

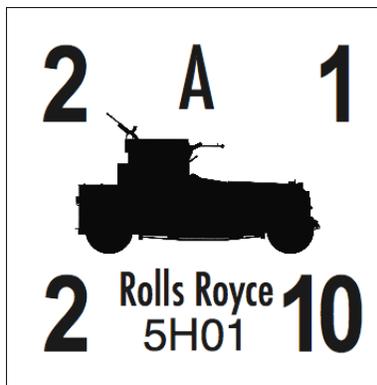


Over the Channel, Across the Desert: **PL Commonwealth 7 & 8**

By Byron Henderson

The units included on the *PL Commonwealth 7* and *8*, coupled with the earlier German and Italian counter sheets, allow Panzer Leader players to recreate the battles of the North African theatre. These two counter sheets fill a substantial void in the Commonwealth counters covering the middle part of the war, 1941 through 1943. Here you will find additional engineer AFVs, infantry and artillery counters, and a variety of tank types proposed for use by the countries of the United Kingdom before the Sherman-spewing factories of the United States made them unnecessary. Also included are three proposed corrections to the Ramiro Cruz 1940 B.E.F. counters that are necessary to allow a coherent AFV transition from 1940 through to 1945 for Commonwealth forces within the Panzer Leader game system.

Recognition should be given to all those involved in the making of this counter sheet: Carl Schwamberger, Derek Quintanar, Glen Coomber, Chris Fawcett, Doug Swanson, Steven Bucey,



and Richard Borenstein all contributed valuable information and debate that shaped the counter factors. No less influential were the articles by Alan Arvold on the original PanzerBlitz and Panzer Leader counter ratings, which provide the basis for the counter factors. Many

thanks to all involved and I apologize if I have neglected to mention anyone else who contributed.

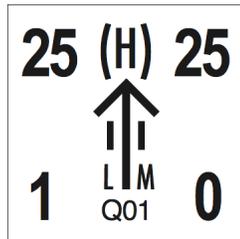
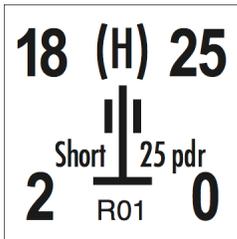
The following is an explanation of the new counters and notes on their background and inclusion in the game.

Infantry and Artillery

Out of all the nations represented in the PanzerBlitz/Panzer Leader game system, the Commonwealth of Nations arguably contributed the largest variety of combatants to World War II yet they possess the fewest infantry types in the game. Even with the addition of airborne troops and commandos, there is less variety in the Commonwealth infantry counter mix than that of any other major power. To redress this

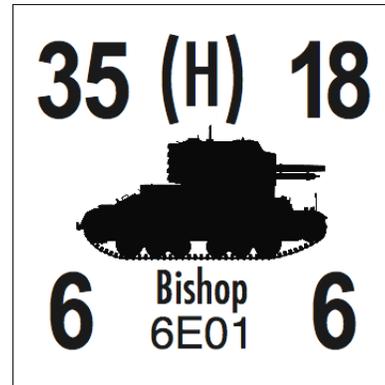
issue somewhat, the new counter sheets include a number of stronger infantry (2 I 2*/8-1) for Commonwealth forces. These are designed to allow for the inclusion of elite (or perhaps just "better") infantry, such as the New Zealand and Maori troops, which were held in high regard by all armies during the North African conflict.

The short 25-pounder artillery piece (18 (H) 25/2-0) was used by Commonwealth forces in two gun sections. It was airdropped into difficult terrain and used as support artillery.



The Canadian Land Mattress (25 (H) 25/1-0) was a multiple rocket launcher possessing 32 tubes armed with light (76.2mm) rockets. While the smaller rockets are somewhat limiting, the saturation they achieve make this unit a very effective artillery piece, although not on par with the heavier rocket artillery produced by the Germans and Russians.

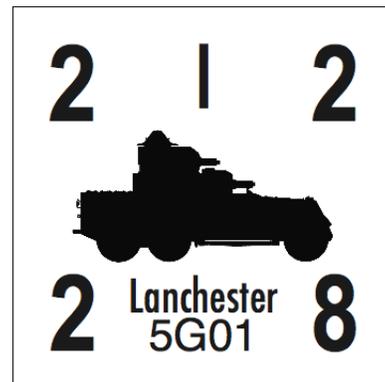
The Bishop (35 (H) 18/6-6) was Britain's first attempt at producing a self propelled artillery vehicle (SPA). Unfortunately, its role on the battlefield was not clearly defined during the planning stages; the tank enthusiasts wanted a heavy assault gun and the artillery enthusiasts desired a self-propelled artillery carriage. The artillery group eventually won out, but the



