

Schwerpunkt in the Ardennes!

**Battles for the Ardennes Quad (SPI)
(designed by Danny S. Parker 1978)**

“Putting a tiger in your tank” By Paul Sheppard

So you think you can reach the Meuse? So you think the Germans are unstoppable? What was it like to face the same strategic challenges the opposing forces faced that cold December back in 1944? Can you successfully organise and execute the 1940 blitzkrieg? If you want to try a game where you can attempt the answers to these and many other questions then try SPI's Battles for the Ardennes Quad. First published in Dec 1978, this quad has since been re-published but personally I'm quite happy with the original. It looks good and plays good. If, like me, you want separate counter mixes for the scenarios and the campaign games, then try and get hold of a second copy.

As with many of the 'Quadr games' published by SPI, you get a collection of four games with additional campaign games therein. As I stated in a sister article about Napoleon's Last Battles Quad, they were (and still are) good value, utilising a very simple but workable system that enabled you to re-enact some great moments in history. The game system in 'Battles for the Ardennes' Quad is a degree more complex but still relatively straightforward and playable.

'Battles for the Ardennes' Quad came either in a box or grip-top (depending on your source of supply) with 400 die-cut counters, 4 maps and two sets of rules, one for the basic game system and the other covering special rules dealing with the Campaign games, utilising appropriate colours for the counters and a set of very attractive and clear maps.

With a very playable and (in my view) reasonably accurate game system, you can try out a myriad of strategic options and some tactical nuances, whether it be the capture of St. Vith or the final dash to the Meuse. In addition, the designer has cleverly allowed you to re-create the 1940 Ardennes offensive with a small scenario (one of the best ever in my view) concerning the battle around Sedan.

I don't propose to analyse all of the facets of the Quad in detail. Rather, the purpose of this article is to suggest improvements and look at the game system, the scenarios and the ways in which players can get 'just that little bit extra' from the Quad.

The Maps

The four folio maps are joined together to form the campaign map and unless you purchase a second copy of the game or buy the folios as individual games, you may as well join the maps together as it doesn't prevent you playing any one of the folios separately, once the four maps are assembled.

Some cosmetic alterations will enhance the visual appearance of the assembled map. I shaded all of the town hexes with red crayon and put coloured stickers (representing a ford symbol) on all the fords. They're not clear to see so some 'enhancing' is definitely required.

I also covered the assembled map with transpaseal (available from any good stationers) which will ensure that your campaign map survives more than a few playing sessions.

Unit types

There are thirteen different unit types in 'Battles for the Ardennes' Quad. They are:-
Armour, Reconnaissance, Armoured Infantry, Artillery, Rocket Artillery, Armoured Engineers, Engineers, Infantry, Parachute Infantry, Glider Infantry, Mountain Infantry, Fortress Infantry and Cavalry.

It is as well to be aware of their different capabilities and to that end I devised a chart to highlight this fact. Readers can obtain a copy from me (see end of article for details). Bear in mind that the chart I use incorporates all of the rule corrections and changes (both published changes and my own).

The emphasis will not totally be on armour in this game as some of the other unit types are particularly useful, though there isn't much difference between the artillery types so I wouldn't have complained if these had been expressed more as Factors. The designer clearly wants to get the history right though, so he's incorporated all the historical units as per the respective orders of battle. It's good to have a game designed by someone who has such a good knowledge and understanding of the history; other prospective designers – take note and research your facts carefully.

Rules and Errata

The rules are well laid out and straightforward but the starting point for all players must be the inclusion of all errata and suggested rule changes, the source of which is 1) Fire & Movement magazine #20 and 2) SPI's published errata from October 1979. With all these inclusions, you will then have a more balanced and more accurate game. [Note: I have a copy of ALL the errata you need. Please see end of article for details on how you can get a copy.]

In addition, I suggest the following rule changes. These have been incorporated from SPI's 'Wacht Am Rhein' and add just a little more 'flavour' to the game whilst not adding much to the complexity.

U.S. INFANTRY LIMITATION (1944 games only)

U.S. infantry units may not move in the turn in which they are placed in March Mode. Due to this delay, they do not have to pay the half movement allowance cost to enter March Mode.

