

DESIGN NOTES FOR PANZERBLITZ: HILL OF DEATH

By
Alan R. Arvold

Back in 2009, the wargame “Panzerblitz: Hill of Death” was published and released to the public. Advertised as the direct next generation descendent of the original Panzerblitz it was in reality a very distant descendent as many generations of tactical armored warfare games had come and gone in the 39 years between the release of both games. Having played the game I found that it did have some of the flavor of the original game, but it was updated with more advanced game mechanics that have evolved over the past forty years. Still it was a nice experience and almost immediately I started converting it to the Talonsoft Campaign series of computer games.

One would wonder, shouldn't this be Panzer Leader as the scenarios in the game occur in the Western Front as Panzerblitz deals with scenarios on the Eastern Front. Well normally yes but the new publisher, Multi-Man Publishing, has decided to use the name Panzerblitz for both fronts, plus any new ones that they may get into in future releases. Never-the-less since the scenarios in the new game occur on the Western Front, I must convert them to Talonsoft's West Front game.

The Mapsheet

Converting the mapsheet was very easy. The new Panzerblitz series uses actual historical battlefields for their maps, not geomorphic game board to arrange in multiple combinations to try and simulate the battlefield in question. The new game sticks to the 250 meters per hex size so both mapsheets exactly match, hex for hex. The original mapsheet had an odd number of hexrows though, so I had to add an additional hexrow on the east side of the board to even things out since the Campaign series of games will not allow map width with an odd number of hexrows. To make things even easier, the new Panzerblitz uses elevation levels to simulate the lay of the terrain. Since the borderlines of the elevation levels go along hexsides, it makes it all the more easier to convert to West Front standards. For the record there is 20 meters of elevation between each level on the original map so that is what I used in West Front. Also the gameboard looks more open than it really was. This is because the original game left out the various fields that existed in that area, preferring to leave the ground open. I decided to go along with this. One will notice that the northwest corner of the mapsheet is blacked out in the computer game. This is because on the original mapsheet this is where all of the combat results tables and other necessary game charts are located. Besides, none of the missing terrain had anything to do with the battle for Hill 112 so I left it off. Also one will notice a lack of terrain along two thirds of the northern edge of mapboard. Again in the original mapsheet there is none as the Germans never went up there, being on the defensive, and so the designers left it empty. This explains why roads seem to disappear before going off of the northern edge of the board.

Another thing on the roads, on the original mapsheet all roads were treated equal, in other words as if they were all hard surface roads. This worked in the original Panzerblitz and Panzer Leader as there were not that many road hexes on the board compared to the other terrain. However, on the new mapsheet, it looks rather ridiculous to see hard surface all over the place where they did not even exist today. So I researched historical maps and the mapsheets of the other West Front scenarios that deal with Hill 112 to get a feel for what each road hex on the new Panzerblitz mapsheet really is. This is why there are paved and unpaved roads, tracks, and in the northeast corner, railroads on the mapsheet. Where these roads and tracks cross a river, I use the appropriate sized bridge, light bridges for tracks, medium bridges for unpaved roads, and heavy duty for paved and rail roads. All rivers are deep water because that is the way they are on the Panzerblitz game mapsheet. The Orne River is one hex wide because again, that the way it is on the game map.

For the towns I used a combination of village and suburb hexes to simulate the relative building density in the hex in question. For vegetation I used both woods and orchard hexes because the Panzerblitz mapsheet uses both symbols.

