle at Grosshidenhafen. Indeed the human forces reached DM+36 2436 before the Kafers and lay in wait.

The resulting combat on the edge of the FTL shelf completed the victory started in the neighbouring system. The Kafer ships were battered, low on munitions and unready for the human force. Set upon by a combined force of three squadrons and swarmed by a mass of Wespe and Harrier fighters the Kafer squadron was annihilated in the space of two hours, long before help could come from the centre of the system. The human force returned to Vogelheim in victory and to replenish and undertake repairs, however Lutke pushed for a quick turn around to exploit his victory.

Unfortunately the defeat of the Kafer squadron had given Lutke an opportunity which the slow turn around at Vogelheim squandered. The Kafers pulled in all their picquets from the edge of the system, denying Shane's depleted force easy targets and concentrating the minds of the Kafer commanders on the defence of the inner system. Shane's ships increasingly had to penetrate deeper and deeper into DM+36 2436 to track Kafer movements and increasingly they were detected and pursued from the system.

At Vogelheim Lutke came under verbal attack from Rochemont for his 'lack of aggression' and unwillingness to attack straight into the system. However Lutke needed the time to alert the landing force to undertake final embarking procedures for a D-Day in 14 days time, in addition the 2nd Battle of Grosshidenhafen had depleted his force of stores and munitions and Lutke was not for taking undue risks. His position was supported by Graham, further poisoning the Briton's spiky relationship with Rochemont, and also later, more reluctantly, by Borodin.

Lutke's main force entered DM+36 2436 from Grosshidenhafen on the 7th of December 2302. Gruppe H2 deployed in battle formation for transit to the inner system. Shane's Gruppe H1 was deployed on the rim of the FTL shelf to interdict any incoming Kafer ships or stop any escaping from the system covering the two main vectors.

TF Tango was now down to a force of 3 BBs, 2 BCs and 3 CGs supported by several squadrons of fighters and numerous auxiliary ships of dubious value. TF Herkules was in much better shape having yet to suffer the loss of a single ship although 1 CG and 3 DDs had taken significant damage in the 2nd Battle of Grosshidenhafen and were being repaired at Vogelheim. Shane's screening force now consisted of 1 CG, 3 Dds and 2 FFs. Lutke's Gruppe H2 had no fewer than 2 CVs, 2 BBs, 1 BC, 4 CGs, 4 DDs, 5 FFs and many fighters. He overmatched his opponents, but not decisively, indeed Admiral Graham was busy assembling a force at BCB from the Reserve Fleet to reinforce Lutke should he not be able to achieve a knockout blow.

The Battle of Dunkelheim

The Battle of Dunkelheim commenced on the 9th of December after Gruppe H2's arrival in the inner system. During the run in the American-Australian squadron provided the outer screen and destroyed no fewer than three Oscar Class auxiliaries. Only hours before the battle was joined Lutke was half expecting the Kafers to fight from around Dunkelheim itself behind a layer of sentinel mines and surface launched missiles. Instead the entirety of TF Tango put out direct into the teeth of Lutke's force.

The preliminary battle was the largest since Beowulf with almost one hundred fighters and scores of missiles involved in a major small unit action. The *Ark Royal's* fighter group was now a veteran force that had played a vital role at Beowulf, 3rd Kimanjano and the aftermath of 2nd Grosshiddenhafen. The German fighters from the *Graf Zeppelin* were less experienced as a unit but many pilots had served in colonial defence squadrons in the Beta Canum Cluster and were hungry for revenge. The smaller squadrons from the battleships were even more highly experienced. For their part the Kafer pilots were some of their most experienced fighters, but had much less in-depth training than their human opponents.

The human fighters won their superiority over the Kafers in a hard fought half hour of combat operations, destroying more than twenty Kafer fighters, but losing eight of their own in turn. The exhausted fighters on both sides pulled back to re-arm, as they did the main body of TF Tango closed on the human force through the heavy cloud of radiation. With fighter submunitions expended and many missiles already depleted the human force's volley of missiles was much smaller than it needed to be to turn back the Kafer charge to close combat. Most of the Kafer warships took serious damage however and Epsilon-78 took a catastrophic hit.

Rather than pulling away Lutke committed his heavy ships into close combat against the Kafers with the *Bismarck*, *Bayern* and *Richelieu* pairing off against the Kafer battleships and *Gloire* and *Montrose* engaging the Betas. The other ships sheered off screening the close battle from the smaller Kafer ships and surviving fighters, while Kafer auxiliaries began to close in.

At this stage Lutke's uncommitted H23 Squadron of American and Australian ships was launched into the fray, engaging the key Kafer battleships one at a time with volleys of missiles while they were locked into the broadside battles. The old partnership of the *Lansquenet* and *Ney* started at the other end of the Kafer squadron, hammering away at the vulnerable Epsilons. The *Imperieuse*, *Richelieu's* long-serving goalkeeper was smashed seconds into the battle.

The outnumbered Kafer ships began to be knocked out, one by one, but they didn't go down lightly. The *Bayern* was left dead in space with a disabled drive and was saved only by the intervention of *Rotterdam* and *Fulda*. *Bismarck* suffered serious internal fires and only the skills of her veteran crew brought these under control while the ship fought on. At this point the Kafer fighter force again intervened forcing the human ships to pull away from their opponents who took the opportunity to break contact entirely vectoring towards the outer system.

By now only four Kafer capital ships remained in the fight and all of these were badly damaged, the remaining BC Beta-15 was little more than a powered hulk. However they now had the surviving Kafer fighters and their remaining missiles covering their rear and a substantial force of Oscar auxiliaries were drawing close to provide further protection.

Lutke's view from the bridge of the *Bismarck* was satisfied but worried by the damage to his entire fleet. Two of the three heavy hitters of the TF were seriously damaged and many of the other ships were also seriously reduced in performance while the *Sioux* and *Fulda* were only a little better off than the *Imperieuse*. His fighters were still to be rearmed and lacked their heavy submunition punch. Worst of all his vital ship-killing missiles were almost totally expended. He faced being forced to being unable to finish off his enemy and complete his victory.

Rear Admiral Spence

Richard G Spence commands the US Task Force 29 which is serving under Lutke as squadron H23. This is a highly capable force with four American ships and the versatile Australian destroyer *Brisbane*.

Spence is very highly regarded by his peers and superiors as a very gifted tactician. A no-nonsense officer he has a long running rivalry with his fellow American Admiral Parker which dates back to their time at the USSF Academy.

Staffel H22

Staffel H22 is the designation given to the core of French heavy combat ships from the Third Fleet that is reinforcing Task Force Herkules for the operation.

Incorporating 1 BB, 2 CG, 2 DD and an FF it is almost a fleet on its own. Integration of this highly experienced squadron has been somewhat problematical due to *Richelieu's* dual role as Admiral Rochemont's flagship.

No one disputes the sheer combat power this squadron brings to Lutke's Task Force and that it is worth jumping through the diplomatic hoops to secure its participation.

OP HERKULES

Sternmarinelandungskraft Bismarck

SLK Bismarck is the marine contingent of that German BC. The SLK has seen extensive action in space and on the land, especially in repeated combats on Aurora.

This unit of 420 veterans has a crack reputation as shock troops and is equipped and trained to fight in all environments. For HERKULES is has been training specifically in boarding operations on large vessels.

Orbital Bombardment

Orbital bombardment is the primary means of indirect fire support for ground troops during any planetary assault. It is usually undertaken by destroyers or cruisers although most vessels can undertake this duty.

Munitions can vary from large guided munitions to loitering packages of smaller munitions to simple dead drop kinetic harpoons. These are either carried in cargo holds or attached as add on packs.

Orbital bombardment is very powerful but is limited by response times and accuracy for certain types of munitions. The Kafers also use these methods although tend to rely on nuclear devices and meteorites.

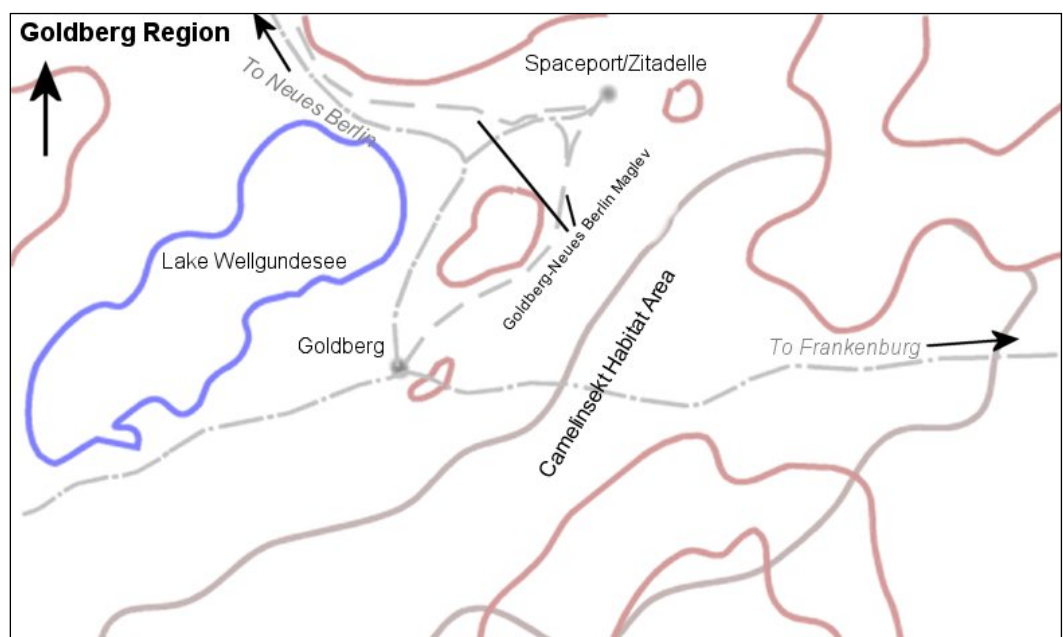
Instead he sent the H23 Squadron under Rear-Admiral Richard G. Spence to screen the retreating Kafer force and for Commodore Shane to mass his force and prepare to use them against the remnants of TF Tango. Spence's H23 was almost depleted of its SIM-14 missiles and was only able to follow up the Kafers while Shane's force would take time to come into engagement range. Lutke then began to re-consolidate his force and get his fighters re-armed; he dispatched his couriers waiting on the edge of the system to Grosshiddenhafen and BCB to pass on news of his victory and to initiate the next part of the campaign.

An hour later a squadron built around *Richelieu* and *Ark Royal* was dispatched to reinforce Spence's squadron. The pursuit of the remnants of TF Tango was not pressed to the finish. Lutke preferred to usher the running force away from the system rather than to go for an annihilation battle hoping to avoid further casualties to his own battered fleet. The human force were, however, able to pick off half a dozen Oscar auxiliaries and as many fighters whilst ensuring the destruction of the damaged Beta and the remaining Epsilon with no loss to themselves.

Lutke was subsequently castigated by Rochemont for the escape of the two Kafer battleships including the notorious *Alpha-66* and *Fighter of All*. However he had succeeded in obtaining in-system superiority and the outright destruction of at least six capital ships for the loss of only one minor ship, although several others were seriously damaged and would required repair at fleet bases at Vogelheim or Queen Alice's Star. It took Lutke a further 48 hours to complete the neutralisation of Kafer satellites and the disabled battleship being used as a station above Dunkelheim.

Crack German marines from the *Bismarck* conducted a boarding and clearance of the station hulk mopping up the remaining Kafers in a vicious close quarter battle. Human communications, navigation and spy satellites were then seeded into orbit.

The high ground was now dominated but was far from secure. The Kafer *Zitadelle* was making its presence felt and began knocking down low orbiting satellites. It then became involved in duelling with the human cruisers in high orbit; lofting submunition carrying ASATs at targets of opportunity. The base's powerful armament rendered counter-fire ineffective



INTERFACE PHASE

18-24 Dec 2302

Fire and forget anti-tank missiles raced towards the airbase and the Kafer's feared gunships began to explode. Mortar rounds impacted around the base as plasma guns began to duel with Kafer bunkers. The Kafers had experienced a couple of raids from the Widerstand but nothing to match the concentrated firepower that the men of Kdo.Abt.393 could bring to bear. In minutes the commandos were gone, leaving burning aircraft and confused Kafers behind them.

Dunkelheim Kommando, Brandenburg Media GmbH

The arrival in-system of Gruppe H3 on the 18th of December marked the start of interface operations against the Kafers. However on the ground the Widerstand was already stepping up harassing attacks in cooperation with special forces. On a larger scale the Governor Schmidt began orchestrating long planned contingency operations for a general uprising coordinated with the landings. Preliminary operations to fix portions of the garrison in place had already begun and information gathering was stepped up a gear.

On the 21st of December the first teams of special forces were landed from ships operating in the *Zitadelle's* blind spot. Teams from KS.2 and Force Recon were landed this first night by a mixture of drop capsule and assault boats. They were soon followed by more German, American, Australian and British teams, included in this second wave were companies from Kdo.Abt.393 and the 3rd Marine Raiders with specific direct action missions. These teams were given a number of days to set up their missions and be in place for their operations to coincide with the main landings.

The *Zitadelle* was beginning to dominate the immediate tactical decision making process. Several commanders had pushed for the complete destruction of the *Zitadelle* either by overwhelming orbital kinetic attack or by nuclear demolition. However the fate of hundreds of Dunkelheimers held as slave labour in the base combined with domestic political pressure to spare damage to the spaceport facilities had ruled this out. Now the ASAT defences were forcing changes in the orbital bombardment programme. Targets such as identified supply dumps were still being hit but a constant orbital overwatch could not be maintained.

Christmas Eve 2302 was L-Day for Operation HERKULES, the first day of landing operations. Across Dunkelheim attacks were launched by the Widerstand and regular forces; Kafer garrisons found themselves under seeming spontaneous attack during the night. The Kafers had been awaiting such an event and fought back ferociously. While only a few isolated detachments were overwhelmed most were pinned in position by these attacks. The special forces had more high value targets attacking key air bases, air defence and command sites. Other high value targets were hit by orbital bombardment attacks. In general these highly planned attacks were very successful and effectively paralysed Kafer command structures for the initial key period of the landings. Other special forces teams maintained observation of key locations for the forthcoming battle.

In addition to these targets there were three larger scale raids launched on the night of L-Day. Kompanie 2 of Kdo.Abt.393 assaulted a Kafer prison complex on the outskirts of Neues Berlin freeing a number of key prisoners. The same unit's Kompanie 3 cut the main Goldberg-Neues Berlin railway. The most daring raid was undertaken by the 3rd Marine Raiders who attempted to infiltrate the *Zitadelle* through underground tunnels. The Raiders were able to penetrate the complex but were almost overwhelmed by the Kafer response. In a battle that raged for several hours underground the Raiders fought their way clear, but at a heavy cost with over half the unit killed or missing.

Kompanie Zirkus

Kompanie Zirkus, irreverently referred to as 'the clowns' is one of the Widerstands's dedicated strike groups. Drawn from Goldberg volunteers and trained by teams from KS.2 it is designed to attack specific Kafer targets within Goldberg's ruins. It has done this successfully using bombings, targeted assassination and raids. This group of around sixty soldiers was heavily involved in a number of diversionary attacks during HERKULES.

Landers

Landers come in several forms. The largest have their own stutterwarp drives and can land hundreds at a time although usually require prepared landing grounds. The smallest can sometimes only bring down a squad and a small amount of cargo but need very little room to land. There are also ROTONs which are entirely VTOL and while lacking atmospheric manoeuvrability are highly efficient.

LANDING PHASE

24-26 Dec 2302



2d Tank Battalion

The USMC 2d Tank Battalion has seen major action twice in the war so far. Both times were on Kimanjano and both occasions saw the battalion take severe casualties and have to be rebuilt.

The battalion has been transferred across to 4 MIB from 1 MIB for this operation and has a hard core of veterans. It is equipped with the USMC's Standard, if ageing, M9B and M24 AFVs

LkPzAufs.Abt.4

This unit is the integral reconnaissance battalion for 4 LkPzGren Division. It is equipped and trained to operate between 50 and 200 kms in front of the main fighting troops of the division. It has responsibility for spotting the enemy, scouting routes and cueing indirect fire Attacks.

LkPzAuf.Abt.4 is highly trained and has experience fighting on Beta Canum. It has been training closely with PKR11 to enhance the reconnaissance capability of the division and corps in the forthcoming battle.

The battalion has three almost identical reconnaissance companies. These include special recon vehicles, APCs, hover-tanks and tactical UAVs.

The Tornado II lander is a beast in every regard, very fast but not the most agile craft, and we were coming down heavy and overloaded as the two German hovertanks in our belly pushed us to the very edge of our safe limits. On top of that it was one of the busiest landings we'd ever done with dozens of landers and dropships in the pattern, bombardment fire tracks planned in everywhere and the threat of Kafer interdiction a real one. As we came in to land at the rough strip at LZ Afrika we just hoped whoever the pathfinders were they know their business.

On the Edge: Stories of Interface Assault, Ares Press

The Kafer response had been hampered by the raids and a number of cruisers and destroyers were busy suppressing the *Zitadelle* even as the 3d Raiders fought beneath it. It was then the landings began. The assault shipping of Staffels H31 and H32 closed the planet in a tightly controlled sequence disgorging the first waves of assault boats onto the Landing Zone. The first elements to land were the recon and command elements of 4.LkPzGren Division at LZ Afrika where teams from KS.2 and a crack Widerstand unit waited for them. The main body of 14.LkPzGren Brigade was the main effort and the fighting echelon of the brigade was complete on the ground two hours into the operation.

