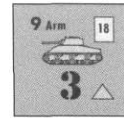


Tigers in the Mist:

A Primer

The Battle of the Bulge, December 16-22, 1944



By Ray Freeman

By the winter of 1944, German armies had been pressed back from their spectacular geographic gains of 1940-42 to the very borders of the Reich. In the east, Soviet armies were on the outskirts of Budapest and Warsaw and astride the pre-war border of East Prussia. In the west, British and American forces had partially penetrated the Siegfried Line and captured the major German city of Aachen. Adolf Hitler decided to gamble that a surprise offensive in the west, if successful, might induce the western allies to negotiate a separate peace, allowing him to turn Germany's full attention to the Russians. Hitler's own generals held no such illusions. The operation was to be conducted with inadequate forces and insufficient supplies. Only the weather would be in their favor as it would keep grounded the overwhelmingly superior Allied air forces, at least temporarily.

TIGERS IN THE MIST is a game that allows two players to recreate the first week of the Ardennes Offensive of 1944. The German player will attempt to use his local superiority to smash through the weak American front line and race across the Meuse River toward the German objective of Antwerp, Belgium. The US player must use the difficult terrain, bad roads, his powerful artillery and what reserves that were available to prevent the Germans from accomplishing their objectives.

OVERVIEW

The map portrays the historical battle area and a bit more, covering an area approximately 90 miles by 90 miles. The map ranges from Aachen and Namur in the north to Luxembourg City in the south, and from Bitburg in the east to Givet in the west. The map uses a point-to-point system for movement, but has been rendered to resemble an area type map in order to better portray the densely wooded terrain of the Ardennes more dramatically. There are 183 areas where most of the moving and fighting take place, and 15 perimeter zones which are used for reinforcement entry, supply sources and German exit points. There are also numerous rivers and bridges which can affect movement and combat. Movement is accomplished by moving from area to area along connecting roads.

Units in *TIGERS IN THE MIST* (*TitM*) are roughly regiments and battalions in size. Twenty-four German and twenty-one Allied divisions plus many independent brigades and battalions are represented in the game's Order of Battle.

The three basic arms of WWII ground combat forces are represented—armor, infantry and artillery. The armor counters use silhouettes, so that they are easily distinguishable from infantry type units which use NATO symbols. This "at a glance" visual difference is very important due

to a combined arms combat modifier. Infantry is further broken down into mechanized, motorized, foot, and engineer types. Engineer units are critical to both bridge demolition and repair. No artillery counters are present, but artillery support is represented abstractly and is possible for both sides in any combat.

Each unit counter has a strength which represents both the number of hits it can take before being destroyed and also is the number of dice it rolls when resolving combat. Unit strength varies from 1 to 5. Divisional strengths vary from 6 for the 106th Infantry Division and run-of-the-mill *Volksgranadiers* (VG) divisions to 20 for the 1st SS Pz division. Basic unit combat factors vary from 3 to 5, with armor being more effective than infantry. If a die roll is equal to or less than the combat factor of the firing unit, it scores a hit which causes its target to lose one strength point. This system has three advantages over the classic wargame Combat Results Table. First, no attack (no matter how strong) is guaranteed to eliminate, or even damage the defender. Second, there is no possibility of an impregnable position. Third, all units participating in battle run the risk of suffering attrition which erodes their combat capability. Many wargames encourage the use of "soak-off" tactics, whereby the big glamour units do the killing while weak units suffer the losses in exchanges, etc. *TitM* is very different (and more realistic) in

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this respect. If you attack with a powerful SS Panzer unit, expect to take casualties with that unit in nearly every battle. One of the real advantages of the combat system is that the outcome of battles are never predictable. This raises the tension level during play considerably.

Units on defense get a -1 DRM. Other combat modifiers include attacking without combined arms (armor, infantry and artillery), attacking across a river, attacking entrenched units and out-of-supply status. Combat is mandatory when entering an area containing enemy units. It is optional when both sides start an impulse in an area.

