

DOCUMENTED PLAY

FORTY-FOUR, FORTY AND FIGHT

The Campaigns in the Ardennes

by Karl G. Wiegiers

Karl returns again to his favorite Bulge simulation and gives us comparative accounts of two playings of the campaign games from *Battles for the Ardennes*. The '44 Campaign is one of those battles that will endure as a game subject for as long as there are such things (SPI has done five of them!). Except for our "Bulge" (now called *Big Red One*, after the movie), SPI's most playable version is the one of which you're about to read.

—RAS

While the four one-map games in *Battles for the Ardennes* (*St. Vith*, *Clervaux*, *Celles*, and *Sedan, 1940*) are excellent, entertaining simulations, they capture only part of the flavor of World War II combat in the Ardennes area of Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. However, players who own the entire *BFTA* package can recreate both the 1940 (Blitzkrieg to the Meuse) and the 1944 (Battle of the Bulge) campaigns, using all four folio-sized maps. Besides these two campaign games, several additional scenarios are also available, some involving variant reinforcement schedules, and others which are limited campaign simulations.

The outstanding design by Danny S. Parker results in multi-map games that are as exciting as the one-map simulations. Tactics of play in the campaign scenarios are much the same as those involved in the individual folio games. However, the campaign games have a tremendously different *strategic* feel than do the folios. In the folio games, the limited objectives and narrow front make the deployment of reinforcements fairly straightforward. But the broad front of a campaign scenario puts the player in the role of a higher-level commander, and the most effective axes of attack may be quite different from those in a more limited action. Defending units which securely anchor a flank in a one-map scenario may be the vulnerable hinge in a line that might extend across two map-sheets.

This article presents after-action reports for both the 1940 and 1944 historical campaign scenarios. Each game provides an enjoyable and manageable simulation of its respective battle, with enough ebb and flow to keep the game interesting for both players.

Blitzkrieg to the Meuse

This twelve-turn simulation of the first German attack through the Ardennes in 1940 features an enormous disparity in strength

between both sides. As the Table shows, the Germans amass a total of 525 strength points (SP's), versus 161 French SP's and a mere 32 for the Belgians. This imbalance is leveled out somewhat by the fact that the Allies often can defend with the advantage of heavy terrain (especially behind rivers), while the Germans must march clear across the map-sheet from east to west just to engage the enemy. Most of the German artillery and many infantry divisions will not even make it to the combat zone by the end of the game. The Luftwaffe provides four air points each game-turn for road interdiction and/or ground support, whereas the Allies have only three air points for the entire game.

The Germans begin the scenario with ten infantry divisions deployed on the map-sheet. The French have units near Sedan in the southwest corner of the map, while the Belgians have very weak forces scattered near Liege, Huy, and Namur, and throughout the woods. A German victory is achieved by exiting at least 75 mechanized SP's off the west edge of the map, although this number can be reduced by capturing the cities of Sedan (worth 25 SP's), Dinant (10), and Namur (15). In addition, no more than 20 German mechanized SP's may be lost by the end of the game.

Game-Turns 1-3. The German onslaught begins with the appearance of five 2/3 Panzer divisions, four infantry divisions, the 1st Geberg, and the Niwi airborne battalion. A three-pronged assault is launched toward

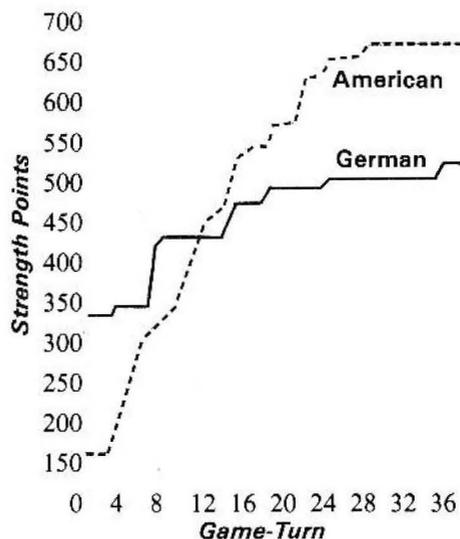
the key cities of Namur (7 Pz), Dinant (2 and 10 Pz), and Sedan (1 and 5 Pz), with the prime goal of securing bridges across the Semois and Meuse Rivers before they can all be blown by the defenders. Subsequent mechanized reinforcements back up these armored spearheads, supported by force-marching infantry. By the third game-turn, a weakened Rommel has crossed the Meuse between Givet and Dinant, but the French 1DLC and powerful 5th Mechanized divisions destroy Rommel's overextended regiment that same turn. Several German infantry divisions approach the Belgian defenders of Huy, and the 1st Panzer pushes the French 5/5DLC out of Florenville with heavy air support.