The Orders of Battle

Creating the orders of battle for the different scenarios ran into several problems. First was the fact that the game provided no charts describing what each counter represents in terms of vehicles, men, and gun/mortars. The presumption is that each counter represents a platoon, battery, or section. Another problem was just how many vehicles a vehicular unit represented. At first this was not much a problem as I used standard unit T.O. & E.s. However I ran into a problem with the British, specifically with their Churchill tank platoons. Three of them equaled a company in the game, but historically five of them equaled a company. The answer was that in the game each unit equaled five tanks but historically three tanks equaled a platoon. Hence, three Churchill tank counters in the game would equal five Churchill units in West Front. Still another was the hidden units in Panzerblitz, namely those historical units which are assumed to be divided up among the line platoons and are part of them when the counter factors were figured out. In past conversions this has mostly had to do with the machine gun platoons on both sides. But in the new Panzerblitz both sides have separate machine gun platoons. For the British it was easy to identify where they came from, namely the Machine Gun Battalions that their infantry divisions had. The Germans were something else, they did not have enough machine gun unit counters in the various scenarios to represent all of their machine gun platoons. After careful study of the German unit T.O. & E.s I figured that the machine gun units represented are only those platoons that were at battalion level (in the weapons company). Those machine gun platoons in the line companies were presumed to be broken up and spread out among the line platoons. However in West Front all machine gun platoons are in the game. Another hidden unit was the headquarters units of the British tank companies. These are usually HE firing tanks like the Churchill Mk VIII with the 95mm gun. I made sure that they were included in the West Front scenarios.

Another thing in the new Panzerblitz is that all of the artillery used in the scenarios is off map. I kept to that in the conversion to West Front and all artillery is off map. However I made sure that each scenario had a different artillery unit supporting the on-map formations in questions, especially on those scenarios occurring on July 10, 1944.

The Scenarios

As one looks at the scenarios, most of them seem to be quite small, with small mapsheets and small unit densities. This was the way they were in the Panzerblitz game. Most scenarios used only a small part of the main map and so I just map only the map section that was required. One thing that I changed was my treatment of the defending side in the scenarios. In my past conversions of Panzerblitz and Panzer Leader scenarios I always gave the defenders Improved Positions for all of their units. This was in keeping with defensive tactics of all of the combatants. However in the new Panzerblitz game each scenario will give the defender a limited number of Improved Position and Hull Down (which is an Improved Position for vehicles) counters. I duplicated this by adding up the total number and giving that number of Improved Positions to the defender. No longer will all of the defending units be so protected at the beginning of the game. (Note that the new Panzerblitz also has rules for Fortifications but none were used in any of the scenarios.)

One factor where the new Panzerblitz is different from the old Panzerblitz and Panzer Leader is the length of the game turn. In the old games the length was six minutes of real time. In the new game it represents fifteen minutes of real time. This was not a great a problem as it would appear. I just used the conversion factor of two to five, in other words two turns in the new Panzerblitz would equal five turns in West Front as both would equal thirty minutes of real time. In scenarios where there are an odd number of turns I would just round the fractions upwards. (Seven Panzerblitz turns would equal eighteen West Front turns.) In cases where reinforcements enter the Panzerblitz on a certain turn I would again use the closest equivalent turn in West Front (Example: Turn 2 in Panzerblitz would equal Turn 4 in West Front, Turn 3 would equal Turn 6, Turn 4 would equal Turn 8, Turn 5 would equal Turn 11, etc..)

There are nine scenarios in this set. Eight of them are from the original board game and the other is an unpublished scenario (as of this writing). Some of these scenarios have very small boards and are uniquely suited for the number of units in the scenario in question. Others have rather large boards for the number of units in the scenario and create unrealistic opportunities for one or both sides to maneuver which in real life would not exist due to the presence of neighboring friendly and enemy units. But then these are faithful recreations of the original scenarios so they are as much as fault for this as I am.

Scenario #1 First Crack

This scenario depicts the initial battle for Hill 112 during Operation Epsom on June 28, 1944. This scenario is a primary example where the map is way too big for the number of

units in question. However, since the objective hexes are confined to Hill 112 itself, it is doubtful that players are going to have the time to execute wide flanking movements. The original scenario is ten turns long which translates to 25 turns in West Front. The British forces, which come from the 11th Armored Division, come in on three different turns, 1, 3, and 9. The Brits, who move first and thus are the aggressors, receive an airstrike during the game and also have an off board artillery battery at their beck and call.

The Germans have an on board starting force, plus reinforcements which come in on Turns 3, 11, and 14, all from the 12th SS Panzer Division. The starting units are set up in a pretty small area and really can not be moved more than a hex or two away for those players who want to vary the set up. In the original scenario the Germans receive five Improved Positions and three Hull-Down positions which in West Front mean that they get eight Improved Positions in their starting set up.

