

## RIDING WITH THE BEST

### A Commander's Eye View of PATTON'S BEST

By Jeff Petraska

So, your B-17 has just touched down after completing its 100th mission and you've finally decided to throw in the towel. Getting tired of dealing with flak and Focke-Wulfs? Tired of flying along like a goose in a flock with no freedom of action?

Well then, climb down from that cockpit. I've got an offer for you. How'd you like to trade in that bomber jacket and headset for a tank's uniform and helmet? There's an opening for you as a tank commander in the U.S. 4th Armored Division. A nice, new M4 Sherman tank is waiting in the depot with your name on it, so assemble a crew and follow me. We're just about to start our little version of the *Tour de France*, if you know what I mean. I'm sure you wouldn't want to miss that now, would you? Just sign these transfer papers and you'll be an official member of *PATTON'S BEST*.

*PATTON'S BEST* is an earth-bound version of the popular *B-17, QUEEN OF THE SKIES* solitaire game. In *PATTON'S BEST* you command one of the many varieties of M4 Sherman tanks serving with the U.S. 4th Armored Division. As part of a task force consisting of Sherman tanks and infantry squads, you are pitted against a variety of German forces as you participate in the liberation of France and the defeat of Germany.

Like *B-17*, playing *PATTON'S BEST* is a very personal affair. That's not some nameless, faceless G.I. in the commander's hatch, that's you. That's your alter ego, with those of your friends, co-workers and acquaintances serving as your loyal crew. As the days pass, the attachment to these characters, and to your tank itself, slowly grows. When the day comes that you lose your tank to a panzerfaust, Panther, or PaK 43, you'll feel real regret if some of your favorite crew members are lost.

Because of this personal flavor, to simply describe the game mechanics from a third person point of view would not do it justice. Therefore, this article offers you a tour of the game as seen from the eyes of a tank commander. Your guide will be Sgt. Jeff Petraska, commander of an M4A1 Sherman (Tank card #5) named the *Iron Mule*. The tour starts on the morning of 5 August 1944 not far from Vannes, France.

0500, August 5, 1944

It was a dark, overcast morning as Sgt. Petraska trudged slowly toward the *Iron Mule*. The engine was already running and the crew had everything ready to go since the task force was preparing to move out soon. As he passed the open driver's hatch, he couldn't help taking a lighthearted jab at Bill.

"Hey, Bill!" he shouted into the hatch.

Bill's head popped up. "Yeah?"

"Let the engineers find the minefields this time, okay?"

Bill simply grinned, shook his head, and disappeared into the hull. It really hadn't been his fault that they'd hit a mine the last time out, and they both knew it. Beside, there wasn't much chance of something like that happening again.

Sgt. Petraska scaled the tank and dropped deftly into the turret. Ed and Scotty were already there, but it still seemed unusually spacious this morning.

I don't believe it. No extra ammo?" Jeff asked. "There's actually room to move in here this morning."

"Nope, just some extra .30 caliber boxes Frank grabbed for his bow machinegun," said Scotty. "It figures that the day we expect heavy opposition is the day they don't order us to take extra ammo. That's officers for you."

"So what have you got loaded for today?" asked Jeff.

"We've got 61 HE, 20 AP and 10 HCBI. I put three HE and three AP in the ready rack, along with two of the smokers," replied Scotty. "Same as usual."

"That ought to get us through the day. We won't be getting air support with this weather, and we'll have to cut back on the advancing fire to conserve ammo. I'm sure we can depend on some accurate shooting by Eddie to keep ammo wastage to a minimum, right?"

"Sure thing, Sarge." Ed patted the breach of the 75mm gun with mock affection. "I feel extra sharp today. I think today's going to be the day we kill some Panthers. I even brought a pencil with me to keep score."

"I hope you remembered to sharpen it," laughed Jeff. "You're probably going to get plenty of opportunities. This looks to be the toughest day's worth of fighting we've faced so far."

Jeff climbed back up and sat on the turret roof, looking at the dreary sky. This tank and crew had been in action since *Cobra* and had become a skilled and experienced team. So far no German tank or gun had fired at them, but they had been plagued with some bad luck lately. They lost a track to a mine the last time out, and the time before that a lucky bullet destroyed the gun sight. "If we've got to have bad luck, I'm glad we've got the kind that creates little problems instead of big ones," he thought. He glanced at the map once more, surveyed the task forces, then waved his arm. It was the signal to move out.

*A day of combat in PATTON'S BEST comes in three forms. The most common are "Advances," representing aggressive rampages against disorganized German defenders. The next most common are "Counterattacks," where you and your task force must fend off attacking Germans. The third type are "Battles," representing attacks upon prepared German defensive positions. Each of these scenarios can take place against light, medium, or heavy opposition. The Combat Calendar lists each day elements of the 4th Armored Division saw action, and gives each day a code defining the scenario type and opposition. For August 5, 1944, the scenario is an advance against heavy opposition.*

*PATTON'S BEST is best appreciated when played as a campaign game, where the player tries simply to survive from July 1944 through April 1945. Campaign play starts by rolling initial skill levels for your five crew members, then assigning them to positions. Initial skills range from 1 to 5 (1D10/2), and may be increased after each day of combat by rolling higher than the crew member's current skill level on a ten-sided die. You start the campaign with a basic M4 Sherman (Tank card #1), the worst Sherman variant in the game. You receive a replacement tank whenever yours is knocked out, or during division refit periods if you so desire. Availability of the various Shermans changes*

monthly.