Play in the game is driven by breaking each day-long turn into three impulses. Units may only move and/or attack once per day, therefore both sides are forced by the game system to hold back reserves for exploitation, to plug gaps torn in the front line, or to counterattack. The combat system uses step reductions to portray the grinding attrition which occurred for both sides during the battle. The German player will literally feel his striking power eroding away each turn he continues the attack. The American player will desperately grasp the weakest of units to place in the path of the German spearheads to slow the offensive. Play is very tense due to the unpredictable nature of the combat system. A "sure thing" attack may fail, a "solid defensive position" may collapse unexpectedly. Wild swings of fortune in combat are possible, keeping both players on the edge of their seats each time the dice are thrown.

Occupation (stacking) limits in *TitM* are controlled by two different factors. Each player may have a maximum of four units with a maximum total of ten strength points occupying an area at the end of any movement impulse. Without the SP limit, both sides could create "killer"

stacks of up to 17 SPs. Such a stack could generate as many as five artillery support points in a battle, resulting in 22 combat die rolls. The 10 SP stacking limit reduces the maximum attack or defense to 13, counting artillery. Significance of the unit-based stacking limit is that the impact of attrition on combat power is more significant. As the big elite units get ground down by battle, their combat power erodes, reducing their value to the stack. Four 1 SP units fully occupy an area, yet generate little hitting and staying power in combat, and still clog up the road net. Battles create a lot of detritus which impairs the ability of reinforcements to get to the front.

The movement rules are very simple. There are two types of road—major and minor. Movement on minor roads is double the cost of movement along major roads. Movement off road is not allowed; much of the Ardennes in 1944 was thickly forested which limited off road movement by major combat formations. A penalty exists for moving through occupied areas, which simulates the road congestion common in the battle. In combination with the impulse system, this penalty creates many traffic headaches for the German player (without requiring the use of special congestion rules so common to games on this battle). Other movement modifiers slow units leaving an enemy-occupied area, crossing a river at a blown bridge (by infantry on foot only), having a bridge blown up as a unit is trying to cross it, and being out of supply. Entrenchment and bridge repair involve very high movement costs.

Bridge demolition takes place during the opponent's movement. A bridge may be blown only as an enemy unit is attempting to cross it, and a defender must be present at the bridge. How long the defender has been in place behind the bridge and the defender's unit type also affects the probability of successful demolition. Engineers

are excellent at demolition. Armored units can't blow bridges at all. Bridge repair takes place after movement, and may only be performed by Engineers that have not moved that turn.

Each attacking or defending stack is assumed to have the possibility of artillery support during any impulse. The players roll dice for each artillery unit they are eligible to call upon for support. Each player may make one call for artillery support for every three strength points he has present in a battle. The defender always gets a minimum of one call. American artillery is much more reliable than German, and defending artillery is significantly more accurate than artillery used in support of an attack. As the US is typically defending, their artillery is usually 4-5 times as effective as the German artillery, gun for gun. In *TitM*, artillery will rarely be a decisive weapon in any given battle, however the cumulative attritional effect of US artillery makes it a very deadly weapon indeed.

The three most important tools in the American arsenal are artillery, shovels and dynamite. The US player must dig in whenever he can and it is prudent to do so. He must also try to preserve his precious engineers—not an easy task when he is desperate to find any unit to plug the holes that occur with alarming frequency. The Germans have to rely on their panzer divisions for punch. As the five panzer divisions they begin the campaign with are usually burnt out after three or four days, it is critical that they release at least some of the four panzer divisions they have in reserve as soon as possible by securing certain geographical objectives.

The Germans also have an assortment of dirty tricks available in the form of the German Special Forces unit. This unit represents the von der Heydte parachute unit, Greif commando teams and the use of

captured US Sherman tanks to lead attacks in order to confuse the defenders. The SF unit has three different effects, each of which may only be used once. During each of the 17th, the 18th and the 19th of December, the German player selects an effect and area for it to be applied. One effect is to impede US movement through an area, one affects bridge demolition die rolls, and one yields a favorable combat modifier in a single battle.