The objective hexes are based on what the British must capture by the end of the original scenario. These, plus the victory points earned for enemy unit destruction are what the victory point levels are based on.

Scenario #2: Launch of Jupiter

This scenario depicts a portion of the beginning of Operation Jupiter on July 10th, 1944. In the original scenario it lasts for ten turns so in West Front the scenario is 25 turns long. The mapboard is only a small portion of the main mapsheet and is about right in size to the number of units in the scenario. The British forces, which come from the 130th Brigade of the 43rd Infantry Division, plus some armor support from the 9th Royal Tank Regiment, are the aggressors and thus move first. The British are supported by a battery of off-board artillery plus a Royal Navy destroyer (also well off the board) and one airstrike. They only have one reinforcement during the game, a couple of tank destroyer platoons from the 11th Armored Division which come on the board on Turn 11. One will note that some of the British infantry companies only have two platoons in them, this is due to fact and the missing ones are being held back as a reserve to be committed later, well past the end of the scenario.

The Germans have elements of two battalions from the 22nd SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment plus a few supporting units. On Turn 4 they get their only reinforcements, a company of Pz IV tanks from the 12th SS Panzer Regiment. They have a total of eight Improved Position and two Hull Down counters in the original game, which means that they get ten Improved Positions in West Front. They are also supported by two batteries of off map 75mm Howitzers.

The games victory points levels are based on the possession of objective hexes, of which there are six, and of course, the elimination of enemy units. The objective hexes are all town hexes and reflect the original scenario's victory conditions. It should be noted that the original scenario had a mistake in it, namely that the three platoons of Bren Gun Carriers were at first just three platoons of standard Bren Carriers, thus implying

that one of the British line companies was mechanized. However MMP corrected this mistake and the current set reflects the correction.

Scenario #3: End of Jupiter

This scenario depicts the end of the fighting on 10 July, 1944 on Hill 112. The original scenario lasts for seven turns so the West Front version lasts eighteen turns. Again, the mapboard occupies a small portion of the whole map and is the right size for the number of counters involved. The British forces come from the 43rd Infantry Division, plus some armor support from the 7th Royal Tank Regiment. Artillery support comes from a battery of off-map 25 Pdr. Howitzers. They have only one reinforcement, namely the armor support which arrives on the first turn on the northern edge of the board and they have three Improved Positions from which to start their attack from as they move first.

The Germans have a battalion from the 19th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, supported by Pz IVs and Stug III's. They are set up on the southern flank of Hill 112 and have seven Improved Positions in their set up. They have the artillery support of one battery of off-map 105mm Howitzers.

The original victory conditions were based on the Germans having at least one unit on the Level Three hexes on the south side of Hill 112. I could not duplicate this in West Front so I set a series of objective hexes along the bottom of the hill. In order to get to them, the British will have to fight their way through the Germans so the effect is sort of the same.

Scenario #4: Take the Hill

This scenario depicts the main effort on 10 July, 1944 on Hill 112. It is the biggest scenario in the game and has the most units. It uses the middle third of the gameboard. The original scenario is seven turns long which translates to eighteen turns in West Front. The British have elements of three battalions of the 129th Infantry Brigade, of the 43rd Infantry Division, supported by elements of the 7th Royal tank Regiment. They are set up north of Hill 112. Artillery support comes in the form of two batteries of 25 Pdr. Howitzers. They have one reinforcement which arrives on Turn 8. This scenario starts some time after the second scenario begins in real life because it assumes that the town of Les Dauns and the Chateau de Fontaine on the eastern side of the mapboard is cleared of German, whereas in the second scenario they have Germans still in them (at least at the Chateau and the woods just north of it).