The few French units may move on game-turn one and head toward Dinant to fortify that undefended sector. By game-turn 3, the 61st Infantry has secured all the Meuse bridges between Vireaux and Dinant. The French units near Sedan construct improved positions in the woods around that city and await the inevitable attack. A Belgian withdrawal rule requires that all Belgian units head for and remain north of the Meuse River, so they deploy their pitiful forces east of Namur (8th Infantry) and Huy (2 CA and 2nd Infantry). The Allies are very successful at bridge demolition, destroying most of those around Namur, Huy, La Roche, Florenville, and hex C1009.

Game-Turns 4-6. Four German mechanized regiments force a bridgehead across the Meuse against the French 5/1DLC on game-turn 4, but this is to be the limit of German penetration south of Dinant. Dinant itself is taken by the 10th Panzer and 471/21, who evict the 14/4DLC on turn 5. The Belgian defenders near Huy are methodically destroyed by the 8, 28, 32, and 62 Infantry Divisions, who then move on to Namur. Farther south, the bridge across the Semois River at Bouillon is captured intact by 5th Panzer, although the efficient Allied demolition teams have really hampered the German advance. By turn 5 the bridgehead across the Semois is being expanded, and the 1, 2, and 5 Panzer begin chewing on the entrenched defenders east of Sedan. Air points are applied both to interdiction attacks (with poor results) and in support of ground combat (a favorable one-column odds ratio shift).

The French spend these three game-turns shuffling and strengthening their defenders near Sedan. The 5th Mech, 1DLC, and 61st Infantry are successfully containing

FIGURE



the enemy penetration across the Meuse at Givet, and the entire sector between Vireaux and Yvoir is reinforced by fresh French troops. The French still don't have the strength to launch a counterattack in force, but have adequate defenses in both breadth and depth to insure that the Germans cannot break through.

Game-Turns 7-9. The German attacks on the flanks are going well, but the center of the line has reached a stalemate as the 10th Panzer and supporting elements futilely batter against ever-stronger opposition around Givet. A flimsy bridgehead is in fact established across the Meuse at Dinant, but cannot be expanded. Repeated attacks at both locations cause serious French casualties, but they are replaced rapidly. The advancing Wehrmacht decimates the Belgians around Namur, and one of the two city hexes is occupied. Meanwhile, at Sedan, the three Panzer divisions there have been joined by some infantry and the 29th Panzer-grenadiers. These massed forces reach the outskirts of Sedan as they roll back the entrenched defenders.

On game-turn 7, the French 71st Infantry heads for Sedan, while other reinforcements move toward the threatened Dinant sector. The Belgians around Namur receive support from the French 14z/5NA regiment on game-turn 8. By the 9th turn, the gap between Sedan and Charleville-Meziers is strengthened by elements of the 53rd and 71st Infantry. Stiffening Allied resistance is beginning to alarm the German commander.

Game-Turns 10-12. As the game reaches its climax, the outcome is by no means certain. The last Belgian outpost is eliminated on game-turn 10, but the assault on Namur is only partially successful. A combined attack supported by Kleist's artillery corps fails to dislodge one last regiment from the second Namur hex by the end of the game. Sedan is occupied by the 5th Panzer as the 5/5DLC unit is eliminated on turn 10. An attempt by the 36th Infantry to outflank Sedan by crossing the Meuse at hex C0111 is thwarted by the French 4CFM and 213/55 units. However, the 1, 2, and 5 Panzers consolidate Sedan and cross the Meuse by the end of the game. Repeated attacks on the French defenders in hex A0606 inflict heavy casualties and consume all available Allied replacements, but no breakthrough is achieved. The 4th and 5th North African divisions finally tip the scales in favor of the Allies around Dinant as the scenario ends.

