

THE ROCK OF MORTAIN

HITLER'S RISKY GAMBLE TO SALVAGE THE WESTERN FRONT

By the end of July 1944, the Americans had successfully broken through the choking hedgerows of Normandy and were engaging the Nazis in the open country north of the Seine. An exultant George Patton was leading the newly activated US Third Army as it poured south through the narrow corridor at Avranches into the Brittany peninsula and southeast toward the heart of France. Fearing Patton's breakout would precipitate a general collapse of German forces on the western front, Hitler ordered his overall commander in France, Field Marshall von Kluge, to assemble a powerful armored strike force to launch a counteroffensive toward Avranches. If successful, this counteroffensive, dubbed "Operation Lutich", would split the Third Army in two, stop the Allied breakout in its tracks, and restore the German strategic position in the west.

Von Kluge was in a difficult position. To assemble a force large enough to accomplish his objective, he would have to cull armored and mechanized units from the German 5th Panzer Army, already hard pressed by advancing American and Commonwealth armies. Elite formations such as the 1st S.S. and 2nd Panzer Divisions would have to be withdrawn from the front and replaced by less capable infantry formations from the German 15th Army, still fruitlessly engaged

guarding the Channel coast near the Pas de Calais. Allied air dominance further complicated von Kluge's problems, since all major movement would have to be accomplished under cover of darkness. In addition, units of the U.S. First Army, under General Courtney Hodges, continued to drive eastward, widening the Avaranches corridor and further aggravating an already critical situation on Von Kluge's front.

By August 6th, preparations for Operation Lutich were complete. Instead of the eight Panzer and Panzergrenadier divisions originally slated for the operation, von Kluge was able to assemble only parts from five divisions. 116th Panzer was positioned north of the See' River, so as to attack the northern shoulder of the American penetration. To its immediate south, 2nd Panzer and 1st S.S. Panzer were to attack along the See' valley and drive directly toward Avaranches. 2nd S.S. Panzer, reinforced by elements of the 17th S.S. Panzergrenadiers, was to seize the vital crossroads town of Mortain and continue to drive southwestward. Defending Mortain and the See' River valley was the veteran 30th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Leland Hobbs and subordinated to VII Corps, U.S. 1st Army. Hobb's division had only relieved 1st Infantry Division on August 6th, and had not completed deploying in its new

positions before the Germans struck just after midnight on August 7th.

Although caught by surprise due to tardy warning by "Ultra" of the impending German attack, Hobb's command was deployed in depth. The 120th Regiment was positioned in and around Mortain. The dominating high ground to the east, Hill 314, being occupied by the 2/120th, and Hill 285 to the west by the 3/120th. 1/120th and the regimental HQ were positioned in Mortain itself. To the north, 117th Regiment was situated in and around St. Barthelemy, another vital crossroads town the Germans would have to capture in order to drive west along the See' River valley. 30th Division's 119th Regiment was positioned in depth west of St. Barthelemy along the river valley between Reffuveille and Juvigny le Terte. The Division's artillery was located two-to-three miles behind the front line, able to provide devastating supporting fire to its infantry battalions throughout the battle.

Initial attacks by 2nd S.S. Panzer were successful in overrunning roadblocks north and south of Mortain and soon seized the town itself, effectively isolating the 2/120th occupying Hill 314. Despite being completely surrounded and assaulted by elements of 2nd S.S. Panzer and 17th S.S. Panzergrenadier divisions during the next several days,

the 2/120th gave better than it got, calling down murderous artillery fire, stopping several determined German assaults cold. The American roadblock at le Abbaye Blanche north of Mortain also proved to be a hard nut to crack. There, 2nd S.S. Panzer's *Der Führer* Regiment was ambushed by elements of the 120th Regiment, reinforced by a battery of towed 3-inch Anti-tank guns belonging to the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. The American roadblock remained intact throughout the battle and accounted for nearly fifty German tanks and other vehicles. To the west of Mortain, other elements of 2nd S.S. Panzer repeatedly assaulted Hill 285, but were driven off by overwhelming small arms, anti-tank, and artillery fire. Hill 285 would remain in American possession for the duration of Operation Luttich.