Far to the north a diversionary operation was being put into action as the landers of the *Iwo Jima* and *Blue Ridge* put the 4th MIB's 2d Tank Battalion onto the ground at LZ Tripoli. This all-arms combat group was to operate against the Kafers and the *Zitadelle* in an aggressive manner to pin mobile forces in this area. This daring operation had been a controversial part of the overall mission but had eventually been agreed to by General Schneider, after lobbying by the USMC who believed they had the capability to complete the mission successfully.

The Kafer response was rapid. *Zmei* strike aircraft soon appeared over LZ Tripoli and were beaten off only with difficulty. A further smaller raid was launched against LZ Afrika but with less success. A number of armoured battle groups were readied for action but did not yet begin to move against the Landing Zones.

At dawn on L-Day 14.LkPzGren Brigade was complete on the ground, as were the HQ elements of 4.LkPzGren Division, and they were pushing out an ever expanding perimeter. A small numbers of UCAVs from II/LG 53 were already in operation as construction engineers began building a landing strip capable of taking the larger landers. The first soldiers of 1.LkPz Brigade were already landing and two hours later the spectacular dead drop of the brigade and division's heavy equipment was started from the Metal Class ship *Atalante*. The massive cargo containers were landed onto a new LZ Marokko, a barren 20 km long strip of land. Key crewmen were driven quickly out to open and activate the vehicles, a process that took significantly longer than the half an hour the drop took. Around 5% of the vehicles were damaged or destroyed in the drop, an acceptable number in the circumstances.

The Kafer armoured forces now began to move against the landings with several forces moving from positions south of Goldberg. One battlegroup based on Division C consisting of several battalion sized cohorts set out to spar with the US Marines 2d Tanks to the east of the *Zitadelle*. In the south several regiments from Divison C were spotted moving into position with more coming down from the *Zitadelle* and was designated as Battle Group Charlie. Their movement was tracked by satellite and special forces Ops.

Around midday on L-Day a second large scale dead-drop was undertaken onto a new LZ. This drop consisted of supplies, ammunition and fuel cracking modules and formed the basis of the Corps Maintenance Area. Further supplies were held in orbit as a reserve and could be dead-dropped on request.

Contact

The first clashes occurred between the Kafer spearheads and the screening force of Luftkissenpanzeraufklärungs Abteilung 4. The German reconnaissance troops destroyed a number of AFVs and called in long range artillery strikes before giving up ground. 4.LkPzGren Division commander began to shape the battle space massing his artillery and his 14 Brigade to counter attack the Kafer spearhead. By this time the German ground forces were some 200km from the initial LZ and had some elbow room to trade ground for time.

It was at this time the *Zitadelle* launched a volley of ballistic missiles towards the human landing areas. Most of these were destroyed in the boost phase by warships delivering orbital support. Several minutes later a tactical nuclear detonation occurred on LZ Afrika as a solitary Kafer cruise missile penetrated the defences and exploded. LZ Afrika was relatively deserted but the construction engineers working on the landing strip were annihilated. Blast and flash effects caused another 1000 casualties in rear area echelon troops and amongst the Luftwaffe contingent and no fewer than 4 landers were destroyed. General Schneider automatically suspended further landings. The supply effort was thrown into utter confusion as the CMA commander attempted to spread out his key supply dumps and maximise survivability in the face of a further nuclear release.

On the frontline the recce elements of 4.LkPzGren Division were beginning to fall back under greater pressure as three armoured groups spearheading the counter strike were identified. It quickly became obvious that the vanguards of these forces were fully alert and there would be no opportunity to 'break clean' and reset the engagement. 14.Bde would have to strike without the usual advantages human armoured forces had taken for granted. However unlike the French light armour at Kimanjano the brigade was a line unit equipped with the most modern and heavily armoured AFVs available. 1.Bde was massing quickly and could be expected to join the battle in hours.

14.Bde was committed to a pre-arranged deployment with two of its Kampfgruppe tackling the central axis of the Kafer advance in a defensive battle whilst the remaining two Kampfgruppe were to launch diversionary attacks on the flanks without becoming decisively engaged. The aim was to utilise the long range punch of the LkPz-IX and strip away Kafer AFVs from the infantry who could then be contained and dealt with at leisure. 1.LkPz.Bde was to be prepared to either reinforce the defensive battle, launch counter-penetrations or launch a pursuit battle.

These tactics had been utilised on many other occasions and the Kafer commanders were aware of their use and had developed countermeasures. The leading battlegroup echelons were led by the best Kafer commanders possible and their crews were fully alert in their CAC-1 hover tanks. The limited Kafer artillery assets were grouped forwards to provide instant support to suppress human dismounted ATGW teams.

The first contacts came as LkPz.Abt.144 conducted a passage of lines with the recce screen which had been pushed hard by the Kafer vanguard. For most of the German crewmen it was their first contact with Kafer armour, the *kämpfer* of 14.Bde had spent the war on the surface of Adlerhorst waiting for an invasion that never came; now they had their chance. The initial clash was vicious and bloody on both sides, the Germans were denied easy long range shots thanks to skilful Kafer use of the ground and massing of hover tanks at key parts of the line. The battle became a swirling manoeuvre fight conducted largely at close range, confused even more by the re-appearance of Kafer fighter aircraft. Nevertheless the Luki crews held their own and began to slow the alien advance.

The situation on the flanks was less successful as the Kafer brushed aside or bypassed attempts by the *panzergrenadier* battalions to slow their vanguards. Indeed on the eastern flank LkPzGren.Abt.141 became embroiled in a fight with the trailing infantry columns amidst an abandoned mining complex.

CAC-1

The Capuchon Aero-Char 1 (CAC-1) is the Kafer's standard hover battle tank. Better known to Anglophones as the 'deathsled' it is a frighteningly robust AFV optimised for close combat. It is a large vehicle with four crew members and array of weapons. These include a large calibre mass driver, missile launchers, plasma cannon, autocannon and machine guns.

Although not invulnerable it is heavily armoured with impressive damage resistance and is seemingly designed to be rapidly repaired and returned to battle.

Luki-9C

The Luftkissenpanzer-IX AufS C, or Luki 9C, is the latest model of the standard German hover tank and is on issue to all German armoured forces taking part in HERKULES.

The Luki-9C is optimised for speed and long range engagements with a notable ATGW magazine. In engagements on Beta Canum and Joi it has shown its ability to outrange and outmanoeuvre the CAC-1. At close quarters however the odds are much more even between the two vehicles.

M9B

The M9B is the standard hovertank in service with the US Marines. The M9B is updated 2260's design which is beginning to show its age. It has very good endurance and a heavy long range missile armament. Unfortunately its armour and close range armament are far from the state of the art.

The M9B has seen heavy action on Kimanjano and taken numerous casualties. The Marines' well trained tankers continue to stand by the design while looking in envy at the modern tanks in service with allied nations.



Drachzahnentruppen

Drachzahnentruppen or 'dragon tooth soldiers' is the name given to specialist German assault troops trained in so called 'sturmtaktik'. Developed in the Central Asian War to penetrate Manchurian defences and trialed successfully against France elements of 'sturmtaktik' have been integrated by all German panzergrenadiers.

There are however several specialist units which are dedicated 'Sturmtaktik' assault formations. Heavily armoured and delivered directly on top of Kafer positions in high risk attacks these units can literally break open the enemy or suffer horrendous casualties.

HERKULES has only a single unit of these soldiers in LkGfPzGren.Abt.4 who are divisional troops assigned only to key missions.

Schneider, Lutke and the leading contingent commanders, with the exception of the commander of 4.LkPzGren.Div held an immediate radio conference as to the future of the landings in the face of the Kafer nuclear attack. The majority were in favour of continuing the assault immediately with 4 Division over 80% landed and in contact and with the US Marines 2d Tank Battalion established but with forces beginning to move against it. However the consensus was that the *Zitadelle* had to be more strongly suppressed by orbital bombardment regardless of the risk to the civilian workers and Marine Raiders.

Schneider was urged to land as much combat power as possible with the landings now in the critical phase, a view with which he strongly agreed. He consequently launched the second wave of landings aiming to land the initial elements of the Australian 37 Bde and PKR11. Operations by *Blue Ridge* and *Iwo Jima* with the USMC's 6 and 7 MIU busy cross decking from civilian transports, were put on hold while 2d Tank Battalion's operations were underway. The decision had yet to be made to withdraw or reinforce the American Marine force in the north. The infantry follow on forces were to remain embarked whilst the manoeuvre action was being fought.

On the ground the situation for the 14.LkPzGren.Bde was becoming critical, whilst the centre of the Kafer advance was in check the flank vanguards were pushing through the German defence. The reserve battalion LkPz.Abt.143 was committed to keep the route of retreat open for LkPz.Abt.144. At the same time LkPzGren.Abt.141 was attempting to extract from its fight with the Kafer infantry in the mining complex and was taking significant casualties. The flanking action by LkPz.Abt.143 in combination with two companies of LkPzGren.Abt.142 annihilated the vanguard of the western Kafer force. However the extraction of LkPz.Abt.144 went less well with the loss of over 20 AFVs when caught in enfilade fire from the eastern Kafer force. In the meantime the conscripts of Panzer Lehr were preparing to enter the conflict.

Far to the north the 2d Tank Bn had its first contacts with the strong Kafer forces sallying from the *Zitadelle*. The USMC 2d Tank Bn were the most combat hardened armoured unit in the force having fought in two campaigns on Kimanjano and had trained hard for this particular mission. They were hampered however by their obsolescent M9B hovertanks. They were also outnumbered by more than three to one, after initially getting into a position for their small artillery element to launch a bombardment of the *Zitadelle* they were than forced into a long retreat action attempting to maximise the stand-off range of their missile armaments. The Marines quickly found themselves in fight for survival as the pursuing Kafers streamed after them.

In the south 1.LkPz.Bde 'Lehr' were launched in a counter-attack against the Kafer attack with its two Luki Abteilungen, 11 and 12, attacking through the disrupted western flank. The attack was pressed with immense aggression by the young soldiers and was aided immensely by massed artillery fire from the division's gunners who were now in position. The two battalions quickly found themselves in the very heart of the Kafer assault forces and in a '*hexenkessel*' a close quarters attrition battle against the Kafer CAC-1's that had been fighting all day. The fighting was reinforced by a further assault by elements of 14.LkPz.Gren.Bde pinching out the Kafer salient. As night fell on L-Day across Dunkelheim the Kafer remnants were streaming north to regroup but the German division had lost over 150 AFVs to the Kafer's 250.

On the eastern flank LkPzGren.Abt.141 still had almost 100 panzergrenadiers cut off in the sprawling mining complex as night fell and after having taken significant casualties in trying to reach them was now preparing a deliberate attack with the aid of LkGfPzGren.Abt.4 and the divisional artillery. In the complex itself the remnants of two isolated companies were in close combat with over 500 Kafer soldiers. In the north 2d Tank Battalion was fighting for its life as darkness fell, the Marines were exacting a fearsome toll from the Kafers, but were slowly being ground down by individual losses of AFVs especially as their supply of Striker missiles was now depleted.

L+1

That night the second wave of Op HERKULES got underway with the dead drop of the lead elements of the Australian 37 Brigade onto LZ GALLIPOLI and the insertion of PKR11 onto LZ SCHWARTZPFERD close to LZ AFRIKA. 37 Bde was fortunate to have the integral assault capability of the LPA's *Tobruk* and *Arnhem* and PKR11 was supported by the large Freihafener merchants allowing a very rapid deployment of these powerful forces. Although the deployment of 37 Bde's airmobile infantry battalion would be delayed by the need to cross-deck the troops from transports. At the same time the American assault ships began to download 6 and 7 MIU to LZ GUADALCANAL, again in the vicinity of LZ AFRIKA along with the HQ of 4 MIB.

Two hours after last light LkPzGren.Abt.141 launched its deliberate attack to relieve the besieged companies. The attack ran into initial opposition by Kafer teams firing the advanced '*Can Killer*' ATGW but dismounted attacks by panzergrenadiers and drachzahnentruppen cleared these positions and allowed the *kampfgruppe* to break into the Kafer defensive perimeter and after an hour of intense fighting retrieve the 60 survivors of the battle whilst killing a large number of Kafer soldiers. The *kampfgruppe* however would be unable to operate in the offensive role for at least two days.

In the north the 2d Tank Bn was making its attempt at a final break clean, leaving nearly half of its AFVs behind it and some 40 marines missing in action in addition to almost 60 casualties. Only once the agile Ravens of the *Arnhem* became available was the battalion able to make good its escape. Out of the debacle some good news came when SOCAV elements of the US 2-3d ACR were able to rescue the survivors of the 3rd Marine Raiders and be uplifted by the Ravens.

The morning of L+1 saw the establishment of a front line in the area that had seen the first clash between the Kafers and 14.LkPzGren.Bde. Of the human forces 1.LkPz.Bde held the line with the aid of the divisional recce unit and was in good shape having swept up a number of retreating Kafer infantry units on the way. 14.LkPzGren.Bde was reconstituting in a position 60km to the rear and just receiving replacement crews and AFVs.

The Freiwehr's PKR11 had come forward and was probing the flanks of the Kafer force and identifying reinforcement routes. The powerful 37 Commonwealth Brigade was attached to 4 Division and in position far to the flanks to aid Panzer Lehr or respond to opportunities provided by PKR11. The USMC's 4 MIB(-) was consolidating on the ground although would be without 2d Tank Bn for at least 48 hours. In the area around the Landing Zones LG53 was completing its preparations and would have the strike fighters I/LG53 ready to fly its first sorties in the day.

By midday the Panzer Lehr Brigade began to push forward with the recce elements of LkPzAufs.Abt.4 to engage consolidating elements of the Kafer position. There were few CAC-1's left but the legendarily tenacious Kafer infantry were already preparing defensive positions. Generalmajor Richter was loath to allow this and began probing forward to engage and seize key terrain features.

Panzer Lehr, with the divisional assault infantry LkGfPzGren.Abt.4 under command, did this with alacrity, massing firepower and close support artillery before launching assaults on key positions. Isolated Kafer warbands stood little chance against this concentrated firepower especially lacking counter-battery capability against the German artillery and air strikes. This was the second day of the *Hexenkessel* but saw much fewer casualties than the first with the exception of losses to the long range *Can Killers* from ambush.

The fighting continued into the night on L+1 and saw steady progress by 1.LkPz.Bde and 4 Luftkissenpanzergrenadier Division begin to switch over to the offensive.

'Can Killer' ATGW

The Kafers have always had a major problem countering human hover tank formations with relatively weak Anti-Tank Guided Weapons.

The 'Can Killer' seems to be an enhanced version of the 'Blue Hornet' first encountered on Kimanjano. A man-packed heavy ATGW it has greatly enhanced range and accuracy compared with its predecessors.

**2-3d ACR**

The 3d Armoured Cavalry Regiment (Airborne) is an American special forces unit tasked with providing covert ground infil- and exfiltration capabilities. Elements of the regiment's 2d Squadron have been involved with HERKULES landing on L-2 with their specially converted ACVs primarily supporting the 3d Marine Raiders.

Air War Dunkelheim

Air operations between LG53 and their Kafer opponents were often confused with neither side being able to maintain air superiority. With the exception of the short ranged *Wirbelsturm* neither side possessed a dedicated fighter aircraft and dogfights often developed between Luftwaffe *jabos* and Kafer *Zmeis*. Away from the respective air defence zones the German pilots usually came out on top.

Battle of Beersheeba

The Battle of Beersheeba occurred in 1918 in Palestine between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. The battle enabled General Allenby to unhinge the Turkish defence and advance into Palestine and contributed to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The battle is notable for the legendary charge of the Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade and also for the command of the Australian Lieutenant-General Chauvel, the first Australian to command a Corps in action. As a result it is a significant occasion in Australian military history.



1st Battalion, The Gordon Highlanders Battle Group

The Gordons are the British ground contribution to Op HERKULES. Formed in 1881 as a combination of the 75th and 92nd Highlanders the regiment can trace its history back to 1787. Recruited from the far north of Scotland around Aberdeen the regiment has maintained a sterling reputation for service to the Crown.

The 1 GORDONS BG is a very strong unit drawn from British 10th Armoured Brigade on Beowulf. It comprises almost the entirety of the Highlander battalion with three rifle and one support company and two attached hover tank squadrons of the 4th Dragoons. This heavy hitting unit complements the smaller, mobile Australian cavalry units in the brigade.

OP BERSHEEBA

As the landing continued past noon on L+1 the first Kafer reinforcements were approaching from the north west. This force was part of the one that had successfully forced 2TB to withdraw from its raid on the *Zitadelle*. It had undertaken an impressive forced march over 600km to reinforce the initial Kafer force but its components were straggling over more than 200km. This force was named as Division or KBG Delta and was now composed of no fewer than seven cohort sized component units and numbered nearly 3500 soldiers. The bulk of these Kafers were from the depot troops nominated for counter-attack duties but were reinforced by two Hordes of garrison troops re-equipped with AFVs.

Initial contact with KBG Delta was by the Freihafener Panzer Kavallerie Regiment Nr.11 which had been ranging around the flanks and to the rear of the initial Kafer force. The drones of 8/PKR11 had been standing off and tracking the oncoming force and cueing long range missile and orbital strikes on refuelling locations. In line with the direction received from 4.LkPzGren.Div the Freiwehr force was attempting to avoid becoming seriously involved in a screening battle with Div Delta and instead shaping the Kafer force for a deliberate attack by a follow on force. Two of PKR11's recce companies had picked up the leading Kafer elements some 500km from the LZs and only 300km south of the *Zitadelle*.