- 1 *U.S. reinforcements and British infantry units are not subject to this rule.*
- 2 *There is no penalty to pay when U.S. infantry units change from March Mode to Combat Mode.*
- 3 *Note that this rule applies to all U.S. infantry types.*

ARMoured INFANTRY DISMOUNTS

Armoured Infantry units may be 'dismounted', provided they are in Combat Mode. Such units may be moved as per regular infantry. The unit has a movement allowance of 3 MPs but may still ignore enemy artillery ZOCs. They may revert to their original status on the next player turn. However, they can only cross non-bridge or ford river hexsides at the cost of their full movement allowance.

With all the rule errata and additions included you have a splendid representation of both the 1940 and 1944 battles. To maximise their strategy and tactics players need to understand the value of combining units in both attack and defence and how priceless the engineer units are, particularly for the German player in the 1944 scenarios.

In my experience, taking the Battle of the Bulge 1944 campaign game, each turn averages about 75 minutes but don't be put off. Two experienced players can lighten the load and shorten the time by judicious planning and a thorough knowledge of both the unit capabilities and the game system. Obviously, for the scenarios, you can allow less time as the number of units involved will be far less. Certainly the scenarios are playable in a few hours but the campaign games will require a few sessions so I would advise either somewhere set aside where the game can be left set up or a system for recording units at the end of each session.

I've always found to get the best out of any game, think in terms of the Sequence of Play and ally any thoughts around it. That way, you can use the rules to your best advantage. In this game, a good knowledge of the terrain is essential so I prepared some maps of my own to use as playing aids. This way you can perform hex counts without disrupting the game and you can also use them to plan ahead when selecting your strategy.

I also found it useful to have tables to hand showing the reinforcement timetable; which units enter the game and where from. To that end, I have drawn up separate tables for each of the scenarios plus all the campaign games and their variants. As regards the Battle of the Bulge 1944 campaign game, I found it useful to have separate columns for the northern map edge Allied reinforcements and the southern map edge Allied reinforcements.

Players may also wish to mark some of the counters to emphasise the divisions, so that they can apply divisional integrity without a frantic and time-consuming search through various stacks of units. If players use hand drawn maps they can more easily mark where the critical units are positioned. Indeed there are all sorts of mechanisms players can adopt to make the flow of the game that much more streamlined and I have mentioned but a few.

With rule changes (both errata and suggested) included, the Sequence of Play now looks like this:-

Sequence of Play

Ardennes Quad - Sequence of Play		
1. SUPPLY	Both players, Allies first. Supply Lines and Sources Supply Status Isolation - Elite and Green units German Supply Shortage Allied Air Supply Replacements	Twice per game turn. 1944 only 1944 Campaign only 1944 Campaign only
2. AIR POWER	Air Interdiction	
3. BUILDING	Not in town or city hexes or by German units in Westwall hexes. Bridge Building Improved Positions	1st turn - start 2nd turn - complete (Engineers take one turn less)
4. BATTERY	Battery Status of Artillery	
5. MODE ADJUSTMENT	March to Combat Mode or vice versa. U.S. Infantry Limitation	1944 only
6. MOVEMENT	Designate Reserves Forced March Armoured Infantry Movement Exiting the map March Mode Movement Reinforcements	
7. REACTION	Opposing Reserves – reaction	
8. COMBAT	Armour Superiority Divisional Integrity Air Combat Support Improved Positions Second Combat Retreats Advance after Combat Artillery - Barrage and FPF	Shift CRT 1 to right Shift CRT 1 to right or left Shift CRT 1 to right or left Shift CRT 2 to left
9. EXPLOITATION	Reserves – Exploitation	
10. BRIDGES	Complete Bridge Building Blow Bridges	

Strategy and Tactics

The designer has done an excellent job in providing player's notes and suggested strategy and tactics. However, readers are strongly recommended to get hold of the articles in Moves #46 and Moves #47, which provide excellent additional commentaries. In the meantime, there are a few pointers of my own that I have discovered in playing the Quad. These I propose to detail.

