

THE ATTACK AT STOUMONT, DECEMBER 1944

BEFORE THE SNOW

By November 1944, the Axis position on the western front had been pushed back to the borders of Germany, although they held the greater part of the Netherlands. Belgium had largely been liberated. However, German planners saw an opportunity to repeat their victories of 1940, a march to the sea through Ardennes to Antwerp.

By Guy Bowers

To say that the plan for *Unternehmen Herbstnebel* (Operation Autumn Mist, renamed from *Wacht am Rhein* in early December) was ambitious is an understatement. If the German forces could break through Allied lines in the Ardennes and if they could capture enough fuel, then perhaps the Wehrmacht could capture Antwerp and split the Allies. If this could be achieved then maybe the Allies could be brought to the negotiating table and a separate peace agreed. Then the remaining German forces could tackle the Soviet onslaught. That's a lot of 'ifs'.

In reality, the Germany of late 1944 was not facing the unprepared Allies of 1940. Nor did it realistically have the manpower or resources for such a gargantuan task. Nevertheless, the or-

der was given and thanks to cloudy weather and intelligence blunders, the Allies did not spot the build-up and concentration of German troops until the offensive was launched. The initial shock was great, but not all assaults succeeded. Stiff resistance was soon encountered, buying time for Allied reinforcements to arrive. Places such as St Vith, Bastogne, and La Gleize would become legendary.

On the northern perimeter of the offensive, the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division met inexperienced US troops at Lutzerath, who conducted a brave defence against overwhelming odds (see *WS&S* 80), slowing the advance. The 12th SS Panzer Division ran into severe opposition at Elsenborn Ridge, and so Kampfgruppe Peiper, spearheading the 1st SS Panzer Division, followed the Amblève river towards Stavelot and Stoumont. Traffic jams slowed the German advance, and a bout of fine weather exposed the advancing columns to aerial reconnaissance and harassment.

The 30th US Division was ordered to form a defensive line between Stoumont and Malmedy. Peiper's Kampfgruppe had bypassed Stoumont, leaving the US 119th infantry regiment to occupy the town. The Germans could not afford to have enemy units in their rear, potentially blocking their supply routes,



so Peiper ordered his rearguard to assault and take the village of Stoumont, then follow him.

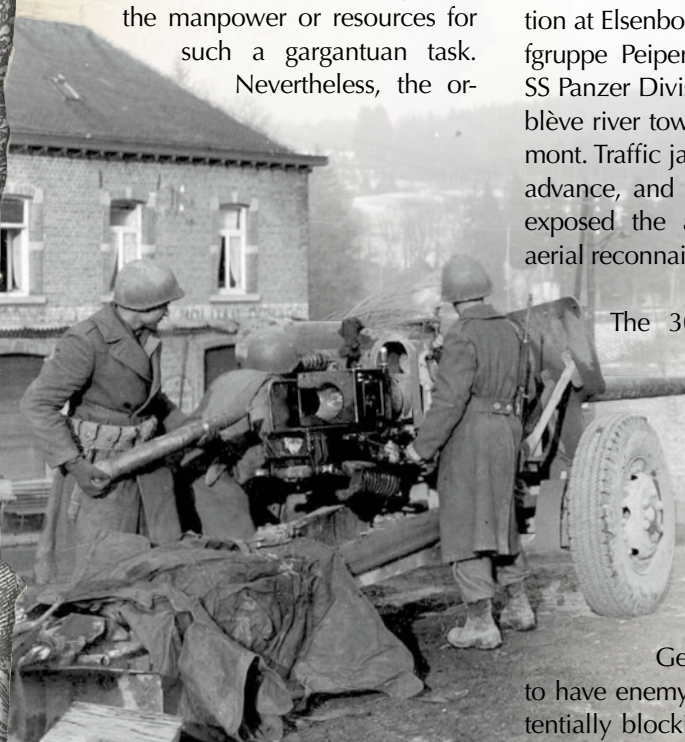
Supported by the 743rd Tank Battalion and the 118th Field Artillery, the 119th only had precious hours to prepare defence lines before the inevitable attack. On the morning of 19 December, the first German units rolled out of the mists towards Stoumont.

PLAYING STOUMONT

This scenario is designed as a platoon-level game, although by scaling up the forces involved, it could easily be turned into a company action. The scenario uses *Bolt Action* as a base, although it can be easily adapted to other World War II rulesets (such as *Big Chain of Command*) by using the scenario as a template for your chosen system.

The board

The game should be played lengthways across the long edge of the board. The first 12" is forest, opening out into fields with maybe a single wooden farm building for the next 24". There should be the odd fence –



A US Army 3" anti-tank gun has been emplaced to cover one of the roads into Vielsalm in December 1944.

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A Panther of Kampfgruppe Peiper carefully navigates into Stoumont while its predecessor burns.

these offer only light cover to infantry. The next 12" is the US defensive perimeter, consisting of a roadblock of felled trees and hastily dug fox-holes. Finally, the last 24" should be the village of Stoumont itself. A road runs along the middle of the table, from one short edge to the next.

