

Game report:

Bizory – the Last Attack

6th Armored Div vs 12th SS Panzer Div (Hitlerjugend) - 4th Jan 1945

Date of game played: 14 March 2009.

Following up on the Sibret scenario played in July 2008, Peninsula Wargames Group played the Bizory scenario from Richard Marsh's "Rapid Fire! Battle of the Bulge" scenario book. For readers without the book, it covers the last German attack towards Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, pitting 12th SS Panzer Div, supported by the 26th Volksgrenadier Div on its right flank, against Combat Command B of 6th Armored Div, with 501st Parachute Infantry Regt of the 101st "Screaming Eagles" Airborne Division on its left flank. Pitting elements of two of the most famous (or notorious, in the case of the Hitlerjugend) divisions of the Western Front against each other, it promised to be an exciting game. The game was played on a snow table, with the full snow rules (rule 20.11) which made for slow movement, especially for the Volksgrenadiers on foot; maximum observation was limited to 36", due to poor weather, but as the game was played across the width of the table, this had surprisingly little effect on the game. The game was 20 turns in length. There were four objectives (the railway halt, Hill 510 and the towns of Bizory and Margeret). Holding two objectives would constitute a draw for either side; three or more were required to claim victory.

The German forces were played by:

- 26th Volksgrenadiers: Tim Cruise & Tim Mercorio
- 12th SS Pz:
 - 26th SS Pz Grenadier Regt, 1st SS Pz Bn, 12th SS Werfer Bn: Chris Pullin
 - 25th SS Pz Grenadier Regt, 12th SS Panzer Jaeger Bn, 501st SS Heavy Tank Bn, 560th Heavy Panzerjaeger Bn, and 12th SS Artillery Regt: Greg Pullin and Michael Karsten

and the US forces:

- US commander CCB 6th Armored (also commanding US Artillery), and Task Force Wall: David Davidson (author of this game report);
- Task Force Davall, and Task Force O'Hara (the latter were reinforcements, arriving later in game): Dean Himzelman
- Task Force Kennedy: Mike Schubert.
- 501st PIR: Quinton Brickhill;

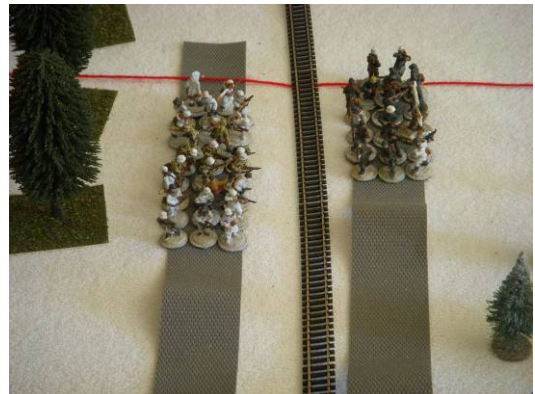
Although the German force contained nominally two divisions, due to very heavy earlier losses, both were severely depleted. 12th SS Panzer was fielding two panzergrenadier "regiments" (26th and 25th SS Pz Grenadier Regiments), but each was effectively only the size of a full-strength battalion; similarly, the 1st SS Panzer bn had only four tanks; 501st SS Heavy tank "battalion" had exactly ONE King Tiger (!) and the two Panzerjaeger battalions each had only three AFVs. Similarly, 26th Volksgrenadier Div's infantry "regiments" were at only battalion strength, with one token Hetzer as armoured support. However, what the SS tanks lost in numbers they made up in quality— 5 Jagdpanzer IV/L70s, 2 Panthers, 3 Panzer IVs, and a King Tiger. It was sobering thought for the US forces that the weakest German tank present (the Pz IV) was as good as the best US tank (the M4 76mm). Although the infantry numbers were much reduced, the supporting gun companies were present in force – each "regiment" had a 120mm and an 81mm mortar, a 150mm infantry gun, etc. The Germans also had some artillery support in the form of Nebelwerfer battalion and an artillery "regiment" of one battery of three 105mm's. Although each battery had an OP, no radio exchange vehicle was available, limiting German flexibility in this regard. Overall, the on-table German forces had the equivalent of four full-strength infantry battalions, 13 tanks and tank destroyers, with plentiful support by MMGs, mortars, and infantry guns.