The Germans are set up on or south of the hard surface road that runs from Hex 0,26 to Hex 19,16. It is composed of units of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 21st Panzer Grenadier Regiment plus supporting elements from the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Regiments and various other support units from the 10th SS Panzer Division. The original scenario historical description states just the 10th SS Panzer Regiment, but this is in error as the Panther tanks came from the 9th SS Panzer Regiment. The 10th SS Panzer Regiment had no Panther tanks at the time of this battle, though they had troops in Germany training on

them in preparation of receiving them the following month.) Being the defender the Germans get eleven Improved Positions to correspond to the Improved Position and Hull Down markers that they get in the original scenario. They have artillery support in the form of one battery of 150mm rocket artillery. They get one reinforcement on Turn 6, a Tiger Company from the 102nd SS Heavy Panzer Battalion, which enters on the south side of the board.

The original victory conditions were based on the British clearing the Germans off of the hard surface road on the Level 3 hexes on Hill 112 itself by the end of the game. I duplicated this by making each of those road hexes an objective hex. Of course, unit elimination also provides Victory Points and I have adjusted the Victory Point levels to account for this.

Scenario #5: Overlooking Maltot

This scenario depicts the effort to capture the town of Maltot on the eastern flank of Hill 112. It occurred later in the day on 10 July 1944 while the main fighting was still raging on the hill itself. This is another scenario that occurs while there is combat still going on the mapboard (in this case Scenarios 2 and 9), yet it is not depicted in the scenario, thus allowing maneuver opportunities that would not in reality exist. The map board uses the eastern third of the game board. It is ten turns long which translates to twenty-five turns in West Front. The British have units from the 130th Infantry Brigade and the 9th Royal Tank Regiment. Some of these start the game set up on the board along or north of the road running from Hex 0,16 to Hex 15,0 on the Level Three hexes and the rest come on as reinforcements on Turns 3, 6, and 9. The British have two batteries of off-board 25 Pdr. Howitzers for indirect fire support.

The Germans set up in the town of Maltot or on or south of the road starting in Hex 0,19 and ending in Hex 17,9. The Germans also have reinforcements coming on Turns 1, 6, and 9. These units come from the 1st SS, 10th SS and 12th SS Panzer Divisions. The Germans have eight Improved Positions and one Hull Down marker in the original scenario, thus they have a total of nine Improved Positions in West Front. They have indirect fire support in the form of an off-board 150mm Rocket battery and an on-board 81mm Mortar Platoon. Note that in the original scenario the mortar was treated as off-board, but as the German 81mm Mortar does not have the range to be posted off board to the south, I opted for an on-the-board unit instead.

The victory conditions are based on the possession of the town hex of Maltot, plus two hexes on the hill mass to the south of the town. This was very easy to convert to objective hexes. These plus the victory points gains from eliminating enemy units are the basis of the various victory levels in the scenario.

Scenario #6: Twilight at Maltot

This scenario occurs twelve days after the main battle for Hill 112. It basically uses the same map as Scenario #5 except that a couple of the western Hexrows and southern

hexlines are missing, shrinking the map a little bit. While this appears to be another scenario where there is too much map to the north of the battle, however all of the land north of the British units now belongs to them by this date. Besides, the set up of the various units on both sides precludes any fancy maneuvering. The scenario is eleven turns long which translates into twenty-eight turns in West Front. The British units, which come from 129th Infantry Brigade and the 9th Royal Tank Regiment, start the game set up north and northeast of Maltot. They have one reinforcement, a couple platoons of Crocodile Flame tanks which arrive on Turn 14. While they do not have any indirect fire support in this scenario, they do have one Typhoon fighter-bomber available.

The Germans start the scenario set up in Maltot and in the woods near the Orne River. These are units from the 272nd Infantry Division. They have six Improved Position markers in the scenario and so that is how many they receive in West Front. The town hexes in Maltot are all rubble hexes to simulate the totally wrecked nature of the town by this late date. The Germans receive two reinforcements during the scenario, one group on Turn 6 and the other on Turn 9, all of these units come from the 10th SS Panzer Division. The Germans have no indirect fire support in this scenario.

The victory conditions are based on possession of the town of Maltot by the end of the game. To simulate this I made each rubble hex an objective hex in Maltot. These plus the victory points earned for eliminating enemy units provide the basis for the various victory levels in the scenario.