This game constantly gives both players the feeling of imminent disaster and defeat. After a few turns, the US player starts to feel as if every roadblock he throws up is being steamrollered by the German juggernaut. However, after some initial euphoria, the German player realizes that his panzers, far from slicing through enemy lines with surgical blitzkrieg precision, are instead caught in an endless meat grinder, where maneuver is limited by congestion and a lousy east-west road net. The promise (or for the Americans, specter) of a breakout by the panzers is ever present, but rarely seems to come to pass. This game conveys a disconcerting feeling of doom to both players simultaneously.

A TACTICAL PRIMER

In combat, each side tends to focus on different objectives. The German player needs to kill US units as quickly as possible. Therefore, he would like as much as possible to attack weakly-held areas, wipe out the defenders, and press forward into an area beyond that position on the following impulse. The US player, on the other hand is intent on keeping his units alive and whittling down the big German units. Three German units totaling 9 SPs are considerably more dangerous than four German units totaling 8 SPs. The 9 SPs generate an additional artillery call (which in turn dramatically increases the probability of a combined arms attack as well as giving one more

potential die roll in combat). Equally important is that if the Germans suffer some casualties in their attack, the three-unit stack allows a fourth unit to attack the same area on a later impulse. This second attack could carry the position against a defender weakened by the earlier attack.

Allied Ideas

Stacking units on defense can lead to increased defender casualties, but makes positions harder to take, especially with three defending units. For example, a single 3 SP unit on defense will be attacked by every attacker in the battle as well as all of the attacker's artillery. Three 1 SP units generate no more battle dice than the above, but enable the defender to spread around his fire (generally what the US prefers) among several attackers and makes it difficult for the attacker to evenly distribute his attacking strength. Thus the three-unit stack generally stands a much better chance of holding the area. However, the flip side is that the US defender may lose two or more units in a single combat, which is highly undesirable.

Tactically, the decision to stack on defense or not may be dependent on the value of the area defended. If loss of the area will open two routes for the Germans to use, then stacking two units at the chokepoint may be just as cheap, although casualties can be worse. Placing weak screening forces in sectors of the board where the road net is bad while stacking critical areas (like Bastogne, Malmedy, Vielsalm or Arlon) to the rafters is also a good idea to channel German attacks along less favorable routes. Sometimes a big stack of Americans can intimidate the German player into going elsewhere for a turn or so.

The US player should entrench whenever he can, so long as these units will not be immobilized long enough for them to be pocketed by a German flanking move. Entrenching early in a turn

can result in a lack of flexibility for a judicious withdrawal of the front line. Always evaluate the situation carefully before committing units on the first impulse of a turn.

If attrition is running high, such that your ability to form a line in a couple of impulses in the future seems doubtful, there are ways to adjust to the situation. If it is really bad, don't be afraid to run away in one sector of the board. A day of respite from repeated hammer blows can do wonders for building up your reserves for a later, tenacious defense. A less-drastring measure is to place defending units just outside the reach of the Germans spearheads in sectors dominated by minor roads or just within the reach of only a very weak advanced force. Keep in mind that a considerable amount of German strength is tied up in their VG divisions. These units are terribly slow except on major roads and opportunities to set up defensive positions just out of range of the German foot infantry are numerous. If a unit survives an attack by a stack of four Germans, don't withdraw unless you are being flanked and surrounded. The defender is absolutely safe for the remainder of the day in such a position. Further, the Germans must use that big stack again to reduce the position the following day. This costs them time and a heavy force commitment.

The following points are obvious, but critical enough to emphasize. Keep reserves centrally located so that they can deploy as needed wherever there is a breakthrough. Group your reserves together to avoid incurring multiple movement penalties which might occur when they are scattered about the rear areas. Don't give up the reserve Panzer division release areas early. Those divisions represent a lot of mobile punch, and 2nd SS Panzer and 9th SS Panzer are critical to German chances in the longer scenarios.