*I took one rule liberty at the start of Sgt. Petraska's campaign. The rule requiring players to start with M4 Sherman #1 appears to have no historical basis, but serves only to put you in the poorest vehicle in the game as a starting point. Therefore, at the start of this campaign I chose to ignore the rule and determined my starting tank at random by rolling on the Tank Availability Table. The result was an M4A1 (Tank card #5), which I named the "Iron Mule." I believe that this is more realistic and helps remedy the combination of poor vehicle and novice crew that tends to make the early campaign play difficult.*

*At the start of each day you must determine the weather, select your tank's ammunition load, and determine its starting deployment. Each Sherman variant has a maximum ammo limit, but you may be ordered to load up to 30 additional rounds by your commanding officer. This greatly increases the risk of explosion or fire if your tank is hit, and is especially vexing when you're commanding a late model Sherman because it negates your tank's wet stowage advantage. The best thing to do when ordered to carry extra ammo is use advancing fire extravagantly until the extra rounds are expended.*

*Your tank's initial deployment is determined by a dice roll at the start of the day. This indicates the status of your tank when, and if, combat begins. Possible deployments are moving, stopped, or stopped and hull down. In addition, you may be designated as the lead tank of the task force, making you a very likely target for German guns. Don't be ashamed to play very conservatively when your tank is nominated for this duty, because it really is a matter of life and death. A new deployment is determined after each engagement.*

#### 0700, August 5, 1944

The task force had been underway for two hours without incident. A few HE and machinegun rounds had been fired at possible ambush locations during the advance so far, but there had been no sign of German presence as yet.

"Hold up a minute, Bill," Jeff called into the intercom. *Iron Mule* lurched to a stop in response.

Jeff looked at the map again, comparing it against visible landmarks and road signs. The first objective area was about eight miles southwest of their current location. The quickest route would be to take the country road they were following into the town ahead, then head south along the highway. It would also probably be the most heavily defended route. The alternative would be to strike out south across the farmlands and meet another country road that paralleled the highway south of the town. That might take longer, but would probably be a safer bet.

Jeff radioed the leader of the recon platoon that was scouting just ahead of the task force.

"Hey Charlie, what's the opposition like south of us?"

"The locals say there are some Germans around the farms in that direction, but we haven't seen any yet. I'd guess moderate opposition in that direction, nothing too serious."

"All right, we're heading in that direction then. Over and out. Task Force Able, this is task force leader. We're heading south."

"Alright Bill, hang a left. We're going to tour the beautiful French countryside."

*Iron Mule's* engine roared in response, and the task force was on its way again. Although all eyes scanned the various houses and barns, the only people visible were French farmers who smiled and waved as the olive-drab column motored past. The good cheer seemed contagious, and soon Jeff couldn't resist waving back. If there had been Germans in this area, they must have retreated toward the village as the task force approached. The peaceful advance continued.

*The scenario starts out on the Movement Board. This board shows a generic area of western European countryside divided into 42 areas. Each area contains a letter defining the countryside within: city, woods, fields, or farms and fields. Ten areas around the edge of the board are numbered, and two die rolls determine which ones will be your entrance and exit areas. For advance scenarios such as this one, the exit area serves as your territorial objective. Each time you capture your exit area the dice are rolled again, new entrance and exit areas are determined, and play continues.*

*It is at this point that the play of PATTON'S BEST really diverges from that of B-17, QUEEN OF THE SKIES. Your starting area and objective area are defined, but what route you take to get there and how fast you travel are entirely up to you. Generally speaking, it's a good idea to choose the path of least resistance rather than the path of fastest advance unless sundown is near and you're striving to reach one more exit area.*

*Speaking of sundown, every action you choose takes anywhere from 15 minutes to one hour to perform. The time it takes to travel between adjacent areas depends upon whether the two areas are connected by a road or highway. Highway travel is fast (15 minutes per area) but leads through towns in the center of the map where the heaviest resistance can be expected. Traveling the back roads takes twice as long, and traveling cross-country takes even longer.*

*Of course, movement is not your only option. You can have adjacent areas scouted to determine the enemy resistance level therein, or call for artillery or air strikes on adjacent areas as a prelude to advance. If need be, you can also call for ammo resupply or a replacement for an incapacitated crew member. All of these actions take time, however, and when the sun sets your time is up.*

*This freedom of action gives you enormous leeway in how you choose to play the game. You may play very cautiously, preceding each movement with artillery and/or air strikes, in which case you will probably not capture more than one exit area. Alternatively, you may choose to ramrod your task force along the highways regardless of opposition. This will garner you two or three (or more?) exit areas in a single day, but will cause higher task force casualties and a higher risk to your own tank. Bold, conservative, or somewhere in between, the choice is yours to make and the results are yours to live with.*

#### 0745, August 5, 1944

The task force had reached the road without incident and was proceeding southward toward the objective area. They crossed a major east-west road heading into the nearby town and followed the dirt road as it turned southwest. Sgt. Petraska keyed the radio once again.

