

Kampfgruppe Nicolussi-Leck (Nico) Action Germany April 4th – 12th 1945

[Kampfgruppe Nicolussi-Leck also known as Kampfgruppe “Wiking”]

History

Karl Nicolussi-Leck was a Hauptsturmführer belonging to the 5th SS Wiking Panzer Division, being one of its Panzer Company leaders and one of Germany's leading tank ACES with well over 100 kills to his and his crew's names. After the 3rd Operation Balaton (relief of Budapest - Hungary), the division had suffered extremely heavy casualties and was in desperate need of replacement vehicles and men, especially tanks and other armoured vehicles. *Standartenführer* “Ullrich” the divisional commander sent Hauptsturmführer Nicolussi-Leck along with 150 selected tank soldiers to Germany to collect new vehicles. Upon arrival at Hesselteich near Gutersloh it was found that there was no way of making it to Paderborn where the collection of the tanks was supposed to take place. Hauptsturmführer Nicolussi-Leck found the way blocked and so sent Obersturmführer Ola Olin (a Finn) along with 30 other ranks to investigate a way through and find transport for all. These troops made it to Harsewinkel just as the U.S. 5th Armoured Division was entering the town. Olin and his group came under fire and began to retreat taking light casualties in the process. They were able to reach Lubbecke via Versmold and Melle.

Whilst this was going on Nico (as Nicolussi-Leck was also known) and his group armed only with pistols (initially) set-off on their way to Lubbecke. Olin and his group arrived in Lubbecke and requisitioned several wood gas powered trucks and proceeded to join Nico and his troops. These two groups met and set off for Minden arriving on the 4th April 1945. It was at Minden that the Kampfgruppe was to score its first of many tank kills and collect more personal weapons for themselves. At Minden the Mayor (Dr Holle) had refused to allow the bridge to be blown by “Oberst Wiese”. It was now that a German Panzer IV appeared driven by British troops of the 6th Airborne Division. This started to fire upon the truck/s of Oberst Wiese and his men using high explosive. It was Obersturmführer Olin who now came forward (he and his men had managed to find a large supply of Panzerfausts), Olin ran to the bridge, took careful aim and fired. The Panzer IV was hit and went up in flames taking its 5 British crewmen with it. This was the first victory of the Kampfgruppe - **more** were to follow – lots more.

The following day the Kampfgruppe headed for Buckeburg, where (via) they discovered a vehicle depot containing 13 armoured personnel carriers, 2 equipped with 20mm cannons. (These carriers being of the Sd.Kfz 250 and 251 series the 20mm cannons probably being Sd.Kfz 250/9 though this cannot be confirmed). On the 6th of April the Kampfgruppe drove on towards and through the city of “Hannover” in these vehicles where the local inhabitants treated them as heroes. Here they were given orders to assist in the defence of “Hannover” and its surrounding area. Nico's forces made up the only mobile force in the area and his orders read as follows: -

“Strike hard and fast, disengage quickly from the enemy who has at least - a ten fold superiority in numbers and arms. Mobility is the watch word and survival”

Nicolussi-Leck was ordered by the area commandant of Hannover “Generalmajor Paul Loehning” (ex commandant of Stalingrad, Kharkov, Poltava and many other towns since September 1943), to take up position along the “Reichstrasse 6”. It was here that the U.S. 84th Infantry Division (under Major-General Alexander R. Bolling 13th Corps, 9th U.S. Army), was expected to attack from the west. Backing up Nicolussi-Leck's Kampfgruppe was the 25th Flak Regiment. This was fact more than likely a Luftwaffe Flakdivision of the Interior (layout shown below in this article) equipped with 258+ Flak guns (88 and 105mm) being used in the ground support role. This Regiment or Flak Division was stationed in and around Hannover and during the war had managed to shoot down one in every ten allied bombers attacking the city. It should also be mentioned here that the batteries that went to make up this Flak Regiment/Flak Division were not just based in the city of Hannover but spread out around the surrounding townships and villages. During that day this small Kampfgruppe of “Wikingers” (Vikings) beat off two attacks destroying a number of enemy tanks (Sherman's) Nicolussi-Leck even adding to his own toll of enemy tanks destroyed by one.