Player's Notes

The following notes are an amalgam of the published player's notes that come with the game and some of my own thoughts. Thus, the wording has been changed in places but the principles are still intact.

March Mode

When there are a number of units to be moved in March Mode, plan the sequencing of those moves beforehand. Usually, with proper planning, all units in March Mode can be moved where a player desires. Conversely, hasty movement inevitably results in a crucial road junction being blocked by a unit in March Mode that has already moved.

If it looks like a unit could benefit from March Mode movement in the *next* turn, make sure it is on a road and not stacked with other units. Keep in mind that a unit in March Mode *may* move adjacent to another unit in March Mode; the rule merely prohibits the units from being adjacent at the *end* of the movement phase (note that this applies to units in March Mode on roads; units in March Mode on non-road hexes may be stacked adjacent to each other).

Also, remember that a unit in March Mode only exerts a ZOC into connecting road hexes; don't be caught out by an enemy unit sneaking through your line because you tried to hold it with a unit in March Mode.

Offensive Tactics

Most of the time the German player is on the offensive and must try to maintain the initiative as long as possible so these comments are directed mainly at him. If there is a weak spot in the enemy line, forget about anything else; attack it with all you can muster, especially armour. A good combat result and the subsequent advance will devastate your opponent.

The importance of getting armour into such an attack cannot be over-emphasised; the advance after combat of such units must be utilised to its fullest extent. The game system rewards powerful attacks to such a degree that a good advance can move you faster than an entire Movement Phase. Do not make 1-1 and 2-1 attacks up and down the line; mass your forces for a few strong attacks in one or two areas with the aim of creating breakthroughs.

It is usually not wise to attack a strong defensive line, especially if it is located behind a river; there is not time to wear such a line away. Players often ignore this advice when they see valuable objectives beyond a strong enemy line, but it pays in the long run to attack the weak part of the line, even if it doesn't seem to lead directly to victory. When making such an attack, include at least one "junk" unit (such as a Volksgrenadier regiment or panzer brigade) to take a step loss in the event of a split result. It is never pleasant to lose a step from a strong mechanised unit if retreating is unattractive. Keep your strong, mobile units in the force of the attack; don't waste them defending an inactive part of the line.

Defensive Tactics

When setting up a defensive line, try to avoid placing units in clear or broken hexes, unless there is a town or improved position in the hex. Even strong units will be hard pressed to repel concentrated enemy attacks when in such hexes.

Never place armour or reconnaissance units in such a position that they could get caught between enemy units and an unbridged river. Their inability to retreat will make them easy pickings for the enemy (or easy to by-pass). On the other hand, defending in front of a river with infantry units is a fine idea; they can retreat across the river and the enemy cannot always follow up. Defending behind a river is even better; even if the enemy gets across the river in one spot he will be hard pressed to expand his bridgehead.

When forced to take an adverse combat result, carefully weigh up the options you are faced with. Remember, you can take a combination of retreat and step loss to fulfil a result. Always keep in mind the enemy's ability to advance when making such a decision.

Divisional Integrity

When attacking it is crucial to have at least one complete division participating so that the column shift can be applied. When attacking a division in two places in one Combat Phase, try to conduct the operation such that the first attack makes the defending division ineligible for divisional integrity (either by eliminating a unit or pushing it away) so that the second attack does not have to contend with a defensive column shift.

Artillery

When planning future attacks, keep in mind that an artillery unit that starts the player-turn in March Mode cannot be put in Battery during that turn. Once the marker is removed, the artillery unit can be moved up to the front in Combat Mode and involved in an attack on the next turn.

The German player, especially, should never forget to move an artillery unit that is not being used in combat. The intolerably slow movement allowance of most of his artillery can be partially compensated for by keeping the units plodding forward. Never put an artillery unit in a position exposed to enemy units; its limited ZOC may lead to unpleasant results.

Engineers and Bridges

When the enemy is on the offensive do not wait a turn to blow an enemy-threatened bridge; the sooner the bridge is destroyed, the less chance of a bad die roll ruining your day. When the German player is on the offensive he should not use engineers to defend a flank or take a step loss. They should be right up front where they can help a stalled German drive across an unbridged river line.

