

## **'One Rule for you.....' (Part Three)**

The third part of a series comparing the results achieved using two popular sets of rules for the same scenarios.

In Part 1 of this article I set out the reasons for bothering writing it in the first place and detailed some aspects of contrast between two popular WWII rule sets ***GHQ MicroArmor The Game (GHQMTG)*** and ***Rapid Fire***. I of course could not highlight every difference as that would be a major undertaking and probably rather tedious reading so I have restricted my comments to some of the more significant areas. I dealt with early war armour versus armour combat in part two and will now move into combined armour and infantry operations.

I was fascinated by Robin Neilland's book *The Battle for Normandy 1944 (Cassell 2002)*. It offers a fresh perspective on important if unglamorous aspects of history's most documented campaign such as, why the casualty attrition rates differed markedly between US and Commonwealth armies, why Montgomery won the battle but lost the historical popularity stakes and how some post war American historians are proactively attempting to discredit UK-Commonwealth contribution to the victory at all levels from private soldier to general staff. What you might be saying, has that got to do with this article? Nothing actually, but the book did also provide me with the framework and the inspiration for the next play test scenario which is called ***Falaise Pocket***.

### **Falaise Pocket**

#### **Historical Background**

The scenario is based on the confused fighting of August 20<sup>th</sup> 1944 in the Trun-Chambois area. Elements from the Canadian II Corps are attempting to prevent break-in to (from the east) and break-out of (from the west) the tightening Falaise Pocket. The scenario sees an exposed and written down battalion from The Queen's Rifles of Canada attempting to block the escape of an enemy Kampfgruppe. The Canadian's hold positions in a village and on a hill directly blocking the route of advance for the Germans. They are supported by a captured German 105mm howitzer placed in a direct fire position and a lone platoon of tank destroyers detached from an advanced American unit. They hope to be reinforced by more American armour but have no idea if or when it may turn up. See Map 1. I believe the scenario to be typical of the tactical situations facing both sides in this area at the time but it is not a specific action documented in any official history. I walked the ground extensively on a recent trip and have based the terrain lay out on my observations during that visit.

#### **Scenario Background**

This scenario contrasts sharply with the first ***Rapid Fire – GHQMTG*** offering - *Kamenewo*. The big differences lie chiefly in the weapon capability of both sides and the inclusion of significant amounts of infantry. The Allied armour in this game although largely absent at the start is relatively powerful. The Germans rely on their two work horses, the StuG and PzIV with of course a Tiger (VIa) thrown in for the hell of it. The article gives a detailed orbat and scenario set up notes if you wish to play. This is followed by a summary of our play testing.

## **Play Test Scenario 2 `Falaise Pocket`**

A German scratch Kampfgruppe is attempting to break through a lightly held sector of the closing Falaise pocket in the area Trun–St Lambert sur Dive-Chambois. They are trying to reach Vimoutiers which is still firmly under German control.

The Canadian battalion holding this sector is supported by a single platoon of American tank destroyers and a captured 105mm field gun. Racing to support them are a company of Sherman Easy Eights and the remainder of the tank destroyer company. Visibility is good and the scenario takes place during daylight. The game lasts 16 turns.

### **German Objective**

Break out through Point A or B or both.

### **German Order of Battle ( In *Rapid Fire* format)**

Dice before the game using a D8 for any two of the following elements to be on the table at the beginning of the game. The other elements are diced for every turn on a D8 until they all appear with only one unit appearing per turn from Turn 1. All German units appear at Point X.

1. SS Panzer Company 3 x PzIV: 240 points. Gun class 2. Vehicle C.
2. SS Heavy Panzer Platoon: 1 x Tiger: 90 points. Gun class 2. vehicle B
3. SS Sturmgeschutz company: 2 x StuGIII & 1 StuG Haubitze. 240 points. Gun class 2. Vehicle C.
4. SS Panzer Grenadier Battalion 3 companies of 9 figures, 1 support company of 1xHMG and 1x 82mm mort. 101 points. All in 251 half track transport.
5. Fallschirmjäger Company of 8 figures. 27 points. On foot.
6. Fallschirmjäger support company 1 x LMG & 3 x panzerfaust. 40 points. On foot.
7. Infantry Company of 9 figures. 16 points. On foot.
8. Group HQ truck & Sdkfz7/Flak37(quad) 10 points

All of the above elements are classed as Elite except item 7 which is Regular. No unit designations are given because of the confused nature of the breakout but the SS units are assumed to be a mixture from 1 SS Panzer Division (Leibstandarte) and the 12 SS Panzer Division (Hitler Jugend).

### **Canadian & American Objectives**

Prevent any German units from escaping from the table.