That follow on attack was shaping up to be delivered by the mainly Australian 37 Commonwealth Brigade which was now massed some 100km east of the *Hexenkessel*, with the exception of its airmobile battalion which was still close to LZ GALLIPOLI whilst its tiltrotor transports were readied. 37 Bde was well placed to deliver the attack having been kept clear of the *Hexenkessel*. The brigade had the luxury of almost 24 hours of planning time to tackle KBG Delta and had some of its recce elements and liaison officers forward with PKR11's Tac HQ.

Brigade Commandant Hughes faced the same problems as his German counterparts in tackling the Kafer CAC-1s that would spearhead the division whilst avoiding decisive engagement with the following infantry. Hughes was in agreement with Generalmajor Richter of 4.LkPzGren.Div that he needed to minimise the time between the engagement of the recce element and the hand over to the main force battle ensuring that the number of aware Kafers was kept to a minimum. Ideally there would be no recce battle allowing 37 Bde to commence a fresh engagement. The limiting factor however would be the need to ensure that Div Delta would not be in position to reinforce Div Charlie.

Generalmajor Richter agreed to Hughes' request to have the rocket artillery batteries of the division's two close support artillery battalions assigned to 37 Bde in order to deliver minefields into the close battle. Hughes assigned a main Killing Area (KA CHAUVEL) for the brigade based on his appreciation as well as reconnaissance by PKR11 and simulations by his battle staff. The KA was far from ideal in normal human terms as engagement ranges were not always favourable for long range shots however the closer country allowed the Kafers to be channelled more effectively. In addition Hughes was confident about the abilities of his Gatto hover tanks in close combat with CAC-1s thanks to their heavy frontal armour. He also hoped to make good use of his infantry ATGW capability.

The battle for KA CHAUVEL opened at dusk on L+1 with elements of PKR11 and 37 Bde launching attacks into the flank and vanguard of the Kafer advance. 1, 4 and 6 Kompanies of PKR11 engaged the Kafer vanguard, concentrating their effort as usual on the vital CAC-1s. The Freihafeners fought a classic cavalry screening battle, avoiding the Kafer response and falling back to better positions. 37 Bde launched its attack 'two up' with 18 CAV and 38 GUIDES in line and 1 GORDONS following up in reserve. Simultaneously the supporting artillery batteries launched a massive SCATMIN deployment whilst their sappers had their SCATMIN systems close behind the leading units.

The massive Australian Gatto hovertanks smashed in to the flank of the Kafers utilising a mixture of missiles and high power plasma weapons. The Kafer response was badly hampered by the presence of the newly delivered minefields and the initial assault was wildly successful. They retreated two hours later as Kafer resistance strengthened having lost a mere ten Gattos to over a hundred Kafer AFVs, although the Guides' A Coy had been badly mauled in one engagement. In doing so they passed through a defensive position established by the 1st Gordon Highlanders Battle Group in the heart of KA CHAUVEL.

The Kafer pursuit, shaped by the minefields and the rearguard actions of the Australian cavalry entered the Gordon's killing area. The main firepower of the British battle group's defence rested on the two squadrons of Montgomery hovertanks from the 4th (Queen's Own) Dragoons who reinforced the Highlanders, yet the infantry also had good dug in anti-tank capability complementing the Dragoons. The initial piecemeal attacks were shot apart and also saw the destruction of a group of CCC-1 'Behemoth' heavy ground tanks. The defence of the Gordons, bolstered by flanking attacks by 18 CAV and the Guides, lasted until dawn of L+2 when the battle group broke contact successfully.

OP BERSHEEBA had pulled off a very fine achievement in blunting Division Delta and causing very serious casualties on their vital armoured vehicles with relatively small casualties. They had also bought time for the complete landing of 4 MIB and HQ 1st Marine Division whilst at the same time the light mechanised 29 and 173d Brigades had begun to land.

Higher Command

General Schneider was very pleased with the conduct of the battle so far although casualties in the first day had exceeded projections those on the second had been much lower. In 48 hours human forces had lost in the order of 200 AFVs, mostly hovertanks, and suffered almost 600 killed and a further 2000 injured of which almost half were to the nuclear strike. Three of his manoeuvre battlegroups had been badly mauled and a further eight seen fierce action. In return his soldiers had destroyed over 400 Kafer AFVs, including most of their key CAC-1 hovertanks, and killed hundreds of foot soldiers. His intelligence staff calculated some 8000 Kafers were involved in the major action. His units were already regenerating whereas the Kafer elements were no longer functioning as massed units capable of smashing his Landing Zones.

The General's main concern was now the containment of the thousands of dismounted Kafer soldiers to the front of his position. He no longer feared their offensive potential but their innate defensive ability could cost him thousands of casualties to defeat. Instead he was looking to contain the Kafers as best he could and bypass with his main forces to reach Goldberg and the *Zitadelle*.

In Goldberg Widerstand resistance fighters had been joined by a popular uprising of the citizens in battling the almost intact Kafer garrison. A Kafer backlash and massacre was becoming a distinct possibility. Scenes like these had been repeated across Dunkelheim but the General could give the brave citizens little support whilst the fate of the main landings was still unclear. The *Zitadelle* was still a threat although it was being continuously suppressed by orbital fire. The General ideally wished to move his Landing Zones and logistics areas forward closer to Goldberg, but to do this the ASAT and SAMs of the Kafer fortress had to be neutralised.

Schneider decided to regroup his forces slightly and planned to launch them at their next objectives and commence his breakout. 4 Division had been heavily engaged but 14.LkPzGren.Bde had three of its *kampfgruppe* online again while 1.LkPz.Bde had been in constant fighting but casualties had been lighter. The Division was to strike out for Goldberg, bypassing the two Kafer forces with elements of PKR.11 in the lead, 14 LkPzGren.Bde and 29 FJg.Bdes following and Panzer Lehr Brigade bringing up the rear as it disengaged from the *Hexenkessel*.

Brigade Commandant Hughes

'Blue' Hughes is the Australian commander of 38 Commonwealth Bde. He is seen as a steady set piece tactician who has risen from the New Canberra Light Infantry to his current position. A popular and astute commander he has also occasionally fallen prey to the factionalism in Australian high command between Terran and Tiranean circles of commanders.

Battle Casualty Replacements

BCRs for HERKULES were a major planning consideration. Schneider could not afford to bring forward additional formed units but would have to rely on reinforcements close to hand.

His staff ensured that over 200 Luki-9Cs and 300 APCs were embarked on the transports to replace damaged vehicles. There were also hundreds of soldiers from IX Korps on Beta Canum ready to crew these vehicles waiting in orbit on the civilian liners.

OP HERKULES

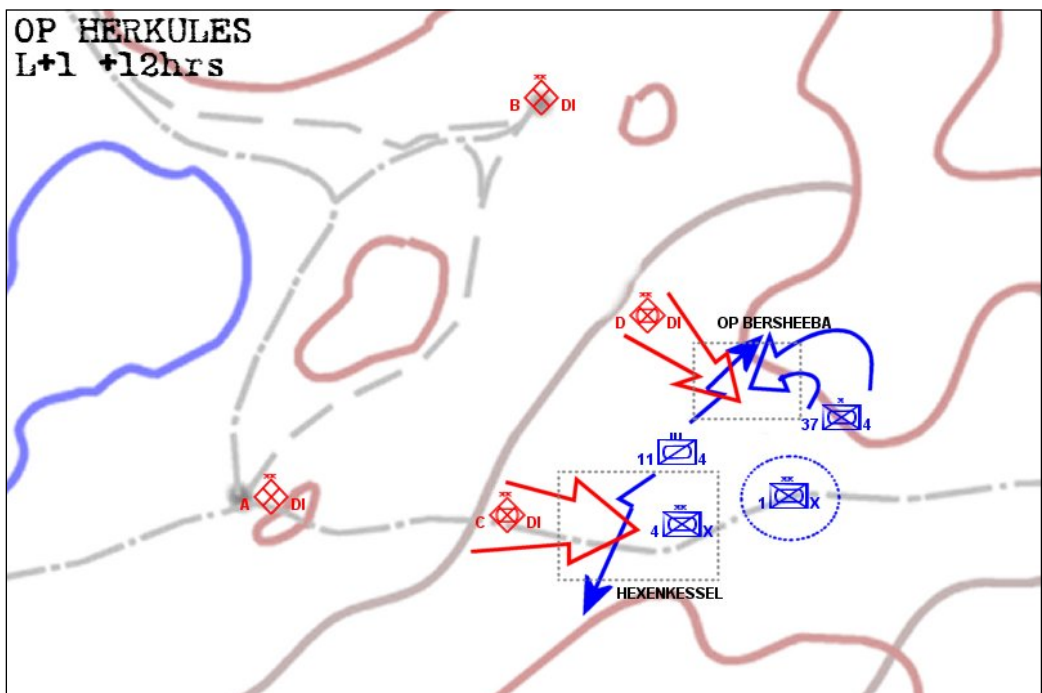
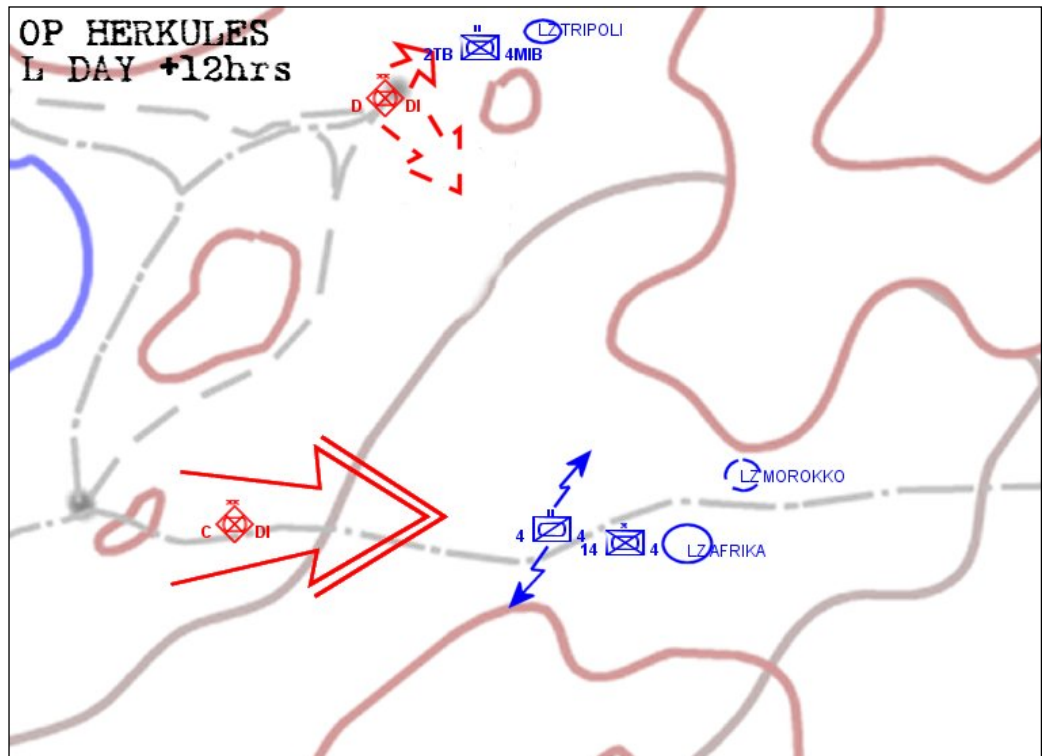
The newly landed 1 MARDIV was to take the Anglo-Australians of 37 Bde back under command and together with 4 MIB and most of the 173d Airborne and make best speed to the *Zitadelle*. To contain the two Kafer battlegroups Schneider was to combine elements of his special forces with the mechanised E Sqn 17th Cavalry, 1-158th Infantry and artillery from the US 173d Airborne. Their aim was to keep the enemy under observation and hit him as hard as possible using dedicated orbital firepower. These forces were grouped together under command of the Deputy Commander of 1 MARDIV with an ad-hoc HQ as TF NORMANDY.

Schneider's sometimes unreliable SIGINT revealed that Kafer command structures had largely disintegrated with the main ground commander isolated at the *Zitadelle* and other commander beginning to fight their own battles. In orbit Schneider retained the HQ of 9 Division together with two Jäger Brigades, two crack light infantry battalions and his embarked marines. All of these forces he intended to keep in orbit until he secured closer Landing Zones near Goldberg.

SIGINT

The gathering of Signals Intelligence against the Kafers is a matter of significant difficulty. While identification of Kafer broadcasts is relatively easy working out command structures is not. Many Kafer units work entirely in clear and force human SIGINT to rely on often unreliable translation.

Others have sophisticated Ylii encryption technology which has so far resisted the best human attempts to decode it. Unfortunately the distribution of this technology does not follow an obvious pattern.



BREAKOUT PHASE

26-27 Dec 2302

The Kafer counter-attack had been comprehensively defeated and it was time to get to our objectives. My infantry force was almost untouched with two full brigades in reserve but the panzers had taken a pounding. The force would now split with the Germans heading to Goldberg and the Americans to the spaceport. My problem was now the containment of the defeated Kafers who I could expect to start regrouping almost immediately.

HERKULES: The Real Story, GenMaj Schneider

The Breakout Phase of Op HERKULES commenced on the mid-morning of L+2 once E/17 Cav was able to take over the recce battle from in contact forces. In the west 2 and 3/PKR11 led 4 Division en-route to Goldberg along MSR Rommel whilst 4/PKR11, trapped on the wrong side of the Kafer force, and recce elements of 37 Bde began blazing the trail for 1 MARDIV on MSR Tarawa towards the *Zitadelle*. Logistic support was to come from dead drop supplies until support from the CMA could be firmly established.

1 LkPz.Bde took longer than expected to break contact and withdrew to leaguer and recover, similarly 37 Bde also took an operational pause to recover from BERSHEEBA while its recce elements forged onwards with 4/PKR11. In its place 4 MIB(-) conducted a passage of lines and the 1st Marine Recon Bn caught up with the recce elements and took the Freihafener cavalry company under temporary command.

In the centre TF NORMANDY took on its role from the German and Freihafen elements in observing the the slowly retreating Kafers. Special forces and 17th Cavalry OPs were especially successful in bringing orbital fire to bear on Kafer infantry columns whilst special hunter killer groups were formed to destroy surviving Kafer AFVs to further target Kafer mobility. The most serious threat was a group of around 10 CCC-1 Behemoths in KBG Delta which formed a kernel of resistance that the lightly equipped TF NORMANDY could take on only with great care.

4 LkPzGren.Div's advance went very smoothly with opposition limited to small contingents moving up to reinforce the Kafer troops in contact which were easily identified by human UAVs, isolated by recce elements and smashed by manoeuvre units if required. It soon became obvious that the Kafers in Goldberg were launching a counter-offensive against the uprising but also digging in a position to the south of Goldberg to hold off human reinforcements. KS.2 operators were engaged in both fighting in the city and reconnaissance of the position on the Strauss Ridge and were providing significant intelligence.

1 MARDIV was also making solid progress across more difficult terrain with the 6th and 7th Marines taking turns at destroying isolated pockets of resistance. The US Marines route was through an area with many small settlements and mines and they gained great help both from the Widerstand, local people and occasional Allied special forces contingents. MG Martín wanted to isolate the fortress with his two manoeuvre brigades and then assault with the infantry of the 173d Airborne and his remaining Marine Raiders. He aimed to have all the principle ASAT and SAM weaponry knocked out before beginning the assault.

Battle of Strauss Ridge

The Strauss Ridge dominates the southern approaches to Goldberg straddling the main access road. It comprises low lying hills rising into a plateau which drops sharply away into the approaches of Goldberg. In happier times it was fertile farmland and scattered with small holiday retreats. During the occupation it had been a mainstay of the resistance and the site of much Kafer raiding. The commencement of HERKULES had seen the Kafer commander of the Goldberg garrison push some of his local reserves, mostly depot troops, onto the ridge to prepare a defence under one of his most trusted subordinates.



E/17 Cav

E Squadron, 17th Cavalry (Airborne) is the American reconnaissance unit for the 173d Airborne Brigade. They are a relatively lightweight but highly mobile formation utilising a mixture of Warbirds and M6A1 Joyner Cavalry Fighting Vehicles. This unit traces its roots back to 1916 and the US incursions into Mexico.

CCC-1

The CCC-1, or Capuchon Char de Combat – 1 is the international designation for the 'Behemoth' heavy ground tank. There are believed to be between 30-40 CCC-1s in service on Dunkelheim.

The tank is very impressively protected and armed and is a handful for even the most advanced human hover tank. It combines the roles of tank killer and infantry support very effectively. The CCC-1 is best tackled with a combination of flanking manoeuvre and long ranged missiles.

OP HERKULES

This move late on L Day brought the Kafers into direct contact with a number of Widerstand companies who put up a spirited defence including several ambushes on the steep approaches before falling back. The Kafers then began constructing a position to make best use of their ATGWs, relatively static infantry and an AFV based counter attack force. On L+1 further reinforcements were dispatched, some of who were ambushed on the way out of the city suburbs. Goldberg was a city truly at war with thousands of human residents under arms against the garrison.

Donnerschlag

The Andersson An-86 *Donnerschlag* is the latest *Luftwaffe* ground attack aircraft. It is replacing the ageing *Rottkappchen* fighter although these can still be found in service in the colonies. The fighter has increased armament, electronics and speed although has yet to be properly tested in combat.

