

## Schneider's Attack

©David Garvin, 2005

"There's the village." With these words the fate of Schneider's company would be forever changed. The problem with war is the cost. After all, so much effort is spent on training a person to be a soldier, only to see it all be wasted away by a stray bullet from somewhere.

"What's this place called?"

"Who cares? After all, its name isn't important. What's important is that we take it, and kill all the Popovs in there."

"So, what's the plan?"

"Well, first of all, it will be a right flanking. Firebase will neutralise those first two houses as Metzger takes two platoons off to the right, through those trees over there. Jürgen will stay over there on the left at first and move up once Metzger's men are in. After that, we'll see."

"Right, well, good luck, and see you in Hell." With that, the two men parted with a smile that only a soldier could comprehend.

After a few minutes, the signal came back to Schneider that all were set. He gave the go ahead to Feldwebel Dorfmann to open up with the firebase.

"Gunners, standby."

"Jawohl," came the reply from the crew leaders, almost in unison.

"Three.... two.... one.... FIRE!" With that, the staccato burst of fire cut the morning calm like an axe. Wood from the first building flew in all directions. From his position, Dorfmann saw at least three Popovs running out of the building. One fell in an odd manner and didn't get up. Without emotion, Dorfmann continued to watch the objective houses with his field glasses.

"That's it, men, really give it to them!" After what seemed an eternity, Dorfmann saw some movement from the second house off to the right. He couldn't quite make out what it was, but it sure as hell made sense to switch targets now.

"All guns stop! Right hand house, lay!"

"On!" came the cry of the four gunners, almost in unison.

"Fire!" Again, the machine guns were tearing up another house, this one made of stone. Glass from the windows was flying in all directions, as were bits of stone and mortar. Again, Dorfmann saw a brown uniformed figure flop to the ground on the outside rear of the house. It took him a moment, but Dorfmann realised that there was no return fire from the buildings to his front in spite of the fact that they were quite obviously occupied.

"Guns one and two, stop. Gun three and four, normal rate, go on." With this, the fire slackened appreciably. The two guns that had stopped changed barrels and reloaded fresh belts into their machine guns, awaiting further targets.

Schneider noted that the firebase was effective and gave Dorfmann the signal to prepare to move.

"Okay, lads, pack up your kit and prepare to move. Make sure your guns are readied, you never know when Popov will come out to slit your throat." A couple of the newer soldiers in the machine gun section winced at his last statement, and Dorfmann smiled inside. He too was new once. He was in Poland, but didn't really remember much, except that he was terrified whenever the Poles were near. His problem was that he was never wounded and was never near anyone when they were. That all changed in Holland, of course, and now he was the veteran. This in only 3 short years of Army service.

Meanwhile, Stefan Metzger's troops were almost in position off to the right. They were shot at as they moved between a gap in the trees, but the fire was quite ineffective. A couple of soldiers did take cover, but they were soon put into motion by a forceful Gefreiter who was quite clear that the fire was probably not even aimed, and if the young lads on the ground wanted to feel the effect of effective fire, he would demonstrate with his sub machine gun. The young men were quick to get up, not wanting to see if the NCO was serious or not.

"All troops, building to your front, at my command, suppressive fire," ordered Leutnant Metzger. Seeing that the Gefreiters to his front had issued individual targets to their squads, Metzger cleared his throat and yelled, "Fire!"

The rifle fire wasn't as impressive as the machine guns they heard on the way in, but it was effective. The stone building to their front lost all its glass windows in the initial bursts. As well, the sound of the sub machine guns added to the sound of fire, if not the actual effect to the building itself. Metzger never really liked the S.M.G., as they were called, except maybe in really close quarters. That will come soon enough, he thought, as he issued his move orders to the Gefreiters to his front.

"Klaus, you go right, Adi, you go centre and Rolff, you take your men on the right." All three Gefreiters nodded. They would be the first wave. From experience, they knew that it wasn't always good to be first, and their faces showed a mild concern, but Metzger was more than confident in these three N.C.O.s. Several months in Russia had earned these three the trust of the young officer.