On the US side, 501st PIR was also sorely depleted, with each battalion at only half-strength, but CCB was by and large close to full strength. Task Force Davall, the most northerly of CCB's task forces, was tank heavy, with 5 Shermans, 2 Stuarts and Hellcat, but only armored infantry company (plus an MG company in support); Task Force Wall, in the centre, was infantry heavy, with an armored infantry battalion (less one company, but reinforced with an engineer company), but only 3 Shermans

and one Hellcat, and Task Force Kennedy was very similar to Task Force Davall, with 6 Shermans, 2 Stuarts, and an armored infantry company (with an MG company in support). The crucial US artillery support included: a battalion of three 105mm SPGs in direct support, a battalion of three 155mm's in direct support, and another battalion of three 155mm's in general support. Additionally, the US had three OPs, plus a radio exchange vehicle; the last proved very important as it permits any OP to call in any of the batteries (within limits). Overall, the on-table US starting force had 14 M4 Shermans (six of which were 76mm armed), 2 M18 Hellcats, and 5 M5 Stuarts, for a total of 21 tanks – although whether the Stuart can really be called a “tank” in 1945 is debatable – and the equivalent of about one and half battalions of infantry.



The German plan of attack became clear as the game progressed. 12 SS started fairly well spread out from the bottom edge of the table to Azette Wood



in the middle (photo left, showing lead elements 12th SS), but the elements in the centre quickly swung to their left to focus the entire division's attack on Mageret. The German plan was clearly for 12th SS to crush the US right flank, starting at Mageret, and then roll up the line from the south-east. 26th VG were left to their own devices on the German right flank, attacking on foot through the Bois Jaques against 501st PIR (photo above right).

The US defensive plan was to use their plentiful (but badly out-matched) armour to blunt the German attack, taking every possible opportunity to destroy German infantry formations with especially their powerful and flexible artillery. The US infantry was deployed as far back as was feasible; Mageret was held by two infantry companies and a supporting MG company; Hill 510 by the engineer company; Bizory by another two infantry companies and CCB HQ, and the railway halt by the remaining company and supporting MG company. The two OPs on foot were positioned in the church (an obvious position, which would cost that particular OP dearly later, but offering excellent visibility) and near the railway halt respectively; the Sherman OP was initially positioned on the hill to the north-east of Bizory, but subsequently was pulled back in Bizory itself as the German attack developed. See map at end of report for the respective initial US dispositions and major German axes of attack.

The game opened with the German pre-game bombardment, which concentrated on the hills north-east of Bizory and Mageret. Since only US armour was present in these forward positions, the -1 deduction for fire against geographical targets meant that no damage was inflicted, to the initial puzzlement of the German commanders, who had clearly expected at least some of the US infantry to be deployed on those forward positions. The US OPs had each marked their five pre-registered targets, and it wasn't long before the German attack drove into two of these; a particularly devastating round of US artillery fire saw an entire German company of 10 figures vapourized in one turn by 155mm fire on the hill overlooking Mageret, and the sole King Tiger was targeted by two artillery batteries and also destroyed quite early in the game. This, however, was to be the last effective fire directed by the OP in the church – in a devastating response, the German mortars and infantry guns leveled the church and its occupants - a full infantry company and the OP team - in one turn, following a cunning close assault (by a token force!) to draw fire from the church.

Tanks from Task Force Kennedy, positioned on the hill overlooking Mageret, had engaged the oncoming German tidal wave of armour from turn one; despite inflicting some damage, it was quickly overwhelmed by the massed German tanks (photo right, showing the



German armour on the ridge, with two M4's already destroyed and another heavily damaged, and the sole runner in hiding behind a building). In the centre, tanks from Task Force Wall opened fire in support of TF Kennedy, and the area between the hill overlooking Bizory and Azette Wood became the scene of a major tank engagement, as tanks from TF Davall, able to re-deploy relatively quickly via the road in the US rear, joined the battle as the game progressed.