Tactical Tips

1. Keep divisions together as much as possible. Ensure that all units of a division are within a move of each other, preferably with two units (at least) of the division being stacked or within one hex of each other.
2. In any given attack, a combined force is the ideal thus avoiding heavy losses to the armoured units. Try and put at least one infantry or "junk" panzer unit (these units should ideally be non-divisional or unassigned corps units) in with any attack involving armoured divisions. This latter unit can then take any required step loss as opposed to losing steps of the divisional units.
3. Try and use engineers as they should be used - building or blowing bridges or building improved positions. They don't make very good combat troops due to their low unit strengths. They need to be 'kept up' with the main units to be of effective use. This way, they can not only perform repairs but they will also be protected.
4. Units in March Mode are heavily penalised in combat so don't keep units in March Mode other than for 'strategic' movement.
5. Zones of Control are crucial. In any given attack, try and cut off the retreat of the enemy unit(s). This will force step losses in most cases.
6. Where possible, use artillery to assist units making "soak off" attacks. For the Germans, this is going to be very difficult after the first few moves as their artillery will probably be unable to keep up with the other units.
7. When attacking, try and ensure that you have an odds ratio that falls about midway across the CRT. If you mean to win a given combat, odds of at least 3:1 on Clear terrain are recommended (higher odds will be required for the less favourable terrain types).

As to the scenarios themselves I offer the following thoughts.

St. Vith scenario – suggested German tactics

1. On Turn 1, attack the 18/14 battalion in hex 1022 using **1LAH** Pz. As the American unit is in an Improved position there will be –2 Column shift on the CRT, but the German player can get a 7:1 attack (including the Turn 1 (+1) shift on the CRT) using 17 strength points so this is well worth a go.
2. Capturing the crossroads in hexes 1117 and 1214 will slow American reinforcements in the southern part of the front.
3. Don't let the two regiments of the US 106th division in hexes 0620 and 0721 pin down important units for too many turns.
4. Decide what to do with the **12HJ** Pz at the start. Either, use it to assault the Monshau-Elsenborn line or use it to support the **1LAH** Pz in the main drive westwards.

Clervaux scenario – suggested German tactics

1. On Turn 1, attack Vianden (hex 1417). As the American unit is in a town there will be –2 Column shift on the CRT, but the German player can get a 4:1 attack (including the Turn 1 (+1) shift on the CRT) AND Divisional Integrity so this is a good first turn attack.
2. On Turn 1, attack hex 2317. As the American unit is in an improved position there will be –2 Column shift on the CRT, but the German player can get a 3:1 attack (including the Turn 1 (+1) shift on the CRT) AND Divisional Integrity so this is another good first turn attack.

Battle of the Bulge campaign game

Due to the increased scope, the campaign game demands greater thought to both the overall strategy and specific proposed engagements. The German player must avoid heavy attrition. He simply doesn't have the ability to 'soak up' losses. In most cases, the units he commits to combat are irreplaceable. The overwhelming Allied strength and air power mean a more judicious approach is required both to planning and execution of the main thrusts.

The four possible victory plans are all difficult to achieve with a degree of success. A good German player will harness any drive to the west using the panzer divisions as spearheads but with the appropriate infantry and artillery in support. As was the case historically, the panzers will likely as not outrun the slower units but chances must be taken. I personally think that if the German player captures the key centres of St. Vith and Bastogne and has chances for further advances by Turn 20 when a victory check is taken, he has achieved somewhat of a moral victory. The later turns will see a rapid Allied retribution so time is one thing the German player does not have on his side.

Conversely, for the Allied player, I recommend a mobile defence. You cannot expect to withstand the initial onslaught so be prepared to give ground and marshal forces for counter attacks when and where possible. After the first 10 turns (if not before) the balance will inexorably shift in your favour so patience should pay off in both the medium and the longer term.

Initially, the German player should adopt the relevant tactics from the St.Vith and Clervaux scenarios (as suggested earlier). Thereafter, once you have decided on a course, then stick to it. You won't have the luxury of changing your mind or the ease of changing direction once the battle is in full swing.