"Vorwärts, Männer, mir nach!" With that, the three squads got to their feet and dashed to the building across the road, a mere dozen metres away. As soon as they cleared the woods, a lone Popov in the building opened up with his sub machine gun. The first burst of bullets tore across the chest of Gefreiter Adolf Steinbach. As he fell in a pool of blood, it was quite obvious to the members of his squad that he was quite dead. As one, they all turned and ran back into the trees to their rear, each fearing that they were next.

Metzger had seen the young N.C.O. drop and he too knew that he had been killed, but he was more interested in the progress of the attack. The squad in the centre was currently useless, hiding like so many scared rabbits. The two outer squads, however, were up against the walls of the building, preparing grenades and firing point-blank into the building.

The squad on the left, led by Gefreiter Klaus Lahr, threw open a door and filed in, firing as they went. The lead man saw a figure to his front and let loose a burst from his S.M.G. The figure gave a shout and dropped to the ground. "Grenade coming in!" came a sudden cry from somewhere. All men took cover as the lead man shrunk into the corner of his room. A deafening roar signalled the explosion of the grenade, and then right behind the blast and through its smoke came five Popovs. The Lead Man noted that they all had their bayonets fixed. He also noted that their attack wasn't very well planned. They came rushing into his room full of energy, screaming "URRAH!" at the top of their voices, but none was firing. As well, their rush was more of a drunken man's stumble. The Lead Man was the only German in the room, but none of the Popovs saw him. Their rush stopped until a sixth came in. He was apparently their leader as he was the only one with a S.M.G. In the few seconds that the Lead Man watched this spectacle to his front, he also noted that the leader of the Popovs wore a helmet, whilst all the others had a field cap of sorts. The leader said a few words to his men and they all went to the door from whence the Lead Man had come in.

Just then a wave of panic came over the Lead Man. He looked around the room from the relative safety of the shadows of the corner and realised that he was the only German in the room. Were the others all dead? Where in Hell were they?

Slowly, the Lead Man's panic turned to rage and he raised his S.M.G. and aimed at the mass of Popovs near the door. He figured that he could get them all in one long burst, if he had enough bullets in his magazine, that was. Again, he shrunk to the shadows and quietly, no, quite noisily, changed magazines. Glancing down, he realised that it was fortunate that he did: the magazine that was on the S.M.G. had but three bullets in it.

With shaking hands, he ensured that the fresh magazine was inserted properly and that the action was readied. Once again, the Lead Man thought of what he was about to do, and why. It was he or they. He couldn't quite believe it, but he was still unnoticed in the corner. Again he raised his S.M.G. and took careful aim. He centred his sights on the leader of the Popovs, as he was the furthest left. Since the S.M.G. usually pulled to the right when he fired, the Lead Man figured that he would do his job, pulling the trigger, and the S.M.G. would do the rest.

The Lead Man closed his left eye and aimed with his right. The pounding of his heart made the S.M.G. jump what seemed to be several metres. Still, the Lead Man remembered his long days on the rifle ranges and

slowly controlled his breathing. The Popovs were preparing more grenades and about to continue their attack, so the Lead Man realised that he better stop procrastinating and shoot those damned Popovs.

Just as he was about to squeeze the trigger, the leader of the Popovs turned to the corner in which the Lead Man was hiding and then did a quick double take as he suddenly realised that he was staring down the barrel of a S.M.G.

"Nemyetski!" screamed the Popov. "Nemyetski" was but one of a few Russian words that the Lead Man understood - "Germans!" The other Popovs quickly turned and the Lead Man noted that they all had eyes as large as saucers.

The next thing that the Lead Man remembered was watching the last of the Popovs slide to the ground, his back leaving a streak of blood on the wall behind him. Shaking his head, the Lead Man restored his composure and suppressed his blood rage. The Popovs were all quite dead or dying and the Lead Man was uninjured. He called out to see if there were any other Germans outside. Just then a familiar voice called out.

"Schmidt? Are you still alive! What the Hell happened?"

Schmidt didn't say anything to his Gefreiter. Instead he went back to the business of looking for Popovs to kill. Klaus Lahr brought the rest of his squad into the room and signalled to Leutnant Metzger that they had made a successful break in to the building. Since the other squad on the right was coming into the same building from the other direction, the Germans continued to clear without resorting to the usual drill: grenades followed by bullets. Within a few minutes, Lahr linked up with the other squad somewhere in the middle of the building.