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US counterattacks are fairly rare occurrences during the period the game covers. However, judicious attacks can really screw up the tight German timetable. Counterattacks are useful in three cases:

Cut off spearheads. A perfect example is Monschau in the northern part of the board. If the Germans take Monschau and then drive towards Eupen or Aachen without covering the other road, then a US counterattack at Monschau can put the German spearhead out of supply, resulting in serious attritional losses. This is especially true if the Germans can't mount an attack on the blocking force prior to the end of the turn. Such a counterattack will not only cause attritional losses to the Germans, but the blocking force must be reduced before the offensive can resume in that sector. This could cost the Germans two or three days, rather a lot in a game that is only seven days long. A late-game counterattack can perhaps be used to put a German VP exit area out of supply. This will cost the Germans the VP and the units exited as well, a double penalty.

Reinforce or contest a critical area. Most victory point areas or panzer division release areas are critical. Other critical areas include hinge points of good defensive lines (such as Arlon).

Jam up chokepoints. These areas block movement to the extent that long and costly detours may be required in order to maneuver around the block (such as at Bullingen, St. Vith and Bastogne).

Even though the game system places a premium on defensive position, the proper use of counterattacks can be devastating. Be alert for such possibilities. However, attacking in *TitM* can be an expensive proposition. The US player must pick his spots very carefully. Still, it is easy for the US player to fall into the trap of playing passive defense all of the time. At a high level of play,

doing the unorthodox can set back the German timetable, shatter your opponent's composure, and induce him to waste time and energy fretting about what crazy thing you might come up with next.

German Ideas

The German player should pay attention to flank security when large US forces threaten to cut off a spearhead. While this may divert strength from a *schwerpunkt*, it is preferable to having your spearheads cut off and having to fight your way out of a trap.

When considering where to attack at the beginning of a turn, the German should think about whether his options will be increased by an attack. Is there more than one exit from the area to the "west"? If so, a successful attack stretches the defense and forces the Allies to move more units on the first impulse. Forcing the US to move as early and as much as possible in each turn reduces his options for later. Have reserves available to exploit the gap opened on the first impulse. Consider whether the American has plenty of reserves nearby or is real thin in this sector of the board. Don't fall into the trap of attacking targets of opportunity with no real plan from turn to turn.

As two of the best US "weapons" in *TitM* are the shovel and the demo charge, the German player should consider whether a weak spoiling attack might prevent or inhibit entrenching. I prefer suffering some casualties to my weak attacking forces on one turn in order to avoid the necessity of attacking an entrenched defender on the following turn. Late in a turn, a US unit behind a bridge may have already moved, in which case its probability of blowing the bridge is half of what it may be on the following turn. Again, it is usually worth the casualties to reduce the odds of the bridge going up in an

explosion and losing a couple of days trying to repair the bridge. It is not always necessary to assault across every bridge in an impulse—a successful attack in one location can compromise river line positions on either side on the following impulse. Don't give the US player unnecessary bridge demo attempts.

Low odds attacks are not always bad things in *TitM*. Occasionally, one will succeed spectacularly, and when it does, the US player will be psychologically traumatized for several turns. Cheap attacks are also highly recommended on second and third impulses of a turn. These usually involve a one or two weak units attacking a 1 SP defender. If the attacker dies or fails to clear the area, not much has been lost. However, if the defender misses and then is killed, the German player has gained ground, saved an impulse in that sector, and will be able to concentrate a strong attack further west at the beginning of the following turn. This is can save the Germans a couple of critical impulses.

The German player needs to realize that half of his starting units of 3 SP or larger are *Volksgradiers*. It is critical to his chances to keep these units employed as fully as possible. With this in mind, he should make sure that lots of these guys are used on or adjacent to major roads. Foot infantry advancing along minor roads are not going to be able to consistently keep up with the mobile forces. Foot infantry are especially valuable for attrition battles against strongly-held sections of the US line. They will absorb casualties that otherwise would be directed to mech or panzer units. VG units are usually very difficult to get into combat on the second impulse of a turn, and nearly impossible on a third impulse.

