

Armored Fighting Vehicles in the Bulge

By Greg Moore

Germans

By December of 1944, Pz III tanks are virtually extinct in the west, having been expended in the battles for Normandy and the disaster at Falaise, in which most of the Panzer divisions in France were effectively destroyed in an ill conceived counterattack. German production is vainly trying to produce enough Panthers and Pz IV's to fill up the rebuilt panzer divisions. The following German armored vehicles are participating in the Ardennes Offensive:

16 A 12	13 A 12
	
12 Panther 10	11 PzKw V (W) 10

German Panther production has peaked in the previous summer but the factories are still churning out about 300 a month of these superb tanks. Each Panzer division is organized with one battalion of 68 Panthers at full strength, but demand has outstripped production and, even with most of the production temporarily steered to the western front, no Panther battalion in the Bulge is at full strength. SS divisions still usually have five tanks in a platoon while the Heer divisions usually have to make do with four.

14 A 8	11 A 8
	
8 PzKw IV (SS) 8	7 PzKw IV (W) 8

The Panzer IV has served as the workhorse of the panzer troops for most of the war. Starting in summer of 1944 however, production in most factories has shifted to PzJg IV/70 and, by December, Pz IV battalions (one per panzer division) are having difficulty filling their ranks. All Pz IV battalions in the Bulge are short on tanks and many of them have Stg-III assault guns added to help make up the shortage. Again, the SS divisions usually have five tanks in a platoon and the Heer divisions usually have four.

15 A 12	20 A 12
	
12 Tiger I 8	16 King Tiger 6

Tiger and King Tigers have never been a regular part of the Panzer divisions but rather are all organized into separate heavy tank battalions. Several of these battalions (also all understrength) participate in the Ardennes Offensive. The 9th Panzer has a battalion of Tigers attached and Kampfgruppe Peiper from the 1st SS Panzer has a battalion of King Tigers.

12 A 8

9 Stug III G 8

Perhaps the most versatile armored fire vehicle in the German army is the Stg-III (the counter in PB/PL also represents the Stg IV). In the Bulge, this all-purpose vehicle serves in panzer battalions, assault gun battalions, and tank destroyer battalions.

16 A 12	20 A 12
	
11 PzJd IV/70 8	15 Jgd Pz V 9
12 A 8	12 A 8
	
7 Marder III 8	12 Hetzer 6

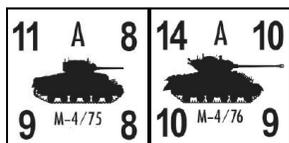
The PzJg IV/70 is a very commonly seen vehicle in the Bulge, being found in at least eleven PanzerJager battalions and two panzer battalions. The JgdPz V also makes an appearance in this battle, serving in the 9th and 12th SS Panzer, Panzer Lehr, and the Fuhrer Grenadier Brigade. The Marder III makes a rare appearance in the western theater, appearing in the Fuhrer Grenadier brigade. Factories in Czechoslovakia are starting to produce their fine version of a tank destroyer, the Hetzer, in large numbers and it appears in about half the Volksgrenadier divisions.

10 H 12	20 H 12
	
5 GW 38 (M) 6	12 StuPz IV 8

The GW38 provides fire support to many divisions in the Bulge while the Grizzly Bear (StuPz IV) makes its appearance on the western front with a battalion attached to the 12th Volksgrenadier.

Americans

American factories are producing armored vehicles in record numbers, enabling the U.S. Army to not only eventually fill up almost 20 Armored divisions with tanks, but to also have enough left over to attach one independent tank battalion to each infantry division. The following vehicles are used by the Americans in the Ardennes Offensive:



New Sherman tanks are flooding into Europe at this stage of the war. Most of the new ones mount the higher velocity 76mm gun and are being supplied to the tank battalions as they arrive but most Shermans in the Bulge are still the old ones with the 75mm gun. American replacement depots are well stocked and are able to replace losses very quickly, with replacement tanks and crews arriving overnight in many cases.



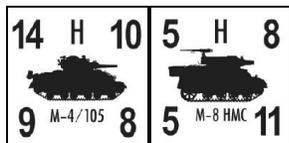
Each tank battalion still contains a company of these light tanks although they are of little value in a tank fight. A replacement, the M-24, is under development but is still a few months away from deployment into this theater.



A more heavily armored assault version of the Sherman has been in service for several months but they are not common and are usually deployed one or two at a time, usually to lead an attack. They should not be included in a scenario unless accounts of a battle refer to them as having an impact on that fight



The standard self propelled tank destroyer of the American Army since D-Day has been the M-10 tank destroyer. In the last few months, however, a number of tank destroyer battalions have been changed over to the nimble M-18 Hellcat; these battalions are usually found attached to the tank divisions. A new version of the M-10 with a 90mm gun, called the M-36, has just started trickling in to the theater and many M-10 or towed tank destroyer battalions are in the process of changing over to them as they become available. Some battalions have a mix of M-10 and M-36. The faster M-18 is not found mixed with either of these two other types, however.



Each U.S. tank battalion also includes a few Shermans equipped with a 105mm howitzer as a main gun, to provide fire support as needed. Armored infantry and cavalry battalions are provided with the M-8 HMC (a 75mm howitzer on a light tank chassis) to serve as their self-propelled howitzer support.

British

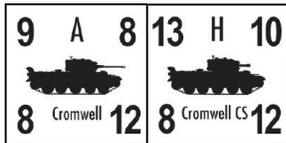
After producing many different tanks of their own, most British armored regiments are now using the Sherman tank, although many “home grown” tanks are still in service.



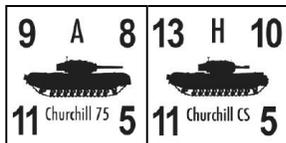
The British tank troop consists of four tanks. By December of 1944, they have produced enough of their upgraded Firefly version that each troop contains two of them. The first counter represents four of the regular 75mm Sherman while the second counter represents four of the 17pdr Firefly. One of each of these is used to represent two of the mixed troops.



Each British tank regiment contains a few light tanks, with the M-5 usually serving in that role as it does for the Americans.



Some light tank regiments in the British Army in this period consist of the Cromwell tank. Fire support in these regiments is provided by a few Cromwells with the 95mm howitzer.



When the Churchill tank was first introduced, several special heavy infantry tank brigades were formed and equipped exclusively with this type of tank. The 34th Tank Brigade is one of those brigades and contains a full complement of the latest versions of this tank.



The British had adopted the U.S. M-10 (nicknamed Wolverine) in 1944 to fill their tank destroyer needs as they worked on developing designs of their own. One of these designs is the Challenger, which uses a British gun design similar in effectiveness to the U.S. 76mm gun. Also, the 17pdr anti-tank gun was now been

adapted to the M-10 TD chassis to produce the Achilles, which has enough punch to take on most German tanks.