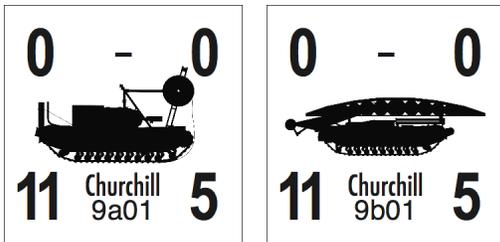
large fixed-box turret – a result of the assault gun school of thinking – limited the Bishop's effectiveness as an artillery piece. Mounted upon a Valentine chassis, the gun had limited range (less than half that of the towed 25-pounder), resulting in the need to build earthen ramps beneath the vehicle to give it proper elevation for effective indirect fire.

Reconnaissance Vehicles and Engineer AFVs

Two armored cars are included in the counter sheets: the Lanchester Mk II (2 I 2/2-8) and the Rolls Royce armored car (2 A 1/2-10). Both are early war units used primarily in the Far East but are included here for completeness as a very few of these vehicles made their way into early part of the North African conflict. Both armored cars move as trucks.



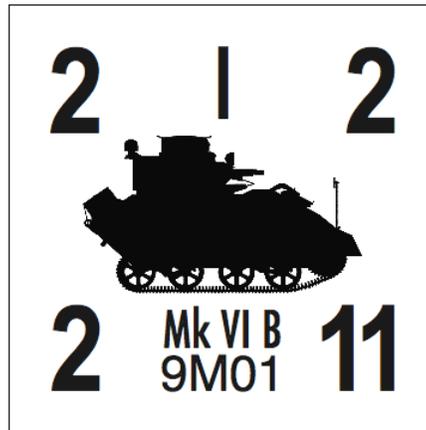
The Australian-adapted LP Carrier (2 A 1/2–10), like the Rolls Royce armored car, was armed with an antitank Rifle. Even though they are rated with an "A" class weapon type, the Rolls Royce armored car and the LP Carrier may only overrun non-armored vehicles. Those gamers who wish to add their own rule allowing multiple LP Carriers to gang up on the occasional Tiger tank should be warned that the attack factor is never doubled in the game; "2" is as good as it gets.



Several engineer or specialty AFV are included in the counters. The Churchill bridge counter (0 - 0/11–5) should be self-explanatory. The Churchill Carpet Layer (0 - 0/11–5) unrolled a "Hessian carpet" reinforced with steel tubes over soft ground or barbed wire to make the terrain more accessible to vehicles. The game currently provides little opportunity for its use, however Doug Swanson has produced several desert maps that include "soft sand" as a terrain feature where these units could be used. In addition, scenarios covering the Normandy landings could also include "soft" beach terrain or improved positions which these units may be useful in overcoming. The standard engineering rules for removing blocks should adequately reflect these vehicles' ability to overlay difficult terrain or light defensive impediments.

Two early-war Matilda specialty vehicles, the Baron bulldozer tank (6 A 3/8–5) and the flame-throwing Frog (40 H 1/8–5) are also included. (Notes on the reduced defense factor for the Matilda tanks are included below). These were Australian variants of the British Matilda tank, used in the Far East.

The light Mark VIb reconnaissance tank (2 I 2/2–11) appears to be the recipient of the tactical modifier given by Ramiro Cruz to the early war German tanks. I reduced its defensive value to 2, which is what it should be based upon its armor thickness (only 15mm). This also allows it to fit well within the developmental progression of British tank design within the game.



British tanks

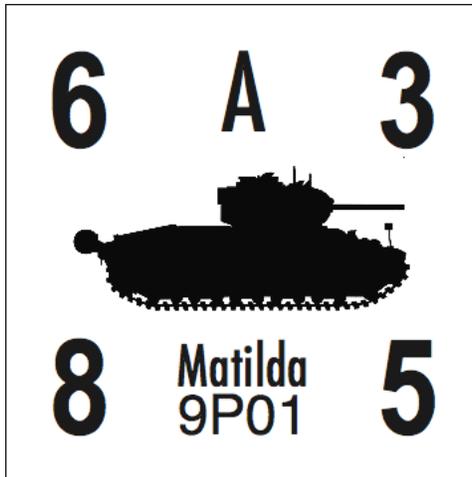
During 1940–1943, British designers, incapable of grasping what was really happening on the battlefields of Europe, continued to produce both "infantry" and "cruiser" tank types. The Matilda infantry tank (6 A 3/8–5) is a correction to the original Cruz counter for Panzer Leader 1940. The Matilda never possessed more than 78mm of armor and any appreciable slope that

would improve its defensive performance was more than offset by its slow speed. With this in mind, I lowered the defense factor of the Matilda to 8, which fits in nicely with the existing tanks in the game: the Italians still cannot touch it, but the better German tanks (primarily the Mark III)

can penetrate its armor if they close with it. Due to the danger inherent in this maneuver, expect the Axis to rely on their antitank guns to challenge the reputed "Queen of the Battlefield."

