

The Ardennes 1944

Hitler' Last Offensive

Design by Rob Kunz
For TOAW IV



Introduction

In his book *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, Hugh M. Cole summarizes the plan for the Ardennes Offensive as follows:

“On the night of 15 December German company commanders gave their men the watchword which had come from the Fuehrer himself: "Forward to and over the Meuse!" The objective was Antwerp. Hitler's concept of the Big Solution had prevailed; the enemy was not to be beaten east of the Meuse but encircled by a turning movement beyond that river. The main effort would be made by Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army* on the

north wing, with orders to cross the Meuse on both sides of Liège, wheel north, and strike for the Albert Canal, fanning out the while to form a front extending from Maastricht to Antwerp. Meanwhile the infantry divisions to the rear of the armored columns would form the north shoulder of the initial advance and a subsequent blocking position east of the Meuse along the Vesdre River. Eventually, or so Hitler intended, the *Fifteenth Army* would advance to take a station protecting the *Sixth Panzer Army* right and rear.

Manteuffel's *Fifth Panzer Army*, initially acting as the center, had the mission of crossing the Meuse to the south of the *Sixth*, but because the river angled away to the southwest might be expected to cross a few hours later than its armored partner on the right. Once across the Meuse, Manteuffel had the mission of preventing an Allied counterattack against Dietrich's left and rear by holding the line Antwerp-Brussels-Namur-Dinant. The left wing of the counteroffensive, composed of infantry and mechanized divisions belonging to Brandenberger's *Seventh Army*, had orders to push to the Meuse, unwinding a cordon of infantry and artillery facing south and southwest, thereafter anchoring the southern German flank on the angle formed by the Semois and the Meuse. Also, the Fuehrer had expressed the wish that the first segment of the *Seventh Army* cordon be pushed as far south as Luxembourg City if possible.”¹

Other TOAW III Scenarios

Two excellent scenarios and their accompanying briefings included with TOAW III: *Bulge 44* by James D. Burns, and *von Rundstedt's Plan Martin* by Daniel R. McBride. The Briefings are both included in the TOAW - WWII West Front folder, and are required reading for anyone interested in The Battle of the Bulge.

The references listed below give outstanding descriptions of the campaign, each from a unique view point.

It is significant to note that Hitler's grandiose but unrealistic scheme was to reach Antwerp, some 150 kilometers from the West Wall, disable the port, and split the American and British forces, both physically and politically. The German generals proposed a smaller scale, and somewhat more realistic, operation aimed at Liege. This was von Rundstedt's *Plan Martin*.

Player's Notes:

German Player:

The German player has several objectives that correspond to the German high-water mark reached 24-25 December that give permanent victory point if reached. His goal should be to reach as many of these as possible, then pull back with an elastic defense to the Houffalize-Wiltz line and set up a defensive line.

The Allied player:

The Allied player needs to block as many of the advancing panzer units to avoid the Germans reaching the permanent VP. Then as the Allied units arrive from the Ninth Army to the north, Patton's Third Army from the south and British XXX Corps from the west, he will need to decide if he should attack the face of the German salient or the attack the flanks of the German salient to cut it off at the based as proposed by Patton.

¹ *The U.S. Army Military History. The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, by Hugh M. Cole. 1964.

Designer Notes:

Design Philosophy: A good historic simulation should be a simulation model that gives the historic result, when played using the historic strategy. If that is the case, then alternative “what if” strategies can be explored with some degree of confidence that they will accurately reflect the “what if” results.

Specifically the scenario was designed the historic map, TOE, unit locations and objectives. Then the variable parameters such as proficiency, supply, replacements were adjusted to The scenario was then played out on PO vs. PO until the Germans generally reached their historic high water mark, and the Allies then pushed them back to near the historic line of 15 January. Victory points are adjusted until these results in a draw.

German panzer division delays. The Germans do not receive use of their panzer divisions until the morning of the second day. On the northern shoulder the *1st SS Panzer Division* and *12th SS Panzer Divisions* were held back to exploit the anticipated infantry breakthroughs that were anticipate to follow a WWI style artillery bombardment.

“The decision as to exactly when the two panzer divisions would be committed in exploitation of the penetrations achieved by the infantry was a matter to be decided by the commanders of the *Sixth Panzer Army* and *Army Group B* as the attack developed. Armored infantry *kampfgruppen* from the *12th SS Panzer Division* and *1st SS Panzer Division* were assembled close behind the infantry divisions, in part as reinforcements for the breakthrough forces, in part because none of the *Volks Grenadier* units were used to close cooperation with armor.”²

Neither the effectiveness of the artillery bombardment nor the infantry breakthroughs occurred, so the German armor was bogged down at the start line.

In the center, *the 2nd, 116th and Lehr Panzer Divisions* were delayed by bridging difficulties crossing the Our River. As a result, the panzer divisions are not available until the second day.

British Units. The availability of the British units generally corresponds to the historic deployment- most were well-worn and held in reserve on the Meuse River.

U.S. Deployment. Several US units –such as the 82nd and 101st Airborne and the 7th Armored Divisions arrive in the scenario near their historic assembly areas rather than their historic entry points. This is to facilitate their historic deployment when being controlled by the Programmed Opponent. Nevertheless, they are near enough to the entry point that they can be maneuvered by a human player.