"Able leader to Easy leader. What's the situation along the road ahead?"

"We're seeing evidence of enemy activity around some of the farm buildings. I'd expect moderate resistance if we press onward," the recon platoon leader reported.

"We're going through," replied Jeff. "It's the only reasonable route we've got."

"Roger, over and out."

The task force continued along the road without incident for another half hour. *Iron Mule* was hull down in a shallow gully when the radio suddenly came alive with sightings and contact reports. A squad of German infantry and an unidentified self-propelled gun were somewhere off to the left, and there were reports of a truck to the right. Soon another truck was reported to the left of the tank at close range.

Jeff quickly scanned the sectors indicated in the reports. He spotted the German squad moving

through some woods 500 yards on the left flank. Straight ahead he spotted one of the trucks making a dash for cover at medium range. The SPG and the second truck were nowhere to be seen, apparently hidden from view by nearby farm buildings and trees.

As Bill slammed his hatch shut, Jeff shouted the spotting reports into the intercom. "Infantry in woods at eight o'clock; moving truck dead ahead, 400 yards. Let's take out the truck first. Do you have him, Eddie?"

"I see him," came the reply. The turret slewed slightly and the gun elevation changed as Eddie took aim at the fleeing vehicle.

"Fire at will," ordered Jeff.

There was a momentary pause, then that characteristic roar as the 75mm gun let fly an HE round. Jeff watched through binoculars as the round scored a direct hit on the truck's bed, nearly tearing it in two. The wreckage careened into a ditch and burned.

"Holy mackerel! Nice shot, Eddie!" shouted Jeff. "I guess you really are in the groove today!"

"Bring on the Panthers, I'm all warmed up now," came the reply.

Jeff surveyed the scene again. The German infantry was still in the woods to the left, engaged in a firefight with friendly infantry. A white phosphorus smoke cloud rising above trees in the distance marked the spot where the SPG was hidden. There was still no sight of the second truck.

Suddenly Jeff spotted a third truck in defile not far from the German infantry. He swung the turret around 120° to the left, laying it approximately on the infantry.

"Infantry firing from the woods, 500 yards," Jeff called out.

Again the turret and gun shifted slightly as Ed took aim, and again an HE round was sent on its way. Jeff saw it hit short and left of the target. The infantry continued to fire but the newly-spotted truck moved quickly to the left, putting it now behind the task force. Apparently it was trying to escape in the direction they had come from. Suddenly the earth around it rose up as another Sherman found the mark, causing it to swerve wildly and overturn.

As Jeff continued to scan for additional targets a radio report indicated that the SPG had retreated. Movement quickly caught his eye as the last remaining truck dashed out from behind a barn 100 yards away. As Eddie fired a second HE round at the infantry Jeff grabbed the .50 caliber machinegun and fired a stream of bullets that passed behind the speeding truck. A glance up revealed that the HE round had found its mark, pinning the squad.

For a moment the truck stopped, its driver apparently confused about directions. It never moved again, thanks to the combined machinegun fire of nearby Shermans. Only the stubborn infantry squad remained. As Jeff turned his attention back towards its location the area around the task force erupted in enemy artillery fire. Jeff crouched down as shell fragments ricocheted off the tank, but the barrage ended as abruptly as it began. It looked as though the task force infantry had been especially hard hit, with numerous casualties scattered around the shell craters.

"C'mon Eddie, take those guys out!" called Jeff. "Scotty, I want maximum rate of fire. Frank, help pass ammo. Let's end this battle!"

The request for maximum rate of fire was rewarded by three shots in rapid succession, all of which fell right on top of the German squad and destroyed it. The order to cease fire was given soon after, and the task force paused to take account of the action. One German infantry squad and three trucks had been destroyed, and one SPG had escaped. Task force losses were three infantry squads, all casualties of the artillery bombardment. The area was now secured, and the task force prepared to continue its advance.

## BETTERING PATTON'S BEST

The following are a series of questions on this engaging solitaire game by Jeff Petraska, with answers from Bruce Shelley—designer of the game. These are presented here in the hopes of clarifying some points for fans of the simulation and making their play even more enjoyable. As always, Avalon Hill welcomes questions on any of our designs still in print, provided that such are accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. However, the following may save players of PATTON'S BEST some postage:

### Spotting

**Q.** Do I have to make spotting attempts for all enemy units every round of battle, or just those that do not have Spotted markers?

**A.** Just those without Spotted markers.

**Q.** If I only have to spot those without markers, are Spotted markers removed when my tank moves? If not, do I still have to check each unit for hidden status from my new location?