SCATMIN

Scatterable Minefields, or SCATMIN, can be highly effective defensive weapons. Deployed by artillery or vehicle based platforms they can saturate an area with smart mines which can target vehicles or soldiers and even close gaps. If utilised correctly SCATMIN can effectively shape a battle space and greatly increase the effectiveness of friendly manoeuvres.

SCATMIN were widely used by humans during HERKULES. Kafers are known to possess similar munitions but did not often employ them in the same aggressive way that humans did.

Liberation

The besieged population of Dunkelheim gave the troops of HERKULES an initially cautious reception, especially as they saw or heard little of the fight of the Hexenkessel. However once the lead German forces reached Goldberg widespread celebration took place even while the bitter house to house fighting continued.

Leading elements of 3/PKR11 reached the ridge at midnight on L+2 having dashed 600km in half a day to rendezvous with KS.2 and Widerstand leaders. By dawn on L+3 the leading elements of 14.LkPzGren.Bde were in position and artillery was taking targets under fire. Inside an hour Kafer reconnaissance units had pushed forwards into contact with the forward screen of 3/PKR11 and LkPzAufs.Abt.4. Although forewarned the human recon forces were forced back and took significant casualties as the Kafers closed aggressively. Widerstand units were also hit hard before the Kafers withdrew in the face of pressure from LkPz.Abt.143.

Leaving 14.LkPzGren.Bde in position to the front of the Kafer position GenMaj Richter bypassed Strauss Ridge at dusk on L+3 with the rest of his force, 29 Fallschirmjäger Brigade in the lead flanking to the east through a series of small townships. The 'Green Devils' were forced to engage several small Kafer units as they did so, slowing the rate of advance significantly. Often it was necessary to destroy buildings to defeat the hard-fighting Kafers. As they did so Kafer positions on the Ridge were engaged with artillery and airstrikes directed by SF teams and forward observers. The density of *Snapfire* launchers on the position making it difficult for drones to get on station forced a reliance on the forward teams.

Kafer positions on the ridge found it difficult to influence the battle and several company sized units began to advance down off the feature to be hit by artillery. The survivors managed to reinforce the small garrisons in the townships slowing down the advance even further. In addition the German paras began to come under heavy rocket fire from Goldberg's *Safe Place* itself, which resulted in increasing casualties until anti-aircraft systems from 4.LkPzGren.Div were moved to counter the threat.

At the height of the confusion a horde sized unit including several CCC-1s and CAC-1s and numerous infantry began to descend from the ridge to assault 29 Brigade. Orbital and artillery fire were brought to bear and a counter-attack launched from the still under strength LkPz.Abt.144. This *kampfgruppe* took casualties from the Kafer ATGW belt but was able to hit the horde in the flank and disable most of the remaining AFVs. One pair of CCC-1s remained active and were able to conduct a fighting withdrawal back to the ridge in spite of everything the humans could throw at them.

As dawn rose on L+4 with 29.FJg.Bde still heavily engaged to the east of the ridge 14.LkPzGren.Bde began an assault on the western flank with its two Panzergrenadier *kampfgruppe* in the assault with help from LkGfPzGren.Abt.4. Prior artillery preparation and the aid of SF and Widerstand forces made this initial assault very successful clearing 4km along the ridge. Resistance stiffened as they approached the key road way and the advance slowed significantly. Some Kafers began to abandon the ridge, crowding the main road down the northern slope of the feature which was attacked with SCATMIN and anti-personnel rounds to maximise casualties. Others simply dug in tighter on the eastern side of the ridge.

In the meantime 1.LkPz.Bde had launched its own wide flanking move along a route identified by elements of PKR11 and was now approaching Goldberg from the east with very little resistance. GenMaj Richter now had two of his brigades heavily engaged on Strauss Ridge and involved in clearance of Kafer infantry, always a time consuming activity. His remaining brigade was poised either to attack into the rear of Strauss Ridge or to begin to attack in towards Goldberg. His major worry now was his very heavy expenditure of indirect fire munitions and several dead drops had to be organised almost directly on his gun lines.

By midday on L+4 14.LkPzGren.Bde had cleared to the main road on Strauss Ridge and 29.FJg.Bde was beginning to fighting its way up the western slopes. 1.LkPz.Bde was already in the western suburbs of Goldberg, to a rapturous reception, whilst a kampfguppe backed up by PKR11 was operating to the north of Strauss Ridge against stragglers and threatening the rear of the collapsing position.

Battle of the Zitadelle

1 MARDIV's approach to the *Zitadelle* was disrupted by numerous contacts with small Kafer garrisons, straggling support elements of KBG Delta and the occasional air strike. MG Martín maintained the momentum with the aggressive advance of 1st Marine Recon combined with the 6th and 7th MIUs and was in position 100km south-west of the stronghold and ready to engage the remaining screening force by dawn on L+3. He also received reinforcement from the reorganised 2d Tank Battalion which was flown forward at low level by HMS *Arnhem's* Ravens.

1 MARDIV's first move was the seizure of the Beckstein Plateau 50km south-east of the stronghold, a mission undertaken by 37 Bde's 38 GUIDES against minimal resistance from a Kafer reconnaissance screen. There they installed a battery of Luftwaffe manned hypervelocity SAMs from II/53LG to engage any ASAT or SAM missile launches from the *Zitadelle* protected by the 1st Wundurras.

4 MIB and 37 Bde deployed on either side of the Plateau and began to range in search of Kafer defenders. A sharp clash took place between 2d Tank Battalion and a company of CAC-1 Deathsleds in which the Marine tankers took revenge for their defeat four days before picking off the Kafers at range with their Strikers. Except for some additional minor engagements the Kafers retreated back to the defences around the stronghold and hunkered down hoping for the return of elements of KBG Delta to even up the odds against them.

1 MARDIV quickly began to launch attacks aimed at destroying the base's key support weaponry. The large missile silos were too deeply buried to be vulnerable but exposed rocket, artillery and direct systems were. The *Zitadelle* was already a shambles after four days of orbital bombardment but with the direction of Force Recon and SASR teams the surviving systems were quickly targeted. The runway was finally put out of action by SCATMIN stranding a number of Kafer atmosphere and space fighters.

On the night of L+3 both forward brigades launched assaults on two Kafer forward positions outside of the main perimeter. The Gordon Highlanders, with a company of Wundurras under command, assaulted one, the 7th Marines the other. These were both successful, although fighting continued until after daybreak on L+4, and freed up the assault routes into the strongpoint.

MG Martín was pleased with his progress and was ready to launch a breach of the fortress. His main concern was the suppression of the ASAT and long range SAMs, but with the Luftwaffe in position he felt confident and no firings had taken place since L+2. He was also concerned about artillery expenditure, but felt that this was not as serious a problem as it would be for 4.LkPzGren.Div.



SASR

The Australian Special Air Service Regiment is one of several special forces units operating on Dunkelheim. SASR draws its recruits from experienced soldiers in other parts of the army and puts them through a very challenging Selection procedure.

The SASR teams on HERKULES are drawn from 'M' Force and are believed to be present in squadron size. They have been tasked with deep recon around the *Zitadelle* and direct action in combination with Widerstand groups. SASR troopers are renowned for aggression, endurance and self-reliance.

CONSOLIDATION PHASE

27 Dec 2302 - 08 Jan 2303

increasing depression: hundreds of my soldiers and civilians would still be casualties before those areas were secure. Then the hard work would start: a further five cities to liberate across the world, tens of thousands of Kafers to hunt down and we would no longer have the massive orbital support that had made things so relatively easy.

HERKULES: The Real Story, GenMaj Schneider

Higher Command

Gen Schneider was increasingly confident of the outcome of his battle with Strauss Ridge about to fall and 1 MARDIV effectively neutralising the *Zitadelle*. He decided to commit 9 Jäger Division from his orbital reserve with its two remaining brigades for the forthcoming Battle of Goldberg. 4.LkPzGren.Div had suffered significant infantry casualties on Strauss Ridge and was nearing exhaustion; additionally his supply of battle casualty replacements for the division was nearly finished. TF NORMANDY was struggling to contain a mass transit of Kafer foot soldiers from the Hexenkessel as columns of bands formed and began slogging northwards. Raids, artillery fire together with orbital and air strikes punished the Kafers, but couldn't break up the formations.

Schneider's priority was to begin the liberation of Goldberg, where civilian casualties were mounting in the uprising, with several massacres reported, pushing his infantry in as quickly as possible. He then needed to ensure the fall of the *Zitadelle* and open the main spaceport up as quickly as possible. Lastly he needed to keep track of the retreating remnants of KBG Charlie and Delta and ensure they didn't link up with the defenders of Goldberg. His greatest concern was the fragility of his logistics with supply links to the CMA very vulnerable and most supplies were coming in to the F Echelon through dead drops.

Kafer forces in the north around Neues Berlin had made no move towards reinforcing their colleagues in the south and Schneider felt confident he could wrap up the initial phases of the contact before that happened. He retained his two reserve infantry battalions for interface raiding operations to slow their movement if required.

9.Jg.Div began landing on LZs to the south of Strauss Ridge in the evening of L+4 with a mass drop of equipment followed by landings using agile Helldiver, Raven and Zenith landers together with large French Rotons. The bulk of the division and its two brigades were on the ground by the next morning as 4.LkPzGren.Div finished its clearance of the Strauss Ridge, a feat which brought the cost to 2000 casualties and left it at 50% of its normal fighting power.

Battle of the Zitadelle

As 9.Jg.Div was completing its landings 1 MARDIV launched its assault on the *Zitadelle* attempting to create two breaches in the south-west and south-east of the perimeter.

4 MIB launched the initial assault with the 6th Marines in the vanguard together with the 101st Marine Raiders breaking into a vulnerable part of the fortifications. With the rest of the brigade massed providing fire support and isolating the entry point the worst fighting was for the bunkers and trenches. It was here that the DNAMs of the Raiders particularly distinguished themselves in close combat against the aliens. Immediate counterattacks were launched from flanking positions and reinforcements from the 7th Marines had to be fed into the battle to prevent the breach collapsing.

Logistics

Logistic support for HERKULES was often a matter of significant difficulty. The Corps Maintenance Area was badly disrupted on the first day by the nuclear strike on the LZs. The logistic effort lacked much in the way of vehicles and protection to support the fighting troops effectively especially during the Hexenkessel and then as the battle strung out.

The later stages of the battles around Goldberg and the *Zitadelle* were forced to rely on dead drops of supplies from orbit. An effective although not particularly efficient method of supply.

DNAMs

DNAMs or DNA Modified humans adapted for unusual environments are a rarity in most ground forces. The largest group in HERKULES are found in the USMC's 101st Marine Raiders and are recruited from the heavy gravity world of King. Comprising roughly half the company these hulking DNAMs are renowned for their physical prowess and have attracted a great deal of media attention.

To the east 37 Brigade launched its attacks on a slightly wider front opposite the old Terminal building, this time with the Wundurras in the lead jumping off from the bastion seized earlier in the day. The Gattos of the cavalry units giving intimate fire support with their heavy plasma guns enabled the Wundurras to gain their foothold, but like the Marines had to fight hard to hold it. Brigade Commandant Hughes launched a second attack to take the pressure off the Wundurras led by the Gordons at the Eastern Gate. It was the Gordons third major action and they were unable to seize the gate although they were withdrawn in relatively good order. They had however relieved the pressure on the Wundurras, who were now firmly in control of their breach.

In the west the first elements of 1-508th Infantry began to pass through the battered Marines and begin to clear the interior of the stronghold. In the east 1-503d also began to pass through the Commonwealth Brigade and begin to clear the terminal. At the same time as the Gordons launched another attack on the East Gate reinforced with dismounts from the Guides and with their pipers playing 'Cock o' the North' they finally seized their objective.

1 MARDIVs armour was now in overwatch and could bring overwhelming firepower to bear on the Kafers but the close in infantry fighting was still ferocious, especially to clear subterranean galleries of the *Zitadelle*. The upper structures were clear by dusk on L+5 but the depths still had been barely touched. The 173d Abn Bde would continue to clear the structure over the coming days but sadly survivors of the slave labour force were few and far between.

TF NORMANDY

TF NORMANDY was still struggling to contain the mobile Kafer force, although inflicting severe casualties for few losses in return. With the *Zitadelle* almost clear 37 Bde was re-tasked with reinforcing TF NORMANDY, and took under command 2d Tank Battalion and 1st Marine Recon Bn whilst leaving behind the Wundurras.

The addition of a further five battalions to the two stretched units of TF NORMANDY greatly eased the containment problem and by L+10 the Kafer force now something around 2000 soldiers had largely gone to ground in the difficult terrain 300km south east of Goldberg riven with Camelinsekten habitats and the watching brief returned to German elements from 4 Division. TF NORMANDY and 37 Brigade returned to the *Zitadelle* where they prepared for further operations towards Goldberg should it be required whilst construction engineers repaired the runway and catapult.

Battle of Goldberg

4.LkPzGren.Div had completed its clearance of the ridge by midday on L+5 and Panzer Lehr was already in contact in the north eastern suburbs of Goldberg. The always willing PKR11 cleared the route from the ridge to the eastern suburbs with the aid of LkPz.Abt.11 clearing Kafer stragglers from the road. Defences had been prepared on this side of the city but probes found many to be abandoned and some occupied by the Widerstand. Elements of 14.LkPzGren.Bde and 4.LkPzGren.Div troops joined PKR11 and secured the line of departure for 9 Jäger Division to pass through.

At dusk on L+5 36.Jg.Bde passed through the city limits and began to fight through. It was a chaotic scene with resistance fighters, rejoicing locals and Kafer stay-behinds all combining to create an immensely chaotic battle picture. The veteran *kampfers* of 36.Jg.Bde took it all in their stride and made good progress forward towards the aliens's main defensive lines in the city centre. Behind them 50.GbJg.Bde also entered the city in combination with 14.LkPzGren.Bde which had been assigned to 9.Jg.Div for the attack to provide armoured support.

29.FJg.Bde was consolidating on the ridge but would soon move across to support Panzer Lehr and 4 Division which was moving in slowly from the east. LkPzAuf.Abt.4 and PKR11 formed a screen around the west and north of the city to intercept retreating Kafers or reinforcements.



TF NORMANDY

TF NORMANDY often showed its roots as an ad-hoc formation as it lacked any sort of staff outside of BG Strickland's tactical HQ. However the highly mobile elements of E/17 Cav, 1-158th Inf and the 4/319th Artillery performed superbly in containing the bypassed Kafer forces. However it was only when reinforced by 37 Brigade that the task force was able to force the Kafers to ground.



Medaille der Befreiung von Dunkelheim

The Liberation of Dunkelheim medal is a round medal embossed with the traditional iron cross and engraved with the words 'HERKULES' on the obverse. It is hung from a blue, white, red, gold and black medal representing the colours of Dunkelheim and Germany.

It is awarded to the soldiers, airmen and spacers of any element force assigned to OP HERKULES for more than 30 days or who received an injury on the mission. It is also awarded to members of the Widerstand who can prove their participation in the resistance, a matter which has sometimes proved controversial.

Operation DONAR

Op DONAR, or Thunder, is the follow up to Op HERKULES which concluded with the securing of Goldberg and the *Zitadelle*. GenMaj Schneider and X Korps was to continue in command but would see a major rotation in his forces, with fresh ground troops coming in for the campaign. His priority was first to liberate Neues Berlin and then to slowly pacify the rest of the colony's inhabited areas. It was recognised however that in remote areas the Kafer threat was likely to last for years.

TF Herkules was dissolved and Admiral Lutke returned to Earth for a hero's welcome and a well deserved break. The allied assault shipping returned to other tasks although some French ships of the EdI remained on station to support the rotation of troops. However the reinforcement and rotation plan was significantly less well developed than the landing operations were.

The Widerstand was to be slowly dissolved as areas were liberated. Its more professional elements were to be absorbed into the regular forces of X Korps.

German government agencies and a number of foundations moved in behind the leading troops to try and start rebuilding Dunkelheim society.

The arrival of Schneider's forces had swung the events of the uprising decisively in the favour of the humans and the Kafers began to fall back to strong points. The German infantry and Widerstand fighters took advantage of the massive firepower available and the brave citizens who helped root out concealed Kafers and destroy the aliens in detail. Strong points would be reduced by artillery, sometimes in direct fire, or airstrikes before being stormed.

More forces troops entered the battle with the arrival of Kommando Abteilung 393, Jäger Abteilung 381 and the German marines from the *Bismarck* and *Bayern*. These forces aided the collapse of a number of Kafer positions. It was however a slow and bloody business which would not be complete until L+15 when the German flag was finally hoisted over the city's ruined Governor's palace by General Schneider and Governor Schmidt resplendent in dusty combat uniform.

Further Operations

With the liberation of Goldberg the initial phase of HERKULES had been completed and the force assembled for it began to disperse. Lutke assumed control of a much smaller force and the impressed merchant ships began to return to trade. Many warships returned to the control of their original fleets or to new taskings and only the *Bismarck* remained out of the capital ships.

On the surface the US Marines were preparing to be replaced as a US Army Divisional HQ and a fresh Army brigade came into take over from the battered 4 MIB which was due for a well earned rest. 37 Commonwealth Brigade was also ready to depart with the Australians returning to Earth and the British to their parent Division on Alicia. They were to be replaced by a smaller composite force of British and Australians.

