

Kasserine Mini-Campaign

The Battle of Kasserine Pass was actually a running engagement fought over the course of several days. As such Kasserine is perfect fodder for a Micro Armour® mini-campaign. The next several issues of Tac News will offer a series of scenarios and articles highlighting this controversial battle marking the US Army's first significant encounter with the Wehrmacht.

STRATEGIC SITUATION

The approaching spring of 1943 heralded certain Allied victory in North Africa. The Americans to the west and the British to the east were crushing the Axis armies between them. As the campaign entered its end game, however, the Allies became complacent. Upper echelon staffs, now utterly dependent on Ultra intercepts for intelligence, seldom pressed units for point-of-contact intelligence. As a consequence, field commanders grew lazy. Reconnaissance efforts became half-hearted at best. In hindsight this seems an obvious disaster in the making, but up to now Ultra served without fault. Unfortunately, the system was about to experience a glitch.

Early in February 1943, Ultra code breakers caught wind of an upcoming German offensive in Tunis. The appropriate alarm was issued, but data concerning Axis disposition and intent was subject to varied interpretations. The British thought the objective was Fondouk. Reconnaissance by the American II Corps indicated an enemy concentration to the south near Sidi Bou Zid, but since this intelligence was not confirmed by Ultra, it was discounted. Gen. Eisenhower was finally convinced by the British. Any effort towards the Sidi Bou Zid/Kasserine sector would be a diversion. The main German attack, should it come, would be "to the north."

AMERICAN ORDER OF BATTLE

Combat Command A (CCA) of the 1st Armored Division and the 168th Regimental Combat Team of the 34th "Red Bull" Infantry Division held the area in and about Sidi Bou Zid. Defending forces at the initial point of attack consisted of:

Reserve force CCA Lt. Col. Louis Hightower commanding:

- 1st Medium Tank Battalion (minus Company G)
- 2. Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (minus one platoon)
- To the east, in general support, was the 91st Armored Artillery Battalion (minus Battery B) & the 17th Field Artillery Battalion

Task Force Waters Lt. Col. "Bill" Waters commanding:

- 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry (minus Company E, and the weapons platoon from Company H)
- 2. Company G, 1st Medium Tank Battallon
- 3. An Armored Reconnaissance Company
- 4. A platoon of Tank Destroyers from Company A, 701st TD Battalion
- A battery of self-propelled 105s from Company B, of the 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalion
- Task Force Waters Headquarters: consisting solely of Col. Waters, his personal halftrack, one jeep, and two drivers.

GERMAN ORDER OF BATTLE Operation Unternehmen Frühlingswind

The Germans committed the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions, and the 164th Light Division. The combat elements of these units were formed into five kampfgruppen organized as follows:

Kampfgruppe Gerhardt

- 1. The 7th Panzer-Regiment
- 2. Panzer Grenadier Regiment 69 (motorized)
- One platoon from the 2nd company, 90th Panzerjäger Battalion (motorized)
- One platoon from the 3rd company, 90th Panzerjäger Battalion (motorized)
- 5. One platoon from 49th Engineer Battalion (motorized)
- 6. One light Feldhaubitzen battery, 90th Artillery Regiment (motorized)

Kampfgruppe Reimann

- One Heavy Panzer Company (equipped with Tigers)
- 2. One battation of the 86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (motorized)
- One platoon from the 1st company, 90th Panzerjäger Battalion (motorized)
- 4. One platoon from 49th Engineer Battalion (motorized)
- One self-propelled battery from the 90th Artillery Regiment (motorized)
- 6. One AA platoon from the 90th Artillery Regiment (motorized)

Kampfgruppe Schuette

- 1. One battalion of the 5th Panzer Regiment
- Headquarters & Headquarters Company, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (motorized)
- 3. The 39th Panzerjäger Battalion (motorized)
- 4. The 1st and 3rd batteries of the 155th Artillery Regiment (motorized)
- 5. One Flakkamptruppe (one 88mm)

Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff

- 1. Headquarters 5th Panzer Regiment
- 2. One battalion of the 5th Panzer Regiment
- The 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (motorized) (minus Headquarters & Headquarters Company)
- Headquarters & Headquarters Battery, 155th Artillery Regiment (motorized)
- 5. The light Feldhaubitzen battery, 155th Artillery Regiment (motorized)
- 6. Two batteries of the 155th Artillery Regiment (motorized)
- 5. Two Flakkamptruppe (two 88mms)

Kampfgruppe Ziegler

- Two motorized panzer granadier battalions of the 164th Light Division
- 2. One Italian artillery battery

Next issue, key unit organizations and battle maps!



Kasserine Mini-Campaign Part 2: Attack!

