

RECON – Bastogne Review, with Designer Response

S&T Issue 21

This RECON may be the start of a new feature. We received the article below and really didn't know what to do with it. Our solution is to propose taking such articles on any game where we have access to the designer (S&T and TSG games) and have the designer add his "Designers Notes". Here's our first attempt, let us know what you think.

BASTOGNE (A Review with Questions)

By James Govostes

One of my favorite Avalon Hill games is **BATTLE OF THE BULGE**. Even with their old counters and the revamped rules, the game was a masterpiece of playability with minimum realism. The game is enjoyable and interesting. Even more so with the S&T counters.

But this Avalon Hill game suffers from one of the same problems that a lot of other games suffer from. After playing them for any length of time, you develop a system that makes the game inevitable regardless of opposition. As the German, I learned to concentrate on the Elsenborn ridge area with the 2 northern panzer divisions, and though it took a little longer, victory was assured by the end of the game. I found the challenge was being the American.

I only have found one particularly annoying facet in the game. The infantry (German), once it is no longer a division counter, can never reunite. To move onto a 2 unit stack costs 6 movement factors and German infantry can only move 5 maximum. So I have

changed the rules to allow reuniting ONLY. To change their entire movement factor would, I feel, ruin the entire play of the game.

There are a few other points that need to be cleared up. In the HOW TO PLAY section, rules are outlined as to breaking up and building units. But there is also a BREAKING DOWN UNITS section. The rules of these 2 sections do not correspond. The latter named section should be included in the OPTIONAL RULES. I also feel that all players should, after minimum mastery of the movement technique, adopt *Optional Supply Rule*

II. Also Supply Units should be allowed normal movement regardless of surrounding friendly units. Only if it must pass through friendly units should the 3 movement factor penalty be invoked.

So much for rules. These aren't many changes, as I feel the game is complete as is. It is not an easy game to master. The movement rules are not difficult, it is their application that can drive you up a wall.

After many practice games, much frustration and finally exhaustion, I have come to the following general conclusions as to form, moves, strategy and tactics.

Under the standard reinforcement rate, the German will find that Elsenborn ridge will not fall easily. More than likely, you will never take it or if you do, it will be too late in the game to help your cause. A good

Allied defense will not surrender Spa to you thus the Marginal Victory Conditions should be forgotten at the onset. Only a stupid blunder will ever give you Spa. As for breaking the 1ss or 12ss Panzers loose, forget it. The Allied player should be able to bottle these two divisions up with CCB/9 Arm and the 2nd Infantry Division.

When you finally think you have got him, up comes the 9th Infantry Division and you'll never get your Panzers out. This doesn't mean you don't attack up here.

You have got to continually force the Allies to send troops here or else your main attacks will only meet never ending reserves.

Your main effort should be between Bastogne and Hoffalize. Though you will constantly meet new units arriving on the board, continuous well planned attacks will eventually enable you to cross the Ourthe River and turn the 11ss Panzer Korps (2ss and 9ss Panzer Divisions) loose. From then on it is a battle against time. Your main problem then will be defeating the British and crossing the Meuse.

As for good old Bastogne, you'll find it as hard to take as the Germans really found it. A stubborn Allied player will make or break you here. If you haven't put him in a desperate position by the 21st 'A' turn, you'll find your south flank taking more and more of your best troops away from you. It is a good idea to control the board up to the

square marked "south" by this time. Though Allied units may come on the board East of this, they won't have any supply counters and thus cannot attack.

I have come up with a fairly good attack turn for the Germans that does not go beyond the 16 'P' turn. Any further planning would be unrealistic as from then on, it depends on how your opponent reacts. This is based on best Allied moves. The chart included shows how this is accomplished. The following objectives are upon what this plan is based. (See chart for setup.) In the north, control of squares BB11 and CC11 and eventual control of south bank of Ambleve River to DD14. In 116 Panzer area, capture of Vielsam with eventual aim to Manhay (BB23). From there it depends on the situation. In 2 Panzer areas, strong attack to sieze confluence of Ourthe River (Q28, R28). For the south, push as hard as you can on Bastogne and square marked "South". By this time you will have your 11ss Panzer Korps and can begin attacking between the Ourthe and Lesse Rivers using them as flank protection for your drive to the Meuse. From then on it depends on how aggressive your opponent is. If he is very aggressive you'll have to settle for a Tactical Victory. If he sits and lets you hit him, you have a good chance of really succeeding.

As for the Allied player, I say the same thing that General Middleton told Colonel Fuller of the 112 Regiment of the 28th Division about the defense of Clervaux: "stand and fight. Nobody comes back, nobody." It may be an expensive way to fight, but the longer you delay the German, the less roads you allow him to operate on, the easier your task

will be once your reserves come on the board. You'll have no trouble forming a line that he will constantly have to attack thus using up precious supply counters and thus forcing limited attacks in certain areas. The German won't be able to move up quickly because of congestion (a problem that caused them considerable headaches in the original campaign). Stubborn defense mixed with contempt of losses will eventually bring you victory. But this does NOT imply needless sacrifice of units. If a unit will deny a road net, junction or access, fight and die if need be. Units are not eliminated if surrounded so don't worry about that. The only way he can clear you out is attack and that costs supply and troops that could be used elsewhere.