It was on the 8th April 1945 that Nicolussi-Leck learned from an employee of the local “Hanomag” factory nearby, that there were some serviceable tanks within its grounds. Nicolussi-Leck immediately took off for the factory with some hand picked tank crews and, upon his arrival, could barely believe his own eyes. For there before him sat seven pre-production Sd.Kfz 173 Jagdpanthers and one Sd.Kfz 179 Panzer-Bergegerät or Bergepanther recovery vehicle. (**Note:** - These were pre-production vehicles and not part of the official 392 Jagdpanthers produced). These vehicles though, were still equipped with the deadly and formidable 88mm L71 gun. The vehicles were immediately fuelled, armed and added to the fighting composition of the Kampfgruppe. Gun sights were collected from Scheve near Celle. It was also here that they found large supplies of fuel for both the armoured carriers and the Jagdpanthers. Nicolussi-Leck even went so far as to sign for the vehicles whilst collecting them from the factory.

The Kampfgruppe was now no longer a purely defensive unit, but had become a **True Beast of Prey** that was about to go out for lunch. (**It should be noted here, that all of Nico's troops in their own right were tank aces, and now they had one of, if not the best tank destroyer of the war**). That afternoon was spent test firing the weapons on a range to 2000 metres with a 100% success rate

for each vehicle at that range, 98% at 2500m. Once this was completed, Nicolussi-Leck placed these tank destroyers in well chosen positions in the Hildesheim area. **It was here that he expected the Americans to attack to take Hannover.**

The 84th U.S. Infantry Division was meant to start its attack on the 9th April 1945 with the aid of the 771st armoured battalion, equipped with 53 tanks – mainly Sherman's (**equipped with 75 and a few 76mm**) and a detachment of M10 tank destroyers belonging to the 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Due to some intelligence from a prisoner, the attack was delayed for 24 hours. On the day of the attack the 335th Infantry Regiment along with its limited armoured support (from the, 771st Armoured Battalion) run straight into two batteries of heavy flak guns at Dedensen and Lathwehren. The 334th Regiment run into two more heavy flak batteries at Heisterberg and later Langenhaven. These four batteries achieved good successes on the attacking forces. The first two firing until running completely out of ammunition (whereupon they they destroyed/spiked their guns). The latter two under Oberstleutnant Rottger, fought on until they were finally destroyed. All four of these batteries had been heavy (88/105mm with there compliment of various 20mm light and 37mm flak guns assigned to support them).

These guns had caused a lot of damage not just to the armoured units of the 84th Infantry Division but also its infantry regiments. Firing over open sights they caused the 84th Infantry Divisions forces to retreat, BUT far worse was to follow!! The 333rd Infantry Regiment, in reserve and without armour support found a river crossing over the River Leine and was heading towards Hannover practically unopposed without the Divisional commander knowing.

That morning Nicolussi-Leck had moved his Wiking kampfguppe with its seven Jagdpanthers, thirteen armoured personal carriers and one Bergepanther to a new location at Frielingen and Ricklingen near the bridges over the River Leine. This move by Nicolussi-Leck proved to be an exceptionally clever tactical move that was to cost the Americans dearly. This kampfguppe was the only mobile armoured group in the whole Hannover area. After the days earlier disasters Major-General Bolling re-grouped his forces and sent the 11th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (which had just been attached to him from the 13th Corps reserve) towards these bridges. When the 11th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment set off everything was at first very peaceful and serene. Suddenly, at a range of 2000+ metres they came under fire from three Jagdpanthers and armoured carriers hidden in camouflaged positions just outside of Ricklingen.