To the north, the Volksgrenadiers battled on, inflicting major casualties on the 501st. In true US airborne style, the paras fought on, one battalion surviving no less than five consecutive morale tests! By contrast, but also in true historical style, the first Volksgrenadier battalion to test morale failed immediately. The other VG battalion had some success, overrunning two Stuarts optimistically positioned in ambush to the south of the railway line, but when they reached the south-western edge of the wood, the US OP positioned near the railway halt caught sight of them, and another crashing US artillery barrage led to the second Volksgrenadier battalion also immediately failing its morale test! Needless to say, both battalions also failed all attempts to rally them - the comments by the commander of the 26th VG division on this turn of events will not be repeated here... This put paid to any German hopes to seize the railway halt; the success or failure of the attack now rested on solely 12th SS's attack on Margeret and Bizory.



By the end-game (picture left), the Germans had completely overrun Bizory (the ruins of which can just be seen in the picture at upper right), destroying its infantry garrison and pushing the couple of US tanks remaining back behind Hill 510 (just off the bottom right of the photo). Jagdpanzer IV's (not visible on the picture) were moving around that hill, right onto the US baseline, threatening to roll up the US line. On the hill outside Bizory, the last US tanks defending that hill had been wiped out, and German armour was pressing on over the hill. However, continual US artillery

bombardments had inflicted heavy casualties on both 26th and 25th Pz Grenadier regiments, and most of the infantry had suffered adverse morale tests. Some of the infantry support weapons (most noticeably a 251 Drilling, which was having an excellent day's shooting) pressed on towards Bizory, but US bazookas in ambush positions opened up, and with the remaining tanks of TF Davall also having rushed to the defence of the town to provide supporting fire, the last German attack ground to a halt just short of Hill 510 and Bizory (picture right). The US reinforcements, Task Force O'Hara, had arrived on bound 10, the earliest possible; although not a large force, it brought fresh infantry and some armour, which combined with Task Force Davall's infantry (who had also not seen action), was sufficient to ensure that the Germans would be unable to seize and hold their objectives, as they effectively had no infantry left. The Germans conceded on bound 13; they had one objective (Margeret) but the US were hanging on to the other three, so in terms of the victory conditions, the game was a US victory. Interesting, the final US positions in the game were almost identical to those which they occupied historically at the end of the fighting on 4th Jan 1945.



