

DESIGN NOTES FOR “ODE TO PANZER LEADER”

**By
Alan R. Arvold**

Ode to Panzer Leader is a series where all the situations that came in the game and were published in the General are converted to West Front Gold standards so that these scenarios may be played in this format. There have not been any previous conversions of Panzer Leader scenarios so these are the first. One may ask, why am I doing this? Well to pay homage to the game, which many consider to be the son of Panzerblitz, which came out back in 1974. Indeed the Campaign Series by Talonsoft has often been referred to as Panzerblitz on the computer. Being of the same scale as Panzerblitz and at the same unit level certainly backs up that assertion. But I think that it was more than that. I wanted to play Panzer Leader using the West Front system. To do this I made the mapboards all to the same standards and when converting the order of battles from Panzer Leader to West Front established the standards for unit conversion. And of course the weather is always warm and clear not matter what the date of the scenario is, just like in Panzer Leader.

These scenarios are not for every body. If you want to play West Front, just go to one of the several hundred fine scenarios that the game has, both those with the game and its expansions and those that are on various websites on the Internet. But if you want to play Panzer Leader on the computer, then try one or several of the scenarios which will be presented in this series.

The Mapboards

The first task that I had to accomplish was to establish the standard size of the mapboards based on their arrangement in the various scenarios. For a single mapboard, the dimensions were a length of 34 hexes and a width of 11 hexes. These dimensions insured that the half hexes on the individual boards were filled out into whole hexes. Unfortunately it created extra hexes in the width which do not exist on the boards. There is also an extra row of hexes in the length. The length of a playing board is 33 hexes, which includes the filled out half hexes. However the computer program only allows me to have map lengths of even number of hexes, so I opted for 34. These extra hexes do not present a problem when I make my maps as I leave the extra hexes clear and they only exist on the bottom and right edges of the map (or top and left edges when the map is reversed).

However the scenarios in the game have mapboards set up to two fashions, either side-by-side square fashion or in the end-to-end oblong fashion. In the square fashion, the boards are placed on top of each other in West Front Gold due to the layout of the grain hex. In the square fashion the map dimensions are a length of 34 hexes and a width of 21, 31, or 41 hexes depending on the scenario. In the oblong fashion the map dimensions are a length of 66 or 98 hexes and width of 11 hexes. Again, in both of these fashions there are extra hexes in the width and an extra row on the length.

The next task was to establish the road net on the boards. I chose to use hard surface roads with all the routes as this is how the roads are on the boards in Panzer Leader. I know that the other authors would rather make some of them into dirt roads in their scenarios and this is probably more realistic, but then again we are recreating Panzer Leader here, not reality. In cases where the roads go into the extra hexes at the bottom and right side of the maps I merely extended the roads to go in the direction that they were going to the map edge. Once the roads were in place, the towns were next on the list. I chose to use suburb hexes in all of the hexes of the towns. I know that some of the other authors would like to use village hexes in some of the towns but after observing the building density on the town map symbols on the playing boards I found that the suburb hexes fill the bill quite nicely. Since the defensive values of the both the village and the suburb hexes are the same, this does not change the defensive posture of these two hexes between the two games.

Having established the road net and town set-up, the problem of portraying elevation and terrain was next. Different authors have used different bases and delta distances for their maps. In some cases the delta distance is so small, that additional levels are established on the boards. This may be more realistic as many of the scenarios occur in areas where the hills were more the rolling type, not the steep sided ones portrayed on the Panzer Leader boards. But again, this is Panzer Leader, not reality. I used an elevation base of 0 meters and a delta distance of 50 meters. Thus there are three elevation levels on the boards, level 0 which includes elevations of 0-50 meters, level 1 which includes elevations of 51-100 meters, and level 2 which includes elevations of 101-150 meters. This worked out very well as the hills take up the same shape as they appear on the Panzer Leader boards, yet vehicle units can still traverse the changes in elevation without having to take a road. Naturally Level 1 is reserved for the slope hexes in Panzerblitz.

Board B presented an elevation problem. In Panzer Leader the slopes adjacent or close to the Beach hexes rise to hilltop hexes. The ground behind these hilltop hexes going inland is presumed to gradually level out to Level 0 as so indicated in the General Vol.12.#1. There is no indication of where to put the Level 1 and 0 hexes as you go inland to duplicate this. I found that it was just simpler to just treat all ground hexes going inland away from the beach as Level 2 hexes with any hills on them as having Level 3 Slopes and Level 4 hilltops. On Board B immediately behind the Hilltop hexes adjacent to the Cliff hexsides there is a five hex long slope. I made this into a Level 1 depression in West Front.