The Germans exited only 24 mechanized strength points, from the roads northwest of Namur. In addition, both Sedan and Dinant were captured, together equivalent to 35 more exited SP's; only 13 mechanized SP's were lost during the battle. But the sum of 59 victory points fell short of the 75 needed, resulting in an Allied victory. The excellent play balance of Blitzkrieg to the Meuse is evident, as one more game-turn would have resulted in certain German victory. Also, a small reallocation of the units trying to capture Namur could probably have resulted in success before the end of the game. Sending at least 30 mechanized SP's (Panzer-grenadiers are good for this task) through the fragile Belgian defenders will help facilitate a German victory, too.

Battle of the Bulge

The ultimate scenario in *BFTA*, of course, deals with the best known battle of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge. In 36 game-turns, the Germans must knife through the unprepared American defenders, capture numerous key towns spread over all four mapsheets, and then defend their gains against ever-increasing Allied strength. German victory points are achieved by taking cities and towns, and by exiting mechanized units off certain mapedges. Although the initial advantage lies with the Germans, after the first few game-turns their advance is slowed down by Allied air power, random supply shortages, and very limited reinforcements and replacements. The Figure graphically illustrates the relative number of German and American SP's present on each turn, without considering losses or replacements. The initial deployments in Battle of the Bulge are the sum of those in the *St. Vith* and *Clervaux* folio games.

Game-Turns 1-4. The German attack progresses on several fronts. In the south, 7th Army (5 FJ, and 352, 276, and 212 Volksgrenadier divisions) pushes toward Luxembourg City and Arlon against the US 4th Infantry. Clervaux is taken rapidly by 2nd Panzer, who then press on toward Bastogne, supported by Panzer Lehr and the tough 26th Volksgrenadiers. The understrength 560 VG are joined by 16 Panzer and 62 VG in driving back the lone 112/28 infantry regiment. (This is the American unit that so securely holds the mapedge flank in both *Clervaux* and *St. Vith*, but it looks awfully isolated in the campaign scenario.) St. Vith's defenders

are hammered by the 1st SS Panzer (LAH) division, which is backed up by 12th SS Panzer (HJ). 62 and 18 VG divisions, plus tank and artillery support, begin to reduce the two exposed regiments of the US 106th Infantry in the Schnee Eifel. Farther north, the combined efforts of 3 FJ, 12 VG, and 277 VG and several artillery units force the retreat of some US defenders near Bullingen. Von der Heydte's paratroops survive their drop, only to be destroyed one turn later.

In the face of overwhelming odds, the Americans can do little but try to establish a continuous defensive line as reinforcements begin to arrive. Heavy losses are taken, but the flanks are securely held. The US defenders blow up bridges left and right, although the few German engineer units prove to be very efficient at rebuilding them throughout the game.

Game-Turns 5-8. St. Vith is captured by 1 LAH, with aid from 560 VG, Skorzeny, and 12 HJ, on turn 6, and Bastogne falls to the 2nd Panzer and the Lehr recon regiment one game-turn later. A joint attack on turn 8 by 1 LAH and 12 HJ on CCB/7 in Vielsam is repulsed. However, the last of the US 422/106 is mopped up by game-turn 5, and 7th Army makes steady if not spectacular progress to the southwest. The German reinforcements on turns 7 and 8 are sent toward Bastogne (Fuhrer Begleit Brigade, 3rd Panzer-grenadier), Luxembourg City (9th SS Panzer [H]), in addition to Malmedy (2d SS Panzer [DR]).

Allied reinforcements begin to arrive in greater numbers during these four turns, and defenses are looking more stable. 7th Armored Division bridges the gap between Houffalize and Vielsam on game-turn 6. Meanwhile, the 82d and 101st Airborne deploy behind the Ourthe River and contain the German penetration past Bastogne; CCB and CCR of 10th Armored extend the 101st's line past the end of the Ourthe. The Vielsam area is reinforced on turn 8 by the fresh 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions. By turn 8 the northern front is fairly stable, but between Bastogne and Arlon is open country.