To the north, Kampfgruppe Shacke/2nd Panzer Division, reinforced by units from 1st S.S. Panzer and 116th Panzer, ran headlong into the 1/117th holding St. Barthelemy. Attacking the town from three directions, German tanks and infantry encountered fierce resistance including both small arms and anti-tank fire. 3-inch Anti-tank guns firing at point blank range destroyed several Panthers and MkIVs before being overrun. U.S troops grudgingly gave ground, delivering a bloody account of themselves and imposing a serious delay on the German timetable. Due to traffic congestion, 2nd Panzer's southern attack column was five hours late in starting its advance on Juvigny le Terte, allowing the survivors of 1/117th along with the regimental cannon company and a company of engineers to establish a blocking position there. After its

pyrrhic victory at St. Barthelemy, Kampfgruppe Shacke continued its advance along the southern bank of the See', with forward elements clashing with the U.S. 2nd Armored Division upon reaching le Mesnil Adelee by daybreak. By then, it was all too late! Reinforcements from the 119th Regiment, CCB of 3rd Armored Division, and elements of the 4th Infantry Division had closed in on le Mesnil Adelee from three sides, effectively ending 2nd Panzers' advance and von Kluge's best hope for reaching Avranches.

Along the north bank of the See', 116th Panzer started its attack shortly after midnight. Much of the division's striking power had failed to reach the jump off line in time, thus hindering the assault. The US 4th Division's 39th Infantry Regiment maintained their hold on Cherence le Roussel. 116th Panzer's attack achieved nothing. By daybreak on the 7th, Von Kluge's offensive had stagnated. The German's situation worsened when RAF Typhoons arrived over the battlefield, ruthlessly slashing at German armored columns and troop concentrations at will, utilizing a lethal combination of guns, rockets, and bombs. The U.S 35th Infantry and 2nd Armored divisions now arrived along the southern shoulder of the German penetration, frustrating all attempts by 2nd S.S. Panzer to exploit its capture of Mortain. Less than twenty-four hours after Operation Luttich had begun, the front line had been stabilized. Although fighting continued on for several days with von Kluge committing additional forces, the Germans would make no more gains. For its heroic stand during the German counterattack, the 30th

Infantry, known as "Old Hickory", earned a new honorific, "The Rock of Mortain".

While the German counterattack floundered, the overall American ground commander, General Omar Bradley, recognized an opportunity to lay a trap for the German 7th and 5th Panzer Armies. The 15th Corps of Patton's Third Army was ordered to abandon its drive into southeastern France and change its axis of attack to the north after reaching LeMans. Bradley planned to combine the 15th Corps new drive northward with Commonwealth forces attacking southward to encircle the German 7th Army near Argentan. Though 15th Corps brushed aside what few forces could be assembled against it, Polish and Canadian divisions from Crerar's First Canadian Army gained little ground against the determined resistance of the 5th Panzer Army. Realizing that the 7th Army's right flank was dangerously exposed, von Kluge, under pressure from an increasingly unreasonable Hitler, was ordered to assemble additional forces and resume Operation Luttich. This proved to be a futile gesture. 15th Corps had already overrun German fuel depots and reinforcements were desperately needed to stop 5th Panzer Army from collapsing under the blows of First Canadian Army. By mid August, Allied forces had driven the better part two German armies into a pocket south of the town of Falaise. Despite leaving the Germans a narrow corridor through which to escape, most of 5th Panzer and 7th Army were either captured or destroyed in the battle of the "Falaise Pocket", shattering the front and leaving the way open for an Allied drive to the German border.