The Americans immediately called down heavy artillery fire on Ricklingen but the Jagdpanthers managed to retreat and take up new ambushing positions in the village of Horst. The Americans attempted to attack these units of Nicolussi-Leck kampfguppe from three sides but the iron nerve and combat experience of the "Wikings" did not waver. Instead the Americans found themselves coming under devastating fire power from the "Wikings" at ranges of well over 2000 metres. In this the first major battle of this kampfguppe they destroyed approximately 60 tanks and other armoured vehicles for no losses to themselves.

After the war, whilst still a prisoner of the Americans, Nicolussi-Leck was informed, that on that day he had destroyed one of the best equipped and trained Reconnaissance Regiments they [the Americans] had.

The surviving units/companies under the command of Colonel Fierson then set off for Bordenau in an attempt to cross over the river Leine. These units got as far as Bordenau without any trouble, **BUT** then on the way to Frielingen they again came under fire from Nicolussi-Leck's forces. This time running into four Jagdpanthers and some of his troop carriers. The tank destroyers began firing at long range (over 2,500 metres). One of the most forward of the Jagdpanthers claimed six tanks destroyed before it in turn was hit by a lucky shot from heavy artillery and burned out. Nicolussi-Leck also lost one troop carrier in this fight this again caused by the American heavy artillery. By contrast the Americans lost over 30 tanks, and an unknown number of other light armoured vehicles. This effectively brought about the end of the offensive of the American 84th Infantry division on Hannover from these directions. Nicolussi-Leck now retired his forces back from the burning villages of Frielingen and Horst towards the east around the Vinnhorst and Nordhafen area.

The next morning the Americans entered Hannover with the aid of the Hannover Mayor "Borner", District President "Binding" and Police Chief "Deuschbein". These three had ordered the General in charge of the defence of Hannover to order all of his forces to lay down their arms and surrender. This left Nicolussi-Leck flanks wide open to the North and South and he had no intention of surrendering as ordered.

Nicolussi-Leck ordered his troops to pull back in the direction of the city of Hannover he would attempt to enter and drive through the city before the Americans became too comfortable. Nicolussi-Leck knew that to avoid capture he would have to take his small kampfguppe (battlegroup) through the very centre of the city (a very risky business when the enemy is in charge of it). Nicolussi-Leck came upon Hannover's Fire's Chief in charge of Hannover's Fire Brigade, called "Richard Bange".

Bange offered to escort the kampfguppe safely through Hannover - if possible. Both Bange and Leck in an open topped vehicle and headed for the Stein gate civilians shouted that the Americans were already at the main train station. Thus the kampfguppe had to make some detours. At one point an American patrol stopped Nicolussi-Leck's vehicle and he and the Fire Chief had to get out. Much to the Americans amazement Nicolussi-Leck opened fire with his machine pistol giving the Fire Chief a chance to escape (unfortunately he was hit in the back and chest and fell in a doorway fortunately this brave man survived the war). Nicolussi-Leck immediately jumped into Olin's vehicle, the first tank destroyer to appear on the scene. Olin opened fire using his vehicles machine guns to add even more confusion to an already confused situation.

Nicolussi-Leck now led his kampffgruppe down Georgstrasse to Aegi and then into Marienstrasse. It was here that more American M4 Sherman tanks came into the picture with the tank crews standing or sleeping beside their tanks - relaxing. (The big cats were still hungry). Now the kampffgruppe's machine-guns from all of its surviving vehicles opened fire causing total havoc amongst the surviving tank crews. The Jagdpanthers main guns in turn opened fire on the M4 Sherman's as they closed, further adding to their already high toll of destroyed American armour. The remaining armour not destroyed by the big cats was taken out by the Wiking troops in the carriers using panzerfausts.