### **Canadian & American Order of Battle (In *Rapid Fire* format)**

All Allied elements are Regular

#### *1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Queen's Rifles of Canada:*

3 companies of 9 figures, 1 company of 6 figures, 1 HQ platoon (PIAT), 2 x 3" mortars 106 points

Anti Tank Company: 3 x 6pdr AT guns 112 points

Captured enemy gun: 1 x 105mm Howitzer 49 points

#### *Attached American forces:*

1x M10 Tank destroyer: 60 points Gun class 1 vehicle D

## **American reinforcements**

2 x M10 Tank Destroyers 120 points  
3 x Sherman E8s: 210 points gun class 3 vehicle C

These are diced for from Turn 2. Arrive on a roll of 5 or 6 on a D6. Only one group can arrive in any turn. There is a possibility that they may not arrive at all during the game if the dice are against you! They arrive from Point B.

## **Allied Deployment**

Allied troops need not be put on the table at the start of the game with the exception of the 105mm gun on the hill to the front of the German advance. Allied units are revealed either when they move, fire or via the Observation rules process if using **Rapid Fire**. If their movement will be out of enemy line of sight for their entire duration of any given turn then they can be moved on a sketch map.

## **Victory conditions**

Firstly aggregate losses. For each 10 points inflicted more than the enemy gain 1 victory point. For each 10 points (unit value) which the Germans get off table successfully at Point A they gain one extra victory point. For each 10 points (unit value) they get off at Point B they gain two victory points.

Scores within 10% = draw  
11-25% greater = winning draw  
25-50% greater = victory  
More than 50% = total victory

## **Alterations to Orbat if using *GHQMTG***

The Germans, with the exception of the composite infantry company are classed as having a Cohesion value of 17(used for moving and firing). The composite company has Cohesion of 14. For the purposes of Initiative at the beginning of each turn the Germans test on 17. The Americans and Canadians have Cohesion of 15. Players should dice for ability of Commanders on a D6 with 1-2 being Poor, 3-4 Average, 5-6 Exceptional.

Item 4 on the German Orbat is as follows:

*SS Panzer Grenadier Battalion*

One HQ Platoon, three companies each of 3 infantry platoons. One Heavy Company of 1 x Infantry support platoon, 1 x 81mm mortar platoon.

Item 5 becomes:

3 x Infantry platoons, 1 x Infantry support platoon

Item 6 is removed and Item 7 becomes 3 x Infantry platoons.

## **The Terrain.**

Hill 90 is steep and convex and so affects movement and visibility for all elements. The barbed wire is a linear obstacle. The farm and village are classed as hard cover. The trees are dense and count as soft cover. Field boundaries are LoS obstacles but do not count as cover.

## The play tests

Play test one used **Rapid Fire** and play test two **GHQMTG**. This is also a tough scenario but in a different way than *Kamenewo*. Visibility is restricted by the terrain and the Germans, once committed to a route of advance become largely hostage to fortune. They have no idea where anything is apart from the one visible presence of the captured 105mm howitzer on the hill to their front. This leads to a cagey approach which in itself can eat up scenario time which is a major influence on the result as the Germans are working against the clock. Having visited the area of the battle I can confirm the nature of the terrain as undulating and generally closed but not in the same way as the Bocage. There are many folds in the farmland and the wider open fields are interspersed with coppices and small wooded areas.

In our play tests we encountered such useful events as an infantry ambush by the forward Canadian company, a short range AT duel as two PzIV platoons stumbled upon concealed 6pdrs and a surprise encounter when the lead German tanks came across the Easy8 company lying in dead ground. Each situation provided interesting contrasts between the rule sets.

Let's take the infantry in the woods first. When using **Rapid Fire** the Canadians were spotted giving the Germans a chance to bring up infantry in support of the PzIVs. The Queen's company clung on amidst the trees for a while but was eventually forced out by combined infantry and armour attacks in three moves. With the **GHQMTG** test the Canadian's proved immovable. The Panzer IVs made no headway. I gave the German panzer troops and Fallschirmjäger a Cohesion of 17(85% chance to obey any move or fire order) and this is high. Applying the penalties for firing into woods, the 'to damage' percentage was 44% with a 'Disorganised' result possible at 18.75% and no chance of an 'Eliminated' result even at short range. The only way to get them out would have been to 'Suppress' them with support weapons fire or artillery and then 'Close Assault', hoping for a succession of 'Disorganised' results leading to a cumulative 'Elimination'. An added complication would be the fact that as **GHQMTG** organizes its battalions in platoons, the process would have to be repeated at least three times to remove the company whereas under **Rapid Fire** the whole company would be on the move after an adverse morale result. The other alternative, which was to use heavier artillery or air support was alas not open to the escaping Germans around the Falaise Pocket.