"Schmidt. Let the Herr Leutnant know that the building is secure."

"Jawohl, Herr Gefreiter". With that, Schmidt left the room to do his duty.

"Herr Gefreiter?" It was Neumann or Lohmann, or whoever, the new guy.

"What is it?"

"Is Schmidt okay?"

"Of course, why do you ask?"

"Well, he seems shook up. What happened back there?"

"He's just nervous. He just earned himself the Iron Cross First Class and the Führer is going to pin it on his chest in person. Right in Berlin, Potsdamer Platz. Then it will be nothing but whores and Schnapps. He's already got the second class, you know."

"Jawohl, Herr Gefreiter." It was Neumann, and he just nodded. Everyone knew that Schmidt had the Iron Cross Second Class. Neumann realised then why those six Popovs were all piled together back by the door.

Outside the building, Leutnant Metzger was just starting across the road with the survivors of Steinbach's squad. He had gone to their hiding spot in the trees just as they stumbled into it and threatened to shoot every last one of them if they didn't get up. The choices were simple: die by a bullet made in Koblenz or one made somewhere in the Ural Mountains. To a man, they all rose and followed the Leutnant, not really believing that he would shoot them. After all, he said what he said, said "follow me" and ran into the street where Steinbach lay in an ever expanding pool of blood.

The first, and only phase of Schneider's plan was successful. Except maybe for Steinbach. The first building had been taken and the troops in it were in relatively good order, preparing to repel the ever-anticipated Popov counter-attack. Schneider directed Dorfmann into his next firing positions to cover the last of the German squads that had to cross the road to their left. Just as the first gunner was limbering up his machine gun, a short fusillade tore into the trees around them.

"CONTACT!" screamed the gunner, almost in a panic. He began to fire at what he thought was the source of fire, only to have Dorfmann stop him.

"Give an indication, you *arschloch*!"

"One-fifty, wooden building at the end of this road, left hand window, Russian infantry!"

"That's *Soviet*. Didn't you know they had a revolution about twenty five years ago?" said Dorfmann as he crawled forward to confirm the target with his field glasses. "Nice indication. There they are. I don't think they see us in spite of your burst. Remember; indicate first and then I will give the fire orders. Got it?"

"Jawohl, Herr Feldwebel". Dorfmann tapped the young Landser on his helmet. If he doesn't get killed in this war, this fellow will go far in the Wehrmacht, thought Dorfmann.

"All guns, in this line, in this direction, adopt fire positions! Crawl up or else Popov will put one between your eyes and I'll have to send your fucking mother a letter in the name of the Führer. Now let's move! Schnell!" With that, the three other guns moved up left and right of Dorfmann and awaited orders. Their guns were readied, noted Dorfmann with satisfaction.

"All guns, one-fifty. Wooden building. Left window. *Soviet* infantry. At my command, rapid." Dorfmann waited to make sure that all gunners were aiming. Each gun crew leader nodded that they were ready. He winked at the young Landser who had called them Russians.

"FIRE!"

All four guns opened up simultaneously. The effect was immediate and quite obvious. The window was smashed quickly and wood from the side of the building was flying in all directions. Watching with his field glasses, Dorfmann again saw fleeing brown figures. This time, however, they weren't just fleeting targets; they were in an obvious panic and running in the open on a hill behind the house.

"One and two, add fifty, men in the open, FIRE!"

With that the two machine gunners changed their aim and tore into the fleeing Popovs. Dorfmann noted that at least three were caught in their backs. No more could be seen. And since no other Popovs seemed to be chasing after those who had fled, Dorfmann figured that the fire of the four machine guns had killed or drove off the Popovs in the building. "All guns STOP. Targets of opportunity watch and shoot. And don't forget to reload with fresh belts!" Dorfmann watched as all four crews complied with his orders.

"All clear, Herr Hauptmann!" shouted Dorfmann back to the company leader, Hauptmann Schneider.

"Good work, Herr Feldwebel!" With that, Schneider signalled for the troops in depth to cross the road. Noting that the machine gunners were alert that Germans would be crossing to their front, Schneider turned to the next phase of the attack. He had successfully broken into the village. Now he had to exploit his success. He retired to a tree to his rear, pulled out his notepad and began to do a quick estimate.

