

THE PATHS OF ROMMEL

New Scenarios for PANZER LEADER 1940

By Daniel Helmbrecht

One of the most decisive campaigns of World War II was the 1940 German invasion of France. No game better recreates the highly mobile actions than Ramiro Cruz's *PANZER LEADER 1940* variant (Vol. 15, No. 2). Cruz introduced new counters characteristic of the 1940 armies and ten new situations. The purpose of this article is to bring players some new scenarios by looking at the battle for France through the eyes of one extraordinary general—Erwin Rommel.

When Nazi Germany began to rearm, many German generals had come to recognize the versatility of massed armor formations. Although France also had armored divisions, many of them were dispersed among the infantry. The Germans meanwhile had organized the panzer divisions into corps. With this tremendous offensive power, they were able to pierce even the strongest lines of defense. After the lightning Polish victory, the German High Command realized that the tank arm was not just important to success, it was vital.

During the winter of the "Phony War" which followed, the German High Command converted four infantry divisions into "light" panzer divisions, equipping them with captured Czech and Polish tanks along with a stiffening of small German ones. One of these, the 7th, had one panzer regiment and three tank battalions and a reconnaissance battalion (a total of 218 AFVs, over half being captured Czech equipment). The division also included two motorized rifle regiments, an engineer battalion, and four artillery battalions. Command was offered to the young Erwin Rommel.

Most people associate Rommel with the dramatic armor campaigns fought in the deserts of North Africa. Wargamers often overlook the significant part he took in the invasion of France. Rommel was a divisional commander at the time, directing the newly-created 7th Panzer Division (having taken command of it at Godesburg on 15th February). Rommel's division was part of the Rundstedt Army Group that attacked through the Ardennes on May 10, 1940.

Although the Allied armies possessed 20 more divisions and over 1400 more tanks than the Germans, they were defeated in one of the most rapid campaigns of history. The key to the German offensive lay in using their limited armored forces as spearheads for their regular army. These armored spearheads massed on a small front, penetrating deep into the Allied rear, totally disrupted the organization of the Allied armies.

These six new scenarios portray Rommel's encounters with the Allied forces in the exciting battle for France.

NOTES:

Situation 42: Rommel encountered relatively little resistance until he reached the Meuse late on May 12th. After getting only an infantry company across, the Germans discovered the French had destroyed the bridges at Dinant and Leffe, behind them. Rommel personally directed a boat crossing which got more infantry across into the bridgehead. A pontoon bridge was constructed and the tanks were able to cross. Rommel's crossing was one of three German river assaults under Rundstedt. Reinhardt's panzer corps crossed at Montheau but was unable to get tanks across until the 15th. Guderian's panzers crossed at Sedan and captured two bridges, but were hampered by heavy Allied air attacks. Thus, Rommel had gained the only secure crossing and began to drive west from the Meuse.

Situation 43: Under increasing German pressure, the French 9th Army commander, Corap, decided to withdraw his forces from the Meuse to a more westerly line. Corap sent two divisions, the French 1st Armored and the 4th North African to slow Rommel's pursuit, but the 7th Panzer struck them before any spoiling attack could be organized.

Situation 44: Rommel continued westward steadily until coming to Clairfayts. Here he encountered a strongly fortified line that was a weak extension of the massive Maginot Line. After close fighting, the 7th Panzer Division was able to break through and pushed west all that night. The next morning Rommel had covered over 50 miles since the previous morning in the daring night drive. Rommel's first wager in the game of armored warfare had paid off with 10000 prisoners and over 100 captured tanks for the loss of only 100 men.

Situation 45: Rommel concluded his initial drive with the capture of Cambrai. On the 20th of May, Guderian's Panzers cut off the Allied armies in Belgium, precipitating an Allied attack on Rommel's advance at Arras. Allied commanders planned a large-scale counterattack to isolate Guderian's force, but all that materialized was a small strike on Rommel's division as he headed towards Arras. The attack hit the 7th hard, inflicting over 1000 casualties. This battle is covered in Cruz's Situation 27.

Situation 46: Rommel's division was next ordered to seal off the western roads leading from Lille, in which the French 1st Army was trapped. Rommel's lead reconnaissance and infantry elements were attacked as they settled into defensive positions by

desperate French units attempting to break out. They managed to contain the French until the main elements of the division arrived. On May 31, the French forces in Lille surrendered.

Situation 47: After Arras and Lille, the 7th Panzer advanced unopposed towards the Somme River. Before reaching it, Rommel came to the La Basse Canal which was defended by a mixed British battalion. The French had sunk barges in the canal and blocked the bridge to prevent an easy crossing like that at the Meuse, but left almost no Allied forces to defend the sector. With considerable difficulty, a pontoon bridge was erected and the attack opened. After some close fighting, the British were overwhelmed and forced back. After organizing the bridgehead at Cruinchy, Rommel departed with the main forces only to be driven to send some back to stop an Allied counterattack (Cruz's Situation 29).

After crossing the canal, and later the Somme, Rommel's division finally reached the coast, and the end of a victorious campaign. Cruz's *PANZER LEADER 1940* variant provides the PL enthusiast a whole new set of counters and situations to expand the basic game. All are used for these Rommel scenarios. The only new rules that missed the Cruz article are that French *tank* units count two for stacking and the 37L can only transport infantry. *PANZER LEADER* is and always will be a highly playable game capable of infinite additional situations. These are but a few; we think them enjoyable and challenging.

