

Test Game – The Defence of Hondeghem May 1940

The game was played with the ORBATS and special rules exactly as laid down in the *Rapid Fire* rule-book.

The table size had to be reduced by 20% in view of space limitations so all distances were reduced by a similar percentage (2cms instead of 1 inch).

The game

The early bounds were difficult for the defenders and they struggled to stay concealed. Fortunately, A Company who had an advanced position was not detected. In bounds 2 and 3, the British artillery had some success hitting the German soft-skinned transport but casualties were light amongst the infantry passengers.

The German waves started to arrive in bound 4 and by bound 6 all of their elements were on the table along with the British reinforcements that had arrived on bound 5.

The British CO was rated as above average and this helped as he drew early cards to set his defensive perimeter. The German CO was being very conservative and waited until most of his elements had arrived before pushing into the town and even then only at a slow pace so that his infantry could accompany the tanks on foot.

Consequently, the first real action did not come until bound 7 when the troop of Pz 38(t)'s, advancing on the yard (where A Company were concealed) came under fire from the British artillery. But the British position was not fully secure as the German mortars had cut a gaping hole in their centre where C Company were taking heavy casualties.

The battle really warmed up in bound 8 when the Germans lost a Pz 38(t) and the subsequent Momentum test turned up 4 ones! The unit reeled back down the road leaving their infantry somewhat exposed. The Germans did have some success on their left where the SdKfz 251/10 mounting a 37mm AT gun put pay to the second British artillery piece.

This action coincided with a downturn in the luck of the British CO. The cards he drew were all high numbers and his shooting was appalling. Only the ability of his element officers to survive Momentum tests kept him in the game. Against him, the Germans had excellent cards but their slow attack speed was giving the British time to hold them off.

On bound 12, the battle for the works and yard kicked off as A Company revealed itself and caught the Germans advancing across open ground. The German 2 platoon lost half its complement of men and now that the Panzer I's were in range, they came under fire from the AT Rifles in the British line.

Bounds 13 and 14 saw the Panzers take more damage that effectively halted their advance. The Inn was seeing a straight fire-fight between the British defenders and assaulting German infantry who had survived an approach across open ground to assault the building without losing too many casualties. But their attempts to break into the Inn were repelled violently and the German right suddenly looked very weak. Although they had a Platoon in the yard of the works, the final artillery shell from the British ripped through them and they took cover in the buildings.

On the British right, the SdKfz 251/10 was still creating havoc and avoided a number of AT Rifle shots. In fact, this one vehicle caused more damage to British Momentum and took more casualties than the remaining 6 tanks that the German CO had at his disposal!

Having held up the German advance for 15 bounds, the British pulled back in their various soft-skinned vehicles and high-tailed it off the board. The German units were in no position to chase after them – 4 tanks were damaged and the artillery was short of shells. The mortar teams had run out completely and nearly all elements were reporting casualties. The game was declared a British victory for holding out so long.

Conclusions

The game took about 8 hours to run 15 bounds but this is not seen as an issue. I estimate that about an hour of this was time wasted checking rules early on in the game and having to clarify *Rapid Fire* rules. Also, some of the **Fight Your Own Battles** rules were used for the first time.

The AFV Momentum rules proved to be OK but when the Pz 38(t)'s had to retire, their supporting infantry were left exposed. The rules state that they should have taken 1 Momentum test (attached element retires following a failed Momentum test) but this seemed too lightweight. Infantry watching their tanks recoil away from the enemy after taking a hit are most likely going to follow or fall back themselves rather than press on regardless. Therefore an extra Momentum Test rule was added for infantry in this position. The above-mentioned rule concerning attached units now only relates to non-armour elements).

I was also concerned at the impact of the suppression rules. At one point, a British infantry element became suppressed after taking casualties and had to withdraw. The move left them in an open position and whilst it would have been easy to dictate that they should fall back to cover, this would have led to a situation where they would have become separated from other friendly elements. Therefore, the suppression rules have been changed. Suppressed units will now get an Order Card but they may not undertake offensive action, move towards the enemy or leave hard cover. They may leave soft cover if they can reach hard cover within 2 moves and this does not involve moving into the open at any point. (Thus they could track sideways along a hedge to reach a building but could not dash across a field to reach slit trenches). A CO will therefore allocate an Order Card to a suppressed unit each bound but if they are in hard cover and suppressed they may not either fire or move until they have rallied their Momentum score back up.

Overall this test game was a great success and the outcome of my game matched what actually happened in reality. It is proposed to replay the game with the same ORBATS etc but with the German CO acting more boldly to see if the British defenders can take the pressure!



British and German infantry clash on the outskirts of the village