

Banging your head on the Belgium border

A GAME REVIEW (of sorts)
by Francis Comerford

I think that by now all major wargame companies have admitted there exists a special breed of wargamer. I mean the type who when not playing wargames pass their time banging their heads against walls. Mark you, they don't do this out of frustration but rather to see if the wall will fall down. No company has recognised the needs of these strange characters as well as Avalon Hill.

In *PanzerBlitz* they gave Situation No. 10 — Kursk, where no matter how well the German plays he is hard put to change the course of history. The game I am going to speak (write) about is from A.H.'s game *PanzerLeader*, Situation No. 13. When not being cursed at (most imaginatively) by frustrated Germans it is called *The Fortified Goose Egg*.

The Fortified Goose Egg was the name given to the strong defensive line hurriedly thrown up by the Americans to halt the German advance during the 1944 Ardenner Offensive. It held till Montgomery ordered a "Strategic withdrawal".

The American line held then and in this game the game balance is in favour of its holding again. The German objectives are inside American lines, well inside. What's worse is that there are a lot of American units unwilling to give access.

I don't know how many German players have suicided after a crushing defeat but I fear the number may be high but I do know one thing — none of those poor souls were head-bangers.

For those of you not familiar with *PanzerLeader*, it is a tactical level game of warfare on the Western Front 1944 - 1945. It is slightly smaller scale than *Mech War 77* and the same basic game system (albeit not simove) It has four 8" by 22" Boards which can be arranged in different configurations to give totally different maps. In the FGE the two roughest terrain boards are laid side by side. At this point veterans of *Terrible Swift Sword* and *War In The East* will scream in horror "That's a tiny board" and they would be right. It is a small board but it's all for the best. The smallness and the very high unit density make this game a very enjoyable slugfest.

The German player doesn't have very many options as a combination of impassable streams and impenetrable woods give only four tank passages ways through the American line. Three of these paths

are bridges, two of them almost adjacent. The fourth path is a sparsely wooded forest trail through a thickly wooded forest. Ideal defensive ground, a couple of trucks could delay a whole swarm of Panthers and two T.D. Units in ambush behind a few wrecks could hold forever.

Therefore, the trail is not a viable option but turning to view the two almost adjacent bridges they, in my opinion, turn out to be no more viable an option. An attempt to seize the bridge "coup a main" means sending your Panzers into a cauldron of fire. Ripping a side of the cauldron down costs time and units.

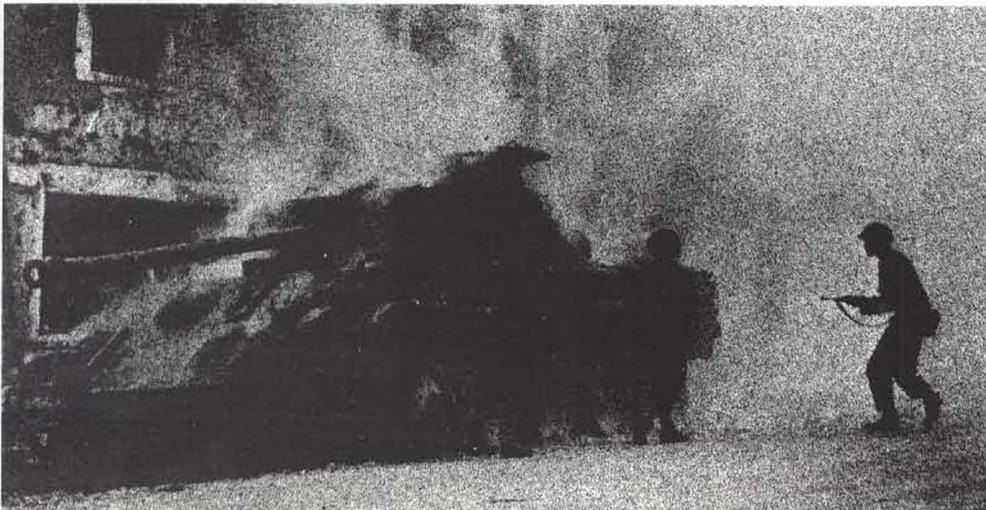
The lone bridge is the best choice and even that is very difficult. One can seize the town on the German side of the stream easily — any American resistance will be token. The bridge will then fall automatically. Very good, mission accomplished — not by a long shot. The bridge is situated at the bottom of a curve in the river. A ridge runs across the top of the curve. You've got a bridgehead, now break out of it. (N.B. never overcrowd your bridgehead. It's accurate indirect fire you are dealing with, not the temperamental *Mech War '77* type).

