

SCENARIO 8: THE BATTLE OF ORP

The first great tank battle of World War II and the largest tank battle of the campaign, indeed the greatest tank battle in history up to that point (with around 1,500 AFVs involved), took place near Hannut in Belgium. The 2nd and 3rd DLMs fought the 3rd and 4th Panzer Divisions from 12 to 14 May 1940.

The French objective was to fight a two-day delaying action to enable slow-moving reinforcements to arrive before falling back on the Gembloux Gap between the rivers Dyle and Meuse.

The German intention was to suck in and tie up as much of the French armour on the secondary northern front for as long as possible and degrade it (although the latter was of secondary importance).

The main tank clash was fought at Orp, largely between 3rd Panzer and the 3rd DLM on the afternoon of 13 May. The



Somua S35



The tank battle at Hannut, by Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing. Taken from Campaign 265: Fall Gelb 1940 (2).

GERMANY STRIKES!

battle started with infiltration by German reconnaissance forces, armoured cars and motorbike infantry, followed by a hasty attack by German armour on French strongpoints defended by infantry and Hotchkiss tanks using artillery and air assets. Allied air intervention was ineffectual and eventually withdrawn.

3rd Panzer's assault was initially successful, but a French counterattack by Hotchkiss reinforcements drove back the German armour. Emboldened, the Cuirassiers launched a

regiment of Somua S35 medium tanks to meet the Panzers head on. Using their experience and superior command control, 3rd Panzer's tanks moved out to the flanks and ambushed the French column.

The battles of the Gembloux Gap are difficult to evaluate. The French disabled about 160 German tanks for the loss of 91 *Hotchkiss H35* and 30 *Somua S35* tanks destroyed or captured. In that sense the French army won. However, the Germans controlled the field after the battle. They recovered and



The French advance through town, looking for the enemy

eventually repaired or rebuilt many of their knocked-out tanks so just 49 were write-offs.

The Somua S35 proved to be a formidable vehicle and the equal of the Panzer III and IV in many ways. The Panzer divisions were outnumbered and outmatched on paper, but superior German tactics and command control nullified French advantages to give the Panzers ultimate victory.

Strategically, the German army had achieved its aim of tying down French cavalry in the north giving the main Panzer

thrust in the south an open goal. However, despite being mauled, the French armoured cavalry was neither destroyed nor demoralised. It fought on with grim determination occupying the attention of Panzer divisions that would otherwise have overrun Dunkirk. The German failure to trap the British army in France was one of the two great strategic failures that meant Germany could not win World War II – the failure before Moscow being the second – even if it did not guarantee defeat.

FORCES

The French player chooses forces from the French DLM selector (see page 64) and the German from the 1940 Panzer Division selector (see page 70). 3rd Panzer was equipped with an even distribution of German tank types so the player may select tanks freely from appropriate 1940 marks of Panzer I, II, III or IV within the limitations of the list.

THE BATTLE

Use 'Scenario 2: Maximum Attrition' from the *Bolt Action* rulebook.

The battleground consisted of a plateau with occasional woods, a dense road network, extended localities and a few isolated large farms. Small streams flowed across the region, within two or three metre deep, rock cuts offering good cover for would-be infiltrators, but there were many crossing points fordable by tracked vehicles.

VICTORY – CAMPAIGN POINTS

A player receives one Campaign Point for winning the scenario by two to five victory points and three Campaign Points if he wins by six or more victory points. Both players get a Campaign Point for a draw. A player receives a bonus of two Campaign Points if he destroys all his opponent's tracked vehicles and a bonus of three Campaign Points if he completely destroys his opponent's forces.

PLAYER NOTES

This game is all about destruction, especially destruction of your opponent's armoured force. The armies are evenly balanced with the Panzers having the advantage of experience and the French having the advantage of very thick armour. Victory will go to the tactically skilled or the lucky, but, most of all, victory will go to the most aggressive. Panzer divisions and DLM were designed to attack, so get stuck in.

