

BLITZKRIEG COMMANDER

Fast-Play Tabletop Wargame Rules For Combined-Arms Operations, 1936-45

Mortain (Operation Lüttich)

Background

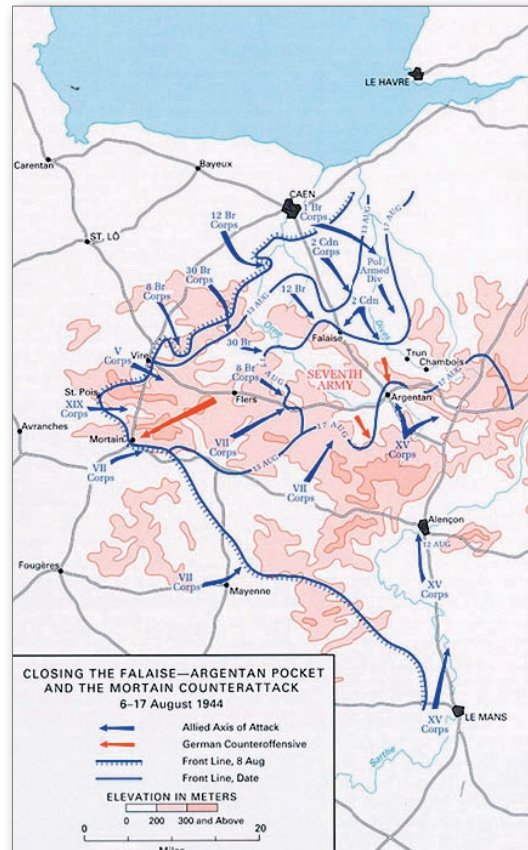
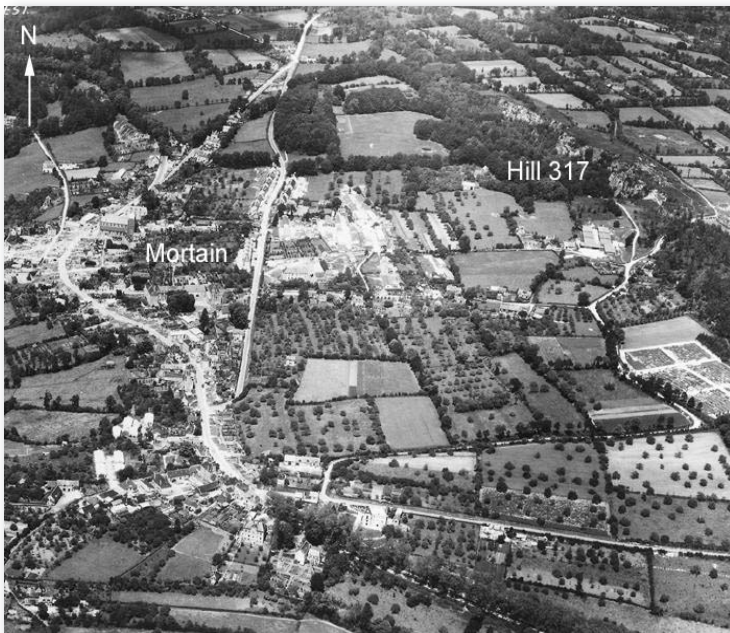
The Americans launched Operation Cobra at the end of July 1944, with the aim of breaking out of Normandy and into the open countryside to the south and south-east. The town of Mortain was taken by the US 3rd Armoured and 1st Infantry Divisions at the beginning of August. The occupation of the town was handed over to the 30th Infantry Division on 6th August, with the troops taking up the exact same positions, but without much in the way of armoured support.

Hitler saw an opportunity of driving westwards to Avranches with the hope of cutting-off the American spearheads. von Kluge was given the task and developed a hasty plan to counter-attack through Mortain and on to Avranches. Time was not on the side of the Germans, so the attack went ahead before all the planned forces were assembled. 2nd SS Panzer Division *Das Reich* led the attack during the early hours of 7th August.

The Battlefield

Below is an aerial map of Mortain and the surrounding area taken in 1948. Hill 317 (some sources state Hill 314) lies to the east of the town and dominates the area. A smaller elevation, Hill 285, lies to the west. The main road runs north-south through the town.

The table should have the town of Mortain roughly in the centre, with two hills - one on either side (Hill 285 to the west, Hill 317 to the east).



the table, through the town. Feel free to use additional minor roads. The surrounding countryside is bocage (large hedgerows lining the roads and small fields), but despite this, the two hills have good line-of-sight across the entire battlefield.

German Deliberate Attack

This is a deliberate attack against the small town of Mortain on the morning of 7th August 1944. The 120th Infantry Regiment of the US 30th Infantry Division is occupying hasty defensive positions in and around the town, but news of the attack has been circulated as small teams of German troops infiltrate their way into the town during the night. The main attack begins at dawn and there is thick fog, reducing visibility considerably.