It is also useful for both players to have access to a turn summary chart. I have prepared one which I will happily pass on so please see the end of the article for contact details.

To assist with planning I use a chart which summarises the main play sequence. Players can then use this chart to write on with any tactical notes (or otherwise) during the current turn and for use in later turns.

In the basic campaign game, the German player has a choice of four Victory Plans. The German player can choose one of these plans 'in secret', the revelation of the plan chosen not being obvious to the Allied player for the first few turns until certain of the special rules 'kick in', thus making the chosen plan clear to see. Of the four, the Historical Plan has to be considered the most difficult to achieve. As the German player, this was the plan I tried when first attempting the campaign. I'm proud to say I achieved a Draw on turn 20 (when there is a check for victory) but other than having a strong 'bulge' there was little chance of me reaching the Meuse. Therefore, this plan must rank the most difficult.

The Small Solution envisages a swing to the north. The main problem with this plan is that the Allied reinforcements on the northern edge enter early in the game and the terrain is difficult, a myriad of rivers and forest hexes. Expect a slugging match with a nervous German player forever looking to the south as Patton's 3rd army start to sweep northwards from turn 10 onwards. Operation Luxembourg I found the most enjoyable to play as it really does offer an alternative strategy. It is also the plan which leaves the Allied player guessing for longer. The easier terrain to the centre and south will give the German player more room to manoeuvre too, which will enhance the feeling of roving panzers.

The Spoiling Attack is merely 10 turns long and offers a limited campaign with more emphasis on unit destruction. Unless you've played the game a few times and want to try it out I can't really recommend it as the limitations of the plan do dampen the thrill somewhat.

To add yet more variation, there are three additional variants to the 1940 campaign game and four additional variants to the 1944 campaign game, so there is plenty of scope for players to investigate some what-ifs and maybes.

Final Thoughts

There have been about 40 published board wargames that have dealt with the Ardennes Offensive, some of which are now almost impossible to find. 'Battles for the Ardennes Quad' must be rated about medium in terms in complexity when compared to say the SPI monster 'Wacht Am Rhein' but when looked at in terms of playability it ranks very high indeed. The choice of scenarios, the variations in strategy, the colourful presentation, the differing unit types all contribute to make this quad one of the best.

Excluding 'Celles', three of the folios are excellent games in themselves whereas the campaign games offer that extra dimension, one that gives players a chance to manage large armies and where they have to make constant choices as to unit placement and objectives. This is the secret of a good board wargame; the more options it gives the player, the more of a game it is, as the emphasis with any good game must be to mesh choice with historicity. Yes, you can re-fight history but you must be given a chance to explore alternatives provided that the conditions of the battle or campaign are taken into account.

Some criticism could be levelled at the game for putting too much emphasis on the capture of towns but certainly as far as the 1944 games are concerned, seizure of key towns and road junctions was a critical issue even though those seizures in themselves would not have guaranteed victory for either side. However, the victory points to be gained can be used as a measure of relative success, i.e. how well you are doing in terms of making westward progress with the Germans or minimising that progress from the Allied perspective. This game does at least restore some play balance; if the Germans could only win by reaching and crossing the Meuse in strength, then every game would be an Allied strategic victory, as this is almost impossible to achieve.

The crucial question – 'do you ever get a bulge?' can be answered. Yes, you do. I've played the 1944 campaign several times and without really trying, in each case, a bulge in the Allied lines appeared. How? Well, when advancing as the Germans, you initially need to 'shore up' both the northern and southern flanks as neither offers a real option for strategic gain if the advance was channelled in either a

northern or southerly direction. Once the Our river is crossed in strength you could conceivably 'swing' in either direction to 'roll up' the Allied forces there but you wouldn't get any real strategic advantage from this course of action. The Allied player would be rubbing his hands with glee as it gives him more time to move up reinforcements to the critical areas in the centre of the map.

Having 'shored up' the flanks, the German player has to make good use of the more open terrain in the centre as the 'prizes' are greater in that direction. In pursuing this course, flanks will need to be maintained. Thus, a bulge in the line will form, in most cases bearing some resemblance to the historical 'bulge' that formed.