Deployment

The Americans can set up their defences and trenches up to 36" from their short board edge. The Germans set up to 12" in from their board edge, up to the tree line. Any American unit may start the game hidden. The Germans may keep up to half of their force in reserve; everything else starts on the first turn. Only the Wirbelwind must start in reserve. The Americans have more than half of their force in reserve. It may start coming on from their short board edge on turn 3.

Objective and victory conditions

The Germans must take and hold Stoumont, removing the US from the position. The Americans must prevent this from happening and inflict as many casualties as they can on the attacker, while hoping their reserves come in on time.



The Germans score two victory points at the end of the game for every unit in Stoumont and one for every allied unit destroyed. The US score two victory points for every German unit destroyed and one for every unit in Stoumont.

Game length

Keep count of the number of turns played. On the eighth turn, roll a D6.



Small arms and a 57mm anti-tank gun are all that the 99th Infantry can bring to bear against the onslaught.

On a 1–3, the game ends on this turn.
On a 4–6, play an additional turn.

FORCES

Rearguard of Kampfgruppe Peiper

Panther Zug

- 1x Command Panther and two Panther tanks (all are inexperienced)
- One Wirbelwind (inexperienced) <in reserve>

Accompanying infantry

- Platoon HQ with veteran First Lieutenant and two men
- 5x inexperienced sections of eight men armed with four Kar98 rifles, an MG 42 team, and two SMGs; each section has two Panzerfausts (all are fanatics and green)
- Panzerschreck team (inexperienced)
- MMG Team (inexperienced)
- 81mm mortar team (no spotter – inexperienced)

US defence line

All the infantry and weapon teams are dug in so enjoy hard cover. All are regular.

- Platoon HQ with regular First Lieutenant and two NCOs with Jeep
- 3x regular sections of nine men armed with six M1 rifles, two BARs, and one SMG
- 2x bazooka teams
- 2x MMG teams





Here come the cavalry! The 743rd Tank Battalion rolls into Stoumont with some much needed armoured support.

- 1x 57 mm A/T gun with Dodge truck tow
- 1x 81 mm mortar team with spotter
- 1x Jeep with HMG

Reinforcements

(all are regular)

- 743rd Tank Battalion: 1x command Sherman 76 mm with two Sherman 76 mm
- 1x 90mm AA gun with M4 HST tow
- M8 Greyhound
- M3 Halftrack carrying a section of nine men, armed as above.

SPECIAL RULES

Weather – The weather was foggy. For the first turn, line of sight is restricted to 24". While there was some snow on higher ground, the deep snow did not arrive until 22 December. The weather was cold, but movement should not be slowed for snow.

Troop quality – Peiper's SS and FJ troops were a mixed bunch of newly equipped recruits mixed in with a few veterans. Likewise, the rear guard would not have contained the Kampfgruppe's best troops. For this reason, the German forces attacking Stoumont are rated as fanatics but also inexperienced and green.

The US troops were from an experienced veteran division so all count as regulars.

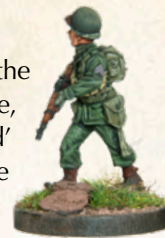
Preparatory bombardment – Before the first turn, roll a D6. On a 2+ the Germans have a prepara-

tory bombardment to hit the US positions. However, due to a shortage of ammunition, the bombardment is relatively ineffective. To represent this, when rolling for the effects of the bombardment, roll two dice instead of one and pick the lowest result. See page 131 of the second edition rulebook.

Reinforcements – Both sides have reinforcements. Due to the poor roads, the American reinforcements can only be rolled for after turn 3. They also do not enjoy their improved communications ability and roll for reserves as normal at -1.

Mud and fog – The road is passable but not in good condition; units do not get any bonus movement for travelling along the road. Vehicles travel-

ling off-road are affected by the mud and can only advance, not run. Alternately, the 'Mud' rules can be used from page 177 of the *Bolt Action: Battle of the Bulge* book.



CONCLUSION

At first, the Germans made difficult but good progress, managing to rout the Americans from their forward positions and force them into fighting hand to hand for the town. Some Americans started surrendering. However, a fresh wave of Allied reinforcements routed the Germans from the town and remained a threat to the Axis supply lines. Peiper ordered his men to dig in at La Gleize and await reinforcements, which effectively halted the Kampfgruppe's advance and surrendered the initiative to the Americans.

Each of the German advances into the Ardennes was met and eventually halted by fierce resistance and a stream of allied reinforcements. As the snow arrived and the weather set in, the fate of *Unternehmen Herbstnebel* was sealed. Overambitious from the start, it was doomed to failure. **WS&S**

This article is dedicated to the brave men of the 119th US Regiment who fought at Stoumont. With thanks to Deep Cut Studio for making the mud-mat available at short notice.



A battalion of Fallschirmjäger had been added to Peiper's Kampfgruppe, seen here with a Panther.