**A.** When you move your tank, you have the option of leaving or removing Spotted markers. When an enemy unit moves, you must remove the Spotted marker.

**Q.** For target identification purposes, should the crew member's skill number be rounded up (as per the table) or down (as per the rules)?

**A.** Rounded down.

**Q.** When I define spotting sectors for buttoned-up crew members in the "Prepare for Battle" sequence, does this limit their spotting to those sectors for the entire engagement or just the initial round of combat?

**A.** Just the initial round. They may choose new sectors each round, or unbutton, etc. This rule just fixes what they are doing when the battle breaks out.

**Q.** Can hidden enemy units still fire at other tanks and infantry in my task force.

**A.** Yes.

### Combat

**Q.** Are German vehicles subject to track hits?

**A.** Yes, Deliberate Immobilization or track hit. Mark it with a Thrown Track marker.

**Q.** When does the Deliberate Immobilization modifier in the To Hit Target Table apply?

**A.** Whenever you are attempting to hit the track of an enemy vehicle; any vehicle with a thrown track cannot move or pivot.

**Q.** Can vehicles be hit by HE fired as Area Fire?

**A.** Yes. You must roll an unmodified 01-03 to hit.

**Q.** Can I switch between Area Fire and Direct Fire without losing target acquisition?

**A.** Yes.

**Q.** Can I put machinegun advancing fire into a zone that contains any enemy unit(s), spotted or unspotted? If so, is that unit affected by the fire?

**A.** Yes. Yes.

**Q.** If I exhaust my Ready Rack ammo supply while firing, but make my rate of fire roll, can I switch to reloading from the normal ammo supply—or must I stop firing?

**A.** You may switch to using the normal ammo supply.

**Q.** What is the availability of APDS ammo for the Sherman Firefly?

**A.** I suggest one ten-sided die roll.

### Movement

**Q.** If the movement of my tank forces one or more (but not all) enemy units to leave the Battle Board from sectors 4-5, 6-8 or 9-10, what becomes of them? Are they gone for good?

**A.** Place them on the Movement Board in the area your task force marker occupied. If you eventually leave the Battle Board, you do not capture the area. If you want to capture the area, go back to 4.4, skip 4.5, go to 4.6 and skip 4.62, place the enemy units that went off the board according to 4.63, and continue play from there.

### Smoke

**Q.** When my tank movement requires shifting of enemy units on the Battle Board, should I also shift the Smoke markers in play? If so, where does the Smoke marker on my tank (from a smoke grenade) shift to?

**A.** Yes, shift the Smoke markers. And any on your tank shift to the close range zone directly to the rear of your tank.

**Q.** Are Smoke markers placed by artillery strikes, air strikes, or advancing fire.

**A.** Yes, all three.

**Q.** For the purposes of tracing line of sight through smoke, is my task force assumed to be in the center hex of the Battle Board with my tank?

**A.** Yes.

### Friendly Fire

**Q.** Do the friendly fire modifiers for the number of U.S.-controlled sectors and friendly force losses apply to artillery strikes—air strikes—and advancing fire?

**A.** No—No—Yes.

### Sequence of Play

**Q.** If after the Random Events check of an ambush, there are no enemy units left on the Battle Board, does the engagement end at that point or does it continue to the Random Events check of step 4.77?

**A.** Immediately jump to 4.77.

**Q.** Can I freely replace broken periscopes, restock the Ready Rack, and generally tidy up my tank after a battle ends, before going back to the "Prepare for Battle" segment?

**A.** Yes.

### Crew Actions

**Q.** When an assistant driver passes ammo, is the rate of fire modifier the crew member's skill (as per the table) or -10 (as per the rules)?

**A.** His skill rating.

**Q.** Does the loader's Restock Ready Rack action completely refill the rack or just transfer one round to it?

**A.** It completely refills the rack.

**Q.** If my crew elects to bail out of the tank after throwing a track, do I get a new tank after the scenario ends or is my old one recovered?

**A.** The old one is recovered.

### Table Typos

**Q.** Is the To Kill number for the Panzer VI (Tiger) in the Friendly Fire Table really "10", or should it be "1-10"?

**A.** Should be "1-10".

**Q.** Shouldn't the dice rolls for MG/LW fire against infantry in the "Enemy Action: Counter-attack Scenario" table be "71-95" rather than "71-75"?

**A.** Yes.

"Chalk up two for us, eh Sarge?" asked Eddie. "Remember, I'm keepin' score today."

"Yep, two confirmed," replied Jeff. He surveyed the battlefield one last time, his eyes finally coming to rest on the medics tending to the wounded GIs. Trading three infantry squads for one squad and three trucks wasn't exactly a tactical victory. He hoped the rest of the day's battles wouldn't go the same way.

Jeff glanced at his watch. The fighting and re-organization had taken half an hour, and the sky was threatening rain at any minute. It was time to get going.

"Task force Able, this is task force leader. Let's move out."