Of the two German divisions 4.LkPzGren.Div was a shadow of its former self and awaiting replacements of men and machines, although it was still providing ad-hoc groups to support other forces. 9.Jg.Div had taken heavy casualties in the clearance of Goldberg but was in relatively good shape. A further German Jäger Division was enroute from Beta Canum and Adlerhorst and would bolster Schneider's force. Schneider and Governor Schmidt were now also trying to create combat groups from the best of the Widerstand forces to bolster the regulars.

Schneider's forces were consolidating around Goldberg and the spaceport but were well aware that they had only dealt with maybe a quarter of the Kafer troops on Dunkelheim. Planning was underway with the objective of liberating Neues Berlin and the rest of the planet under the code name Op DONAR. Operation HERKULES was officially over.

AFTER ACTION REVIEW

I found Sandrock again in the central square of Goldberg. He looked the worse for wear in every way he could; scorched, bruised and more than a little drunk. He was reclining on the hull of his latest Luki-9 with a bottle of schnapps and a couple of adoring young local girls. The jokes were as bad and as inappropriate as always, but the crowd of liberated Dunkelheimers and Bundeswehr soldiers lapped it up. I knew that his war was nearly over and wondered what peace would bring to such a man.

Diary Entry, J Herman

Op HERKULES was undoubtedly the most successful opposed landing undertaken during the Liberation. It was able to complete all its initial objectives and within two and a half weeks was able to transition to subsequent operations in a conventional ground operation. It benefited greatly from the prolonged planning process and the detailed intelligence that was able to be gathered on the Kafer presence. Op HERKULES also learned the lessons of previous landings including Op ENTANTE, and the liberations of Kimanjano and Beta Canum.

Lutke's operations were very successful and were able to clear the way for the liberation of Dunkelheim after several hard fought engagements. Although losses were relatively light many of his warships suffered heavy damage, but they were able to destroy the last major Kafer force on the Eta Bootis Finger.

Immediately after the landing GenMaj Schneider was able to take on the Kafer counter-attack on his own terms with frontline heavy mechanised forces. His two strong German armoured brigades had performed exceptionally well in holding off the initial attack and the Australian 37 Brigade conducted a fine spoiling attack on the second wave killing its momentum. His system of battle casualty replacements also enabled him to keep his fighting units as powerful as possible and maintain the momentum on the battlefield.

In addition to the fighting quality of his troops he also had superb intelligence from in place special forces and resistance fighters and numerous tactical recce forces of great skill. These combined with orbital strikes, strong artillery and then air support to give the humans overmatch of firepower when required. He concentrated his efforts on destruction of enemy AFVs and only when absolutely required would close to finish the robust and highly survivable Kafer infantry.

The spoiling raid on the *Zitadelle* by the 3d Marine Raiders and 2d Tank Battalion was badly miscalculated and added little to the plan save extra casualties. Similarly the logistical effort misfired with the expensively established CMA unable to support the forward troops during the breakout phase. Only dead drops of materiel allowed the attacks to continue at times and this required a huge and often wasted outlay of resources.

The greatest weakness of HERKULES was its lack of follow on forces for Op DONAR, where unlike the liberations of Kimanjano or Beta Canum there were insufficient forces to continue on and aid the uprising of poorly coordinated colonists. A pause had to be called once Goldberg was captured and many towns under Kafer occupation were wiped out and Neues Berlin almost totally abandoned. This was a limitation forced on Schnieder back his lack of integral starlift and other commitments of his Allies.

In the event Operation HERKULES was largely successful and went some way to restoring German morale and prestige as they took the key role in liberating the last of their occupied colonies. It also strengthened the links with the Americans and other Allies and rid the Kafers of their last functioning fleet base on the Eta Bootis Finger.

The Butcher's Bill

The casualty rate for HERKULES was far from insignificant and fell heavily on AFV crews in the Hexenkessel and on the infantry soldiers fighting in Goldberg and the Zitadelle. German soldiers of X Korps suffered almost 2400 killed or missing and around 3800 injured of whom 300 were killed and 1000 injured in the nuclear event on LZ Afrika.

The Americans also suffered heavily with nearly 3000 which fell heaviest on the Marines. In addition there were some 300 Australian and 250 British killed or injured, mostly in the breaches of the Zitadelle. There were also 150 Freihafen and around 50 Austrovenian casualties.

Widerstand and civilian casualties are hard to estimate but it is believed at least 5000 were killed over the period of HERKULES. In total it is estimated there were over 7250 casualties in the attacking force in some 15 days of fighting.

GAMING OP HERKULES

We were forced into the shelter of a collapsed Kamelinsekt habitat as Kafer bullets popped around us showering us in dust. We returned fire as best we could but the MG-7s kept jamming with all the dust. The Widerstand guerrillas with us wanted to get away and I couldn't blame them. In the distance I could hear the clanking of a tracked vehicle. It looked like the Kafers were serious in wanting to hunt us down. We had destroyed one of their main radar sites and we could only expect a violent reaction. We knew we were down here on our own while the heavy forces of X Korps landed half a world away. I could only pray that the rest of the company could help us out, if they couldn't no one would.

Dunkelheim Kommando, Brandenburg Media GmbH

High intensity military operations are often difficult to role play as the PCs often become a very small cog in a very big machine. The individual soldier has relatively little latitude to do their own thing which can be extremely constraining for role playing purposes. HERKULES is a particularly high intensity conflict with tens of thousands of soldiers engaged and battle with hundreds of AFVs in action over the space of a fortnight, not to mention dozens of warships and fighters.

The concept of the 'nail mission' is a favourite of game designers: the players must recover X or do Y in order to save the planet etc. Unfortunately this approach is little seen in the real world where almost inevitably victory goes to the biggest battalions. This is not to say that these sorts of missions do not occur, just that they are very rarely decisive.

Op HERKULES works best as a back drop to smaller scale adventures, and as background for characters. To know that a Marine comrade fought in the breaches of the Zitadelle is to know he is a true veteran of the service. Should a party role play part in Op HERKULES it will probably be most rewarding for it to part of a reconnaissance unit, a commando unit tasked with a raid or vital reconnaissance or as a guerrilla Widerstand unit fighting for their homeland. Alternatively they could take part in the more drawn out Op DONAR following on from the conclusion of HERKULES.

Player Characters

PCs can come from any of a wide array of backgrounds. The most common will be soldiers, guerrillas or simple colonists attempting to survive the war. There may also be a range of non military personnel accompanying the liberation such as foundation relief workers, media, returning refugees or others. There may also be room for less honourable characters with thieves, profiteers or quislings also possible. Players looking for a challenge may even decide to play Kafers in an 'OPFOR' campaign against the oncoming human juggernaut.

Military Careers

Panzergranadier - The Panzergranadier has always been one of the most renowned of German soldiers. These mechanised troops are highly skilled at working in combined arms formations alongside the fast moving hovers.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 3, Heavy Weapons - 2, Melee - 2, Hover Vehicle - 2, Stealth - 1, Tactics - 1 and First Aid-1

Primary Skills: Combat Skills, Hover Vehicle, Stealth, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Bureaucracy, Ground Vehicle.

Operation JUBILEE

Op JUBILEE was the Allied raid on the French town of Dieppe launched on 19 Aug 1942. The main force of the raid was drawn from the 2nd Canadian Division while on the flanks the British 3 and 4 Commandos were to assault coastal batteries on the flanks.

4 Commando under Lord Lovat completed its task with great aplomb overrunning the German battery 3 Commando was hit hard before they got to the beach but a handful made it ashore to disrupt the functioning of their battery.

Nevertheless the raid was still a costly failure with over 4000 Allied casualties, the majority of them Canadian. The assault onto the main beaches was caught in a cross-fire and shot to pieces. The hard bought success of the commandos had come to nothing.

Panzertruppen - The crews of the powerful LkPz-IX hovertanks that provide the bulk of HERKULES' initial combat power. There are over two hundred Luki-9s in the first wave and their highly trained crews expect to cause, and suffer, significant casualties.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 1, Heavy Weapons - 3, Sidearm - 1, Hover Vehicle - 2, Mechanical - 1, Electrical - 1 and First Aid - 1.

Primary Skills: Heavy Weapons, Indirect Fire, Combat Rifleman, Hover Vehicle, Ground Vehicle, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Combat Skills, Computer, Bureaucracy.

Fallschirmjäger - The German Fallschirmjäger is a soldier trained as lightly mechanised airmobile shock troops. They use aggression and infiltration to make up for their lack of heavy firepower.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 3, Heavy Weapons - 2, Melee - 2, Hover Vehicle - 1, Stealth - 1, Tactics - 2 and First Aid-1

Primary Skills: Combat Skills, Hover Vehicle, Stealth, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Bureaucracy, Ground Vehicle.

US Marine – Versatile heavy infantry trained to spearhead landings from the sea or orbit. The marines involved in HERKULES are a mixture of veterans of heavy fighting in the Beta Canum cluster and green replacements keen to live up to the Corps' traditions.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 3, Sidearm - 1, Heavy Weapons - 2, Melee - 2, Hover Vehicle - 2, Tactics - 1 and First Aid-1

Primary Skills: Combat Skills, Hover Vehicle, Stealth, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Bureaucracy, Ground Vehicle.

Freihafener armoured cavalry – The reconnaissance soldiers of the Freiwehr's PKR11 are highly trained and hand picked for this mission. As proud representatives of this new nation they are highly motivated to perform well.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 2, Heavy Weapons - 2, Melee - 1, Hover Vehicle - 2, Indirect Fire - 1, Tactics - 2 and First Aid-1

Primary Skills: Combat Skills, Hover Vehicle, Stealth, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Bureaucracy, Ground Vehicle.

Australian Cavalryman – There are two Australian cavalry units involved in the operation, one Queenslander and one New Canberran. These fast moving, heavy hitting units are well trained and have highly flexible tactics.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 2, Heavy Weapons - 3, Melee - 1, Hover Vehicle - 2, Stealth - 1, Tactics - 2 and First Aid-1

Primary Skills: Combat Skills, Hover Vehicle, Stealth, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Bureaucracy, Ground Vehicle.

British Highlander - The soldiers of the Gordon Highlanders are traditional British regular soldiers, rigorously trained, stalwart, disciplined and ferocious in the assault.

Initial Skills: Combat Rifleman - 4, Heavy Weapons - 2, Melee - 2, Hover Vehicle - 1, Stealth - 1, Tactics - 1 and First Aid-1

Primary Skills: Combat Skills, Hover Vehicle, Stealth, General Skills (except Prospecting).

Related Skills: Bureaucracy, Ground Vehicle.

Luftwaffe

The Luftwaffe is playing a small but vital part of Op HERKULES with its mixture of drones, fighter bombers, transports and SAMs. PCs can be generated by using the Interface Military career.

Deutsches Stern Marine

The DSM involved in HERKULES are the contingents drawn from the two German capital ships *Bayern* and *Bismarck*. They are highly trained troops at ease on land or in space. They can be generated using the Space Military career.

Marine Raiders

The Marine Raiders are trained as regular US Marines but have additional training opportunities with an extra two skill points in any weapon skill.

RPG SCENARIOS

Wilhelm Sandrock

Wilhelm Sandrock is in his early 30s and from a small town in the Black Forest. He was serving as a young Luki-8 gunner in the Bavarian Army on the outbreak of the War of German Reunification and was regarded as something of an embarrassment in barracks. However in action he proved to be a superb soldier with outstanding ability to read the ground and employ his weapon systems to best effect.

His subsequent career has followed the same model; frequent disciplinary infractions combined with excellent field performance. He has been promoted only slowly, serving in the German mission to Aurore before being stationed on Beta Canum during the Invasion.

He received a field commission on Beta Canum and has been decorated several times but still lacks any social graces or ability to interact with the opposite sex. He remains unmatched, however, in his ability in killing Kafer AFVs and surviving the most unlikely situations.

NDR Media Team

The team from Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) comprises two people, a reporter/producer and a camera operator. They are fully accredited by the Bundeswehr and have undergone a 'combat reporter' course back on Earth. They have access to all of LkPz.Abt.143's activities although their broadcasts will be checked to ensure no sensitive information is inadvertently released.

KNIGHT'S CROSS

We found Sandrock at the battalion's dressing station being treated for minor injuries. His driver wasn't so lucky and was being evacuated back to the LZ with severe burns and other injuries. The story was he was now up to 41 kills. The last being a Kafer support vehicle that had rolled up to investigate a cluster of burning AFVs including his knocked out Luki-9. He'd destroyed it at short range with a disposable PLAW. Sandrock was splattered with blood, bruised and his ballistic overalls were distinctly charred. He tolerated the ministrations of the medics while waiting for the battalion to bring forward a replacement Luki, his eyes constantly scanning the horizon.

SITUATION

Oberleutnant Wilhelm Sandrock is a living legend in the German Army and wider Beta Canum Cluster. He is the highest scoring tank ace of the Kafer War having fought on Aurore, Beta Canum and now Dunkelheim. There are strong rumours that he will be awarded the new German state's highest bravery award the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Swords and Stars. As part of an information operation, high command has insisted that a media team is to accompany Sandrock's unit in order to gain maximum publicity out of the event.

MISSION

The mission is to ensure that team of embedded media operators are able to provide maximum information on Sandrock and the overall HERKULES mission. In short they, and Sandrock, need to survive, and any potentially damaging media coverage be avoided.

EXECUTION

The PCs can be drawn from either the members of Sandrock's battalion Luftkissenpanzer Abteilung 143, or the NDF media team 'embedded' with the unit. The media team will follow Sandrock from embarkation on Adlerhorst all the way through the campaign. Obviously they will not be able to ride in his Luki-9, but it has numerous cameras attached and the reporters will follow in one of the company support vehicles.

The plan is simple but the reality will prove very different. Sandrock has the uncanny ability to be where the action is thickest and still manage to walk away despite the heaviest casualties around him. Sandrock is also an unlikely hero; while almost insanely brave he is also homely, stocky and has an almost impenetrable Württemberg accent and a penchant for offensive jokes. The battalion's media operations officer will have their work cut out to ensure that Sandrock will not cause any 'faux pas'.

LkPz.Abt.143 is due to be the reserve battalion for the leading brigade but is expected to see heavy action throughout the operation. Indeed it will play vital roles in both the Hexenkessel battle and the fight for Strauss Ridge to the south of Goldberg. Sandrock will be in the thick of any of the fighting, indeed his commander has decided not to order him to take things easily as he knows he will be ignored. While Sandrock has superb situational awareness and the ability to read a battle field the media team are not so lucky. The NDR anchor normally reports on Hamburg local affairs and sees this as his big break, his camera woman is savvy but burdened with the cameras and other paraphernalia.

PERSONNEL

PC's may be drawn from any of the national contingents or from groups of the Widerstand who just happened to be in the area. The most likely source of PCs or NPCs are the German contingent from LkPz.Abt.143 or attached media personnel. Wilhelm Sandrock should remain an NPC due to his The following are a selection of possible characters:

Johannes Herman

Johannes has been a major media figure for the last 20 years hosting the NDR local news in Hamburg while also moonlighting as a soccer pundit on late night TV. A tall man with a distinguished mustache and greying hair he is undoubtedly a 'housewives' favourite' but has been dismissed by rivals as an intellectual lightweight. He has taken the opportunity of the war to reinvent himself as a war correspondent and has recently reported from Beowulf, Beta Canum and Adlerhorst and has also interviewed several senior commanders. He is however completely out of his depth on the front lines and in his new role. He is very reliant on his producers but will be without them for this assignment.

Oberstleutnant Manfred Rettemeier

ObLt Rettemeier is the commander of LkPz.Abt.143. A Bavarian veteran of the Central Asian War he has been a recurring factor in Sandrock's career and is one of the few officers who can harness him correctly. Rettemeier is an intelligent and driven officer who has been marked out for promotion. He has been tasked directly by General Schneider to ensure the best possible media coverage of his operations. He is an officer driven to make a success of the battle which looms before him but is being distracted by the attached media team and the pressure from his headquarters.

Surita Henricks

A native of Capetown in her late 30s Surita is an award winning media camera operator. After service in the Azanian Army she became a freelance camera woman who became famous for her coverage of the Central Asian and Elysian Wars. After a period of semiretirement she has been covering the last stages of the Liberation and has been recruited by NDR for HERKULES. What is not know however is that she is a PAX sympathiser and is willing to pass information on to that organisation.

Leutnant Lena Böhm

Lena Böhm is a young staff officer from Saxony. She has been assigned to LkPz.Abt.143 to act as a media minder for the NDR team. A highly telegenic former athlete who is very elequent on camera, she has increasingly more highly interviewed by Herman than Sandrock. It is no secret that Herman is highly attracted to her. Böhm is a relatively inexperienced officer for whome HERKULES is her first experience of combat.

LkPz.Abt.143

Luftkissenpanzer Abteilung 143 is a regular German armoured battalion. Formed in 2294 on Adlerhorst as part of a revamp of colonial defences it retains a mixture of native Neumarkers and experienced soldiers from Germany.

The battalion remained on Adlerhorst throughout the war so far in expectation of a Kafer invasion. It has recently re-equipped with more modern vehicles and received an influx of combat veterans from Beta Canum and elsewhere.

The battalion has two armoured and two armoured infantry companies in addition to the usual support Elements.

PAX

PAX or *Paix Avec les Xenos* is a minority pressure group which is lobbying for peace at almost any price with the Kafers. They believe that humanity has provoked the Kafers into this invasion and is now reacting with unwarranted brutality towards them.

There is very little sympathy for PAX in the colonies but they have a remarkably vocal support base in the core. PAX is on the look out for proof of human brutality towards the Kafers.