George Chrestensen

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MICRO ARMOUR®: THE GAME

TACNEWS Scenario #15

"Deuces Wild" - 7 august, 1944

Deuces Wild is a hypothetical meeting engagement between the U.S. 2nd Armored Division and German 2nd Panzer Division along the banks of the See' River on the morning of August 7th, 1944. Historically, advance units of these formations only skirmished and exchanged artillery fire before the 2nd Armored division was directed west to skirt the battle area and reinforce the southern shoulder of the German penetration. If however, the 2nd Panzer had been more successful in the opening hours of Operation Luttich, the U.S First Army commander, General Courtney Hodges, would have probably been forced to commit the bulk of the 2nd Armored Division to stop the German advance before it posed a significant threat to the Avranches corridor. These two divisions would clash again during another German counteroffensive in January 1945, when the 2nd Panzer Division was stopped just miles from the Meuse River by the 2nd Armored Division during Operation "Wacht am Rhine" (Also known as the Battle of the Bulge). But that is another story, and another scenario...



axis forces

cohesion

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Kampfgruppe Shacke

Deploy anywhere within 4 inches of the poor road running east to west south of the See' River, no further east than le Mesnil Adelee

Kampfgruppe Command

1 x HQ (+0 GHQ) (FO), 1 x SdKfz251/1, 1 x SdKfz251/16

1st Battalion, 24th Panzer Regiment, 116th Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x PzV Panther (HQ) (FO),
1 x SdKfz7/Quad20mm

1st Company: 3 x PzV Panther

2nd Company: 3 x PzV Panther

3rd Company: 2 x PzV Panther

1st Batt., 304th Panzergrenadier Regiment, 2nd Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x SdKfz251/1, 1 x SdKfz10/20mm

1st Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x SdKfz251/10, 2 x SdKfz251/1,
1 x SdKfz251/2(1),

2nd Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x SdKfz251/10, 2 x SdKfz251/1,
1 x SdKfz251/9

3rd Company: 2 x Infantry, 2 x SdKfz251/1, 1 x SdKfz251/2(1),
1 x SdKfz251/9

Heavy Company: 1 x Engineer, 1 x 75mm ATG, 1 x 120 Mortar (2),
3 x SdKfz251/1

1 x Forward Observer (May be assigned to a stand of the player's choice)

38th Panzerjaeger Battalion (-), 2nd Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x JagdPzIVB (HQ) (FO)

1st Company: 2 x JagdPzIVB

2nd Company: 2 x JagdPzIVB

3rd Company: 2 x 88mmFlak36, 2 x Heavy Tractor

Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st SS Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x SdKfz251/1, 2 x SdKfz234/3

1st AC Co. (R): 4 x SdKfz234/2, 1 x SdKfz234/3

2nd AC Co. (R): 3 x SdKfz250/9, 1 x SdKfz250/1

1st Recon Co. (R): 3 x Recon Infantry, 3 x Kubelwagon

2nd Recon Co. (R): 2 x Recon Infantry, 2 x Kubelwagon

Support Co.: 1 x Engineer, 1 x 75mm ATG, 2 x SdKfz250/8
1 x 75mm Infantry Gun (1), 3 x SdKfz251/1,

Armored Engineer Co., 304th Panzergrenadier Regiment

3 x Engineer, 3 x SdKfz251/7, 1 x SdKfz251/16

Infantry Gun Battery, 304th Panzergrenadier Regiment

3 x 150mm sIG Bison (1)

Panzerjaeger Company, 116th Panzer Division

3 x StugIII F

S/P Howitzer Battery (-)

2 x 105mm Wespe (1)

Southern Attack Group

Enter by road on south edge of the battlefield on game turn 3 as indicated on the sketch map

Kampfgruppe Command

1 x HQ (+0 GHQ) (FO), 1 x SdKfz251/1,

1st Battalion, 1st Panzer Regiment, 1st SS Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x PzV Panther (HQ) (FO),