From what he had seen, the flanking units were pretty well unscathed. Apparently one of the Squad Leaders was killed, but all in all, things were going well. He had a few buildings left to clear, and clearly the Popovs were on the run. His men had the initiative, and Schneider wasn't about to give it up. He gave himself five minutes to make a plan, and did so quickly.

Schneider always wrote things down. He was quick to think on his feet, but forcing himself to write his orders was his way to make sure that he gave his orders in a clear, logical manner. In three minutes, his plan was done and written. He then passed the orders on to his runner and then he had the runner read them back.

For Metzger, he would hold where he was, fending off any counter-attacks. Schneider would move up with the machine gun section and form a collective firebase. For the squads just crossing the road to his front, they would form the assault group, and once in position, Schneider would indicate the next buildings to be attacked by firing on them with the machine guns. After the two runners read back the orders, Schneider sat back and called Dorfmann to him. As he approached, Schneider began to laugh.

"Is something wrong, Herr Hauptmann?" asked a confused Dorfmann.

"No, nothing, Herr Feldwebel. I just realised: today is the fifteenth. It's my wife's birthday!"

"Are you old enough to be married, Herr Hauptmann?" said Dorfmann with a smile.

"Yes, but not old enough to be a grandfather as you are." The two men broke out into laughter, drawing a few confused glances from the machine gun crew leaders.

When they stopped laughing, the Hauptmann gave Dorfmann his plan. Dorfmann nodded and got his crews ready. Schneider crawled forward to see that the two runners had made it, and was satisfied to see that they did. Both forward elements signalled back that they had received their orders. "Prepare to move, Herr Feldwebel."

"Ready, Herr Hauptmann," replied Dorfmann, his four crews ready behind him. Glancing back, Schneider noted that they all seemed so much older now. It was an odd time to make such an odd observation, but Schneider just attributed it to his lack of sleep.

"Okay, men, follow me!" With that, Schneider rose and darted to the building to his front. It was the second to be engaged by the firebase in the initial fire, and as he entered, Schneider almost fell as he slipped in a pool of blood. Looking down to see the source of his misstep, Schneider found himself to be looking in the blank stare of a man whose forehead was missing. Schneider smiled, recognising the rank of an officer of the Red Army. Leaders, let alone officers, were usually scarce, so putting a bullet into this fellow's head had probably been the reason for the lack of cohesion in the enemy. The Soviets were tough fighters, but only when they felt Stalin's wrath in the form of a commissar or officer. Their sergeants were generally useless on their own. With no leadership, the Soviet soldier was apt to run under effective fire. So, with this conclusion, Schneider realised for the first time that he might, just might make it to have the hot meal promised for lunch following the attack.

With Dorfmann, Schneider glanced toward the depth of the village to their front. They both noted one building with no windows and some wire around its base. That was obviously, too obviously held.

"That's our objective. Have the gunners prepare to fire. Let me know when you're set."

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann."

Schneider went back around to the building to his left and gave the indication to Metzger. "When we open up, you follow up with fire. We'll give area fire; you watch and shoot for individual targets. Let us know if you see anyone in other buildings. Got it?"

"Ja, clear!" came the reply.

Going back outside and to the follow up troops, Schneider signalled them to prepare to react to his fire. The Platoon Leader nodded his understanding.

Going back into the firebase, Schneider just nodded to Dorfmann, and the four machineguns let loose on the building in depth. Slowly, the group under Metzger's control joined their fire. Schneider and Dorfmann scanned with their field glasses, but could see no target effects.

"Keep the fire up. I'll send the assault in now."

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann."

Schneider went back around the building and signalled to the assault group to move out. They acknowledged and Schneider went back to Dorfmann's position.

"Do you see anything yet?"

"Not a thing. Maybe the Popovs have left."

"We should be so lucky," replied Schneider. He noted with satisfaction that the assault group was moving out in short skirmishes. So far, there was no return fire. Maybe his Feldwebel was right and the Popovs had long since left. They had killed an officer in the opening barrage, so maybe they had fled? But there was that enemy group in the depth building. That was long after the first salvos were fired. And Metzger's group had to fight for their building. No, the Popovs were not finished yet.