Game-Turns 9-12. Important attacks by the 2 DR Division must be postponed as German supply shortages begin to crop up on turns 10 and 12. The Fuhrer Begleit Brigade and the Panzer regiments of Lehr and 2 Pz make a foolhardy penetration to Neufchateau and encounter elements of the US and 10 Armored divisions, resulting in the trapping and eventual destruction of 130/Lehr. However, the reinforced 7th Army attains its objectives, occupying both Arlon and Luxembourg City on game-turn 11 while inflicting two step losses on regiments of the US 4th Infantry. To the north, Elsenborn is captured by 277 VG, 12 VG, and 501SS Tiger Brigade. On game-turn 10, both Houffalize and Vielsam fall, and the Panzer divisions involved regroup for the next series of thrusts toward the northwest towns and victory points.

On game-turn 9, two combat commands each from the 3rd and 10th Armored divisions are sent south of Bastogne to seal the last major gap in the American line. These

TABLE: Total Strength Points in Blitzkrieg to the Meuse (number of units in parentheses)

NATION	INFANTRY	MECHANIZED	ARTILLERY	CAVALRY	TOTAL
Germany	334 (76)	151 (28)	40 (4)	0	525 (108)
France	73 (27)	49 (16)	25 (5)	14 (5)	161 (53)
Belgium	15 (9)	9 (9)	8 (1)	0	32 (19)

two powerful divisions will both cut off the flank run by several panzer regiments and form the spearhead for the imminent Allied counterattack. Elements of Patton's 3rd Army (4th Armored and 5th, 26th, and 80th Infantry divisions) arrive in time to launch counterattacks on the German infantry in Luxembourg, inflicting heavy losses on 276 VG. Constant shuffling of the US units near Elsenborn is needed to shorten the line and provide reserves; repeated efforts to dislodge the Tigers from Elsenborn are not successful. The town of Malmedy remains in American hands due to the supply shortage problems of the 2d SS Panzers, and elements of the arriving 84th Infantry take positions in support of that town. Several British units deploy along the Meuse River (they can only participate in the battle if activated by nearby German troops), but they will sit out the rest of the battle as spectators.

It is almost impossible for the Americans to gain the defensive divisional integrity bonus at any point in the line, since there are just barely enough units to maintain a continuous defensive perimeter and beef up the most seriously threatened positions. Although a few American units have been cut off by the advancing enemy forces, so far they are still serving as thorns in the side of the Germans. The presence of several strong US artillery units and their 2-point FPF strengths is making a real difference in the outcome of many enemy attacks. US replacements (one step each game-turn) are effectively limiting the German progress in some areas; depleted units are pulled out of the line long enough to incorporate replacements, then jump back into the fighting. (The Germans may pick up replacements at the rate of only one strength step during every other game-turn.)

Game-Turns 13-16. The tide of battle is distinctly turning against the attackers, as supply shortages, Allied air power and replacements, and ever-increasing opposition in heavy terrain bog down the offensive. The pattern for the rest of the game is set on game-turn 13: attacks launched toward the key towns of Manhay (12 SS Panzer, 116 Panzer, 3 Panzergrenadier), Trois Ponts (1 SS Panzer, 560 VG), Malmedy (2 SS Panzer and infantry), and La Roche (26 VG and elements of 2 Panzer) are thwarted as the Americans shuffle in fresh units faster than the Germans can destroy them. The southern front is becoming a German defensive struggle with major American attacks throughout the Arlon-Luxembourg City area. The remnants of Panzer Lehr, Fuhrer Begleit, and several odd units defend the approaches to Bastogne, as the slow-moving German artillery finally becomes useful in a defensive role. (A very few German artillery units are actually supporting some attacks on the towns situated on the northern part of the battle front.)

In a definitely ahistorical move, several regiments of the 101st Airborne advance on Bastogne, inflicting three steps of losses on elements of the hapless Panzer Lehr. A critical defensive position farther north has

the 352G/82 and 119/30 regiments in an improved position in heavy woods at the crossroads in hex B0606. Although nearly surrounded by enemy units, these two units are almost invulnerable in their prepared positions, and they are greatly slowing down the German push to the northwest. Arlon is recaptured on game-turn 16 by a whole slew of US infantry, armor, and artillery units, who eliminate the 13 and 14 regiments of the 5 FJ division in the process. At the same time, a fresh American armored division, the 2d, is racing south to support 101st Airborne in their move on Bastogne. This key town is worth 5 victory points, enough to change a German victory into the historical defeat suffered by Hitler's last attacking armies.