Board B also introduced new terrain in Panzer Leader. These were the Beach hexes and the Cliff hexsides. The Beaches were simple as all the ground hexes adjacent to the sea were beach hexes. Unfortunately, on the Panzer Leader Board B, in some of these hexes the beaches fill the entire hex and in others the hex is part beach and part sea hex. In West Front the Beach symbol fills the entire hex so the coastline does not exactly match up to that in Panzer Leader. However the differences were minor and as landing craft can still disembark their passenger units in the shallow water sea hexes, the effect is still the same. The Cliff hexsides go from Level 0 to Level 2. In West Front this prevents any unit from crossing them though in Panzer Leader only infantry and engineer units may traverse

across a Cliff hexside. This may cause problems in some invasion scenarios as it will give the defender a pretty well impregnable position from the direction of the sea.

In places where adjacent slope hexes that are parts of different hills, I placed Gully hexsides to separate those slope hexes, so that they take up the shape of the separate hills as they appear on the Panzer Leader boards.

A couple of authors on their West Front maps have placed Embankment hexsides on the slope hexes in the same hexsides as where a brown hexside symbol is placed on the Panzer Leader boards. This is an error. Brown hexsides in Panzer Leader represent obstructions to Line of Sight, not movement. Embankment hexsides cause additional movement costs in West Front which should not exist on these boards. Thus I did not use them in my Panzer Leader conversions. Yes this does cause an occasional situation where a unit can see through many level 1 hexes where they could not on the equivalent Panzer Leader board due to an intervening Brown Hexside, however the West Front game system has a wonderful program for determining Line of Sight/Line of Fire and these previously mentioned occasions happen only rarely.

The item on the list was vegetation. On the Panzer Leader boards the only vegetation shown is forests. Therefore forests are the only vegetation which I have placed on the maps. Now other authors may place other forms of vegetation such as fields and orchards on their maps. However I found that while these are probably more realistic, especially the fields in the rural area depicted by the Panzer Leader boards, they are not part of fictional reality of the Panzer Leader boards. Other authors may place hedge hexsides in the forest hexes on the same hexsides as Green Hexsides are on the Panzer Leader boards. Very unrealistic, but I can see their point. The Green Hexsides in Panzer Leader serve two functions. First they serve as barrier to Line of Sight/Line of Fire. The aforementioned West Front program for determining LOS/LOF eliminates this purpose. The second function is to serve as a barrier to vehicular movement through forests, except on roads. In West Front vehicular movement through forests is allowed, albeit rather slowly, and this is one aspect I could not eliminate from the game. Besides, hedge hexsides do not serve as a barrier to movement so there is no purpose to having them there.

Last on the list was the water features. In Panzer Leader the main water feature is the sea depicted on Mapboard B. because this board is primarily used in the invasion scenarios, I made all Sea hexes adjacent to the Beach hexes shallow water and any sea hexes further out as deep water hexes. This makes sense for the presented coastline. The Marshes were also easy to place in the hexes matching their placement on the Panzer Leader boards. In Panzer Leader these hexes are called Swamps, but their defensive value is the same as Marsh hexes, so I used Marsh hexes in West Front.

The Streambed hexes in Panzer Leader presented some problems. First, the Streambeds can not be crossed or entered into by anything in Panzer Leader except infantry and engineer units. Thus I had to make the Streams into Minor Rivers to duplicate the effect in West Front. Unfortunately this means that no units can cross except at bridge hexes,

except for amphibious units of course. Second, these Minor Rivers are placed in the middle of the hexes that they occupy on the Panzer Leader boards. In West Front the Minor River is placed on the hexsides, not the in the middle of the hex. So using a Panzer Leader PBM sheet I drew on it which hexsides of the Minor River hexes would be on in the mapboards in West Front. Of course Board B is not on the PBM sheet so I had to photocopy of the board and make my drawings on the copy. I made sure that there was enough space between the Minor Rivers and other terrain features to give them the same approximate location that they have in the Panzer Leader boards. Where the roads cross the Minor Rivers I placed Heavy Bridges to insure that all vehicles may use them like in the game. Unfortunately, Panzer Leader does not use Fords in any of its boards so I do not used them in West Front.

Sometimes, when the mapboard is arranged the square fashion, the Minor River hexsides do not match up or connect because they are on opposite hexsides of the same hex due to individual board orientation. However I would connect them using a connecting hexside in the hex that would be either a half hex on the Panzer Leader board or whose hexside would normally be an individual board edge.

After finishing the maps, it was time for the labels. I labeled all of the towns and roads with the same names that they have on the Panzer Leader boards. As the hilltops in the Panzer Leader do not have names, I do not label them.

