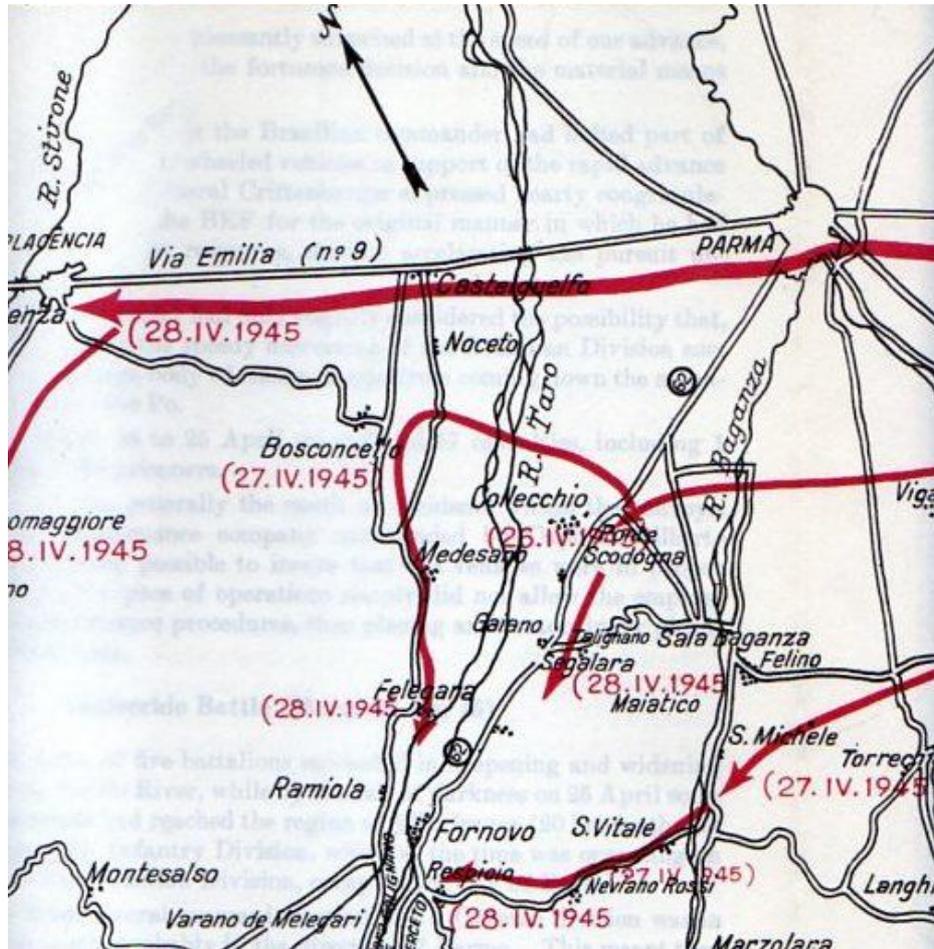


# The Battle at Collecchio

*The Brazilians in Italy April 26 - 27, 1945 by Richard Baber*



The Brazilian Expeditionary Force (Forca Expedicionaria Brasileira) – FEB commanded by General Mascarenhas de Moraes arrived in Italy in July 1944 and were assigned to the US 5<sup>th</sup> Army under General Mark Clark. They served with 5<sup>th</sup> Army until the end of the war (over 8 months and 239 days in continuous contact with the enemy). See my article on the FEB which appeared in MW254, July 2004 for the complete history of this South American unit during the Italian campaign.

## Collecchio

On the morning of April 26<sup>th</sup>, whilst strengthening the defences around Parma (captured by the US 34<sup>th</sup> Division under Gen. Charles Bolte on April 25<sup>th</sup>); news came of German units fleeing north towards the city along highway 62. The recon squadron was immediately ordered to move down the Taro River to scout for the enemy. By early afternoon they had encountered the lead enemy units at Collecchio. The initial encounter was with armoured cars from 90<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Division's Recon Battalion, but soon infantry from the 281<sup>st</sup> Regiment (148<sup>th</sup> Division) were also discovered so the recon squadron called for help.