Programmed Opponent: The scenario was designed with a bias toward the human player as the German versus an Allied PO, but it is playable as the Allied side vs. PO, or PBEM.

² *The U.S. Army Military History. The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, by Hugh M. Cole. 1964.

Operation Stösser The plan was for Oberst von der Heyde to parachute the near the cross roads between Malmedy and Eupen to secure the road junction for the Sixth Panzer Army and block Allied reinforcement from the Aachen area. Some 112 Ju-52 transports and 870 paratroopers took off. The force was shot down, scattered and injured- few than half jumped into the Hohes Venn area... Their main success was the resulting paranoia among the allied rear area troops and they tied up the 18th Regiment of the US 1st Division for three days searching for parachutist! The Germans have air transport available only on Turn 3 to airdrop *von der Heyde Kampfgruppe*.³

Operation Greif SS-Ostbf. Otto Skorzeny, labeled by the British intelligence “the most dangerous man in Europe”, was charged by Hitler with leading a deception panzer brigade under the tile of *Operation Greif*. In addition to a few captured Shermans and armored cars, Skorzeny had a company of jeep teams that were to race ahead of the Sixth Panzer Army and capture at least two of the Meuse bridges.⁴ Ultimate the brigade’s main success was spreading confusion and suspicion in the Allied rear area.

Weather: Initially cloud cover and fog restricted air support on both sides. Finally on the afternoon of 23 Dec the skies clear for several days. January will again have overcast weather that will disrupt offensive operations, supply and air support and recon.

The Air War: The air war is one of the more difficult aspects of TOAW to successfully model. Parker quotes official sources as 1138 Allied battlefield sorties vs. 1088 German sorties on 24 Dec, the busiest day of the Ardennes air war⁵. McBride’s *Plan Martin* includes 1878 German aircraft vs. 2098 Allied aircraft, and modifies the Air Shock and Theater Recon values turn by turn depending on the daily weather. Burns’ *Bulge 44* has 522 German aircraft vs. 1212 Allied aircraft.

Ardennes 1944 has 1049 German aircraft vs. 1360 Allied aircraft, with Air Shock modified for poor flying weather initially, improves around Christmas for clearing weather, and again reduced in January.

Allied Counter-Offensive: Despite the overwhelming Allied advantage in the Allied counter attack, began on 3 January, the US forces did not achieve major advances. “A mile a day was a major achievement”⁶. This can be attributed to bitter cold, snow two feet deep, supply difficulties and local German counterattacks. Thus in January both sides suffer Shock effects, the Allies more than the Germans.

*Optimum Panzer Division: This variation deploys the 1 SS and 12 SS Panzer Divisions in more central locations, and assumes that the Our River crossing sites were more careful reconnaissance and had more proficient engineer support for the 2nd, 116th and

³ *The Battle of the Bulge*, 2nd Ed., Danny S. Parker, 2004. pp. 129-133.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 192- 196.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 337.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 300.

Lehr Panzer Divisions so these units are available the first day. (This variation is still in the planning stage.)

References:

The U.S. Army Military History. The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge, by Hugh M. Cole. 1964. This is a classic volume as part of the US Army Military History series, photographs of many of the towns, and pull-out colored maps.

See http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/wwii/7-8/7-8_cont.htm for an online version.

Hitler's Last Gamble: the Battle of the Bulge December 1944- January 1945, COL Trevor N. Dupuy, David L Bongard, and Richard C. Anderson Jr. 1994. An excellent reference for game designers. The appendix includes actual strength of troops, tanks, and guns for the major units involved, a detailed order of battle, and even a calculation of relative unit effectiveness.

It should be noted that COL Dupuy has developed The Ardennes Campaign Simulation (ARCAS) Study, a program for the Pentagon that "compares credibility of the Stochastic Concepts Evaluation Model (STOCCEM) simulation by comparing a STOCCEM simulation of the WW II Ardennes campaign of 1944-45 with historical campaign result. Historical campaign data had been developed from archival sources into a computerized data base". In summary, he concludes 100 German soldiers were the combat equivalent of 120 Allied soldiers based on eleven battles in the Ardennes campaign.

A Time for Trumpets, Charles B. MacDonald, 1985. Charles MacDonald was the author of *Company Commander* with his wartime experience with 2nd Infantry Division in the Ardennes.

The Battle of the Bulge, 2nd Ed., Danny S. Parker, 2004. Danny Parker was a designer of the classic board game *The Battles of the Ardennes* (SPI). This is a highly readable book, with operational maps and arrival times of reinforcements not available from other sources.

To Win the Winter Sky: Air War over the Ardennes, 1944-1945, Danny S. Parker.

Engineering the Victory, Col. David Pergrin, commander of the 291st Engineer Battalion. Although numerous engineer units were in the Ardennes, I decided to represent only those that were directly involved in combat.

Rundstedt's Plan Martin, Briefing for TOAW III by Daniel R. McBride-in this folder. A truly outstanding account of this option as well as a detail of the game mechanics and rationale. This article is of publication quality and alone is worth the price of the game!