THE RATS OF THE ZITADELLE

'Contact front! Contact front!' The Gunny swore as rapping bursts of M5 fire thundered in the confines of the mining tunnels. The 3d Marine Raiders had been on Dunkelheim for less than 72 hours and their mission to cripple a Kafer stronghold was already falling down around their ears. The Gunny prayed silently that the Bugs hadn't got in behind them, then began shouting and cajoling his marines while trying to plan a way out of the death trap they had walked into.

SITUATION

The Kafer *Zitadelle* sits astride the old space port but also holds missile batteries and ground launched fighters that can challenge human control of orbit. It could be neutralised by mass orbital firepower but there are concerns about the need not to damage the space port and the hundreds of human slave labourers known to be held in the complex. The US Marines believe they have a solution.

MISSION

The 3d Marine Raiders have a plan to infiltrate the Kafer fortress from below through a series of tunnels that pass beneath the defences. Once inside they will destroy key targets and release as many prisoners as possible. Outside the 2d Tank Battalion will engage the fortress and draw away as many of its defenders as possible. The mission is risky but the pay off could be huge.

EXECUTION

The Raiders will be landed at a remote location from assault shipping on L-3 with mobility support from 2/3 ACR and move towards a secret location where they will meet up with guides from Force Recon and the Widerstand. On the night of L-Day they will begin the infiltration as the human invasion force swings into assault orbit.

The mission is far from easy. The Kafer response is fast and aggressive and the marines must fight toe to toe with the alien warriors. Though there are some successes the Raiders are in danger of being overwhelmed and the fortress continues to fire on human warships high above. Outside the raid of the 2nd Tank Battalion is being heavily counterattacked and will offer little help.

The surviving Raiders must fight their way out of the complex, destroying what they can while keeping themselves and as many slave labourers alive at the same time. Once outside they must escape and evade, linking up with whatever friendly forces they can locate.

Task Force Raider

TF Raider is the name given to the force led by Cpt Kelly. It comprises the 3d Marine Raider Company and 10 M23J3 APCs from the I Troop of 2/3 ACR. They are to link up with a team of Force Recon Marines who have been deployed to Dunkelheim under Op REGENBOGEN since 2301. The Force Recon team also includes a group of the local Widerstand.

The Tunnels

There is no single tunnel system under the *Zitadelle*, instead there three separate elements that must be negotiated. These are external mine workings around the spaceport, quarries dug by the captive workers and the subterranean elements of the Kafer defences.

These have been linked only by the covert efforts of human slaves to allow the escape of several of their number. The route is tortuous and difficult to navigate and frequently comes to the surface inside the compound in less than ideal locations.

Movement through the tunnels is especially difficult with large amounts of military equipment the raiders bring with them.

PERSONNEL

PC's may be drawn from any of the national contingents or from groups of the Widerstand involved in the operation. The most likely source of PCs or NPCs are the Marines of 3rd Raiders or German Widerstand. The following are a selection of possible characters:

Captain James S. Kelly USMC

A lean young officer in his mid-20s from Arizona Kelly has seen almost constant action in the war so far. He initially served with 4 MIB before volunteering for the Raiders as XO of the 3d Raiders and becoming its commander in combat. He is a highly charismatic leader and aggressive tactician who has a burning hatred for the Kafers. He has been closely involved in the planning for this mission. He is aware of the risks but feels the potential rewards are great. As an NPC he is a veteran in ground military.

Gunnery Sergeant Norman Rhodes USMC

A stocky, no-nonsense, long service marine Gunny Rhodes is the bedrock of the 3d Raiders. He knows all of the marines personally and is always at least two steps ahead of them. Rhodes has two broken marriages behind him and is widely regarded as being married to the Corps. He is highly experienced having served in several units and had a reputation as a brawler in his younger days. As an NPC he is elite ground military.

Staff Sergeant Juan Santiago USMC

Santiago is a Force Recon team leader who has been deployed on Dunkelheim for over a year as part of a group deployed from Adlerhorst. It is Santiago who has done most of the reconnaissance and liaison work for this mission in combination with the Widerstand. He is alarmed that the mission profile has changed to include a whole Raider company rather than the special operations teams he originally suggested. A quiet but highly competent native of Ellis in his early 30s, he is essentially running his own Widerstand private army along with the rest of his small team. As an NPC he is elite ground military.

Maus

Maus is the *nom-de-guerre* of a Karla Gant a young female Widerstand fighter who is one of the mission's guides. Maus was one of the slave labourers captured by the Kafers from the suburbs of Goldberg who escaped from the facility two months ago. It was Mouse who found the subterranean route out before linking up with the Widerstand. She is almost reclusive following brutalisation at the hands of both the Kafers and some of her fellow prisoners; however in action she is a ferocious fighter. She has developed a close relationship and loyalty to SSgt Santiago, but he fears she is potentially suicidal. As an NPC she is an experienced colonist.

The Kafers

The Zitadelle's garrison is no easy mark. Based on CR DI-B3, or regiment Bravo Three it also includes a cohort from the elite Foxtrot One as an airborne reserve.

There is one cohort manning the interior defences and two cohorts the outer perimeter. There are also numerous other troops involved in maintaining the base and its aircraft.

The base is busy and the slaves well guarded. If discovered the marines will likely face a powerful counter attack from the highly experienced Kafers of cohort Foxtrot One Bravo.

The Captives

The captives are drawn from across the Goldberg region and most have been held for almost a year. Over half of them have died in captivity thanks to cruel guards, neglect and harsh working conditions. Only a handful have successfully escaped.

They did most of the work on the defences, and some of these are distinctly under par. There are no over 400 survivors and many are completely in the thrall of 'Stockholm Syndrome' and have been set over the others as supervisors.

It may prove very difficult to convince them to leave. Their cells are in the basement of the old terminal building which has been expanded by diggings.

The Patrol

The patrol is drawn from 2 Kompanie of PKR11. It comprises two LkSpPz-3 cavalry fighting vehicles. There are a total of 14 Freiwehr soldiers split between the two vehicles. The patrol is designed and equipped for long distance and long duration patrolling and observation tasks.

It is also capable of engaging limited numbers of enemy AFVs should it be necessary. The patrol is able to carry an extra four personnel should it be required.

LkSpPz-3 'Schattenkatze'

The Luftkissenspähpanzer 3 is a Freihafen design named after a member of the Tiracat family. A modification of the trusty LkPzTr-V the Schattenkatze is a very handy cavalry and reconnaissance vehicle. It retains the innate sturdiness of earlier vehicle with enhanced stealth and sensors including a tethered UAV system.

Weapons include the CPL-1A plasma cannon, a 7.5mm coaxial MG and a Luchs missile launcher with a total of five rounds. The Luchs can be directed from the UAV or from a remote firing post as well as conventionally.

The Schattenkatze has a crew of three, including driver, gunner and tactical commander. It has the capability of carrying six passengers although normally only four troopers are carried.

WHERE EAGLES DARE TO LAND

The information came from an encrypted wideband transmission from the Marshall Ney high in orbit which although it blanketed half the planet was aimed solely at us with one time code. A French lander had been shot down carrying a key German colonial official. The Zénith, callsign Aigle Dix Huite, had crash landed far too close to a Kafer stronghold for comfort and definitely too close for another lander to get in. We were the only unit anywhere near so it was up to us to get in and rescue the survivors. We got all the best jobs.

SITUATION

It is L+1 and a patrol of Freihafeners observing a possible Kafer approach route to the landing zone about 200km south of Goldberg. They have received information that a lander carrying an important official to a meeting with the Widerstand has crash landed 400km away close to the Wellgundesee. The area is a zone of mostly deserted farmland and where a Kafer garrison is sparring with the local Widerstand from its fortification. High command are unwilling to risk a lander with the SAR task and LG53's transports are not yet in action. It is up to the patrol to take action.

MISSION

The patrol's mission is to get to the crash site, locate any crash survivors and extract them from the area.

EXECUTION

The PKR11 patrol will need to traverse some 400km through a no mans land of sparse farmland which is home to scattered pockets of Kafers, Widerstand and local civilians. At full speed they could be there in two hours, however they would be very vulnerable to ambush or chance encounter. The longer they take, however the less chance they have of finding the survivors alive.

On arrival in the crash area they will find the lander with ease as it is at the centre of a firefight between a Widerstand company and a Kafer patrol. The location of the survivors is not known but the Widerstand fighters have seen at least one dead crewman with the Kafers and fear the rest have been taken back to the stronghold some 20km distant.

The patrol faces a dilemma; they can stay and help the Widerstand in their battle or chase after the survivors. The pursuit might not be successful as there are other Kafer patrols in the area and the survivors might be taken inside the stronghold. They then face the decision of whether to try and mount a rescue; if they do HQ might be able to get a single airstrike to aid them.

The extraction from the area might be even harder with the Kafers closing in and human civilians rising up to support the Widerstand and their 'liberators'. The players will face a moral challenge of whether to support the nascent uprising or not. They will also need to get the rescued survivors to an evacuation point to be uplifted by another lander or a transport.

PERSONNEL

PC's may be drawn from any of the national contingents or from groups of the Widerstand involved in the operation. However most will need to be members of PKR11, or alternatively another nation's reconnaissance or special forces unit. The patrol has room for a number of attachments who could come from a variety of backgrounds.

Oberleutnant Joachim Wolff

Wolff is the commander of the 2/PKR11 patrol. He is a regular Freiwehr soldier who has been promoted from the ranks and is quick thinking, gregarious and roguishly handsome. An ideal cavalry officer he is tactically astute and knows when to take risks. Raised in the Sudgarten he is a passionate Freihafener in his late 20s who has had a number of run-ins with some of his German colleagues. He is a veteran in ground military.

Unteroffizier Manfred Hackensellner

Hackensellner is the second in command of the 2/PKR11 patrol. He is a Munich born soldier who originally enlisted in the Bavarian Army and was posted to Garten, and after independence transferred to the Freiwehr. A highly skilled soldier he has served in parachute and commando units before settling in PKR11. He is a hard driving soldier who can be relied upon in most circumstances, although is very fond of alcohol. His relations with Wolff however are a little strained as he regards his superior as too willing to take risks.

Premier maitre Marie Forquet

Forquet is the pilot of the crashed *Zenith* class lander. A member of the crack 49e EACO she is one of the most experienced pilots in the MSIF and has seen action throughout the Kafer War from the *Dien Bien Phu*. She is a petite woman in her late 30s who is highly intelligent, driven and professional. This is not her first experience of being shot down as she lost a ROTON lander over Elysia and was captured by the *Maquis Verte*. She is determined not to repeat the experience.

Markus Bentler

Bentler is one of the German government's leading colonial governance trouble shooters. A Bavarian with a wide range of experience he has dealt with Governor Schmidt in the past and is a close confidant of the German President. A man used to the cut and thrust of politics and diplomacy but is uncomfortable with physical confrontation. Close contact with the Kafers in captivity may well prove too much for him.

Günther Brandt

Brandt is the leader of the local Widerstand second tier company. He is a former policeman who has gathered together his force of 70 over the last year with little help from outside. He has only limited supplies of heavy weapons and most of his small arms are hunting weapons, nevertheless he has succeeded in making himself a nuisance to the local Kafers. He is an honest and hardworking man who has only self-taught tactical skills.

49e EACO

49e EACO is a highly regarded French assault lander squadron. Equipped with the small VTOL capable *Zénith* landers it is able to bring troops in very close to target areas. Although nominally assigned to the *Dien Bien Phu* it has operated from numerous other ships and landed troops from half a dozen nations so far in the war.

Ex Machina

In this mission the patrol faces the easy possibility of biting off more than it can chew for a number of reasons. It may well request help which could come in a variety of forms. This could include airstrike, orbital bombardment or fresh troops. Any troops are likely to be a maximum of a company from the orbital reserve. These are most likely to be crack German troops, either marines from *Bismarck* or *Bayern*, commandos from Kdo.Abt.391 or landing specialists from Jg.Abt.381. Although troops from any contingent may be drawn upon.

Strikes with Anger

Strikes with Anger is the commander of the local Kafer garrison headquartered in the strongpoint. He is a veteran soldier who has learned much since his arrival on Dunkelheim. He is intrigued with the humans and has adapted to their tactics very quickly. His unit, designated CCDI-A2C is significantly under strength with only 200 soldiers but has numerous APCs and no fewer than four CAC-1s. The unit is scattered over the area but he is trying to concentrate it and hit hard against the human invaders and the Widerstand.

ICE COLD IN GOLDBERG

The wind borne dust whipped painfully against Anson's face as he dragged himself further from the burning Templer on bleeding elbows. He heard the screaming noise of hovercraft turbines and staccato popping of flying Kafer missiles and through the ground he could feel the rhythmic impact of artillery. Overpowering everything was the smell of his own burnt flesh...

The next thing he was aware of was a startled looking young Australian bandaging his wounds as pyres of smoke rose into the air behind him. It didn't look like rescue was coming any time soon.

SITUATION

In the aftermath of Op BERSHEEBA several soldiers both injured and able bodied were left behind in the tactical withdrawal from Killing Area CHAUVEL. In amidst the smashed bodies and vehicles a small party of survivors bands together only to find that friendly forces have since left the area and are en-route to Goldberg and the *Zitadelle*.

MISSION

The mission is simply to survive. The players will need to avoid the Kafer remnants beginning to roam the area, death at the mercy of Dunkelheim's elements or simple starvation.

EXECUTION

The PCs can take a number of routes for survival. They may attempt to walk out of the area but may lack rations and water and be at risk from mines or Kafer activity and may have a serious casualty. They may attempt to salvage radios but may lack the required codes to communicate effectively. They will probably aim to salvage a vehicle which may take a significant amount of time, and it might even be quicker to repair a Kafer vehicle. They will be under the threat of Kafer soldiers and even vehicles throughout.

Once they have escaped the immediate area they face the problem of where to travel to next, and navigation may be difficult without functioning satellite or inertial navigation. The PCs are also in between the remnants of two Kafer Battle Groups and will have to tread carefully to avoid becoming engaged. Indeed they may end up being tracked by vengeful Kafers.

The PCs may aim to travel in a number of directions, either back towards the LZ or towards one of the objectives. They will probably hope to run unto a friendly unit although if they are travelling in a Kafer vehicle this might make things even more difficult. The journey might have many twists and turns and involve many hardships but there might be some of life's simple pleasures at the end.

The Kafers

The enemy took a heavy blow from the allied attack and lost many vehicles destroyed. There are still many groups of infantry in the area however and these are beginning to reorganise, repair their equipment and begin patrolling.

Equipment

The PCs will find that most of their equipment and weapons are broken or out of rounds or battery power. There is much equipment in the area but most of it is in the same state and salvage is the order of the day. There are many vehicles of many different types around but almost all have been badly damaged, and ironically the Kafer vehicles are easier to repair than their human equivalents.

Op BERSHEEBA

Op BERSHEEBA was a highly successful spoiling attack by 37 Brigade. At the conclusion of the attack and with the destruction of most of the Kafer vanguard the Australian and British units withdrew from the battle-field, inevitably abandoning some of their members who could not be accounted for.

PERSONNEL

PC's may be drawn from any of the national contingents or from groups of the Widerstand who just happened to be in the area. The most likely source of PCs or NPCs are the Australians and British of 37 (Commonwealth) Brigade or Freihafener or German reconnaissance soldiers. The following are a selection of possible characters:

Sergeant Tom Anson

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland and in his mid-30s Tom Anson is the commander of an anti-tank team in the Gordon Highlanders. He is a gruff, stalwart and highly professional soldier whose APC was hit in the withdrawal. He is the only survivor from the vehicle and his hands and face are badly burned in the escape. He is very mechanically minded and is a heavy weapons expert. He is a Veteran in Ground Military.

Defender Theo van der Maast

A native of Bennelong, New Canberra, Theo – or ‘three names’ – is a scout in the 38 GUIDES and is in his early 20s. He was knocked unconscious during a dismounted assault on a Kafer ATGW position and was abandoned during an alien counter-attack. He has only just regained consciousness and is still dazed and more than a little confused. A young, brave but somewhat naive soldier he is an experienced NPC in Ground Military.

Leading Defender Allan Redmond

Al Redmond is a soldier in his late 20s from country Queensland. He is a tank gunner in 18 CAV who was forced to abandon his vehicle during the battle. He survived by playing dead and has since managed to locate some other stragglers. Al is a gregarious man, a fine soldier and is also a consummate survivor. He is a veteran in Ground Military.

Karl Hettich

Karl Hettich is in his early 30s and a native of Goldberg. He claims to be a Widerstand member whose group was involved in the surveillance of the area that became KA CHAUVEL. He is an individual who has clearly been under pressure for some time and has been living rough. He is armed with a variety of human and Kafer weapons and equipment. He has a good grasp of the ground and survival techniques for Dunkelheim. He is a veteran colonist and militia man.

Quislings

Quislings, or humans who collaborate with the Kafers, are a phenomenon encountered mostly on Beta Canum but has also occurred on other worlds. Many soldiers from the core who are taking part in the liberation can be suspicious about colonists who they may believe to be helping the Kafers.

Friendly Forces

At the conclusion of the operation forces from 37 Bde have withdrawn from the area. The only human units who might be in the area are reconnaissance elements tracking large Kafer movements which might be regular troops, special forces or Widerstand. Soon the Americans of TF NORMANDY will form to fix the Kafer remnants. However all these forces will be thin on the ground and may be hard to locate. Indeed they might also prove to be a tempting target for the Kafers themselves.