Game-Turns 17-20. Supply shortages are definitely causing some problems for the Germans, but only for an average of one panzer division every two game-turns. The northern front has degenerated into trench warfare; desperate attacks on units defending Malmedy, Manhay, Trois Ponts, and Monshau are all repulsed with losses which the Germans can ill afford. The few reinforcements which arrive are almost all needed in a defensive role on the southern flank, where persistent Allied attacks are threatening to recapture some of the towns that the Germans must retain to have any hope of a win. American attacks on the defenders of Bastogne are meeting with some success, too. All along the front it is clear that Germans have shot their wad. The breakthroughs they need are not forthcoming, and no reserves exist to replace the losses which are mounting with each turn. The need for the Germans to mass their forces to try to move ahead at the most vital areas has resulted in some dangerously thin spots in the line; the emboldened Americans just might be able to knife through a weak spot and cut off the German armored formations. At this point an eventual Allied victory certainly appears inevitable.

A tally of victory points is made at the end of twenty turns of play to see if a decision has been reached. In this game, the Germans have accrued 13 victory points for towns captured, and none from exiting mechanized units or eliminating British units. This is enough points to avoid an Allied Strategic Victory, but the prospects of getting enough points during the rest of the game to result in a German win are pretty slim. Since the remaining 16 game-turns are likely to be progressively more lopsided and boring, the German player surrenders at the conclusion of twenty turns of play. As with the 1944 folio games, Battle of the Bulge suffers from a play balance problem. The victory point totals needed for a German win are just too demanding. The rule which calls for victory point evaluation after twenty turns will probably result in most games being played for only twenty turns. Even if the Germans have too few points at that time to be declared victors and too many to be declared losers, the outcome of the game will probably be apparent at that time. No one is likely to get bored in the first 20 game-turns, though!

Other Campaign Scenarios

Three optional variant scenarios are provided for Blitzkrieg to the Meuse, allowing players to simulate Belgian defense in the Ardennes instead of behind the Meuse (no Belgian withdrawal rule in effect), improved French command (all Allied reinforcements enter the game two game-turns earlier than scheduled in the historical scenario, and the Allied player may take up to 16 additional optional units as reinforcements), and a smaller scale German offensive. Victory conditions are modified in these three variants to compensate for changes in the balance of play.

There are several major variants for the Battle of the Bulge. One optional rule involves rolling a die every other game-turn to check the weather that day; the availability of Allied air points each game turn then depends upon the weather, rather than using the historical air point schedule provided. Another intriguing situation involves the secret selection of one of four alternate strategies by the German player at the beginning of the game. Multiple victory point schedules are provided, depending on whether the German strategy involves the Historical Plan, the Small Solution, Operation Luxembourg, or a Spoiling Attack. These variants all involve modified orders of battle and victory conditions; the Spoiling Attack is only 10 game-turns long. An All-Out German Effort in 1944 scenario features the rapid arrival of heavy German reinforcements, more rapid reaction of American forces to the enemy offensive, and a commensurate increase in the number of victory points the Germans must have to achieve victory.

For those who wish to capture the flavor of the 1944 Ardennes campaign without the 36 game-turn commitment, two shorter multi-map games are provided. *Angriefen!* covers the first five days of the attack on the *St. Vith* and *Clervaux* mapsheets only. Using the historical plan victory point schedule, the Germans must make unreasonably rapid progress to win, a condition which results in the game being somewhat biased in favor of the Allies (as usual). But *Angriefen!* is easy to set up, not too long, fast moving, and, for my money, the most enjoyable of the shorter campaign scenarios in *BFTA*. 22 December simulates four days (game-turns 13 through 20) of the 1944 Ardennes battle, a slice of the action between the initial assault and the beginning of the end. The bulge forming process is well underway, spearheaded by Panzer Lehr and the 2d, 2d SS, and 116th Panzer divisions. This scenario permits the player to explore alternative Allied approaches to containing the Bulge and turning the tide of war in favor of the Americans.

As with the four folio games in *BFTA*, many enjoyable hours of historical and not-so-historical recreation of the vital actions fought in the Ardennes are provided by the various campaign scenarios. Once you set up all four maps together, you won't put them away for a while. ■ ■