

## Bottleneck: Mid Battle

### Combat Action Command After Action Report: Bottleneck

With the front in flux, the Americans probed eastward looking for the open flank. G2 sifted through aerial recon reports and thought they had pinpointed a wide open road. The US 4th Armored, fresh from its repulse at the Crossroads, raced to take advantage of the gap with a mixed advanced force of an armored infantry platoon, a Sherman platoon of five tanks, and an understrength platoon of three Sherman tanks fitted with the 76mm main gun instead of the barely adequate 75mm. A 105mm artillery battery was on call. The force reached the Convent d'Eau de Vie with good speed, then roared down the main road in between the Bois d'Fauvette and the Hills d'Windmill to reach the village of Fleur with a pair of Shermans, the infantry marching up behind them. More infantry slogged over the hills, and still more headed into the Bois d'Maudit. A Jeep, a Sherman 76 and a Medium Machine Gun team sped around the Bois d'Maudit and reached the distant village of Nonnette, although the MMG took a while to get there.

The 4th Armored was poised to continue the advance down the main road to the village of Lys some 600 yards away, when the Germans stoppered up the gap.

A Kampfgruppe from the famed 12th SS Division passed the Monastery d'Tese and its impressive bell tower and headed towards the Americans. Half a platoon of SS infantry headed for the Bois d'Arrache, the other half filtered into Lys and the wooded hill overlooking the village. One Panzer IV swung wide to capture the village Rente and serve as a flank guard, while a second drove down the main road into Lys. Two STuG IV assault guns skirted the edge of the woods on the hill while a third swung wide in the other direction to serve as a flank guard. Huffing and puffing up the rear was a 20mm AA gun. A German artillery battery served to support the Kampfgruppe.

The tanks and assault guns slugged it out with the Shermans at 600 yard range. The Shermans came off the worse as first one, then a second brewed up. The panzers hardly suffered any scratched paint. A hit on a building knocked loose some stone, which jammed in the Pz IV's track, but the crew popped out and cleared away the stone.

The Jeep with a forward artillery observer left Nonnette and skirted the Bois d'Arrache until they found a nice patch of woods to observe the SS troops -- and called in the artillery. The SS troops, caught in the open, swore mightily when they glimpsed the jeep in the woods and heard the scream of artillery shells. They need not have worried. The barrage scattered to their rear and the FAO forgot to call in an adjustment. A mortar barrage, erroneously called in by the Jeep FAO, also scattered. Revenge came quickly and the jeep turned into a flaming pile of metal from the SS MG team.

The SS troopers flooded into the Bois d'Arrache. The STuG IV drove hard for the spot the Jeep occupied, and traded shots with a Sherman 76 in Nonnette. STuG shots hit close to the Sherman, retreating it away. The Sherman crew did not even realize that its parting shot plastered the STuG and brewed up it. The Sherman would return to the fight. The STuG would not.

Meanwhile, the US troops filtered into Fleur as Shermans swung out onto the hills to the left and right of town. Another Sherman drove down the road between Nonnette and Fleur. The SS Panzershrek turned it into a smoking pile of metal.

But the SS troopers soon found they had problems of their own as 75mm high-explosive shells and machine gun fire tore into their ranks, pinning many of their teams. The SS wrath fell upon supporting US infantry, although the wrath proved doubly effective because pinned troops usually fire at half effect and the SS and US commanders forgot about that. Two US teams streamed away in panic in the Bois d'Maudit.

Back at Fleur, artillery and small arms fire turned the eastern part of the village into death traps. The lucky teams only panicked. The unlucky ones died. The tanks continued to trade shots, with the US getting the worst of it. The surviving US tankers came to call the place Ronson Corner.

US artillery spent most of its time plowing holes in empty fields, finally nicking one German team for no effect. Sherman HE fire proved just as useless for the most part, but MG fire proved effective. German squads closest to Fleur and its protective Shermans were shot up and destroyed. One Sherman in the woods outside Nonnette and one in the Bois d'Maudit, both having found good cover, sprayed the SS troopers in the woods with more MG fire. The SS team closest to Nonnette was killed off and the rest were pinned.

Combat withered away as the Germans pulled back the two STuGs on the hill outside Lys to reposition them for a push on Nonnette. The SS troopers dug in. The Americans repositioned some infantry and the XO tried to rally the panicked teams in the Bois d'Maudit. The Germans had plugged the gap.

\*\*\*

Three turns in three hours, although that included plenty of time to poke through the rules to doublecheck what we thought we knew and kibitz about this and that -- figure more like 45 minutes per turn between two relatively new CAC players. In the Crossroads scenario, we had 1500 points each. In this Bottleneck scenario, we had 2000 points each.

The game was close. If you tally up the points (100 points for each building and points for whatever was eliminated), the final tally found: US 1178 points (800 from buildings) versus German 1036 (400 from buildings). As you can see, pushing forward in the attack can be costly, and Shermans (lost 4) really do flare up like Ronsons (Germans lost 1 STuG IV).

Some points: Learning from the last game, we both used the Combat Action Command interrupt function (CAC) to move teams around, not just fire (although we did that, too). Picking the right spot for your artillery observers is very helpful -- I bungled that quite a bit. Quality troops cost a lot of points, but really pay off in combat.

Both of us played faster as we got to know the data cards -- like where to look and what to roll. Both of us did the 'shoul-da-coul-da' post-action analysis. Most important, with that CAC interrupt, both players are always involved in a game. You gotta pay attention. In a two-player game, that works well. In a multi-player game, I'm not sure. On the one hand, it could be delicious bedlam. On the other, the game could bog down.

I played in a 4 on 4 demo back at Historicon '11, but each player (newbies all) had only a couple of teams each. A 15-team infantry platoon (including heavy weapons) and platoon of five tanks and artillery for each player in a 4 on 4 may prove overwhelming. Veteran players, maybe not. Newbies...my guess is maybe yes. Hard to say.

Easier than Squad Leader.

Smarter than Flames of War.

Russ

