THE PATHS OF ROMMEL
New Scenarios for PANZER LEADER 1940
By Daniel Helmbrecht

One of the most decisive campaigns of World War II was the 1940 German invasion of France. No game better recreates the highly mobile actions than Romiro Cruz's PANZER LEADER 1940 variant (Vol. 15, No. 2). Cruz introduced new counters characteristic of the 1940 armies and ten new situations. The purpose of this article is to bring players new scenarios by looking at the battle for France through the eyes of one extraordinary general—Erwin Rommel.

When Nazi Germany began to rearm, many German generals had come to recognize the versatility of massed armor formations. Although France also had armored divisions, many of them were dispersed among the infantry. The Germans meanwhile had organized the panzer divisions into corps. With the tremendous offensive power, they were able to pierce even the strongest lines of defense. After the lightning Polish victory, the German High Command realized that the tank arm was not just important to success, it was vital.

During the winter of the “Phony War,” which followed, the German High Command converted four infantry divisions into “light” panzer divisions, equipping them with captured Czech and Polish tanks along with a stiffening of small German ones. One of these, the 7th, had one panzer regiment and three tank battalions and a reconnaissance battalion (a total of 218 AFVs, over half being captured Czech equipment). The division also included two motorized rifle regiments, an engineer battalion, and four artillery battalions. Command was offered to the young Erwin Rommel.

Most people associate Rommel with the dramatic armor campaigns fought in the deserts of North Africa. Wargamers often overlook the significant part he took in the invasion of France. Rommel was a divisional commander at the time, directing the newly-created 7th Panzer Division (having taken command of it at Godesburg on 15th February). Rommel’s division was part of the Rundstedt Army Group that attacked through the Ardennes on May 10, 1940.

Although the Allied armies possessed 20 more divisions and over 1400 more tanks than the Germans, they were defeated in one of the most rapid campaigns of history. The key to the German offensive lay in using their limited armored forces as spearheads for their regular army. These armored spearheads massed on a small front, penetrating deep into the Allied rear, totally disrupted the organization of the Allied armies.

These six new scenarios portray Rommel’s encounters with the Allied forces in the exciting battle for France.

NOTES:
Situation 42: Rommel encountered relatively little resistance until he reached the Meuse late on May 12th. After getting only an infantry company across, the Germans discovered the French had destroyed the bridges at Dinant and Leffe, behind them. Rommel personally directed a boat crossing which got more infantry across into the bridgehead. A pontoon bridge was constructed and the tanks were able to cross. Rommel’s crossing was one of three German river crossings under Rundstedt. Reinhart’s panzer corps crossed at Malmédy but was unable to get tanks across until the 15th. Guderian’s panzers crossed at Sedan and captured two bridges, but were hampered by heavy Allied air attacks. Thus, Rommel had gained the only secure crossing and began to drive west from the Meuse.