The kampffgruppe was now free of Hannover and Nicolussi-Leck headed off towards the town of Celle with orders to harass the Americans to the best of his ability. In many cases this meant surprise attacks on the over confident American units with many Americans becoming P.O.W.'s (which the kampffgruppe could not take care of thus the prisoners were stripped of all useful equipment and then sent on their way a few hours latter). In this manor the kampffgruppe managed to fight through to the end of the war. Unfortunately just before the war ended Nicolussi-Leck was captured and put under heavy interrogation by U.S. intelligence personal who wanted to know the location of the unknown Waffen SS Panzer Division that was operating in and around the Hannover area causing such total havoc wherever it appeared. It seems that the Americans could not accept the fact that they had been so heavily defeated by such a small battlegroup in the defensive battles around Hannover.



Gaming

Above is a brief history of this small but highly effective kampffgruppe. The history gives one the ability to either play the whole battle as a miniature campaign or to play a series of battles all linked directly to the other. The whole affair in the Hannover area was basically fought over a period of just 48 – 72 hours (2 – 3 days). Ideally the rules used should be those that work on a vehicle for vehicle and section for section basis. This is because we are talking for the German side of such small units, (well all except the Hannover Flak Regiment and its 258+ guns). These heavy flak guns could easily be used in either the direct or indirect artillery or anti-tank fire roll. This hopefully adding to the defensive effect of this small kampffgruppe, though nothing is actually mentioned in the history or the article from the book “Panzer Aces 2” on the unit getting any artillery fire support whatsoever but this should not be ruled out. The Americans work better also on a vehicle for vehicle and section for section basis even though their forces are quite large.

Wargaming Rules

Wargaming rules where one vehicle or stand represents one platoon, will not really work - why, well a unit of either 3 or 4 Jagdpanthers makes one platoon with a platoon of Sd.Kfz 250/251 armoured carriers, facing off the whole 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment along with elements of the 84th Infantry Division and its associated armoured units. Talk about being one sided and the ranges like those in rules like “Spearhead” etc., will come up just too short, you have got to let the Jagdpanthers get off at least four shots or more before the allies have any time to either respond or fire back. Likewise World War Two wargaming rules that deal mainly with skirmish style gaming are also going to be a problem simply because of the large number of American forces allowed at any one time. I personally have never heard of any skirmish game where one has over 60+ tanks on just one side whilst in 1/285th or 300th scale this is more than possible and can be done quite cheaply. The new range of 3mm scale miniatures can equally be used easily and even cheaper than the 1/285th - 300th scale models. Large numbers of vehicles here would certainly not look out of place.

Basically rules like Panzer War (1979), Panzerfaust (Australian, - but can be purchased/obtained over the inter-net through a company called Milsims, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia) or Firefly. Though recently a good number of other rules have come onto the market, many will still not suffice simply because of the mechanics that they work on.

Morale and Training Level Modifiers: -

German Waffen SS troops: - Training Level 1, Morale Level 1 (Elite/Fanatical)
German Luftwaffe/Hanover Flak Regiment/Troops: - Training Level 2, Morale Level 3
German Infantry Battalion: - Training Level 3, Morale Level 3
German Volksturm/Firemen and Hitler Youth: - Training Level 4, Morale 4/2 (Hitler Youth – Fanatical - just about).
American 11 Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment: - Training Level 2, Morale 2
American 84th Infantry Divisions Infantry Regiments: - Training Level 3, Morale 3
American Tank Destroyer Detachment/Company: - Training Level 2, Morale 2
American 771st Tank Battalion: - Training Level 3, Morale 2

T.o.E. Layouts: -

Luftwaffe Flakdivision

Under normal conditions the German anti-aircraft defence, was the responsibility of the German Luftwaffe (Air Force) – though the German HEER (Army) did have a large number of its own anti-aircraft units/battalions. In both cases the battery layout was very similar and to a degree standardised till you get to flak regiments of the Interior.