1 x SdKfz7/Quad20mm

1st Company: 3 x PzV Panther

2nd Company: 2 x PzV Panther

3rd Company: 2 x PzV Panther

2nd Battalion, 3rd Panzer Regiment, 2nd Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x PzIVH (HQ) (FO)

1st Company: 3 x PzIVH

2nd Company: 2 x PzIVH

3rd Company: 2 x PzIVH

1st Battalion, 1st Panzergrenadier Regiment, 1st SS Panzer Division

Battalion HQ: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x SdKfz251/1, 1 x SdKfz10/20mm

1st Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x SdKfz251/10, 2 x SdKfz251/1,
1 x SdKfz251/2(1), 1 x SdKfz251/9

2nd Company: 2 x Infantry, 1 x SdKfz251/10, 1 x SdKfz251/1,
1 x SdKfz251/2(1)

3rd Company: 2 x Infantry, 2 x SdKfz251/1, 1 x SdKfz251/2(1),
1 x SdKfz251/9

Heavy Company: 1 x 75mm ATG, 1 x 120 Mortar (2),
2 x SdKfz251/1, 1 x SdKfz251/9

1 x Forward Observer (May be assigned to a stand of the player's choice)

SPECIAL RULES

12.1 The Hot Shot!

SCENARIO LENGTH

12 Turns

NEW WEAPON - RECON INFANTRY (GERMANY)

Firepower	Range	Defense	Speed	Cargo	Cost
1/3	1/5	6**	4F	4	4

This unit costs 9 points



allied forces

cohesion

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Elements, 4th Infantry Division

3rd Battalion(-), 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division-

Deploy within 4 inches of le Mesnil Gilbert

Battalion HQ: 1 x HQ (FO), 2 x 57mm ATG, 1 x Light Truck

1st Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x Infantry Support

2nd Company: 2 x Infantry, 1 x Infantry Support

Support Co.: 2 x Infantry Support, 1 x 81mm Mortar (2)

12 x Light Improved Positions

1st Battalion(-), 39th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division-

Deploy within 4 inches of Charence le Roussel

Battalion HQ: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x 57mm ATG

1st Company: 2 x Infantry, 1 x Infantry Support

2nd Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x Infantry Support

Support Co.: 2 x Infantry Support, 1 x 81mm Mortar (2)

13 x Light Improved Positions

Elements, CCB 2nd Armored Division

Enter anywhere along north edge map on game turn 1

3rd Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment

HQ Company: 1 x M4 Sherman (HQ) (FO), 1 x M4-105mm,
1 x M16 MGMC, 1 x Jeep/.50 cal (R)

1st Company: 4 x M4 Sherman

2nd Company: 3 x M4 Sherman

3rd Company: 3 x M4(76mm) Sherman

4th Company: 3 x M5 Stuart

1st Battalion, 41st Arm. Inf. Regiment

HQ Company: 1 x HQ (+1 GHQ) (FO), 1 x M3 Halftrack,
1 x M16 MGMC, 1 x M8 HMC (1),
1 x M21 MMC (1), 1 x Jeep/.50 cal (R)

1st Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x 57mm ATG, 4 x M3 Halftrack

2nd Company: 2 x Infantry, 1 x 57mm ATG, 3 x M3 Halftrack

3rd Company: 3 x Infantry, 3 x M3 Halftrack

82nd Reconnaissance Battalion

HQ Company: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x M3 Halftrack, 1 x M8 HMC (1)
1st Troop (R): 3 x M8 Greyhound, 2 x Jeep/.50 cal

2nd Troop (R): 2 x M8 Greyhound, 2 x Jeep/.50 cal

3rd Troop (R): 3 x M8 Greyhound, 1 x Jeep/.50 cal

Tank Company: 3 x M5 Stuart

702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion (-)

HQ Company: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x M3 Halftrack

1st Company: 3 x M10 Wolverine, 1x M20 Armored Car

2nd Company: 2 x M10 Wolverine, 1x M20 Armored Car

Recon Co. (R): 2 x M8 Greyhound, 2 x Jeep/.50 cal

78th Armored Artillery Battalion (-)

