

Lagus Armored Division: The Battle of Tali-Ihantala



The Battle of Tali-Ihantala

After the initial Finnish advance of 1941, the Continuation War stabilized into mainly trench warfare near the pre-Winter War positions with very little activity on either side. With the lifting of the siege of Leningrad in January 1944, Stalin ordered the planning of an offensive in the Karelian Isthmus in an effort to knock Finland out of the war. The Soviet offensive was coordinated with the launching of the Allied invasion of Normandy, and commenced on June 9, 1944. The 21st Army led the main Soviet attack force with a total of 150,000 men in 14 divisions including numerous tank brigades, artillery regiments, and other heavy support assets. Soviet artillery in particular was heavily concentrated with ten guns per every 100 yards. Some of the heaviest bombardments of World War II occurred during the battle of Tali-Ihantala. Facing the Soviets on the Karelian Isthmus was the 50,000 men of the Finnish IV Corps commanded by Lt. General Taaveti Laatikainen. The IV Corps at Tali-Ihantala included the 3rd, 4th, 6th, and 18th Infantry Divisions, the 'Lagus' Armored division, and the 3rd 'Blue' Brigade. The Soviet numerical advantage going into the battle, had the Soviet commanders confident of quickly steamrolling the Finnish forces. The one advantage the Finnish defenders had was the fact that they were fighting not only for survival, but also for their nation's very existence.

By June 10th, the Soviet attack had breached the Finnish front line of defense in Valkeasaari forcing the Finnish forces to retreat to their secondary defense line, the Vammelsuu - Taipale (V-T) line. Four days later the V-T line was breached at Sahakylä and Kuuterselkä. The abandonment of VT-line was followed by a week of retreat and delaying battles as the Finnish defenders fell back on the VKT (Viipuri (renamed Vyborg) - Kuparsaari – Taipale) line. The Soviet offensive was crowned when the city of Viipuri (Vyborg) was captured by the Soviets on June 20th after a short battle. Despite the Red army's great success in smashing two Finnish defense lines in just 10 days, it had failed to destroy the Finnish army.



The initial defense of the VKT line allowed time for the Finns to regroup and bring in reinforcements. When the Soviet attack resumed around Tali on June 25th, the Finnish defenders were able to blunt the attack. The resulting battle of attrition, fought in an area of about 40 square miles, was larger in scale than El Alamein. The fighting around Tali and later Ihantala was as savage as in any battle on the Eastern Front with severe losses on both sides. The Finnish defenders fought with fierce determination and skill and managed to hold the VKT line against Soviet attack. The Border Jaegers, artillery units, and troops of the Lagus armored division were particularly outstanding during the Tali-Ihantala fighting. On July 10th, Stavka ordered Soviet forces on the Karelian Isthmus to take up purely defensive positions ending the battle of Tali-Ihantala.

The Battle of Tali-Ihantala was the single most important battle fought in Finland's Continuation War, as it determined the outcome of the entire war. The fierce defense put up by Finns, convinced Stalin to reconsider his call for the unconditional surrender and led to final peace negotiations resulting in a separate armistice between Finland and the Soviet Union before the end of World War II.