The average non-motorised zone of the Interior Flakdivision's (shown below) shows a large number of trailers with little motorisation, thus the units relied for mobility on a separate transport unit/battalion. So one can imagine why the Luftwaffe flak units around Hannover fought to the last round, last man. Very few had enough transport to retreat so fighting on until out of ammunition was the only option other than surrender open to them. It should also be noted that in some cases the heavy flak guns were mounted on heavily reinforced and converted railway carriages. In this way they could be moved easily and quickly to areas where they were desperately needed as long as there was a railway siding or marshalling yard nearby. In turn some of the 88mm guns could be replaced with captured stocks (though in this case it doesn't seem so). These guns could be any of the following: - 75mm from Yugoslavia, Poland, Norway, Greece or Sweden (purchased), 80mm from Hungary and Greece, 3.7 inch captured from British stocks at Dunkirk, Greece and Crete, 85mm captured on the Eastern Front from the Russians (Soviets). Some of these guns were re-bored to take the German 88mm rounds BUT not in all cases. Likewise the heavy 105mm flak (which was an excellent anti-tank weapon in its own right), could be replaced with the super heavy 128mm or dual mounted 128mm systems. Though the later tended to find itself restricted to flak towers it is said that some of the Krupp 150mm guns saw service in Berlin. However this project was officially stopped in September 1943 and not that many of them were made thus it is not known whether any of these latter weapon systems existed in Hannover, though the former did exist in both Berlin and Hamburg. I do not know whether they existed in flak towers in Hannover or even if Hannover had any flak towers to place such weapons in.

An example of the German standard **Flakdivision of the Interior** is listed below; the details come from the U.S. War Department -Handbook on German Military Forces ISBN: - 0-8711629-7. This has been reprinted many times and should be available from any GOOD library. The book has its faults but is a good source for general information. Remember though, most of the transport wouldn't have existed and many of the motorcycles by this time would have been replaced with bicycles.

Luftwaffe Flakdivision of the Interior: - or (Hanover City Flak Regiment)

Divisional Headquarters: - 200 officers and men/women, 2 light machine guns, 30 motor vehicles, 1 trailer and 20 motorcycles.

Air Defence Signal Battalion: - 300 officers and men/women, 11 light machine guns, 44 motor vehicles, 18 trailers and 10 motorcycles.

Heavy Searchlight Regiment: - 2,043 officers and men/women, 29 light machine guns, 90 - 105cm searchlights, 18 - 200cm searchlights, 94 motor vehicles, 255 trailers and 52 motorcycles.

3x A.A. Regiments: - (each): - 2,448 officers and men/women, 38 light machine guns, 52 - 20mm Flak 38 anti-aircraft cannons, 9 - 20mm Flak 38 Quad anti-aircraft (Flakvierling) cannons, 12 - 37mm Flak 18, 36, 37 or 43 anti-aircraft cannons, 24 - 88mmL56 Flak 18, 36 or 37 anti-aircraft guns or 88mmL72 Flak 41 anti-aircraft guns (656 being produced), 16 - 105mmL44 Flak38 or 39 anti-aircraft guns, 16 - 60cm searchlights, 72 – barrage balloons, 109 motor vehicles 109 motor vehicles, 238 trailers and 55 motorcycles.

Air Medical Unit: - 250 officers and men/women, 2 light machine guns 37 motor vehicles.

Woman for the most part, manned the barrage balloons, searchlights, signals equipment and the medical unit. They could also be found in the motorcycle/bicycle courier roll. This all took a significant toll out of the total manpower needed for these units/Flakdivision's. Many of the motor vehicles could also be found manned by female staff. Other members of the man pool came from Russian volunteers, thus the division had a strong corps/cadre of Luftwaffe personal with backup coming from the Russian volunteers and female staff.