The Orders of Battle

The next challenge was translating the Panzer Leader opposing forces on the scenario cards into appropriate orders of battle for West Front scenarios. To do so we must divide the counters into three categories, infantry, artillery, and vehicles, because each category must be handled separately.

The infantry counters in Panzer Leader represent more than just the type of units named on the counter. Frequently these represent the named unit plus attachments from support elements such as machine gun and small mortar units. These units have no counters in Panzer Leader (with one exception and it's a machine gun unit at that) but do have units in West Front. Thus I used the orders of battle for the type of major organization and time period in question and added the support unit in proportionate numbers to the number of rifle, engineer, and SMG units. There are a couple of units that deserve explanation. Panzer Leader German SMG units did not exist as such in the German Army. These were just a convenient way to represent more heavily armed infantry, albeit with extra sub-machine guns and/or assault rifles in the later years of the war. In West Front these are just the more heavily armed rifle units in the later years or units with extra machine gun units in the early years of the war. Panzer Leader German Security units are represented in West Front using bicycle troops. The Allied Machine Gun Platoon in Panzer Leader is a sort of combined unit in the American Army, representing a combination of the infantry battalion heavy machine gun platoon and the anti-aircraft machine gun platoon. However in the British/Commonwealth units it represents just a large machine gun platoon. Just

which type of unit they represent depends on the larger organization they are part of in the Panzer Leader scenario cards.

Artillery units were rather easy to convert. In Panzer Leader most artillery units come with either six, four, or two guns or mortars per unit. All I had to do was to count up the number of guns or mortars of each type and make the equivalent number of units in West Front. The number of units will not always match, but the total number of guns/mortars represented in both games will be the same most of the time. Sometimes in Panzer Leader an artillery unit will be used which will represent more guns/mortars than what the unit would realistically have. (Example: A German 81mm Mortar unit (six mortars) supporting a company of three Rifle Platoons, which would in reality be a two mortar section.) In cases like these I will assign the appropriate number of mortar sections instead of a whole platoon. In Panzer Leader, whenever you see an Allied 105mm Howitzer unit in an infantry regiment, this could either be a regular 105mm howitzer battery attached down from an artillery battalion or it could be the smaller 105mm infantry howitzer that is organic to the regiment. It really depends on the scenario in question as to what it will be in West Front.

Vehicles are treated in basically the same fashion. In Panzer Leader, each platoon can represent anywhere from two to six vehicles. I merely added up the number of counters for each type of unit, multiply the number by the number of vehicles the unit represents, then take the result and create platoons for them in West Front. In a lot of cases where there are not five or six vehicle units in West Front for the unit in question, I will merely create more platoons, making them as even in strength points as possible, while keeping the total number of vehicles equal to those in Panzer Leader. In the Panzer Leader 1940 variant, which will be covered in future modules, the French have AFV counters with company size strength (10-13 vehicles). I will break these down into platoons in West Front. Transport units in West Front such as trucks, halftracks, and wagons are merely provided for those units that are meant to have them without regard to the number of transport units in Panzer Leader. This is due to additional "invisible" units that are not present in Panzer Leader. I also give units the proper type of transport meant for them as noted in the order of battle lists in the organizational files in West Front. In addition, I also only give enough strength points in each transport unit to carry its assigned dismounted unit.

Before leaving the subject of units I need to address the Headquarters and Leader units in West Front. Panzer Leader does not have these units. I supplied Headquarter units for each organizational level present in the scenario. These include a supreme Headquarter unit for each side be it a division, brigade, or regiment. I did not include very many leaders for each side. The supreme commander for each side is usually a command level three leader with subordinate brigades, regiments, and battalions receiving command level two leaders. Independent companies receive a command level one leader. Sometimes I will vary the command level of an individual leader by one to represent a poor or excellent leader in that position. Some the scenarios have elements of two different divisions on a side. In this case I will create a supreme commander, along with

their respective division HQs, for each division. Sorry, there are no command level five leaders in my scenarios.

The Scenarios

There are a lot of considerations when setting up the scenario. First concerns those sides which start the game on the defensive. In Panzer Leader these sides are sometimes given minefields, blocks, and fortifications. In Panzer Leader the Minefield counters cause a 2-1 attack against any unit that move onto them. Thus in West Front I give a level two Minefield for each minefield counter in the Panzer Leader scenario. Blocks are easy since they represent the same thing in both games, therefore there is a one to one ratio in blocks between the games. Fortifications can be tricky. In Panzer Leader fortifications represent trenches, bunkers, and pillboxes. In a scenario I will usually give one bunker and three trenches for every four Fortification counters in Panzer Leader, but I may vary the ratio depending on the scenario in question. Because pillboxes are concrete in construction, I do not use them unless the scenario depicts an assault against well established fortifications (like the Atlantic Wall or Siegfried Line) where concrete would be used. Improved positions are a whole other story. Because improved can be constructed during a scenario, I give all units on the defense not in a trench, bunker, or pillbox an improved position. Since improved positions can be constructed during a scenario, whose to say that they can not be constructed before the scenario began. Besides, during the war units that settled down in defense, if even for only a few hours, always made foxholes or even rifle pits, which is what improved positions represent. So it seems only fair that the units on the defense get them automatically. However, units on the offense, including those scenarios where both sides are moving towards a meeting engagement, do not get any improved positions at the start, although they are still free to construct them during a scenario.