*"Combat in PATTON'S BEST occurs when your task force moves into a new area. The probability of an engagement occurring depends upon the level of resistance in the area and the area type. The number of German units involved is also determined by the area's resistance level: two units for light resistance, three for medium, and four for heavy.*

*The types of units encountered are determined randomly, but vary with the scenario type. The widest variety is encountered in Advance scenarios, where you can come across anything from a dug-in 88mm anti-tank gun to an unarmed truck. During Battle and Counterattack scenarios only enemy combat units will be encountered, reflecting better German preparation for combat.*

*Combat takes place on the Battle Board, which consists of a central hexagon surrounded by three concentric circles representing short, medium and long range. These circles are split into six sectors by lines emanating from the hexagon corners, thus defining 18 zones. Your tank is always in the central hexagon, and enemy units are placed into zones somewhere in the front three sectors by random die rolls.*

*Once all German units are in their initial positions, the combat sequence is ready to begin. If you called for a preliminary artillery bombardment or air strike on this area, the dice are rolled for each German unit to determine if they are knocked out. Advancing fire by your task force is handled in a similar manner, except only select zones are affected and German units "killed" are actually assumed to have withdrawn from the area, garnering you no victory points.*

*The real shooting usually starts off as an ambush, meaning the defenders get to perform the first actions. All German actions are determined at random from an action table appropriate to the scenario type. Thus, the opposition tends to be more determined during Battles and Counterattacks than Advances. Dice roll modifiers for ambushes make them especially dangerous for the lead tank (which hopefully is not yours). German actions are followed by a random event, which concludes the ambush.*

*After the ambush, you and your crew get to perform activities. You may open or close hatches, try to spot and/or identify German units, and choose actions for each crew member. The selected actions are then resolved by dice rolls on various tables, and any units knocked out by your tank are removed from the board.*

*The remaining German units get to perform their actions for this round of combat. This is followed by the friendly fire segment, where the other tanks and infantry of your task force may eliminate German units or obscure them with smoke. A final random event is determined, completing the combat round. If enemy units still remain on the battle board, play cycles back to your tank and crew and for another combat round; otherwise the engagement ends and the area on the movement board becomes U.S.—controlled.*

0945, August 5, 1944

After fighting through two encounters so far this morning, the task force was finally entering the objective area. Task force losses were three infantry squads from the first encounter and one tank from the second, killed in an ambush by an unidentified anti-tank gun. Opposition in the objective area was expected to be moderate, so Sgt. Petraska and his crew had an HE round already loaded in the gun and were ready for action.

As *Iron Mule* rolled along, Jeff scanned the passing farmlands with his binoculars, trying very hard to avoid being ambushed again. A steady light rain was falling now, reducing visibility and making an ambush by a concealed enemy even more likely. He was also concerned with the ground condition, for if the rain didn't let up soon the terrain would turn muddy and slow down their progress toward the second objective. Assuming they captured this one, of course.

"See anything, Sarge?" Ed asked over the intercom. "All quiet," Jeff responded. "But stay sharp down there. I can't believe the Germans . . ."

He was interrupted in mid-sentence by a nearby explosion. The lead Sherman was showered in a cascade of sod and mud from a near miss. Once again the tactical radio came to life with shouts of warnings and contact reports. Jeff clutched his binoculars more tightly and looked for signs of the muzzle flash, but almost immediately the whooshing sound of incoming artillery filled the air. He instinctively crouched lower in the hatch, but this time the sounds passed them by and the area ahead of the task force was pummeled. Apparently someone had called for friendly artillery as soon as the first shot was fired, and now the surrounding farmlands were getting a good pounding.

As the artillery lifted, Jeff searched the sectors indicated in the radio reports. A machinegun team was reported in some woods to their left, but the line of sight was blocked by a small copse of trees. However, he did spot the anti-tank gun dead ahead at short range, and recognized it as a 75mm Pak 40. It was the gun that fired at the lead tank to start the encounter, and had survived the artillery unscathed.

Jeff's eyes were quickly drawn from the gun position to a large object moving just to the right. It was a Panther, moving across open ground at 200 yards directly toward them.

"Panther and ATG dead ahead, close range!" Jeff shouted into the intercom. "Bill, back us up NOW! I'll guide you toward a defilade position! Scotty, fire the smoke mortar! I want some cover!"

The *Iron Mule*'s forward motion abruptly ceased. It paused momentarily as Bill changed gears, then lurched backward as Bill hit the gas. Jeff spotted a sunken path not far behind them and guided Bill's driving toward it. With a sharp pop the smoke mortar fired, its bomb hitting the ground 100 yards forwards of the retreating tank and providing an instantaneous white smoke plume between them and the threat. In this rain it wouldn't last long.

Jeff glanced forward and saw the muzzle flash of the Panther's long 75mm gun through the smoke. It had fired at the lead tank but missed as the exposed Sherman took wild evasive action. For a brief moment he felt sorry for the crew of that tank, imagining the fear and panic they must be going through as the preferred target for both the ATG and the Panther.