Almost to confirm his opinion as to the disposition of the enemy, a burst of enemy fire was directed at the assaulting element. Schneider looked over to see a German soldier lying in the grass, writhing in obvious pain. No other Germans could be seen and there was no return fire, as far as he could tell.

Unknown to Schneider, there was indeed another group lurking in the depths of the village. They numbered about two squads in total and had been the group that was occupying the buildings initially engaged by Dorfmann's machineguns. Also unknown to him was the fact that their leader, a "useless" sergeant, had gathered the survivors from the first two buildings and formed a defence group. They were holed up in a building that by happenstance was out of view of the firebase. They were about to storm back into the building they had just vacated when the firebase opened up. The sergeant knew that an assault was coming, and since there was no return fire from the building that was being engaged, he decided to wait for the assault to come in. The defenders in that building were all dead as far as he knew, so he was it. He and his group of barely trained soldiers were the last members of the Red Army in Mirnaya Devenya as far as he knew.

The Germans caught in the open lost three of their number in the opening barrage by the Popovs. All three were new soldiers, on the front for barely two months. All three would probably have still been alive had they taken to heart what they learned in their training. Instead of crouching low and using all available cover, they decided that it was too uncomfortable to run in such a stance and ran as though they were still in the school

playground. The bullets fired by the Popovs tore into them without warning, and now all three lay severely wounded in the open. Their only saving grace was that their wounds, though terrible to look at, were relatively minor when all things are considered: they would survive these wounds and with any luck, learn from their mistake.

Leutnant Jürgen Maier took cover immediately when the Popovs opened up. He looked about and did a quick assessment. Three or so of his troops were apparently hit and about ten were in close proximity to him, close enough to yell to.

"Does anyone see the enemy? Where in the name of God are they?"

"That little brick building to our left, Herr Leutnant," came the reply. It was Radl, the Austrian Gefreiter, or so thought Maier. It didn't matter.

"Get some fire down there. Radl, you take some men and infiltrate our main objective."

"Jawohl, Herr Leutnant," replied Radl.

Maier gathered the men about him and took shelter behind a little stone wall in the garden in which they found themselves.

"Okay, the Popovs think they have us, but I think we can do it, lads. On my command, adopt fire positions here and cover Radl's men. Questions?"

There were only nods of understanding from the men. The Leutnant gave his order and the men rose as one and began to fire on the brick building. The rifle fire seemed to have its effect as Radl carried on with his assault group unhindered. Perhaps the Popovs were lucky and had already fled after inflicting the casualties. Still, Maier wasn't about to take chances. They continued to fire on the building with apparent good effect.

Suddenly, Maier was blinded and deaf. He felt a warm sensation running down his neck and he struggled to breathe. He was going into shock, and he knew it. He gathered all his strength and opened his eyes. The ringing in his ears was slowly turning into searing pain, but he was recovering. He figured that it was a grenade blast. In a stupor not unlike that of a man who has had too many schnapps, he looked around him to see a horrible display. Mixed in with the Feldgrau of his troops was the distinctive brown of the Red Army's uniform. Unknown to him, the Popovs had infiltrated his position and were assaulting. They had indeed thrown a flurry of grenades, one of which went off on just the other side of the wall from Maier. The concussion of the blast had burst his eardrums, causing warm blood to flow down his neck. Not all of his troops were caught in the blast and even now they were in a hand-to-hand battle with the Popovs.

Relying on pure instinct, Maier fumbled for his entrenching tool and withdrew it from the carrier. He went up to a Popov who was locked in a struggle with one of his soldiers. Without much thought, Maier embedded the blade of the little shovel firmly in the back of the Soviet sergeant who was leading the attack. The sergeant slumped to the ground and Maier simply looked about for another target for his wrath.

Maier found it odd that he could hear nothing. Even though he knew that men were screaming in pain and in rage, he heard nothing. Well, that wasn't exactly true. He did hear something, and that was the ringing of pain in his head.