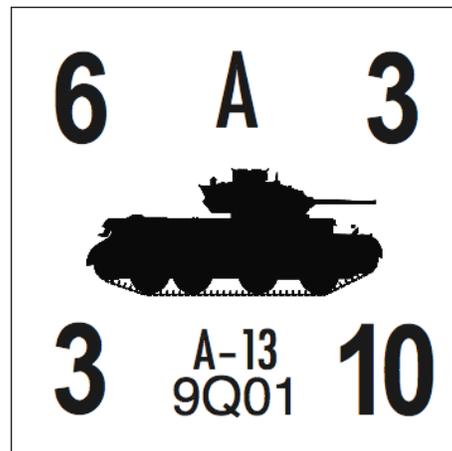
The A-13 Mark IV cruiser tank (6 A 3/3-10) is another correction to an earlier Cruz counter. As the tank only had 30mm of armor, Cruz apparently decided to give it the same tactical modifier (doubling the defense factor) as he gave the 1940 German tanks. There can be no doubt that the British record in effective tactical use of their tanks was spotty at best during the early and middle years of WWII, so that adding a modifier based upon tactical expertise seems ludicrous. In addition, by doubling the armor defense factor, the A-13 would be rated in the game as a better tank than the AFV that took its place (the Crusader)! For these reasons, I found it necessary to remove the modifier and rate the tank's defense factor only on its armor thickness.

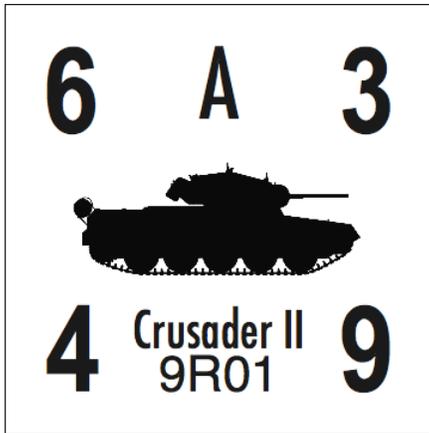
Some people may argue that the problem of the higher defense factor for the A-13 can easily be solved



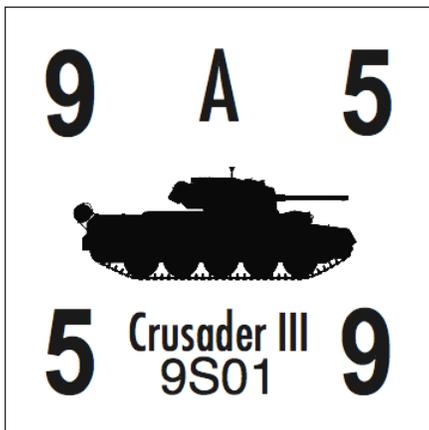
simply by applying the same modifier to the Crusader tanks and hence doubling their defense factor to 8. There are two reasons for not following this line of thought: First, the late-war Crusader tanks, already rated by Alan Arvold using the original Z factor PanzerBlitz rating

system, possess a defense factor of 5. To be consistent with the original game pieces, we need to keep the defense factor for the early Crusader tanks consistent with the previously rated late-war Crusader variant – this is especially necessary as both Crusader tank types served together during the Alamein battles. Second, the tactical modifier that Cruz added disappeared from the counter-mix after 1941 (he applied it to the early war Russian counters as well). Counters representing AFVs from 1942 and later simply do not include any sort of modifier. In addition, the gallant British tankers, given their low level of tactical training from 1940 to 1943, should not receive any bonus.