Jeff glanced back and corrected Bill's movement toward the path. When he looked up he could hardly believe his eyes. The Panther was a dead hulk, the crew scrambling from its hatches. A 76mm Sherman has put an HVAP round right through its turret front. He also noticed that the crew of the anti-tank gun had tried to pull the gun back to medium range, but were mowed down by intense infantry fire. It was almost too good to be true.

Almost as quickly as it had started, the encounter

was over. The remaining machinegun team had been outflanked and killed by an infantry squad. Task force losses were negligible.

"Hold it, Bill," Jeff ordered. He watched as the lead tank's maneuvering stopped and the crew's heads appeared in its hatches. "Drive over to the lead tank."

*Iron Mule* rolled up next to the tank. Jeff saw the name "Beginner's Luck" on the side of the hull and smiled. Even in the rain he could tell the young commander was sweating profusely. He recognized him as one of the new replacements that had come up a few days ago.

"Hey, you guys all right?" Jeff shouted over. The youthful sergeant looked up, smiled weakly, and waved.

"I've never seen a Sherman dance before," Jeff chided. "You took that machine for one heck of a ride. Now take it back to the rear of the column, I think you've earned yourself a break."

The commander smiled with much more strength this time, waved a thank you, and tank rolled away. Jeff reached into the turret and drew out the map. He glanced at his watch and wrote "taken 1045" next to the circled objective area. He then planned the approach path toward the next objective.

*Soldiers of any nationality will attest to the fact that the most dangerous enemy is the one you don't see. PATTON'S BEST reflects this in two ways. First, your crew must spot an enemy unit before you can fire at it. Second, and more importantly, all tanks, self-propelled guns and anti-tank guns are subject to identification by your crew. Whenever any of these units are placed on the Battle Board, they are placed face down. The back side shows a surrogate identity that is used for all purposes until it is identified. Each unidentified tank is assumed to be a Tiger; each SPG is assumed to be a StuG IIIg; and each ATG is assumed to be 88mm Pak 43. It is very important to identify these units as quickly as possible so that they may be replaced by their true (and probably less dangerous) identities.*

*This is one of the reasons that ambushes are so dangerous. In an ambush you won't get an opportunity to identify enemy units until after they have performed their first actions. Thus, in an ambush every anti-tank gun is an 88 and every tank is a Tiger. This is enough to make even the crews of Sherman "Jumbo" assault tanks nervous, especially since they are called upon to lead the task force much more frequently than other Sherman variants.*

1415, August 5, 1944

It was early afternoon and already the task force had engaged in more combat than on any other day before. Still, their losses were light—one tank and three infantry squads. Jeff glanced at his watch again. The task force's progress had been slowed by the frequent fighting and occasional detours around areas of heavy opposition. Although the rain had stopped at noon, the ground was soft and muddy, reducing the speed of advance even further. There was still time enough to reach the second objective today, but the third one was out of the question.

The task force was traveling along a highway now, advancing into an area of farms near the outskirts of the town ahead. Scouting reports indicated light opposition, and Jeff hoped to drive through to the town without further fighting.

The explosion of a nearby Sherman immediately dashed that hope. "Another stinkin' ambush!" Jeff shouted into the intercom to no one in particular. Once again he pressed the binoculars to his eyes and rapidly searched for the unseen foes. He quickly spotted a machinegun team moving through woods at medium range to their left and an infantry squad firing from a nearby farmhouse just 150 yards ahead.

The source of the fatal cannon shot was straight ahead at close range, not far from the farmhouse. Jeff recognized it at once. It was another Panther; but unlike the ones they had encountered earlier today, this one was presenting a side view. This was a golden opportunity, a flank shot at a Panther at close range. Even their 75mm gun could penetrate the monster under these circumstances.

Jeff keyed the intercom with excitement. "Bill, stop! Eddie, flank shot at a Panther, 150 yards dead ahead. Now's your chance, pal. Nail him!"

"We've got HE loaded," Scotty replied. "I'll change it to AP."

"Forget it, there's no time," called Jeff. "Just fire it and reload with AP from the ready rack. Maximum rate of fire."

The turret slewed slightly and the gun came down to near horizontal. *Iron Mule* kicked as the shot was fired. The HE round hit the Panther square in the turret side.

"Hit! Hit! Keep firing!" Jeff shouted. Even as he said it however, the Panther belched smoke from its exhaust and moved quickly away. "Hurry up! He's running away!"

The seconds passed agonizingly slowly. Jeff just now noticed that Frank was spraying the farmhouse with the bow machinegun, apparently with little effect. The German squad inside continued to exchange fire with their American counterparts. In fact, fire from one of the windows was directed toward the *Iron Mule*, the bullets ricocheting off the hull.

By the time the gun was reloaded with AP the Panther had retreated to medium range. It was still offering a flank shot, but as a moving target it would be harder to hit. The gun roared and Jeff saw the shot pass just behind the tank and splinter a tree trunk. "Come on guys, move faster!" Jeff called out. "He's getting away!"

Frank continued to spray the farmhouse with MG fire. The German squad had apparently had enough, because it fled the house and retreated into some woods further away. Jeff looked to his left just in time to see the machinegun team take a direct hit from a 75mm shell. The gun sailed into the air and fell several yards away. There was no sign of its crew.