Turning around, Maier found another brown uniform. With all his might, he swung his entrenching tool and struck the Popov in the side of the head. The man went down without a noise, blood flying from his face. Maier stood and stared and realised that the entrenching tool had nearly cut off the top of the man's head. The strength of rage was indeed enough to allow someone to complete feats of superhuman strength.

Suddenly Maier felt a wave of nausea overcome him. He started to vomit and collapsed on the ground. When he opened his eyes, it was a young soldier, one of the new replacements. The young Landser was fitting a dressing to the side of Maier's head and moving his lips. Maier heard nothing and slipped into unconsciousness.

Meanwhile, Radl's group had indeed made their assault unscathed. Maier's fire group was enough to allow them to move up to the objective building. The wire around its base was totally ineffective, allowing his men to infiltrate right into the building itself. Once inside, Radl's group found a group of bodies by the window. The Popovs were still teenagers, probably 15 at the most, thought Radl. Instead of being outraged that children were being sent to do a man's job, Radl took this as a good sign: the Popovs are running out of men and getting desperate. Maybe the war will end soon.

Schneider had watched with horror as Meier's group was locked in the struggle with the Popovs. His group could do nothing, for fear of shooting their own. It was with some satisfaction, though somewhat muted, that he noted that when all was said and done, the only uniforms still walking about down there were Feldgrau. He counted only four, but that was better than none.

He also noted that the objective house was firmly in German hands. The assault element had signalled that they had cleared the house and that there were no further enemy to be seen. He ordered his company into defensive positions around the village and gave direction to Dorfmann to begin the reorganisation. He also had the medical services move up and take care of the wounded. Sitting next to a wall in the building, Schneider took out his notebook and prepared his report. The attack was obviously a success, but what was also important was the fighting state of the company. He searched out and found Dorfmann to get the butcher's bill.

"We lost six dead and twelve wounded, including Leutnant Maier. He's gone for a long time, Herr Hauptmann. He'll live all right, but I don't think he'll be able to hear again. From what the lads say, he did all right, even after the grenade went off. He apparently has to clean the blood off of his entrenching tool. Young Kleinsteuber says that he decapitated a Popov during the hand-to-hand battle we saw."

"Well, decorations may be in order. Get what statements you can, and show me the prisoners. I take it that we did take some Popovs alive?"

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann. Radl ended up leading the assault on that last building. Once they got in, they killed about four or five Popovs and then fifteen of the bastards came out with their hands up. Some nervous lad, that young Alsatian, shot the first fellow but the rest came out. Follow me, Herr Hauptmann, they're over here."

Schneider followed his Feldwebel and saw a group of fourteen Popovs sitting against a wall. A few soldiers guarded them, and the Popovs all sat up when Schneider arrived. It was quite strange to Schneider that even in captivity, these Popovs still respected an officer. He also noted that a few were wounded, one quite severely. The Popov was holding his belly but his face showed no pain. Schneider figured that the young Popov believed his commissars and that he resigned himself to being in a German stew by sundown.

"Well, Herr Feldwebel. You tell me that you can speak Russian. Find out what you can from this lot."

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann." And with that, Dorfmann started talking to the prisoners. At first they just stared blankly, but then a few of them nodded. Then, almost in unison, they fell to their knees and started shouting and crying to the Feldwebel. He talked back to them in a firm manner, and the prisoners regained their composure. Then he concentrated on one of the prisoners. He led the prisoner away from the group and talked to him in a quiet tone. After a minute or two, Dorfmann came to Schneider.

"This fellow doesn't like the Soviet Party, apparently."

"What do you mean?"

"He wants to join the Wehrmacht. He says that he and his group here were farming about a week ago on some collective east of here when a truck pulled up and a group of commissars came out with S.M.G.s. They then announced that these fellows would then be 'defending Mother Russia against the great invaders from the West.' Seven days later, here they are. Scared shitless and worried more about their crops than killing Germans."

"Do you believe him?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Okay, tell him that he can stay with us. Send the rest back to the battalion. Maybe this guy can cook or do laundry or whatever. If nothing else, he can be a guide. Just like that fellow we had in Smolensk."

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann."

---

Author: David Garvin (copyright David Garvin, 2005)

Scenario: Beta-0 (Hasty Assault)

German Player: David Garvin

Russian Player: Gary Olson

Played FTF in early 2005