HQ Company: 1 x HQ (FO), 1 x M3 Halftrack,

1 x M16 MGMC

1st Battery: 3 x M7 Priest (1)

2nd Battery: 3 x M7 Priest (1)

Elements, CCB, 2nd Armored Division

Enter anywhere along north edge map on game turn 4

2nd Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division

HQ Company: 1 x M4 Sherman (HQ) (FO), 1 x M4-105mm,
1 x M16 MGMC, 1 x Jeep/.50 cal (R)

1st Company: 4 x M4 Sherman

2nd Company: 3 x M4 Sherman

3rd Company: 3 x M4 (76mm) Sherman

4th Company: 4 x M5 Stuart

2nd Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment,

HQ Company: 1 x HQ (+1 GHQ) (FO), 1 x M3 Halftrack,
1 x M16 MGMC, 1 x M8 HMC (1),
1 x M21 MMC (1), 1 x Jeep/.50 cal (R)

1st Company: 3 x Infantry, 1 x 57mm ATG, 4 x M3 Halftrack

2nd Company: 3 x Infantry, 3 x M3 Halftrack

3rd Company: 2 x Infantry, 1 x 57mm ATG, 3 x M3 Halftrack

Elements, 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, 2nd Armored Division

3 x M10 Wolverine, 1x M20 Armored Car

Elements, 78th Armored Artillery Battalion (-), 2nd Armored Division

3 x M7 Priest (1)

VICTORY CONDITIONS

German Victory:

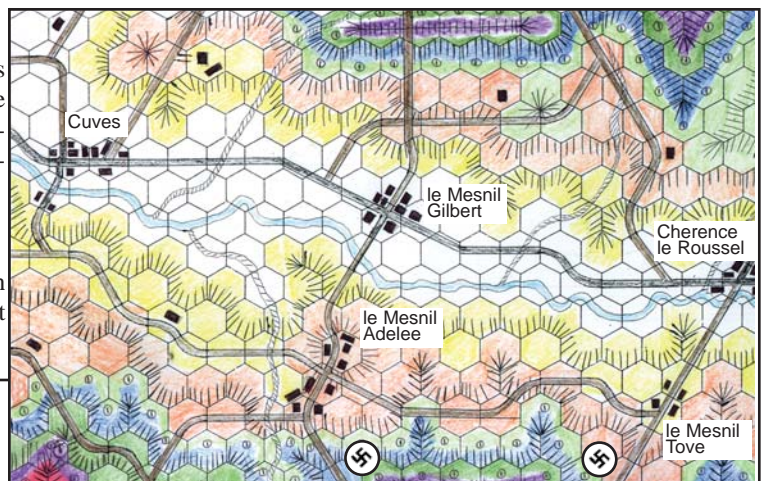
Exit at least thirty (30) or more armed stands (empty transport stands do not count!) off the western exit area edge of the map via the three exit roads indicated on the map (see sketch map) by the end of the scenario and occupy either Cuves or le Mesnil Gilbert at the end of the scenario. Exiting stands may be Suppressed and/or Disorganized.

American Victory:

Eliminate 1/3 or more of the armed German stands before the German player achieves his victory conditions. Once again, empty transport stands do not count towards this total.

TERRAIN SUGGESTIONS

1. The map should be approximately 72" (East to West) x 48" (N to S)
2. Terrain is open: Maximum sighting distance is 25 inches.
3. The See' River is fordable along its entire length. In order to enter its bed, a stand must make a successful cohesion die roll as for movement (modified for the presence of HQs). It may then proceed. The riverbed should be considered Rough Terrain 2.
4. All structures should be considered Light Buildings.



5. All slopes are Gentle slopes.

6. (Swastika symbol) - German Southern Attack Group enters on these two roads marked with swastikas on Turn #3.

Each hexagon on the map is four inches from side to side.