This help came in the form of the Division Commander himself (Gen. Mascarenhas) along with the commander of II Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> infantry - Major Ramagen and 5<sup>th</sup> company, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the medium machine gun

platoon from 8<sup>th</sup> company (also 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry) all carried in a mixed convoy of trucks and jeeps. Once contact had been established with the recon squadron Major Ramagen sent the transport back to ferry further II Battalion elements to the town. Also the commander of 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry upon hearing of the battle sent his 9<sup>th</sup> company (III Battalion/6<sup>th</sup> Infantry) under Captain Lemos to Collecchio too. By 1830 on April 26<sup>th</sup> all elements were in position and under the direct gaze of their Division commander prepared for action against the enemy.



*Brazilian half-track – note the Northern Cross symbol*

Major Remagen was given overall command and so ordered 5/II to advance whilst 6/II, 9<sup>th</sup> company (III/6<sup>th</sup> infantry) and the recon squadron supported by the machine guns of 8/II dug in to prevent the enemy moving north along highway 62. The attack commenced at 1930 hours and 5<sup>th</sup> company met intense fire from infantry defending the town outskirts; the Germans also had mortars and some artillery. At 2100 hours extra troops arrived in the form of 2<sup>nd</sup> company (I Battalion/6<sup>th</sup> Infantry) their 1<sup>st</sup> platoon riding into battle on American tanks. Still the Germans resisted and put in several attacks in an attempt to breakout northward. By 0200 hours (27<sup>th</sup> April) Brazilian troops and US tanks were fighting within the town. Just before dawn the Germans with artillery support made one final all out effort to smash through the Brazilians, this was unsuccessful and with this last effort ended the German resistance. By noon the Brazilians were in full control of the town and by late afternoon II Battalion/11<sup>th</sup> Infantry and US tanks were already pressing the enemy south towards Forno.

Initially the Germans have just light recon elements (the recon commander Capt. Pitaluga mentions German armoured cars with 20mm cannon). Then infantry elements of the 281<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment who defended the town (I would estimate about one weak battalion) supported by machine guns and mortars (they had at least one `88 too as it nearly decapitated Pitaluga in the Town Square!). The counter attacks should be short and sharp (platoon sized) until the last attack at dawn on April 27<sup>th</sup> when I would estimate the enemy strength to be about a battalion with artillery support. This last attack should be directed at 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> companies dug in across the valley.

It was this battle and the following couple of day's patrol activity that convinced the German commander General Otto Fretter Pico that continued fighting was useless. This led to his unconditional surrender of all the forces under his command.

### The Game

**The terrain** was very close due to the numerous heavy wooded areas that were spread unevenly around the hilly valley surrounding the town. I decided on a close town with lots of buildings and narrow streets with walled gardens. There was a cobbled square with a fountain in the centre with streets leading off from all sides.

### **Brazilian attack**

I decided to concentrate on the evening attack by 5<sup>th</sup> company (II/11<sup>th</sup> infantry) and 2<sup>nd</sup> company (I/6<sup>th</sup> infantry) supported by the US tanks and some of the recon squadron..

The Brazilians had none of their organic artillery present due to a tactical decision where the artillery transport had been utilised as infantry transport to assist the divisions speed and movement during this pursuit phase. I allowed Lt. mortars from the dug in companies to be used in support of the attacking units.

### **Brazilian units**

*5<sup>th</sup> Company, II Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry*  
Coy HQ – CO, RTO, NCO, 3 runners  
3 – 10 man platoons (1 BAR)  
Support platoon - .30cal, Bazooka, 60mm mortar (10 men)

*2<sup>nd</sup> Company, I Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry*  
As 5<sup>th</sup> Company above

*Elements – Recon Squadron*  
M8 armoured car  
M3 half-track with 8 man platoon (BAR)

*Elements US 751<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion*  
3 – M4 Sherman (75)

**Off table**  
60mm mortar support fire

### **German forces**

*Recon Elements 90<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Div.*  
Sdkfz222 armoured car  
Sdkfz250/9 armoured car