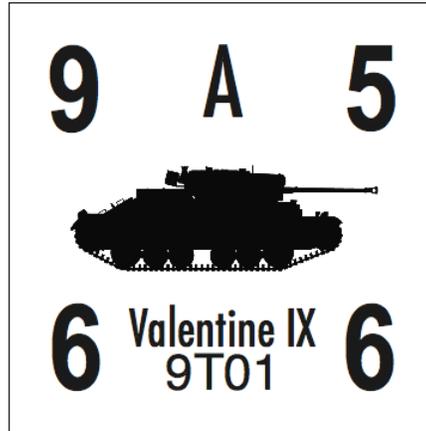




The British Crusader tanks (6 A 3/4-9) first made their appearance in late 1941 during the offensive named in their honour, Operation Crusader. Although still armed with the 2-pounder gun, they were an improvement over the A-13 as they possessed more armor and still had good speed. Equally important, the turret ring was large enough to allow for improvement of their main armament as larger guns became available. By the time of Alamein, the majority of the Crusader tanks had thicker armor and mounted the 6-pounder gun, greatly increasing their attack capabilities (9 A 5/5-9). The Valentine IX (9 A 5/6-6: the 5-tank counter is included in the Russian counter sheets; ratings for both were supplied by Alan Arvold) also appeared at Alamein.



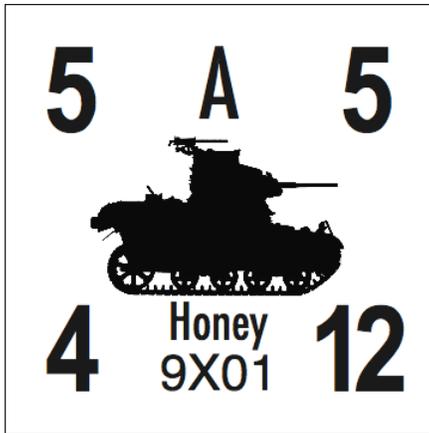
Both the Matilda (5 H 8/8-5) and Crusader tanks (5 H 8/4-9) receive their early war close support variants. Each was armed with only a 3-inch howitzer, roughly akin to the light 75mm howitzers of other close support AFV of the early war period.



With the inclusion of these tank types in the British AFV counters, one can logically trace the development of the Cruiser tanks from the early A-13 through the Crusader and finally to the existing Cromwell and Comet tanks. A similar developmental path from the early Matilda, A-11 and A-10 tanks to the Valentine and Churchill AFVs is easily notable as well. The result is a consistency and logic in British AFV counter values in the Panzer Leader game that could not exist without the correction to the original Cruz counters of Panzer Leader 1940 fame.

Lend-Lease tanks

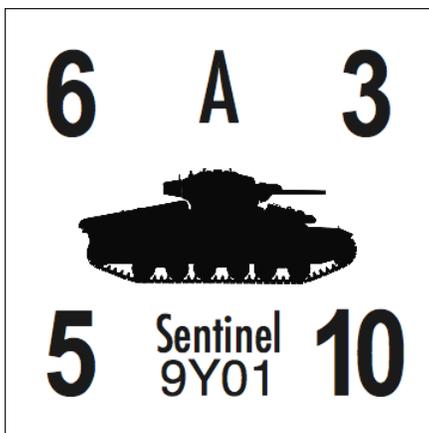
Two U.S.-supplied AFVs are included in the counter sheets: the much-loved M3A3 Honey (5 A 5/4-12) and the M3 Grant (8 A 8/6-8). When comparing the existing British tanks (Crusaders and Valentines) to the Honey and Grant, it is easy to see how



these fairly average AFVs were considered such an improvement over the existing British AFVs in North Africa. Ratings for these tanks were provided by Alan Arvold.

Commonwealth tanks

Before the U.S. entered the war and began openly supplying the Commonwealth with more Sherman tanks than any country could possibly imagine using, several nations experimented with producing their own AFVs.



The Australian AC1 tank – commonly known as the Sentinel (6 A 3/5–10) – rolled off the production line in August of 1942, just 22 months after the original specifications for it were issued. Although too lightly armed for

that period of the war (later models replaced the 2-pounder gun with the 17-pounder), the tank was considered a success. However, production was halted after it was established that the U.S. would supply Australia with enough Shermans for their needs. The 66 tanks produced were used for training.

Canada produced a number of variants, primarily of the M4 Sherman, for use during WWII. Some, like the Kangaroo APC (on *PL Commonwealth 3*) saw fairly widespread use. Others, such as the anti-aircraft armed Skink (14 H 10/8–8) or the Grizzly (basically a Sherman tank assembled in Canada), were cancelled after very short production runs. The most common Canadian-built tanks were the Ram I (6 A 3/8–8) and Ram II (9 A 5/8–8). Over 1000 were produced but their use was limited to either training vehicles in Canada and Britain or conversion to Kangaroo APCs. Their generous quantities on *PL Commonwealth 8* are meant to make up for the immense but self-effacing contribution of the nation that produced them.

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