The game lasts 12 turns and the Germans must occupy Mortain and Hill 317 in order to secure a major victory and either of the two to secure a minor victory. The Americans win a minor victory if they occupy Hill 317 and a major victory if they occupy both Hill 314 and Mortain at the end of the game. The Americans deploy first up to two-thirds of the table, taking the western table edge as their baseline and all units are dug-in. The Germans deploy along the eastern table edge using static deployment and they may use the flank deployment rule. Movement off-road should be made difficult for all but infantry on foot, due to the bocage. No American units can move until the Germans have been located.

Due to the thick fog at the start of the battle, use the target location rules, but roll one die per 10cm. At the end of each game turn, roll one die: on a 6, the fog lifts and visibility is returned to normal. Reduce the score required by one for each additional turn. During any turn of fog, no indirect fire (including on-table mortars) or air support can be used, except if scheduled.

American Order of Battle

The American battlegroup (120th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division) comprises of the following units:

Regimental HQ (Breakpoint 8)

CO (CV10)

1st Battalion

HQ (CV8)

6 x Infantry Platoons

1 x Support Platoon (MG)

2nd Battalion

HQ (CV8)

6 x Infantry Platoons

1 x Support Platoon (MG)

F Company

HQ (CV8)

2 x Infantry Platoons

1 x Support Platoon (ATG, 57mm) & Truck

1 x ATG Platoon (76mm) & Truck

Artillery Support

2 x FAO (CV8)

4 x 105mm Batteries

4 x 155mm Batteries

Air Support

FAC (CV8)

3 x Ground Attack Flights (P-47, rockets)

American Notes

The artillery support was impressive, involving some ten artillery battalions once the battle got under way! For the purposes of the game, however, only the artillery used during the morning of the attack is included in the scenario. Due to the intensity of the barrages, armoured vehicles can be knocked-out, but count as if in hard cover, ie: they are hit on sixes. The artillery is pre-registered, so you may have six registered targets (as for scheduled artillery, but these can be used when requesting support, ie: do not roll for deviation). Due to shortages of ammunition, if an FAO rolls a blunder, one of the batteries he requested is out of ammo for the remainder of the game.



German Order of Battle

The German battlegroup (leading elements of 2nd SS Panzer Division *Das Reich*) comprises of the following units. These aren't the exact forces used as I couldn't find accurate information on what units were involved and what equipment they had, apart from the fact that the panzer regiment was equipped with Pz-IVs and Panthers. An unusual aspect of the attack was that the Luftwaffe made an appearance during the night by attacking Mortain!

Battlegroup Command (Breakpoint 17)

CO (CV9)

1 x Recce Platoon (Sdkfz 250/9)

1 x Recce Platoon (Sdkfz 234/1)

1 x Support Platoon (IG, 75mm, 251/9)
2 x Support Platoons (AA, 20mm) & Trucks
1 x Support Platoon (AA, Sdkfz 7/2)
2 x SPAT Platoons (Jagdpanzer IV)

1st Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd SS Panzer Regiment

HQ (CV8)
4 x Medium Tank Platoons (Panther)
6 x Infantry Platoons in Hanomags
2 x Support Platoons (MG) in Hanomags
1 x Support Platoon (Mortar, 251/2)

4th Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd SS Panzer Regiment

HQ (CV8)
4 x Medium Tank Platoons (Pz-IV long)
6 x Infantry Platoons in Hanomags
2 x Support Platoons (MG) in Hanomags
1 x Support Platoon (Mortar, 251/2)

Artillery Support

FAO (CV7)
3 x Nebelwerfer Batteries with 4 assets each

Air Support

1 x Ground Attack Flight (Fw-190) with 2 assets

German Notes

Use the rule for Fixed Formations, but you are free to assign any of the units under the CO to other formations either before or during the game. The scheduled air support must be used at the start of turn 1. It is also advisable to use the optional rule for tanks running out of fuel and ammunition, as this was the case during the attack. Only start testing half-way through the scenario, ie: from turn 7.



The Battle

The attack was supposed to involve 1st and 2nd SS Panzer Divisions, Panzer Lehr, the 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions, and the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. Leading elements of 2nd SS finally made contact with the Americans at around 1am on the morning of the 7th August. The Germans made significant gains in the early hours of the attack, actually capturing the village of Mortain. However, they failed to gain control of the crucial high ground around the town, especially Hill 317 to the east of Mortain, which offered a superb vantage point across the entire region. They were also denied the roads due to accurate artillery fire being directed from Hill 317. The Germans lost much of their hardware when the weather turned against them, the fog lifting during the morning, opening the skies to swarms of fighter-bombers.

The US 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment, occupying Hill 317 and cut-off from re-supply, managed to hold-out until relieved by elements of the 35th Infantry Division on the morning of 12th August. This was due to the massive support of ten artillery battalions - some 120 tubes! By standing fast, the 30th Infantry Division fixed the attention of the German high command, allowing Bradley to encircle an entire Army Group as a result. This in turn led to Operation Totalize - the closing of the Falaise Gap and the destruction of much of the German Army in France.



Sources

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