The German player starts with five panzer divisions in the
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Replay: TIGERS IN THE MIST

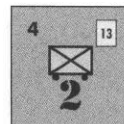
breakthrough—and accounting for road congestion and stacking limits—is the German player's prime resource management task. The sequencing of unit movement and the selection of attacking units on each impulse can make a big difference in the German performance, particularly in this small scenario where one missed movement or attack opportunity can be telling. This need to orchestrate unit movement and combat is what makes the German side the more challenging side to play in "The 7th Army Attacks."

The Germans took two gambles during the game (three if you count the ill-considered attack on Luxembourg on 18-2) and neither one paid off. The decision to avoid attacking the entrenched infantry in Beaufort in order to attack and clear Larochette with full-strength foot infantry on 17 December has already been mentioned. Had the attack successfully cleared Larochette,

the surviving infantry could have assaulted Mersch on 18-1 regardless of whether the bridge was destroyed or not. The other gamble was the decision to commit the 3 SP mechanized infantry into an attack on the surviving US infantry at Echternach on 16-3. Had it been successful, the Germans could have been knocking on the door at Luxembourg by 17-3 and likely prevented the US from reinforcing Mersch with their arriving infantry. That in turn would have prevented the bridge demolition and probably resulted in a German victory. Instead, the attack failed and the weakened mechanized infantry was doomed to participate in clearing Echternach on 17-1 instead of being free to join in the attack on Consdorf or even possibly Junglinster. Although both of these gambles had less than a 50-50 chance of success, the potential payoffs may have justified the attempts.

FINAL WORD

This replay has demonstrated the major features of *TIGERS IN THE MIST*. I hope it has provided readers with a flavor of its play. The remaining three scenarios of the game, which range from three

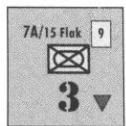


to seven turns in length, provide a much larger play area and open up greater opportunities for offensive

breakthroughs, desperate defenses and counterattacks. I have had very different outcomes with these scenarios depending upon the vagaries of the combat dice and the risks one chooses to take. With no "perfect plans" that survive beyond the first impulse or two, *TIGERS IN THE MIST* is an easily-played and highly-replayable game that is a good choice for an evening's entertainment.



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Campaign Scenario. Generally, these divisions are really chewed up after about three days of attacking. It is therefore critical that the German player release 2nd SS Panzer and 9th SS Panzer as soon as possible—ideally on the first day they are available. The difference in a release on the third impulse of the 18th instead of the first impulse of the 19th is considerable. You get a full day's march towards the front out from that earlier release date. Early German play should focus on strong drives towards those release areas and stretching the US line as much as possible.

The Campaign Scenario in particular enters a second phase once the Arlon-Liege highway is cut by the Germans. This highway permits rapid concentration of US

reinforcements from the north and south edges of the board. Once it is cut, the US player finds that he can no longer help out in one sector so easily with units from the opposite sector. The German player may want to keep this in mind and consider ways to take advantage of this mid- to late-game problem for the Allies.

Successful German play in *TitM* depends heavily on good traffic management. This includes getting units into combat when and where they are needed and keeping chewed up units out of the way. However, those weak units must be kept close enough to the front to lend a hand when they can (when better forces are either unavailable or are being held back for exploitation). Traffic control also means positioning mobile reserves in areas where they can exploit holes wherever they occur. It is very frustrating to open a hole in the US line only to

discover that there is no decent exploitation force available to take advantage of the opportunity.

CONCLUSION

TIGERS IN THE MIST was designed to provide an accessible, enjoyable gaming experience that is playable in a single session. The game portrays many of the problems both sides faced in the Ardennes and delivers the flavor of the battle. The German player will be struggling with the bad roads, a tight timetable, the lack of infantry mobility, poor artillery, and constant erosion of his attacking power. The US player will gain an appreciation for just how difficult it is to stop prepared assaults using mostly scratch forces with insufficient time to prepare defensive works. I think players will find the game illuminating as well as fun.