STAR CRUISER SCENARIOS

INTERDICTION

'Sir! Kafer Epsilon crossing shelf from Golf Hotel vector. Range 4 light seconds.'
'Where the hell has that come from? Someone covering our backsides has been sleeping!'
'Sir, ship appears to be damaged. Getting some inconsistent drive emissions. She seems to be signalling. Unknown profile, she's not in the database.'
'We'll take her, signal Illustrious to follow us after her, Seydlitz to cover us.'

Invincible Class

The Invincible Class is the most modern destroyer of the Royal Space Navy. It is robust and capable design that has performed well in the Kafer War so far.

Epsilon 90

Epsilon 90 is the designation given to Epsilon CG arriving at DM+36 2436. No positive ID has been made of this ship so it has been assigned the next available number. Human intelligence has not positively ID'd 90 Epsilons but many fleeting encounters have proved difficult to track.

Epsilon 90 is actually a relatively recent arrival on the French Arm and has been raiding in the area around Sans Souci. It has been damaged by a mine at a discharge point at Grosshiddenhafen and is now limping back to safety.

The ship is a standard Epsilon Class cruiser.

SITUATION

Gruppe H13 is covering the FTL shelf of DM+36 2436 on the vector out to Grosshiddenhafen. It has picked up the entry of a fugitive Kafer Epsilon class warship.

MISSION

The commander of Gruppe H13, Commodore Campbell, has ordered his two British destroyers in to engage and destroy the Kafer vessel.

EXECUTION

The map is set up with the Kafer ship in the middle of the first map. The British enter from the edge of the first map.

The British must destroy the Epsilon without losing a ship to win. The Kafer wins by destroying a British ship and transiting off the second map.

ORDER OF BATTLE

TF HERKULES

Indefatigable – British Invincible Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Ordnance carried: 16 x Longbow missiles

Illustrious – British Invincible Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Ordnance carried: 12 x Longbow missiles

Kafer

Epsilon 90 – Kafer Epsilon Class Cruiser (CQ-2)

Ordnance Carried: 20 x X-Ray missiles

Battle Damage: 10 hull hits, 5 drive hits, 2 x x1+1 dbl mounts destroyed.

BAIT

The grav pulse trigramme came in from the Minerva and Campbell swore softly. For the first time since the Second Battle of Beta Comae Berenices he felt real fear, since then he'd always been the hunter, now he wasn't even the hunted. He was a tethered goat. Bait. His squadron was battered and damaged and now six Kafer warships were bearing down on him.

SITUATION

Gruppe H13 has fought a convoy action in the DM+36 2436 system provoking a Kafer insertion in force into the Grosshiddenhafen system. Campbell's squadron has been recalled to act as bait for the Kafers and draw them deep into the system's minefields and expose them to counterattack. The rest of Lutke's fleet is massing but Campbell aims to survive to see the trap sprung.

MISSION

The squadron must draw the Kafers deeper into the system to allow other elements of Lutke's Task Force to infiltrate behind the Kafers.

EXECUTION

The map is set up with the British ships in the middle of the first map. The Kafers enter from the edge of the first map. The Anglo-German squadron must draw them into the second map and hold them there for at least two turns.

The humans get one point for holding each Kafer ship in the second map for two turns. They lose 2 points if a ship is destroyed. The Kafers get five points per human ship destroyed. Whoever gains a positive number of points is the victor.

ORDER OF BATTLE*TF HERKULES*

Indefatigable – British Invincible Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Ordnance carried: 12 x Longbow missiles

Illustrious – British Invincible Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Ordnance carried: 8 x Longbow missiles

Seydlitz – German General Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Ordnance carried: 12 x Donnerweter missiles

6 x Mine Hexes

Kafer Squadron

2 x Kafer Alpha Class Battleships (CQ-1)

Ordnance Carried: 10 x Whiskey missiles

1 x Kafer Beta Class Battlecruiser (CQ-2)

Ordnance Carried: 10 x Whiskey missiles

3 x Kafer Epsilon Class Cruiser (CQ-2)

Ordnance Carried: 30 x X Ray missiles

**Seydlitz**

The Seydlitz is a German destroyer of the General Class, which was a Bavarian licence build of the French Maréchal Class. Sometimes seen as 'second class destroyers' and treated with suspicion by some in the DSKM who fear the French know too much about them these ships have performed with alacrity in the war so far. The Seydlitz in particular has won glory for its role as one of the raiders of Grosshiddenhafen.

Mines

Mine warfare in 2300AD revolves around the use of autonomously packaged submunitions which are triggered by a variety of passive and active close range sensors.

The mines deployed in the Grosshiddenhafen system are 5x2 devices. Each hex has a number of devices. Each time a ship comes into a neighbouring hex a mine can fire (CQ 0) and a D10 roll is made and if a 0 or 1 is rolled then no more mines will be fired from that hex.

Gustav Class

The small and agile Gustav Class Fighter was the pinnacle of Bavarian fighter design. It is a dual role fighter capable of engaging large warships effectively with its submunitions. The Reunification has seen its rate of construction drop slightly as the new DSKM concentrates on heavier fighters designed to spar with the French Martels.

Wespe Class

The Wespe is a Hanoverian designed fighter that has become one of the key designs of the DSKM. A pure and survivable superiority fighter designed to counter the Martel it has proven itself on numerous occasions against the Kafers.

Foxtrot Class

The Foxtrot Class fighter is one of the lightest of the Kafer small ships. It is however lacking in agility when compared with most human fighter craft.

FURBALL

The wave of fighters erupted from the squadron and raced out towards the world of Dunkelheim where the battleline of battleships clustered. The Kafer fighters responded, flying out to protect their big ships. Light lanced silently between them and men and aliens began to die in the hard cold.

SITUATION

A massive fighter battle preceded the main action of the Second Battle of Dunkelheim. In one section of this a strike group of 25 SJG from the *Graf Zeppelin* with four Wespe fighters escorting the same number Gustav fighters on a mission to attack a Kafer auxiliary squadron encountered six Foxtrot fighters of KFS642.

MISSION

The German commander must move his Wespe fighters towards the opposite edge to attack a Kafer squadron off the map, at the same time protecting them with his Gustavs. The Kafer commander must disrupt the human attack on the Oscar Class auxiliaries.

EXECUTION

A single map page is set up with the two sides entering from opposite sides. The humans gain two points for every Gustav that exits the opposite edge in under eight turns. The Kafers gain two points for each Gustav destroyed, one point for each Gustav forced to fire its submunitions and one for each Wespe destroyed. The side with most points wins.

ORDER OF BATTLE

TF HERKULES

4 x Gustav Fighters – German Gustav Class Fighters (CQ+2)

4 x Wespe Fighters – German Wespe Class Fighters (CQ+2)

Kafer

6 x Foxtrot Class Fighters – Kafer Foxtrot Class Fighters (CQ-2)

BATTLELINE

There are battles won by guile, stealth and tactical ability. Our time with Borodin had shown us most of these. Then there are battles won by standing toe to toe with the enemy. Dunkelheim was the latter, and our much battle scarred Bismarck and her crew were again to pay the price.

SITUATION

The climax of the 2nd Battle of Dunkelheim is approaching as the heavy units of Task Force Herkules close on the remnants of Task Force Tango in orbit above Dunkelheim. The fighter fleets of both sides are rearming so the surviving ships must battle toe to toe for control of the orbits above Dunkelheim.

MISSION

Admiral Lutke must drive the Kafers from Dunkelheim orbit. To do so he will rely on his three capital ships. His missile supplies are low and his fighters are out of action rearming. The Kafers must extract as high a price as possible from the humans and then escape with whatever ships can still move to fight again another day.

EXECUTION

A single map is set up with the planet counter in the middle representing the planet of Dunkelheim. The Kafers must set up within two hexes of the planet hex. The humans will enter from the edge, and the Kafers may place five radiation hexes between themselves and the humans. The Kafers must defend the planet until half of their ships are disabled, at that time they may retreat to the other edge of the board at best speed. The Kafers gain two points for every human ship disabled, if they reach ten points then they win, they draw if the score more than six points.

ORDER OF BATTLE*Task Force HERKULES*

Bismarck – German Bismarck Class Battlecruiser (CQ+4) – 8 x SR10 missiles

Bayern – German Bayern Class Battleship (CQ+2)

Montrose – British Nelson Class Cruiser (CQ+3) 4 x Ritage-2 missiles

Rotterdam – German Stadt Class Destroyer (CQ+2)

Fulda – German Stadt Class Destroyer (CQ+2)

Richelieu – French Richelieu Class Battleship (CQ+3)

Gloire – French Gloire Class Cruiser (CQ+3) – 6 x Ritage-2 missiles

Marechal Ney – French Marechal Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Lansquenet – French Soldat Class Destroyer (CQ+3)

Imperieuse – French Fantasque Class Frigate (CQ+3)

Jefferson – American Kennedy Class Cruiser (CQ+4) – 6 SIM-14 missiles

Brisbane – Australian Voyager Class Destroyer (CQ+3) – 4 x SIM-14 missiles

Cayuga – American Cayuga Class Frigate (CQ+2)

Sioux – American Cayuga Class Frigate (CQ+2)

Kafer Squadron

2 x Improved Alpha BBs, 1 x Alpha BB, 2 x Beta BCs and 3 x Epsilon CGs all CQ+2 with 50% missile loads

Ship Stats

There are several ships in this scenario without stats. Simply substitute a suitable similar ship from the same class.

AUTHOR'S NOTES



Operation OVERLORD

Operation OVERLORD was the invasion of Western Europe through Normandy in France by the Allies against the forces of Nazi Germany under the overall command of General Eisenhower and is regarded as lasting from 6 Jun to 25 Aug 1944.

The first day alone involved eight full divisions with 130 000 American, British and Canadian troops and saw 10 000 Allied casualties. Off shore there were 7000 allied ships involved. In the end Allied forces involved rose to some 1 ½ million men from over 10 nations. The end of the campaign came with the Battle of the Falaise Gap and with 220 000 Allied and 400 000 German casualties in total.

The destruction of the German army in West led to the liberation of France, but was not able to be exploited to decisively defeat Germany in 1944.

It should be noted that no formed bodies of US Marines were involved in land operations during Operation Overlord. The US Marines were almost entirely committed to the war in the Pacific against Japan. A campaign in which they acquitted themselves magnificently.

The liberation of Dunkelheim was first described in the module 'Operation: Overlord' written by Clare Hess. This described the liberation as being entirely conducted by a brigade of the US Marine Corps. However it has proved to be one of the more controversial 2300AD modules and many find it very unsatisfactory, even its very title is a matter of annoyance for the historically minded.

Operation HERKULES is my take on the liberation of Dunkelheim. It makes no claim to canon status, but hopefully is a little more realistic than previous attempts. The size of the invasion force is based on what I see are the requirements for an assault on such a defended target given a realistic defending force. The numbers of Kafers on Dunkelheim are based on numbers of Kafers on Aurore as described in the Aurore Sourcebook and Kafer Dawn and a realistic appraisal of how many troops would be required to hold the population of Dunkelheim in check.

Operation: Overlord and Invasion depict a Kafer occupation and resistance movement limited to the area around Goldberg and the spaceport. This module attempts to include the rest of the planet in the occupation, although the action is concentrated around Goldberg and the spaceport.

Op: Overlord has the Kafer force as a meagre body of less than 1000 Kafers holding the spaceport. This is a force which is when concentrated in such an area would have resulted in there being no practical occupation at all for most Dunkelheimers. Invasion similarly depicts Governor Schmidt's resistance as a relatively easy matter of repeated ambushes against bungling Kafers.

The decision to give overall command of space operations to Admiral Graham, and the Adlerhorst Alliance is taken from Operation Back Door by J Gammon. I don't agree, however, with Gammon's conclusions about the nature of French power and the development of the Adlerhorst Alliance as a counterweight, especially given America's closeness to France in canon.

This sourcebook is rather wordy and detailed and I might no apologies for this. It is an attempt to follow through a major ground campaign in as great a detail as possible while still offering adventure and gaming opportunities.

Bibliography

The key works from 2300AD canon are Invasion, Ground Vehicle Guide and Aurore Sourcebooks. 3W's Operation: Overlord is worth a read, but militarily is unrealistic.

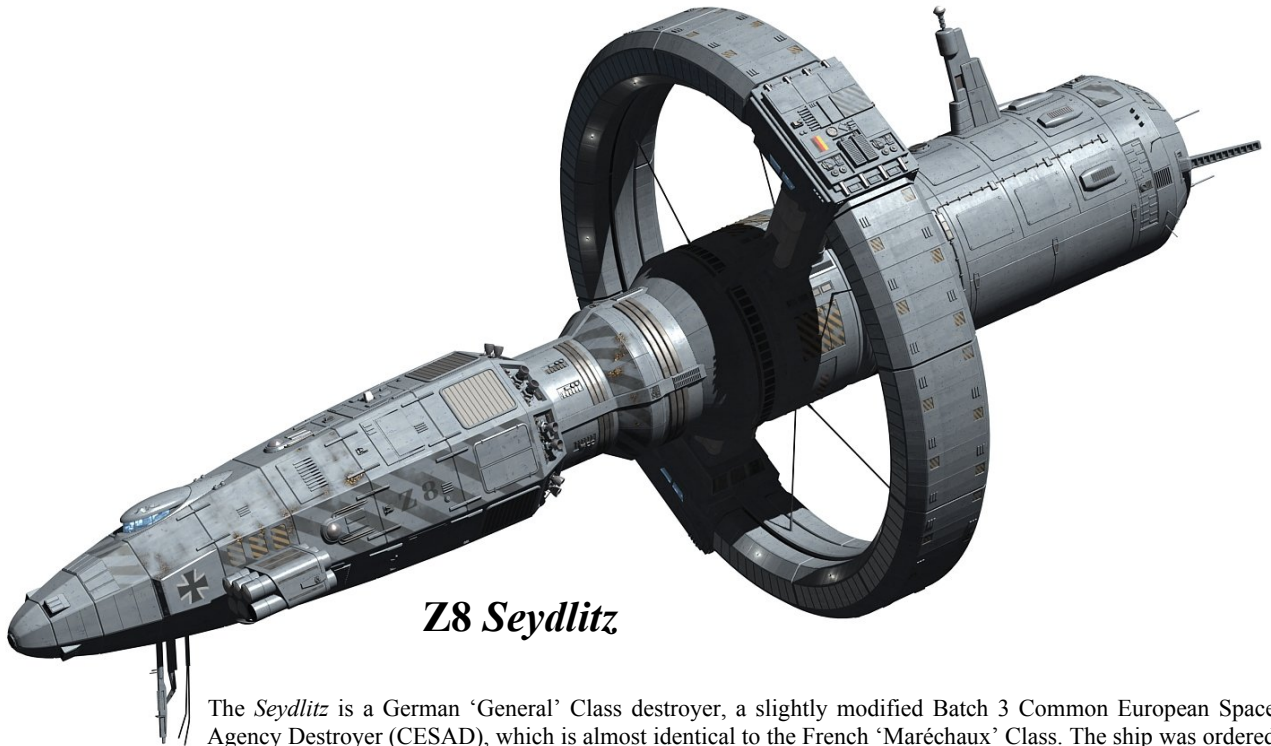
The organisations, weapons and starships used in this sourcebook are drawn predominantly from the Etranger webpage:

<http://www.etranger.org.uk/2300/Admin/Index1.htm>

Jonathon Pearson's discussion of orbital assault in 2300 is at:
<http://www.etranger.org.uk/2300/Articles/RWJSI/JPLec02.htm>

Bryn Monnery's British RSN warships are at:
<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/9292/2300/UKCV.htm>

COLOUR PLATES



Z8 Seydlitz

The *Seydlitz* is a German 'General' Class destroyer, a slightly modified Batch 3 Common European Space Agency Destroyer (CESAD), which is almost identical to the French 'Maréchaux' Class. The ship was ordered by the pre-Reunification Bavarian government but was completed and commissioned into German service. There were five ships built in this class but later funding was concentrated into the development of German native designs like the 'Rotterdam Class'. *Seydlitz* has seen heavy action in the war and was present at the 2nd Battle of BCB where her sister ship *Lützow* was destroyed along with three other ships.

The ship then operated in a mainly British squadron operating out of Grosshiddenhafen and also fought at 64 Ursae Majoris, Henry's Star and BCV. The ship's crew are highly experienced and well drilled under the command of Kapitan Kessler and were heavily involved in the early shaping operations on the fringes of DM+36 2393 and was heavily damaged at 2nd Grosshiddenhafen.