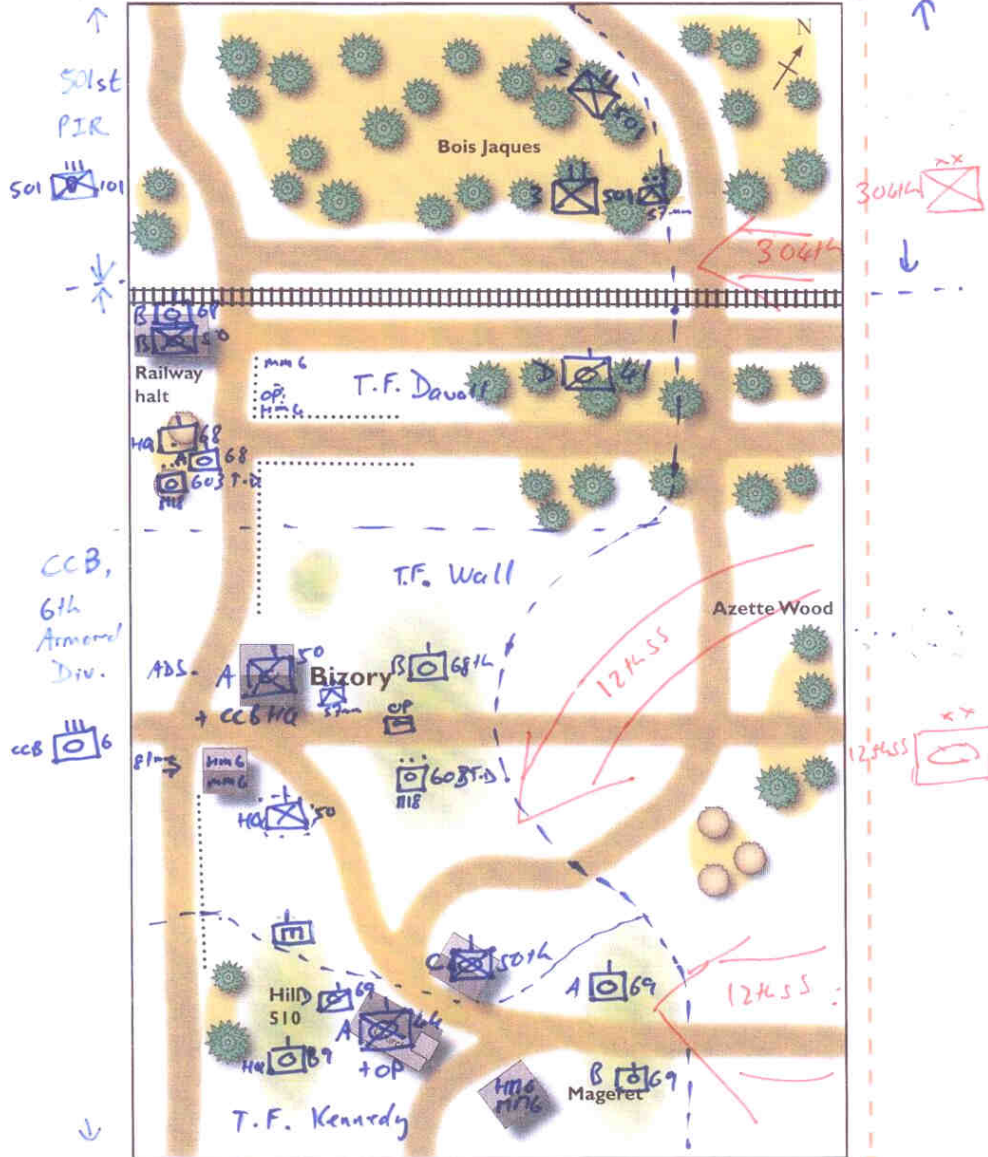
The game was a close run thing; there is no question that it was the US artillery fire which turned the game in the US favour, as with the previous game, Sibret. Although the Germans overran one OP, the other two, combined with the radio exchange vehicle, kept up a storm of fire (and good dice throws!) throughout the game, and the US plan to focus artillery fire on infantry was very effective. On a few turns, there were no suitable infantry targets and the artillery engaged German armour, destroying a King Tiger early in the game, and a Panther on the last bound, both the lucky 6's at the crucial moment. The US used requested and obtained two of the available three GSF rounds of firing during the game, and these were predictably devastating.

This was also the first scenario game PWG played using the rules for firing and moving as intended by the Rapid Fire authors – i.e. if both firer and target move, the -1 modifier is only applied once. It did make the US 76mm's (gun class 2) noticeably more effective, but also meant that the German tanks fired very effectively indeed and even in hull-down positions, the US Shermans did not last long.

Although the US narrowly won, it has to be conceded that not all the deployments of the US forces were optimal. The infantry were well positioned, and were untouched by the German pre-game bombardment, and the Shermans and Hellcats were effectively positioned, albeit expendable. However, the Stuarts were essentially sacrificed for very little gain – and they could have been usefully employed engaging German transports. As many US moves were made on the map (due to the limited visibility), even the US CCB CinC was sometimes a little confused about where some elements of his other task forces were – but again, this is historical quite accurate for the Battle of the Bulge! Regarding the German plan, the German commanders were heard after the game debating whether a slower and more deliberate attack (given that they had 20 turns to reach their objectives) would have been better. However, given the US artillery dominance, their plan for immediate attack as executed was probably best. Had the US artillery missed, or fired ineffectively, on only a few turns, the Germans would have very probably been able to seize both Bizory and Hill 510. The only real remaining question is whether an attack on the centre, able to support the Volksgrenadiers (the actual historical plan), would have been more effective than Hitlerjugend's attempted left hook of the game.

Battle Map: Bizory

(Table size 8' x 5')



US