Totals: = 10,137 officers and other ranks, 158 light machine guns, 156 – 20mm flak 38 A.A. cannons, 27 – 20mm flak 38 Flakvierling A.A. cannons, 36 – 37mm flak 18, 36, 37, or 43 A.A. cannons, 72 – 88mm flak 18, 36, 37 or 41 (limited), 48 – 105mm flak 38 or 39

A.A. guns, 48 - 60cm searchlights, 90 – 105cm searchlights, 17 – 200cm searchlights, 216 – barrage balloons, 532 motor vehicles, 982 trailers and 249 motorcycles.

Basically each of the regiments T.o.E.'s was as follows below: -

Luftwaffe Flak Regiment Headquarters (non-motorised): - 7 officers, 7 N.C.O.'s, 42 other ranks, and 2 light machine guns.

Each Regiment consisted of 1 Light Battalion, 2 Heavy Battalions, a Regimental Barrage Balloon Battalion, the layout of these units is described below: -

Barrage Balloon Battalion Headquarters: - 8 officers (including 2 officials) 14 N.C.O.'s, 44 other ranks, 1 light machine gun, 13 various motor vehicles, 5 trailers and 3 motorcycles.

Battalion Communications Section: - 3 N.C.O.'s, 16 other ranks, 4 signal vehicles and 1 motorcycle.

The battalion contained 4 - Barrage Balloon Batteries, all of whose layouts were the same as that shown below: -

Barrage Balloon Battery: - 2 officers, 20 N.C.O.'s, 130 other ranks, 2 light machine guns, 18 barrage balloons, 3 motor vehicles and 3 motorcycles.

Light Anti-Aircraft Battalion:-

Battalion Headquarters: - 7 officers (including 2 officials), 13 N.C.O.'s, 36 other ranks, 1 light machine gun, 9 various motor vehicles, 3 trailers and 3 motorcycles.

Battalion Communications Section: - 1 N.C.O., 8 other ranks, 2 signal vehicles.

The battalion contained 3 – 20mm anti-aircraft batteries and one 37mm anti-aircraft battery.

1st 20mm Anti-Aircraft Battery:-

Battery Headquarters: - 3 officers, 6 N.C.O.'s, 10 other ranks, 2 motor vehicles, 2 trailers and 2 motorcycles.

1st Platoon: -

Platoon Headquarters: - 3 N.C.O.'s, 8 other ranks and 2 ammunition trailers.

1st Section: - 1 – 20mm Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

2nd Section: - 1 – 20mm Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

3rd Section: - 1 – 20mm Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

The 2nd, 3rd and 4th platoons had the same make-up as that above.

5th 20mm Flakvierling Platoon: -

Platoon Headquarters: - 3 N.C.O.'s, 8 other ranks and 2 ammunition trailers.

1st Section: - 1 – 20mm Flakvierling Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

2nd Section: - 1 – 20mm Flakvierling Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

3rd Section: - 1 – 20mm Flakvierling Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

6th Platoon: -

Platoon Headquarters: - 3 N.C.O.'s, 8 other ranks and 4 electrical generator trailers.

1st Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

2nd Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

3rd Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

4th Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

The 2nd and 3rd 20mm Light Anti-Aircraft batteries are as the 1st battery above.

4th Battery - 37mm Anti-Aircraft: -

Battery Headquarters: - 3 officers, 6 N.C.O.'s, 10 other ranks, 2 motor vehicles, 2 trailers and 2 motorcycles.

1st Platoon: -

Platoon Headquarters: - 3 N.C.O.'s, 8 other ranks and 2 ammunition trailers.

1st Section: - 1 – 37mm Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

2nd Section: - 1 – 37mm Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

3rd Section: - 1 – 37mm Anti Aircraft Gun (static)

The 2nd, 3rd and 4th Platoons all have the same layout as the 1st Platoon above.

4th Platoon: -

Platoon Headquarters: - 3 N.C.O.'s, 8 other ranks and 6 electrical generator trailers.

1st Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

2nd Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

3rd Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)

4th Section: - 1 60cm Searchlight (static)