Using **Rapid Fire** and shooting HE ammunition at the infantry from standard range with the PzIVs, the 'to hit' odds were 66%. The subsequent 'to cause casualties' roll was 83% and the possibilities of a platoon equivalent of casualties (two figures) at 50%. Do not be deceived by the relatively easier circumstances of the Cohesion test to 'move or fire' score under **GHQMTG**. Firing is irrelevant if the consequential damage is negligible. Once a hit is achieved under **Rapid Fire** then a reduction in combat effectiveness is inevitable and the rot has set in. Fire from a SS infantry company at standard range to a soft cover target had a 'to hit' percentage of 83% with casualties immediately achieved and a 16.6% chance of three casualties. I could go on but prefer to spare you the arithmetical water torture. The conclusion is that using **Rapid Fire** the combat depletion of a unit is certain once casualties are sustained whilst under **GHQMTG** infantry units in any kind of cover are very difficult to displace (even when attacked by the best quality infantry) and stand a better than evens chance in many cases of recovering from depleted morale. The commitment to attack and prevail was therefore a far safer bet using **Rapid Fire**. Unaccompanied armour also has a far better chance of achieving some sort of positive effect against infantry under these rules.

The PzIVs surprised at short range by the 6pdrs offered an interesting contrast. Two 6pdr platoons were sighted on a blind corner at the edge of the forest. They were only spotted at point blank range when their targets hove into view. A 6 pdr is Gun class 3 under **Rapid Fire** and a PzIV (Long) Vehicle class C. At point blank range the 'to hit' percent is 66%, with a subsequent 66% chance of heavy damage and 33% chance of a KO. With **GHQMTG** a 6 pdr has AP strength of 6 facing the PzIV defensive armour value of 7(-1 combat differential) offering a 'to damage' percent of 66% at point blank with a 33% possibility of 'Disorganised' (nearest equivalent to

Heavy Damage) and no chance of a KO. Under **GHQMTG** the PzIVs were stopped by 'Opportunity fire' and if they survived it had no option to fire back but only to 'Over run' the 6pdrs on a further Cohesion test. Again with **Rapid Fire** the Hollywood heroics are easier to achieve as following the defensive 'Reserve Fire' rule the attackers can fire if they have not already done so.

Finally, the German tanks coming across the concealed Easy8 Company. If the Germans had moved during their turn under **GHQMTG** they would not have had a chance to fire on encountering the American tanks. The Shermans would have tested for Cohesion (set at 15 which means a 75% chance of passing) and then 'Opportunity fired'. Their Combat Differential against a PzIV is +2 and against a Tiger, -1. This would have given them a very good chance of KO against the IVs and a slim chance of KO against the Tiger if they concentrated their fire. They themselves would suffer no adverse morale effects for the surprise of seeing the Germans. With **Rapid Fire** the Americans would employ the 'Reserve Fire' rule under the same odds as stated for the 6pdrs against the IVs. If the Germans survive this fire and pass their morale test they have the chance to fire back. This is exactly what happened in our play tests. The Americans lost a tank, the company failed its morale test and pulled back toward the village letting the Germans escape toward Vimoutiers.

### Play test results

During the **Rapid Fire** tests four tanks, the HQ and Flak wagon made it off the board at point B (in both games) and around half of the SS infantry in halftracks exited through point A. The Fallschirmjäger and other infantry paid the ultimate price, either massacred in the open or considered captured for failing to escape before the final whistle blew. Allied casualties amounted to one M10, all of the Shermans, the two forward 6 pdrs and three quarters of the Canadian infantry and gunners. A definite German victory. The significant events related to rule construction were; the effectiveness of the 105mm in a direct fire AT role (as during the *Kamenewo* game) and the relative ease with which the German tanks firing HE were able to deal with the Canadian infantry in the woods. Finally the adverse morale test result forcing the Easy8 Company to retreat thus permitting the foremost German tanks to escape toward Vimoutiers.

This contrasted sharply with the **GHQMTG** test during which the Germans got thoroughly pummeled with nothing making it past the hill or village. Allied losses in this game amounted to all of the armour except one M10, the 6pdrs, the 105 and two platoons of Canadians! The German armour was useless against infantry in cover signally failing to make the slightest impact on it throughout seven turns of close range firing and not daring to attempt an overrun of cohesive infantry in cover. Even semi coordinated infantry assaults 'shot in' by HMG and mortar fire did not do enough to expel all three Canadian platoons. German casualties during these attempts were relatively enormous with three companies being eliminated over a period of around five turns. The Canadians were still holding as these attacks fizzled out. The firepower advantages of the Tiger were neutralized by the Easy8s at close range and the flanking fire from the M10 in the village neutralized the German bid for freedom.

The nature of the game played using each rule set is quite different. I began to realize that **Rapid Fire's** chief characteristic is simplicity, perhaps over simplicity. I think care must be taken not to confuse simplicity with speed of play as these are definitely not the same thing. **GHQMTG** plays at roughly the same speed but the tactical situations presented to the players are in my opinion more challenging. They require more frequent decisions and perhaps a little more of the chess player's mentality. The ability of the enemy to recover combat effectiveness through the Cohesion system makes many situations highly unpredictable. If you are fighting a highly professional enemy then nothing is a given even if your tactics and the dice are going your way. Of course the games are balanced for each side within the context of the rules as the points highlighted in this article work both ways.

In the concluding part to this series I will offer some further reflections on the pros and cons of both sets of rules.