

CHOPPERBLITZ

HELICOPTERS IN PANZERBLITZ

by Phil Kosnett

The helicopter was invented in the early 1930's, but few people—especially in the military—took it seriously. It was just too ugly, too clumsy looking—and how could you ever mount weapons on anything so fragile? Apparently these men forgot that the airplane had once been slow, fragile, and clumsy. In any event, no country had an organized program to develop military helicopters. The only use of a helicopter in World War II (to my knowledge) was a single British chopper which evacuated casualties in Burma—one man at a time.

But, what if things had been different? Postulate: In 1935 Hitler hears of a new kind of aircraft being developed by an American named Sikorsky. Hitler, the first sponsor of *blitzkrieg* tanks and planes, is eager to add the helicopter to Germany's arsenal. Goering takes the Fuehrer's pet project under his wing, ever eager to gain favor. By 1938, the Luftwaffe has test-flown helicopters which can carry ten heavily armed men into battle, and tank-buster copters armed with twin 20mm cannon have shown their worth in secret trials. Still, Goering considers the copters unnecessary, just like the jets that have been tested. After all, the war is only going to last a few months. So when the Wehrmacht charges into Poland, there are no helicopters overhead.

Twenty-one months later, however, the situation has radically changed. Crete had shown that the Luftwaffe's gliders and paratroops were too vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire. Perhaps the long forgotten helicopters could bring back to Germany the vertical envelopment capability lost over Crete. And *Fall Barbarossa* was only three weeks away... A furious construction program is undertaken, dozens of utility and tank-buster copters being cranked out of factories in Schweinfurt and Regensburg. General Kurt Student's XI Air Corps paras (those who were left after Crete) undergo a crash course in helicopter tactics. When the Wehrmacht crosses into the Soviet Union, three helicopter battalions are with them.

RULES: MOVEMENT

Helicopter units (both Utility and Attack) have twenty Movement Points. It costs Helicopters one MP to enter any hex; *i.e.*, they ignore the effects of terrain. Helicopters can be at either of three levels. At High Level, units may move over enemy units. At Low Level, units may not move over enemy units (buzzing the enemy in such a fashion would be foolhardy). At Ground Level, units may not move. Movement between levels costs four MPs, and landing (moving to Ground Level) costs ten MPs. Units may land only in all clear terrain hexes.

COMBAT

Attack Helicopter units represent five vehicles armed with two twenty millimeter cannon. Utility Helicopters are unarmed. The Attack Helicopters may only fire their weapons while at Low Level. Helicopters may spot and fire over woods and hills while at High or Low Level, but may only spot into woods or town hexes if they are at Low Level, adjacent to the hex. Helicopters may spot for friendly ground units. The Attack Helicopter's weapons are treated as normal 'A' weapons, doubled when firing at half range or less. Helicopters may move up to five hexes on a turn they fire their weapons.

Helicopters at High Level can be attacked only by 12.7mm MG units; the range of the MG is cut to four hexes due to the problems of elevation. Helicopters at Low Level may be attacked normally by infantry, cavalry, and halftrack units, by 12.7mm

MG units (at normal range), or by tanks, tank destroyers, and assault guns. All tanks, TDs, and AGs attack Helicopters with a strength of '4', to a range of four hexes. This strength represents the 12.7mm MG sometimes turret-mounted on the vehicles. (True, they were seldom available, but the Soviets need some AA capability or the Helicopters would be invulnerable.) Helicopters at Ground Level are treated as normal soft targets with a DF of '1'. The only time artillery can attack Helicopters is when they are at Ground Level. Helicopters at Ground Level may be attacked by close assault or overrun. When firing at a Helicopter at either Low or High Level, terrain is ignored; this is because the Helicopter is above the terrain.

STACKING

An unlimited number of Helicopters may occupy High or Low Level airspace. Helicopters at Ground Level count against the normal German stacking limit of three.

TRANSPORT

Utility Helicopters may carry infantry units in the same manner as trucks. They may *not* carry artillery units. To load, the Helicopter spends a full turn at Ground Level in the same hex as the infantry. To unload, the Helicopter moves to Ground Level and the infantry dismounts.

COMBAT RESULTS

'X' destroys the Helicopter and any passenger. 'D' means that the Helicopter cannot fire next turn, but it may move; the pilots are worried more about getting out of the way or moving toward their objective than returning fire. 'DD' result means that the Helicopter may not fire next turn and may not move next turn; the Helicopter is immediately placed at High Level. This represents the pilots evading fire by moving vertically out of range. 'D' or 'DD' results scored against Helicopters at Ground Level prevent the Helicopter from loading or lifting off. Helicopters, being unarmored, do not become Wrecks.

FACING

By now you're probably wondering how you're going to keep track of Level and dispersion state without paperwork. The best way is to face the units: towards the Northeast means High Level; East means High Level dispersed; Southeast means High Level special dispersed; Southwest means Low Level; West means Low Level dispersed; Northwest means Ground Level; Northwest inverted means Ground Level dispersed. It's easier than it sounds, and much better than paperwork. Just be sure both players know what the facings mean.

SCENARIOS

Unfortunately, there are no historical scenarios showing the uses of helicopters in World War II, so we'll have to make due with hypothetical situations showing how they *probably* would have been used. For this, I have borrowed heavily from U.S. doctrine, which defines the role of heliborne troops as *vertical envelopment*. Vertical envelopment means making commando raids in the enemy rear, dropping in front of advancing friendly ground forces to assist their progress, taking key terrain features by surprise and holding them until reached by ground forces, and moving quickly to troubled sectors to delay advancing enemy forces. (In the only war fought in which helicopters were widely used, Vietnam, vertical envelopment usually meant search and destroy sweeps and rescue missions. But

the U.S. Army expects to make greater use of helicopters for conventional combat in any future high-intensity war. That is why there are two airmobile divisions stationed in Germany.) The major drawback to the use of helicopters is that they cannot be successfully used unless there is friendly local air superiority. Therefore these scenarios only extend until 1943, when the Luftwaffe lost any chance of even air *parity* at Kursk.

COMMENTARY

If these Helicopters seem slow, remember that they aren't jet-powered. The inability of the Helicopters to land on hilltops will cause problems, especially in Situations #3 and #6. If you wish to convert this system to *PanzerLeader*, be sure to give the copters to the Allies—the Germans could never contest the airspace with sufficient certainty to commit Helicopters. And feel free to change these situations; you should use the Realspace Line-of-Sight rule with them.