The key to a good Allied defense rests on the same 3 areas that it did in the original battle. They are Elsenborn ridge, St. Vith (the "fortified Goose-egg") and Bastogne. I have already discussed the Elsenborn ridge area. Suffice to say that you will not lack for reinforcements for this area. In the St. Vith area is where you must stand and where you no doubt will pay the highest price for eventual success. In the original German attack plan, all fortified areas and cities were to be avoided or surrounded and bypassed except for St. Vith. Reason - it was a key to the road net in this area and would ease the resupply problem. It linked north and south. One look at the board should show you its importance. And thanks to Mr. Dunnigan's research of the battlefield and his conditions created, the 7th Armored will arrive in time to do battle for this key town. Though you may not hold the town itself, you must control the road net

within your ZOC. In the real campaign, the Fuehrer Escort was used to aid in taking the town. It arrives on the 19 'A' turn. This should give you an idea of how long you must defend. Try not to surrender this area until the 20 'A' turn. That should be plenty of delay. Other than that once your strength has increased, play George Patton and "Attack, attack, attack!" Note - in almost every game played, Allied victory was assured but lost whole 7 Arm.

So much for overall strategy. As for tactics, breaking down or building up units for the Germans is dependent on what can be achieved by it.

Remember, you can break up a panzer division, the first move costs you at least 6 movement factors (2 per friendly unit). The more you have on the board, the more factors it costs you to move. As for the Allied player, stacking at least 2 high makes it impossible for the German to attack with infantry (8 movement factors to move next to enemy). Thus Panzers are used for clearing operations and drain the main assault. I have found this to be the singular delay technique, it forces dispersion of German armor.

Movement technique is the key to victory for both sides. Which unit to move first, should I break units down, build them up? How many should I move forward? All these are the real keys to victory. It just takes practice and a little horse sense and you are ready to take on all corners.

I found one problem overlooked. This deals with his optional combat results table. I like his idea but he neglected one important point. What if the Germans (this won't apply to Allies) attack with

motorized and regular infantry units? According to the rules, you cannot add one to die roll because they attack at full factor. Only the motorized units suffer. The only solution is to use the original combat results and half the motorized units factor. Any suggestions Mr. Dunningan? Using the 2 systems doesn't mix too well. The only suggestion that I have would be to go ahead and add 1. If however, it calls for adding 2, only add one. When defending, don't subtract at all in forest squares, only when surrounded.

*****JDF answers:**

***BASTOGNE** is one of those games where research and care in design paid off. All of the problems that arise in the rules may be solved with the rules themselves or simply by taking the rules literally. Mr Govostes brings up some of the problems with the rules. which I will deal with first.*

Others have complained of the restrictions placed on the German infantry units. Actually, these restrictions are intentional, and quite realistic. Only on turn one may the German infantry formations attack as divisions. After that, because of movement restrictions, they may not reunite once they have broken down. They MAY, however, enter the ZOC of two or more stacked US units. With one exception (passing through friendly units) you must only use one (the highest) movement restriction. Read the rules again.

*****End of JDF answers**

***** Donald B. Johnson comments:**

1) JFD wrote: "Only on turn one may the German infantry formations attack as divisions." This is an oversimplification and is not strictly correct. What is correct is that German infantry divisions may not enter an enemy ZOC, but if an Allied unit remains next to

a German unit from the setup or moves next to a German infantry division, then the German infantry division can attack it. What I think he meant to say is that a German infantry division as a division-sized unit may not enter the ZOC of an Allied unit and that this restriction was deliberate.

2) JFD further wrote:

"They MAY, however, enter the ZOC of two or more stacked US units."

"They" in the above sentence refers to German infantry regiments and battalions with a movement factor of 5.

***** End of DBJ comments**

Most of the German infantry in the Ardennes had, at most, sixteen weeks training. They were almost all green, except for the cadre, who were mostly men just out of the hospital for wounds. But the important factor was that none of these units had had time to train as units. This made their ability to launch large scale operations minimal. This was a critical factor in the Ardennes (sometimes entire German battalions would either get lost or stumble into US units and be wiped out). The battle was carried, for the most part, by the German motorized troops. Even the German paratroopers had fallen upon evil days, their ranks were filled with green troops who were simply not trained. Against veteran US units they were in a hopeless position.

Another question has been raised about that bridge south of St Vith. According to the rules it is blown. The rules state that any bridge with enemy units on the other side (it doesn't say where on the other side) is considered blown.

Another problem is with the breaking down of units. This was made more complicated in the rules than it

should have been. It is really quite simple. You may combine or break down units either before you start moving or after you have stopped moving. You may not breakdown (or build up), move and build up (or breakdown) in the same impulse.

On the optional CRT, if a penalty applies to one unit in attack, it applies to all units participating in that attack (this hurts the Germans only). Another problem which nobody has really raised yet is Allied supply in the basic game. Actually, it should be able to come from the north and south sides of the board also. But this could get hairy. Try this, you may receive supply from the north or south side of the board WEST of the easternmost German unit on the south edge of the board. It may still get hairy, but give it a try.

End of Review

Editor Notes: The above critique of *BASTOGNE* had with it an opening set up and a proposed set of moves for the first four impulses. To put it in the magazine would have required about six inches of type (each page contains about 30). Would it have been worth it. Reply on the FEEDBACK. Also included was a grid system. We will reproduce that. Letters along east side to start at SE corner (A-II). Numbers along north and west sides to start at NE corner (1-55). We do not want to start another Avalon Hill GENERAL, we're just trying to find out what you want.