*Elements – 281<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment (148<sup>th</sup> Div.)*  
HQ – CO, 2IC, FOO, 2 X RTO, NCO, 4 runners, sniper  
6 - weak 8 man platoons (1 panzerfaust per platoon)  
Support – 3 - LMG, 1 MMG, 1 panzershreck, 1 Pak36, 1 - 88mm Flak + some soft skinned transport

**Off table**  
3 turns of 105mm artillery (2 guns)  
5 turns of 81mm mortar (2 tubes)

By evening the Germans had established themselves within the town and had set up defensive positions facing northeast up highway N62. Their artillery (what there was of it) was positioned in the south of the town in the groves and orchards. They have no tanks, but a few armoured cars from 90<sup>th</sup> PG, the `88 was positioned off the town square deployed without tow.

### **German counter-attack**

One last desperate throw of the dice and break through to Highway 62 and the way north. The Germans moved units around Collecchio through the thickly wooded areas, then launched an attack against the dug in Brazilians above the town. The victory conditions are simple – the Germans must break through and open the highway for their comrades bottled up south of the town. The Brazilians must hold the line preventing any German units escaping the valley.



**German force**

*Elements of 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*

**Composite Battalion HQ:**

CO, 2IC, 3 officers, 2 RTO, FOO, NCO, 4 runners,  
8 man security platoon (LMG)

**12 – Weak platoons with:**

8-9 men each (weapons to be divided among  
platoons – 7 LMG, 1 Panzershreck [3 rockets], 6  
Panzerfaust, 1 Flamethrower [3 bursts], sniper rifle,  
2 grenade rifles)

**Support**

2 – MMG  
2 – 81mm mortars (1D6 + 6 turns of ammo)  
75mm IG (2D6 rds)  
Off table  
3 turns of 105mm fire (2 guns)



**Sources**

AFV News (Sept-Dec 1997, Volume 32, No3)

Armes Militaria Magazine (No171)

Micro-mark list BZ1 (Mark Bevis)

Brazilian Expeditionary Force Italy 1944-`45 (an orbat  
published in Command Post Quarterly No6 by Greg  
Novak)

The Brazilian Expeditionary Force by its Commander -  
Marshal J.B.Mascarenhas de Moraes (US Government  
Printing Office 1965)

E A Cobra Fumo! (Richard Baber – Miniature wargames  
254, July 2004)

**Brazilian Forces**

*Composite HQ*

CO, 2IC, 3 officers, 2 RTO, FOO, 4 runners, 10  
man security platoon (BAR)

*6<sup>th</sup> Company, II Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry*

Coy HQ – CO, RTO, NCO, 3 runners

3 – 10 man platoons (1 BAR)

Support platoon - .30cal, Bazooka, 60mm mortar (10  
men)

*9<sup>th</sup> Company, III Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry*

As 6<sup>th</sup> Company above

*Elements of 8<sup>th</sup> Company, II Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry*

4 x MMGs

*Recon Squadron*

M8 armoured car

M3 half-track with 8 man platoon (BAR)

**Off table**

2 batteries 81mm mortars (8 tubes)

**Figures and rules**

We use Charles Grant's old "Battle" rules, with modifications derived over years of play. This battle could easily be fought using Arc of Fire or Crossfire (or any other company/battalion level set). We used 20mm figures and kit from my collection from various manufacturers.

For the Brazilians any US figures can be used as the FEB was totally equipped by the Americans - standard US Uniforms (M-41 Jacket, HBT Coveralls, OD wool shirts and trousers, service shoes, dismounted leggings, M-36 suspenders, the M42 double-breasted waterproof greatcoat was popular), I've also seen photos of Brazilians in the white snow camouflage suit too, but obviously not in April `45! In combat they wore the M-1 US standard helmet, but beanie caps and side-caps were also worn. It should be noted if you are going to paint up a unit specifically as Brazilians that there was a racial mix, unknown within the US Army of this period with coloured, Hispanic, white and even Asians present. The Brazilian vehicles had a unique marking of the Northern Star constellation within a broken circle.