The challenges for the 1940 games are quite different altogether as the Germans have such overwhelming strength that the challenge is more from the point of view of a Chief of Staff officer, being able to marshal and organise the forces in such a way that they reach the western map-edge when and where required.

Anyone who wants a copy of the full errata, my playing aids or anything else you would find useful, then please email me at paulsheppard@msn.com and you are welcome to a copy!

IMPORTANT: YOU WILL NEED WINZIP INSTALLED ON YOUR PC TO ACCESS THE FILES AND PREFERABLY OFFICE 2000 OR A MORE RECENT VERSION.

Or, as I have said before, if you live within striking distance, let's have a game!

Bibliography and References

Historical Research

The Battle of the Bulge and the 1940 Ardennes Offensive have had so many books written on the respective campaigns, it's hard to know where to begin. Suffice to say, the best books on the subjects I have come across are:-

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| J.P.Pallud | Battle of the Bulge Then and Now
[Battle of Britain Prints International Limited 1984]
Over 500 pages of photographs, text and maps. Jean Paul has been all over the Ardennes and this work will really 'take you there'. |
| D.S.Parker | Battle of the Bulge: Hitler's Ardennes Offensive 1944-1945
[Greenhill Books 1991]
Danny designed the game so this book must be considered essential. He really knows the subject well. Phenomenally detailed. |
| C.B.MacDonald | The Battle of the Bulge
[Weidenfield and Nicolson 1984]
Excellent from the American point of view, though still an unbiased account. |
| C.Whiting | Death of a Division
[Leo Cooper 1979]
The story of the U.S. 106 th Division |
| C.Whiting | Massacre at Malmedy
[Grafton Books 1986]
The story of Kampfgruppe Peiper |
| H.Guderian | Panzer Leader
[Michael Joseph 1952]
Guderian's memoirs. A standard reference for the 1940 campaign. |

Gaming Magazines

I can recommend the following magazine articles with respect to rule changes, game replays and general comments all dealing with 'Battles for the Ardennes Quad'.

CAMPAIGN Magazine

Campaign #92

Once More into the Woods: A Review of Battles for the Ardennes: Tyrone Bomba (Analysis)

Campaign #95

Dark December and Battles for the Ardennes: Parker vs Parker: Kevin Pollock (Analysis)

FIRE & MOVEMENT Magazine

F&M #18

Player's Notes: Battles for the Ardennes: Bill Sanders (Review)

F&M #20

Battles for the Ardennes and Dark December Comparative Review: Gary Charbonneau (Analysis)

Battles for the Ardennes-Dark December Designer's Notes: Danny S. Parker

Errata: Battles for the Ardennes

F&M #65

World War II Anthology: Chapter 4: The Western Front: Jeff Petraska (Review)

GRENADEER Magazine

Grenadier #27

Shorttakes: Battles for the Ardennes (Review)

MOVES Magazine

Moves #46

Good Woods: Battles for the Ardennes is a Player: Karl E. Wieggers (Analysis)

Moves #47

Moves in English: Battles for the Ardennes: David Bolton, Peter Bolton, John Flynn, and William M. Orr: (Analysis)

Moves #53

Forty-Four, Forty, and Fight: The Campaigns in the Ardennes: Karl G. Wieggers (Strategy)

Moves #83

Variants for the Ardennes: A Baker's Dozen in the Bulge: James E. Meldrum (Variant)

Moves #85

The Day We Lost the War: James E. Meldrum (Variant)

STRATEGY & TACTICS Magazine

S&T #37

The Ardennes Offensive: The Battle of the Bulge December 1944: Stephen B. Patrick (Historical)

S&T #71

Battles for the Ardennes: May 1940 and December 1944: Danny S. Parker (Historical)

Special Edition #3

Variants for Ardennes Battles: Expanding the Battles for the Ardennes Game: Jerry Epperson (Variant)

WARGAMER Magazine

Wargamer Vol.1 #26

Race to the Meuse – Historical Notes: Bob McWilliams (Historical)

Wargamer Vol.1 #33

Briefings: Battles for the Ardennes (Review)

Wargamer Vol.2 #17

Battle of the Bulge Games Anthology: Jeff Petraska (Review)