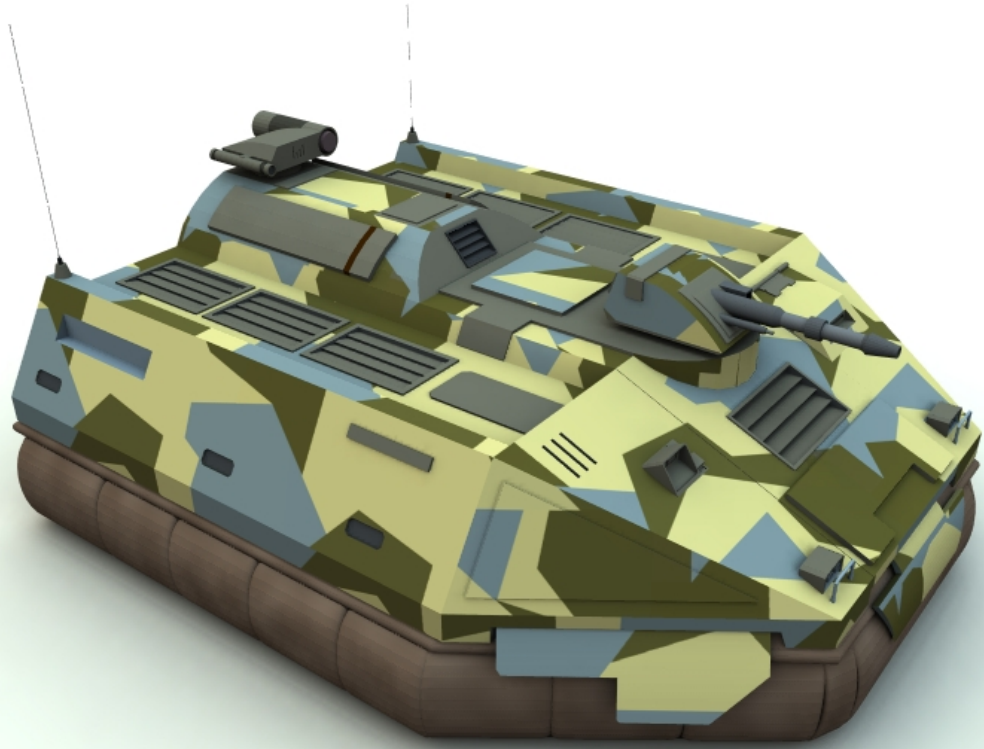
CGS-25 USS *John F Kennedy*

The *Kennedy* is the eldest of the eponymous class of 'Fast Missile Carriers'; lightning fast, hard hitting, although sometimes vulnerable, cruisers that were the most high profile American contribution to the war against the Kafers.

Kennedy served with the Reserve Fleet at Beowulf where she led a squadron which repeatedly struck at the flanks of the Kafer force in contact with the main Terran line of battle. She then went on to play a key role in scattering the Kafer survivors at Kimanjano, before forming part of an all-American TF29 patrolling the vulnerable links of the French Arm.

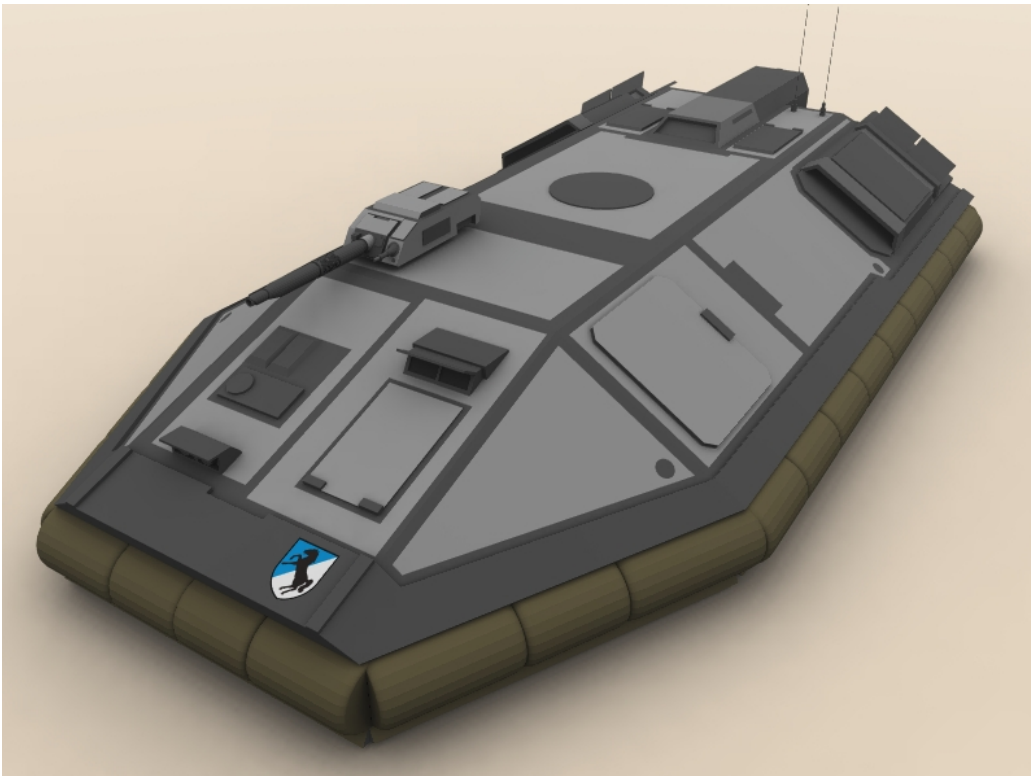
TF29 became an integral part of Task Force HERKULES as Staffel H23 with the addition of the Australian destroyer *Brisbane*. The squadron was involved in several key actions during the campaign filling reserve, screening and strike roles with alacrity. The *Kennedy* escaped without major damage, although twice almost completely deplete her missile magazines.





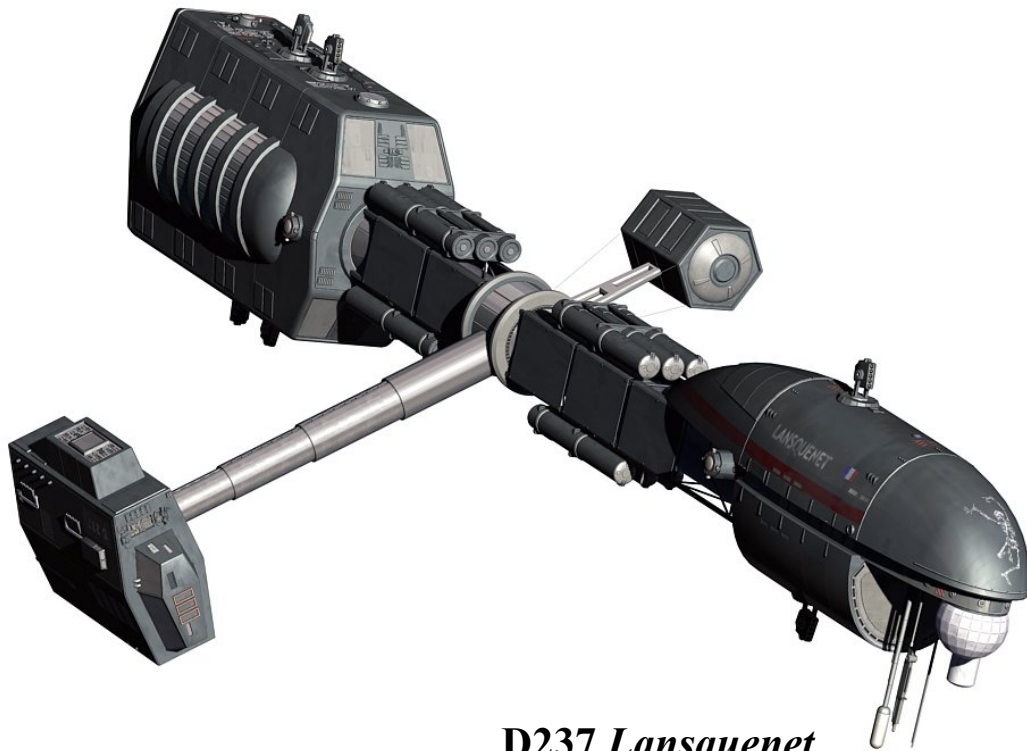
LkGfPzTr-XIII

The LkGfPzTr-XIII is a specialised infantry assault vehicle used by Germany's crack 'drachenzahnetruppen' and is designed to drop assault troops directly inside an enemy position. The Aufs B model used on Dunkelheim by LkGfPzGren.Abt 4 are more heavily armoured than the original models and have a number of other improvements including widened drop hatches to allow easier disembarkation. Despite their specialist training LkGfPzGren.Abt 4 were most often used as a high value reserve or assault force during Op HERKULES. The XIII is externally very similar to the LkPzTr-VIII which is the standard German HAPC, especially now the LkPzTr-VIIIB also has the remote rear turret making positive identification of these high value units very difficult.



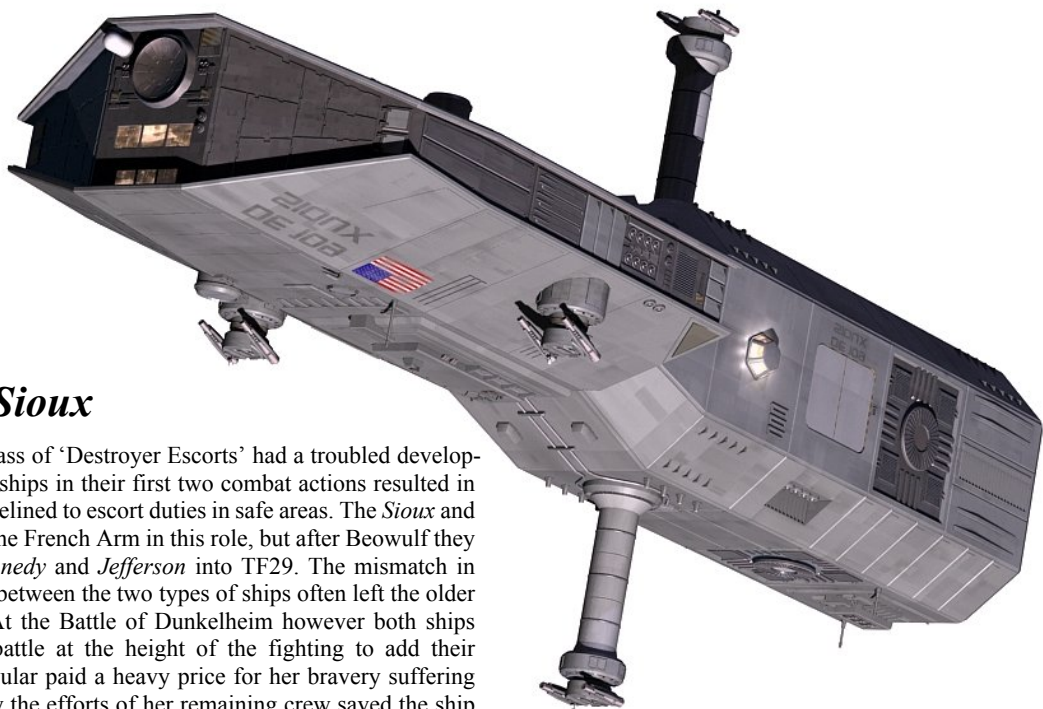
LkSpPz-3 Shattenkatze

The LkSpPz-3 is a cutting edge Freihafen reworking of the venerable LkPzTr-V. It is a highly capable and stealthy reconnaissance vehicle capable of operating over huge distances. While designed to avoid confrontations with heavily armed opponents it has a respectable armament suite capable of countering its enemy counterparts or break contact from front line AFVs. The LkSpPz-3 is the most common AFV in PKR11 and proved itself on numerous occasions and also gained a strong media profile due to its presence in the vanguard of most operations during Op HERKULES.



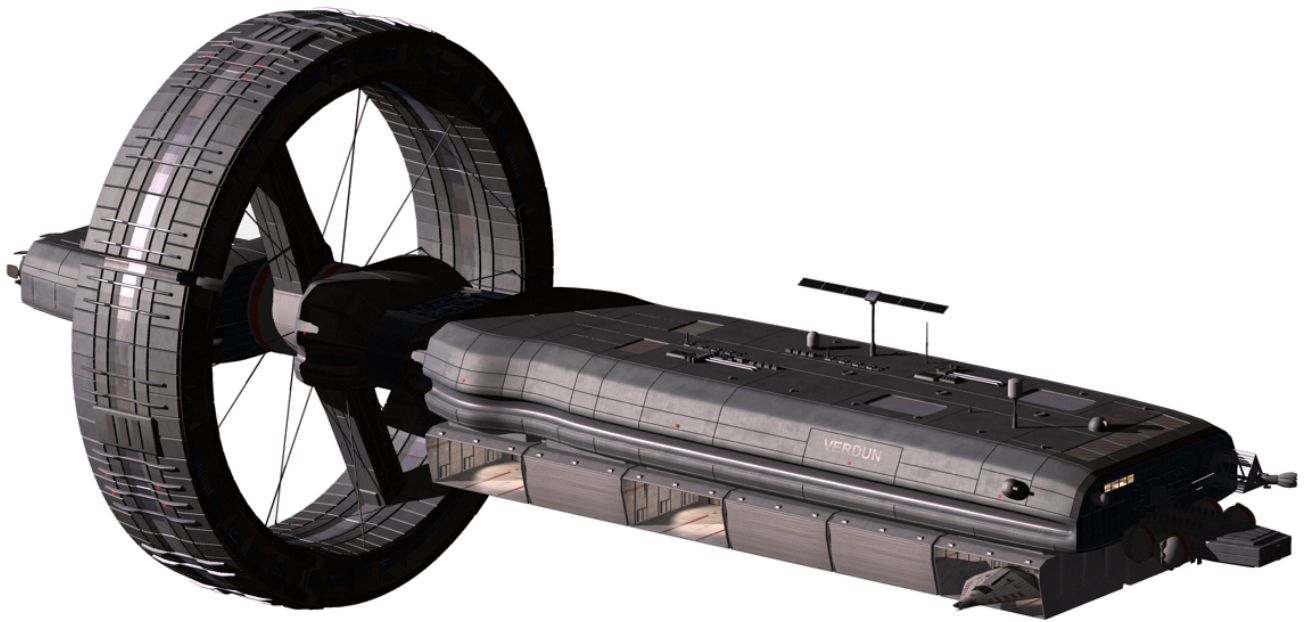
D237 *Lansquenet*

The *Lansquenet* is a French warship of the 'Soldat' Class which is the current mainstay of the French destroyer fleet. *Lansquenet* has seen heavy action throughout the war as part of Rochemont's Third Fleet, often operating independently with the *Marechal Ney* and gaining great fame as a commerce raider. Her charismatic skipper warship Jaqueline Ardant has the ear of Rochemont and the respect of many of the other captains operating on the fringes of the main force. The destroyer saw heavy action in all phases of HERKULES and took significant damage while crippling a large number of opponents in several engagements. It should be noted that the ship is shown carrying extemporised applique armour protecting the vulnerable midships area.



DE-109 USS *Sioux*

The American Cayuga Class of 'Destroyer Escorts' had a troubled development and the loss of two ships in their first two combat actions resulted in the ships being largely sidelined to escort duties in safe areas. The *Sioux* and *Cayuga* were present on the French Arm in this role, but after Beowulf they were combined with *Kennedy* and *Jefferson* into TF29. The mismatch in combat power and speed between the two types of ships often left the older ships in a reserve role. At the Battle of Dunkelheim however both ships closed into the line of battle at the height of the fighting to add their firepower. *Sioux* in particular paid a heavy price for her bravery suffering severe casualties and only the efforts of her remaining crew saved the ship from abandonment. She has since been returned to Queen Alice's Star for emergency repairs before being returned to Earth for refit.



L-4 Dien Bien Phu

The *Dien Bien Phu*, or DBP is a French assault ship of the Verdun Class designed to land large numbers of troops on a world with its large compliment of landing craft and shuttles. DBP saw repeated action as the main assault ship assigned to Rochemont's Third Fleet and has landed troops in action at Joi, Crater and Beta Canum. The ships also serves as the flagship of the French commander of the landing phase of Op HERKULES, Vice Admiral Doumer. In addition to its normal compliment of French landers the ship also embarked USMC Helldivers which were involved in the insertion of special forces and raiders onto the surface of Dunkelheim.



CIT/A-14 HELLDIVER III

The Helldiver is the USMC's own specialist assault lander which supplements the US Space Force's heavier CIT-IIIs. The Helldiver is a highly manoeuvrable vehicle with a significant weapon payload and is most often used in support of Recon and Raider elements. The Helldiver is limited by a relatively small cargo hold which restricts it to carrying only small soft skinned vehicles or dismounted troops. Its is highly popular with both its pilots and troops it lands due to its speed and stealth. This particular Helldiver is flown by the USMC's VMLA-232 'Red Devils' squadron which provided these craft for HERKULES.

OPERATION HERKULES

A steady stream of slow moving 12.1mm APHE Kafer bullets exploded against the armour of the Kz-VII combat walker, the pilot twisted out of the line of fire only to walk directly into the path of an anti-tank rocket. The debris showered around the firing position of Obergefreiter März, forcing him into cover. His company of Fallschirmjäger had been only a dozen kilometres or so from the capital Goldberg and making good progress. Now they were in the centre of a Kafer counter attack that threatened to overrun them, there option was to stand and fight, and die if they had to. To free Dunkelheim they just had to get through to Goldberg.

SITUATION

The German colony of Dunkelheim was occupied by the Kafers in June 2301. The surviving population has been terrorised and hunted by Kafer ground forces and their world used as a base for invasions of other human colony worlds. A year and a half later humanity is on the counter attack after the victory at Beowulf. Help is finally on its way to the colonists and the brave guerrillas of the Widerstand. Dunkelheim is the last human world under Kafer rule and it must be freed.

MISSION

With a force of over 30 warships, dozens of transport vessels and three fighting divisions of ground troops Admiral Lutke and General Schneider must overcome the Kafer fleet and orbital defences to allow their forces to begin to assault the planet below. Once on the ground they will face a massed Kafer mechanised assault attempting to destroy the human invaders while they are most vulnerable. If they survive that threat they must secure their landing grounds and begin to liberate the colonists from 40 000 aliens.

EXECUTION

On the multinational fleet of assault ships, transports and liners thousands of human soldiers prepare for action that they know will result in hundreds of casualties. Crack German panzergrenadiers and jägers will spearhead the assault but they will have plenty of support. US Marines and Airborne will join forces with Freihafeners, Australians and British Highlanders in combat against the battle hardened Kafer legions.



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