The gun was reloaded with another AP round, but by now it was too late. The Panther had retreated to long range and turned to present its invulnerable frontal armor. The golden opportunity has passed, and it was time to take some defensive measures. Jeff spotted a stone wall just a few yards ahead.

"Bill, move us up to that wall. Eddie, spray that infantry squad with the coaxial. Scotty, give us a smoke screen."

As *Iron Mule* moved into its hull down position, the coaxial machinegun fired repeated bursts at the infantry. Movement of the tank made it impossible to aim, however, and most of the fire fell far from the mark. As the tank stopped behind the wall the smoke mortar fired, making the distant Panther just a hazy gray blob in the binoculars.

Both the Panther and the infantry squad moved around to the right and out from behind the smoke screen. The Panther disappeared behind a barn out of Jeff's view. The infantry could still be seen in the woods, dark figures dashing from tree to tree.

The turret rotated to the right as Eddie followed the squad with his machinegun fire. Seeing the soldiers were in good cover, Jeff grabbed the .50 anti-aircraft machinegun and added its fire to that of the .30 caliber. By this time the combined weight of the small arms fire directed toward the squad was awesome, and soon a couple of small white handkerchiefs were waving in the trees. The volume of fire died down as friendly infantry moved forward, and the few remaining German soldiers stepped out from the woods with their hands in the air.

Jeff looked back toward the barn where the

Panther disappeared. There was still no sign of it. He was about to order Bill to close the range when another rank radioed that the Panther had retreated.

Jeff dropped down into the turret. "Rats! We missed our big chance," he lamented. "I thought we had that Panther cold."

"Too bad we had an HE round loaded at the start," said Scotty. "We could have killed him on the first shot. I guess I should have changed the gun load before firing after all, huh?"

"I can't believe I missed him on that second shot," said Eddie. "Did you see how close it was? Couldn't have been off by more than a foot, if that."

"Well, I guess there's no use crying about it now," said Jeff. "We may still get another chance yet today. It's still early. We'll have to practice our rapid fire technique a little more, though. I hate to see them get away like that."

"Right, Sarge," Eddie and Scotty replied in unison.

Jeff climbed back up through the turret hatch and watched the task force get reorganized for the advance again. He glanced at his watch. The time was 1515. They had four more hours of daylight.

*The single most important thing new players of PATTON'S BEST must learn is WHAT targets to shoot at and WHEN to do it. Beginning players, especially those experienced with B-17, QUEEN OF THE SKIES, will tend to open fire on every unit in sight. This is a very good way to earn a ticket home in a pine box. As the crew of a Sherman tank you must be very selective of your targets, especially of those capable of knocking you out.*

*The rules of thumb for target selection depend upon which gun your Sherman is armed with, the 75mm or 76mm. The 75mm gun has a superior HE lethality, while the 76mm has a superior AP penetration and higher accuracy. Regardless of gun, you may freely fire at any German unit that is incapable of knocking you out. These units consist of light weapon squads, machinegun teams, trucks, armored cars, and armored infantry vehicles (half-tracks).*

*Of all German units, anti-tank guns are the most dangerous to bring under fire. This is because if you fail to kill them, the probability that they will fire at your tank jumps dramatically (from 5% to 40% in Advance scenarios, 10% to 60% in Battle scenarios). They are also especially difficult to kill with HE fire, almost impossible from a 76mm gun. Before you fire at an anti-tank gun, therefore, you had better be in a hull-down position and have a good chance of a first round kill.*

*Only the 50mm PaK 38 anti-tank gun is a relatively safe target, especially at medium or long range or when you are hull-down. This is assuming of course, that you are facing the target. Offering any gun, even the lowly 50mm, a flank shot is like playing with dynamite.*

*For the 75mm PaK 40 or 88mm PaK 43, your best option is simply not to shoot at them if at all possible. Leave them for your infantry to eliminate; that's what they're there for. Note that this also applies to all unidentified guns as well.*

*Tanks and self-propelled guns must also be engaged with care because they too like to shoot back at whoever shoots at them. Unless you have a Sherman Jumbo, any German gun of 75mm or larger has a good chance of penetrating your frontal armor at almost any range. A good rule of thumb, therefore, is don't shoot at the front of enemy AFVs if you don't have to, or unless you have a very good chance of killing the target with a single hit. If you catch an AFV with a flank or rear shot their preferred reaction is to move back to a longer range, as the Panther did in this encounter.*

*Frontal shots at German tanks is frequently pointless anyway, especially with the 75mm gun. The only tank the 75mm gun can knock out with a frontal hit is the Panzer IV. A 75mm Sherman is roughly equal*

*to the Panzer IV, so engaging one in a face-to-face gun duel is about a 50-50 proposition, which are not really the kind of odds you'd want to bet your life on. The 76mm gun has a good chance of killing a Panzer IV with a single hit, making such duels a better bet. For all other tanks, the rule is never shoot at their front.*