Scenario #7: No Happy Rest

This scenario occurs five days after the main battle on Hill 112. It depicts the attack on the town of Les Bon Repos at the bottom central portion of the mapboard. The actual playing field in the original scenario is the Level 2 hexes in and around the town. However, the British force, from the 15th Infantry Division and the 34th Tank Brigade, are set up in the Level 3 hexes (incorrectly listed as Level 4 hexes on the scenario card) to the northeast of Les Bon Repos, so I made the mapsheet square by including all of the Level 3 hexes in the surrounding area. They have no reinforcements in this scenario, nor do they have indirect fire support or aircraft. The original scenario special instructions state that the scenario occurs at night but have the artificial lighting from “Monty’s Moonlight” improving the visibility so I made the visibility range three hexes.

The Germans force, from the 10th SS Panzer Division, is set up in the three towns on the map. They have reinforcements coming on the board from the southwest on Turn 11. They have no indirect fire support in this scenario. They do not have any Improved Positions or Hull Down markers in the original set up but the special instructions state that they may make them during the game. This works out beautifully as they can do that anyway in West Front.

The original scenario had the Germans secretly setting up three victory hexes in the towns and the nearby orchards and the British had to take all three of them, without knowing where they were, by the end of the game to win. I could not duplicate this

directly, so I put objective hexes in all of the hexes in the towns and the stated orchard hexes and set the victory point level high enough so the British must take a substantial number of in order to win. Of course the elimination of enemy units for both sides will also affect the total score as well.

Scenario #8: Pierced and Bloodied

This small scenario depicts the German night attack on the town of Eterville on the night of 10 July 1944. For once it is the British who are defending in the scenario. The map is small one of only 10 hexes square. Because the attack occurs at night the visibility is down to one hex range. The scenario is six turns long in the original scenario so that makes it fifteen turns long in West Front. The British force, which is from the 15th Infantry Division is set up in the town of Eterville and the nearby orchard. They have four Improved Positions in the original game so I gave them four Improved Positions in this scenario. They have one reinforcement which enters from the northwest on Turn 9. They have no indirect fire support nor do they have any aircraft.

The German force, which is from the 10th SS Panzer Division, starts the game set up on the southwest corner of the map. They have no reinforcements, but they do have indirect fire support in the form of one 81mm mortar platoon. Because of the small size of the map I was able to set up the mortar platoon as off-the-board artillery, despite its short range.

The victory conditions in the original scenario were based on German possession of the orchard hexes around Eterville. I set up the objective hexes in each of them to duplicate this condition in West Front. The victory point levels are based on these, plus the elimination of enemy units.

Scenario #9: Jupiter's Flank

This small scenario was originally an unpublished one that I came into possession of. It was still going through play-testing when I received it last year. However, with the long passage of time and no sign of it ever seeing the light of day, I decided to include it in this set. The scenario did not even have a name so I gave it what I thought was an appropriate one. It depicts the flank attack against the town of Les Mesnil and the southern approaches to the (off map) Carpiquet Airfield. The scenario is eight to ten turns long (still being in playtest) so I opted for the eight turn length which means that it is twenty turns long in West Front. The British force, which is from the 15th Infantry Division and the 7th Royal Tank Regiment, start the game set up on the board west of Hexrow 5.0. They have no reinforcements in the scenario but they do have indirect fire support in the form of a battery of off-the map 25 Pdr. Howitzers.

The German force, which is from the 1st SS Panzer Division, starts the game with a small force on the board. They have a block in Hex 10,1. They receive reinforcements on Turns 4 and 9. They have no indirect fire support. They also do not start the game with any Improved Positions, although they may construct them in the course of the game.

In the original scenario victory was determined by the British capturing the town of Les Mesnil and three other objective hexes. I duplicated this in West Front. Also both sides receive points for eliminating enemy units.

It should be noted that this is still (as of this writing) a playtest scenario. Should it eventually get published and changes be made to it, I shall update and repost this particular scenario to reflect them.

Conclusion

I hope that gamers enjoy these new scenarios. Should Multi-Man Publishing come out with more expansions to the new Panzerblitz, I shall indeed convert the scenarios in them to the appropriate game in the Campaign Series.