The Battle of Kasserine Pass commenced on February 14th, 1943. Kampfgruppe Schuette, coming through the Maizla Pass, approached Sidi Bou Zid from the southeast. Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff hooked wide and attacked from the southwest. The 10th and 21st Panzer kampfgruppen directly forced the Faid Pass

The Germans were first met by a screen of light tanks. These were easily brushed aside and the full weight of the assault fell on Sidi Bou Zid. With his supporting artillery silenced by Stuka dive bombers, Lt. Col. Louis Hightower, commanding CCA, resorted to a series of delaying actions. Although Hightower commanded with deft brilliance, he was hopelessly overmatched. By day's end CCA had lost 44 of its 55 tanks. As Hightower fell back, Kampfgruppe Gerhardt swung around Djebel Lessouda and

linked-up with Kampfgruppe Reimann. This move isolated Task Force Waters holding the high ground just north of Sidi Bou Zid. TACTICAL SITUATION

To American player, remain patient. In the opening rounds of this extended fight you are going to take a beating. Do not get too attached to your miniatures. Just remember, your dead pile will return as reinforcements. Take every opportunity to bleed the German, because his stuff, once gone, isn't coming back.

To the German player, now is your time to make hay. Suppress the Americans with artillery fire and air attack, then root them out with infantry close assaults. Your panzers are better armored and armed. Don't throw away this advantage with close range exchanges of cannon fire. Next issue, Counterattack!

LEGEND

The map's top half is north. The town of Faid lies just of the east edge of the map by the highway. The Faid Pass itself lies some six hexes beyond that.

The hill is a level three elevation. It was a gentle rise, covered with stone outcroppings and scrub vegetation. Wadi El Fekka, which bisects the northwest corner of the board, is a minus one depression.

AMERICAN

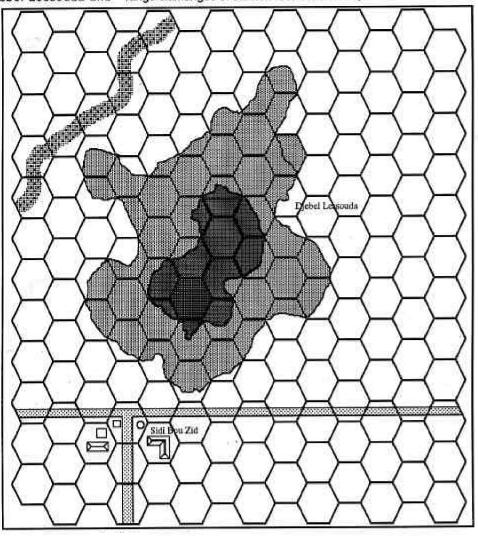
Lt. Col. Hightower's CCA sets-up south of the east-west highway within four hexes of a building. Task Force Waters sets-up on any elevation hex.

GERMAN

The Germans move first. Kampfgruppe Schuette enters on any southern edge hex. Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff enters from any western edge hex. Kampfgruppe Reimann enters from the east edge, Kampfgruppe Gerhardt from the north edge. (Kampfgruppe Ziegler was at this moment consolidating the Faid Pass.) During the battle the Germans achieved local air superiority. During each turn, the German player makes one Stuka attack.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The game consists of twelve one-hour turns. To win, the German must clear the Americans from all wadi, ground-level, and level one hexes. If you are playing the complete Kasserine campaign game, German losses carry over to each of the next two scenarios, "Counterattack!" and "Kasserine Pass".





Kasserine Mini-Campaign Part 3: Counterattack!

With the destruction of 1st Armored Division's CCA, Task Force Waters was completely surrounded on the high ground north of Sidi Bou Zid. Now was the time for an American counterattack, but Gen. Sir Kenneth Anderson, the overall Allied commander, was unsure of his enemy's disposition. Rommel's strike at the Faid Pass came as a complete surprise. Sir Kenneth's staff hoped this attack was no more than a battalion-strength diversion masking an offensive the Allies expected farther to the north. Still, some effort had to be made to rescue Lt. Col. "Bill" Waters, the son-in-law of Gen George Patton. Sir Kenneth played his cards close to the vest, dispatching just Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division to rescue Waters. To cover his bet he retained Combat Command C and a full British tank battalion in reserve.

The result was a catastrophe. The 2nd Battalion of the First Armored regiment, supported by the 3rd Battalion of the Sixth Armored Infantry ran into the combined strength of two panzer divisions. Kampfgruppes Reimann and Gerhardt were at the moment mopping-up Waters, hoping to bait the Americans into a counterattack. CCB was allowed some initial gains toward Djebel Lessouda before it was viciously attacked by the 1st Company of the 501st Independent Heavy Tank Battalion. The Tigers rolled up the American Grants as they vainly tried to cover the retreat of their armored infantry. By day's end, forty-six of the 2nd Battalion's fifty tanks were lost. The Germans had eradicated their second enemy armored battalion in as many days.

LEGEND

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The hill is a level three elevation. It was a gentle rise, covered with stone outcroppings and scrub vegetation. Wadi El Fekka, which bisects the northwest corner of the board, is a minus one depression.

AMERICAN

CCB moves first, entering the west edge of the board south of the highway. The remnants of Task Force Waters are confined to any second or third level elevation hex.

GERMAN

Kampfgruppe Reimann and Gerhardt setup anywhere north of the highway excluding enemy occupied hexes. The Tigers set-up hidden.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The game consists of twelve one-hour turns. To win, the American must occupy Djebel Lessouda for one turn and then exit the west edge of the board with at least one stand from Task Force Waters. Good luck. Had the Allies acted more decisively, the battle could have easily turned in their favor. Try a plausible historic variation. Add an American Sherman tank battalion and another armored infantry battalion to the Allied order of battle.