The next thing to consider is environmental conditions. In Panzer Leader, the environmental conditions are assumed to be perfect with unlimited visibility. Yes, there have been many variant articles bringing the effects of weather to Panzer Leader, but they are variants and not the main rules. Granted, this gives perfect weather conditions to the game all year round, no matter what date the scenario in question occurs. Thus in West Front all scenarios will have a maximum visibility of 20 hexes and normal conditions in all environmental categories, regardless of what time of year the scenarios occur.

The next thing to consider is the length of the scenarios. I prefer to keep the scenario length the same in both games. I found that the movement rates of the units in West Front tend to match their counterparts in Panzer Leader, although the infantry seems to be a little fast in West Front. Thus, the opposing forces have the same relative ability to move around the playing board in both games. However, this is assuming perfect environmental conditions and visibility. In games where environmental conditions play a factor, the scenario length in West Front must be increased to over what it is in Panzer Leader in order to give the respective forces the same relative chance of being able to move around the playing board in a given scenario. I can see why those other authors would increase

the scenario length and I do not blame them for doing so. But since we are playing Panzer Leader using the West Front system, my scenarios will be the same game length as their counterparts in the regular Panzer Leader board game.

There are some scenario functions that I assign default values to. For example, for Ammo both sides get 80% availability. Since there are smoke rules in Panzer Leader, I give two smoke rounds for every indirect fire unit on the offense, and one smoke round for every indirect fire unit on the defense. However, naval gunfire units are not counted when figuring out the number of smoke rounds because these units never had smoke rounds. As there are aircraft rules in Panzer Leader, each side gets one airstrike per counter in the game, usually a Typhoon for the British, a P-47 for the Americans, and a Stuka for the Germans. Since there are a few scenarios that will occur at night, each side gets two starshells for each indirect fire unit in their respective forces. For the AI, I assigned 80 for the attacking side or both sides in a meeting engagement and 40 for the defending side. In the morale department, if the higher level organization in the organizational file of the scenario is a Ranger, Commando, or Parachute unit for the Allies or an SS or parachute unit for the Germans, then all units in those organizations get a morale level of 7. Otherwise, all units get a morale level of 6 for both sides. Yes this gives the Americans something of an advantage as their regular units have a morale level of 5, not 6, which is historical. However, this is Panzer Leader that we are playing in the West Front format and so the regular units must be equivalent in the morale levels.

The last thing to consider is the victory conditions. In victory conditions in Panzer Leader where the destruction of enemy units, the capture of geographical objectives, and exiting of friendly units are the norm, West Front can easily accommodate them as it has the same type of victory conditions built into its system. However, in scenarios in Panzer Leader where the ratio of friendly to enemy units on the board or destroyed, the capture or possession of a particular counter, or the establishment of a friendly “corridor” across the board are the criteria for victory, certain substitutions have to be made. These substitutions usually appear in the way of additional objective hexes or adjustments in the first player’s point total requirements for victory or defeat in a West Front scenario. Generally, I usually establish the minimum point total for a minor victory to be between forty and fifty per cent of the total point value of the second player’s forces, both on board and reinforcement, and the objective hexes in the second player’s possession at the beginning of the game.

Variations

None of the scenarios are written in stone. All are unlocked and players are free to make any changes to them as they wish. Recommended variations would include changing the positions of starting forces or the entry points of reinforcements, changing some of the default values listed above, adding the effects of environmental conditions, giving one or both sides additional smoke and/or aircraft, and changing the length of the scenario. Of importance is if environmental conditions such as soft ground, mud and snow are added to the scenario, two, four, and six turns should be added to the scenario

length respectively. This is in order to insure the relative ability of units to move across as much of the board as they would in normal conditions.

Conclusion

This article has explained most of the rationale behind the design decisions that went into the making of these scenarios. I wish to thank those original authors who blazed the trail when they converted Panzerblitz scenarios into East Front II ones. They certainly pointed the way and though none of them did anything with Panzer Leader, they could have. I am glad that I am the first to do so. Enjoy the scenarios.