Combat AAR June 26th, 1944

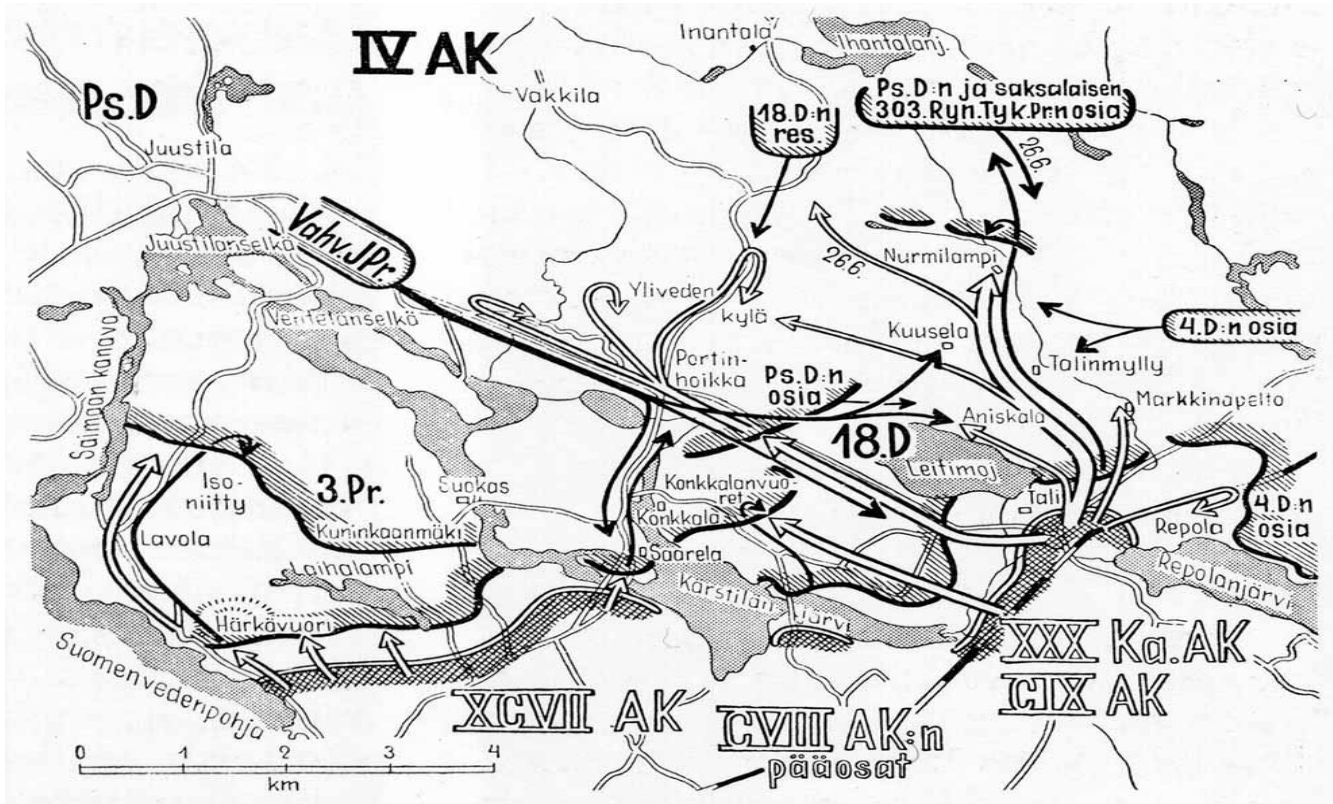
In the early morning hours, elements of the Lagus Armored Division, commanded by Col. Albert Puroma, continued its counter-attack towards Tali west of Lake Leitimonjärvi. By 2 am, Jäger Battalion 3, reinforced by assault guns, had reached the defensive positions the III/IR 13 had occupied the previous morning. During the attack, Jäger Battalion 3 destroyed or captured eight enemy tanks. As with much of the fighting during the Battle of Tali-Ihantala, a Soviet counter-attack forced the Jäger Battalion 3 to retreat back to positions it had occupied the previous midnight. Between 8 and 9 am, Jäger Battalions 4 and 5, reinforced by elements from Maj. Eric Åkerman's Assault Gun Battalion, settle into defense on the isthmus between lakes Kärstilänjärvi and Leitimonjärvi, while Jäger Battalion



3 withdraws to reserve around Portinhoikka.

Late War Finnish Jägers in Flames of War

The following force represents elements of the 3rd Jäger Battalion of the Lagus Armored Divisions during this counter-attack on the morning of June 26th. Since the Finnish LW list has yet to be released from play testing, I am using the Fallschirmjäger list from Festung Europa. All equipment used in this force was present in the Jäger Brigade of the Lagus Armored Division during the fighting at Tali-Ihantala.



1st Company , 3rd Jäger Battlion, Jäger Brigade, Lagus Armored Division

Company HQ, Major Sarasite	90
w/ attached 81 mm mortar and Panzerknacker	90
1 st Jäger Platoon , 1Lt. Kakariluto	265
(3 Squad FJ Platoon w/ PanzerFaust)	355
2 nd Jäger Platoon, 2Lt. Koskela	265
(3 Squad FJ Platoon w/ PanzerFaust)	620
Jäger Mortar Platoon, 2Lt. Viirila	100
(8 cm FJ Mortar Platoon w/ 1 section)	720
2 nd Battery, Medium Artillery Battery	210
(Full 105mm Artillery Battery)	930
“Liisa”, “Aili”, and “Toini”, 1 st Platoon, 2nd Co, Separate Assault Gun Battalion	285
(Panzer Platoon w/ 3 Stug G)	1215
“Bubi”, “Airi”, and “Lea”, 2 nd Platoon, 2nd Co, Separate Assault Gun Battalion	285

(Panzer Platoon w/ 3 Stug G)

1500