When you have broken over the ridge another forest lies before you. True, you can try to out-flank it but it is almost a necessity to take the town of Nece lying beyond that wood. Once, and if, you take Nece you are still one town hex short. Whatever town you aim for depends totally on each separate game so I say "No comment".

This game would be difficult against a weak American force. Against the strong well-balanced force which faces you it's almost impossible. I say it's only almost impossible because I believe it is possible to win. I have almost done it once or twice (well, actually only once). I'm still trying!

Whatever the outcome, the game will nearly always end with the two forces glaring manfully at one another, victory decided by who holds what. The very high unit density will by now be a very low unit density and the wreck count will be nothing short of amazing.

In short, *The Fortified Goose Egg* is one of my favourites. There's victory for the American, a challenge for the Germans and a stiff fight for both. Of course, you shouldn't take my word — you should see some of the bumps on my head!



ARNHEM

R. CREMERS

Living in Nijmegen I am most interested in games on the Market-Garden operations. What struck me in the game 'Arnhem' were some more or less serious mistakes.

I was amazed when I saw the number of spelling mistakes in the Dutch names on the map: Genert (0811) should be Gemert, Veldt (3625) should be Velp and Heavadorp (3619) should be Heveadorp. Reichswald Forest is a pleonasm as "wald" means forest. What is worse is that the towns of Berg En Dal (2523) and Elst (3121) have been omitted. It is also very confusing to see that the map is printed in a way that brings the West to the top of the map and the North to the right edge. But that may be because I am not used to looking at a map of this part of Holland in that rather odd way.

A second and more serious criticism is that the rules on the canal and rail bridge demolition are incorrect. Anybody who has read "A Bridge Too Far" by Cornelius Ryan knows that the highway bridges at Nijmegen and Arnhem were actually mined. SS Brigadeführer (Maj. General) Harmel of the 10th "Frundsberg" Division in fact gave the order to blow up the highway bridge at Nijmegen (A Bridge Too Far, P. 417-418). That did not work because of sabotage. The story goes that a Dutch underground worker, Jan van Hoof, who was killed while he was guiding a British patrol through Nijmegen, had cut the wires (418, note).

A third criticism is the omission of one vital bridge on the map. There should be a rail bridge at Nijmegen from hex 2620 to hex 2721 (which still exists today). This bridge is also described in Ryan's book (p. 412-413). In the game, this bridge can be of vital importance to the 82nd Airborne Division in their attempt to drive the Germans out of Nijmegen and to clear the highway bridge for the ground forces.

The fourth and last criticism concerns the Victory Point Schedule. The object of the Market-Garden operation was to establish a perimeter across the Rijn at Arnhem. The first time I played Arnhem this was achieved. But due to a German "Kamikaze" attack on St. -Oedenrode (1005), that could have been thrown back easily in game turn 11 (if there had been 11 game turns), the Allied player received no Victory points for his non-airborne troops North of the Rijn, thus losing about 50-70 Victory Points and leaving a tactical victory to the Germans, this should have been an Allied tactical victory! The Allied player paid too high a price for a mistake made in the defence of the corridor by the 101st Airborne Division.

What to do about these points? I propose the following alterations to be made on the map and in the rules:

MAP

Hex 2523 becomes a town hex. The town is called Berg en Dal.

Hex 3121 also becomes a town hex. This town is called Elst.

A bridge symbol is drawn from 2620 to 2721.

12.0 CANAL AND RAIL BRIDGE DEMOLITION (RECTIFICATION)

All bridges on the map are wired for demolition.

12.12 (ADDITION)
A die roll of 1 is considered to demolish the highway bridge.

12.16 (CLARIFICATION)
Note that this rule does not change. Highway bridges can never be repaired.

17.11 VICTORY POINTS AWARDED THE ALLIED PLAYER (ADDITION)

4. The Allied player receives eight Victory Points for every non-airborne, non-glider unit north of the Neder Rijn at the end of the game, if the unit in question can not trace a line of communication off the map at the end of the game.

Note that the allied player in fact only gets five Victory Points, as the German player receives three Victory Points for every Allied unit that is unable to trace a line of communications.