*There is considerable variation in the armor protection of self-propelled guns, making it impossible to define a single engagement rule for them. The Marder II and Marder III are easy kills for any Sherman at any range, or these vehicles may be engaged whenever you have a high first-round hit probability. On the other hand, the frontal armor of the JagdPanzer IV and the JagdPanzer 38t (Hetzer) are virtually invulnerable. These are best given the same respect as Panther or Tiger tanks. The armor of the StuG IIIg is somewhere in between, comparable to that of the Panzer IV. Make your firing decision accordingly.*

*The one great equalizer that I haven't mentioned yet is HVAP ammunition for the 76mm gun. You can penetrate just about anything at medium range or less with an HVAP round; so if you've got one to spare and you have a high hit probability, you might decide to use it to knock out a particularly dangerous opponent. Just be sure to cross your fingers before you roll the dice.*

#### 1600, August 5, 1944

The task force had passed through the town without incident and was now poised at a crossroads at its outskirts. The second objective area was two miles to the west, along the muddy country road that crossed the highway they had followed through the town. Scouts had reported heavy resistance in that direction, and further along the highway. There appeared to be no reasonable alternative; they would have to take the country road and tackle whatever the Germans had waiting for them.

Jeff spent the next 45 minutes on the radio arranging a rolling artillery barrage to precede the task force into the area. Since there was no chance of reaching the third objective today and they had daylight to spare, waiting for the strike to be coordinated was worth the time expended to arrange it.

At 1645 the shells began to fall, and Jeff signaled the task force to move out. He had also ordered advancing fire, so the tanks were periodically firing HE and machinegun rounds into woods, buildings and other potential hiding places. So close to the objective area, there was no need to take unnecessary chances.

After about half an hour's time the task force came upon some evidence of the barrage's effectiveness. A demolished barn with the bodies of German soldiers scattered about lay to the right of the road. In a nearby grove of trees the remains of a German truck burned.

"I guess they were expecting us," Bill commented dryly in the intercom.

"Looks like they got a lot more than they were expecting," replied Jeff. "Pull off to the right and stop here. Eddie, get ready to provide covering fire for the task force as they advance."

"We've got an HE round in the gun as usual," came the reply.

As Bill brought *Iron Mule* to a stop, Jeff radioed the other tanks in the platoon to do likewise. The remainder of the task force would press onward up the road, then stop while the covering forces caught up. They had been using this leap-frogging technique all day.

As the first few Shermans rolled past, the radio came to life again with spotting reports. Jeff caught sight of another truck as it fled from a gully just ahead and struggled through the mud in an effort to escape. Before it got far, an artillery shell dropped right next to it, leaving it disabled. Guided by the radio reports, Jeff also spotted a German half-track

moving at long range, using a sunken road as partial protection.

"Half-track at 10 o'clock, 1300 yards," he called out as he rotated the turret toward the target. "Fire when ready, reload with AP."

There was a pause as Eddie judged the lead angle on the moving vehicle, then the gun roared as it dispatched the HE round toward the target. Jeff watched through binoculars as the shell hit well short of the mark. He heard the bow machinegun firing as he watched the shell fall. Frank was spraying the area ahead of the tank to keep any panzerfaust-toting infantrymen at bay.

The half-track slowed and stopped, apparently bogged down in the mud. That was all that was needed for one of the 76mm Shermans to destroy it with a well-placed AP round. Jeff was about to relax when an infantry squad reported sighting an assault gun at long range. He scanned the reported sector for the SPG but was unable to locate it, the line of sight apparently blocked by the nearby farm buildings.

"Bill, let's move up," he called to the driver. "There's an assault gun somewhere up ahead. Frank, continue the advancing fire."

*Iron Mule* moved forward slowly over the soft ground. Eddie swung the turret back to face forward. An AP round was already in the breech from their shot at the half-track. The bow machinegun fired a long burst, then went silent.

"Frank, where's that advancing fire?" asked Jeff.

"The gun's jammed up," Frank replied. "I'm trying to clear it now."

Up ahead an HE round churned up the earth near an infantry squad, apparently fired by the SPG. Jeff scanned the area again as the buildings passed by and spotted the SPG hull-down behind a small earthen bank. It was still at long range and presenting a front view. Partially obscured as it was, Jeff was unable to identify it.

"SPG straight ahead, 1200 yards in defilade," he called out. "Can anyone identify it?" A chorus of negative responses came in return.

"Keep us moving, Bill. Let's close up on him. Eddie, give us advancing fire with the coaxial MG until Frank clears his jam."

"Right-oh, Sarge." The coaxial machinegun came to life, firing several short bursts as the turret rotated slightly side to side.

The machinegun fired as Jeff watched the range to the SPG close to under 1000 yards. The SPG was moving to the left, being careful to remain hull-down behind the bank.

Suddenly there was a loud explosion. Jeff was pitched sideways in his hatch as *Iron Mule* lurched sharply, then came quickly to a stop leaning noticeably to the left.

"Oh no! It couldn't be!" Jeff cried into the intercom. He leaned forward and looked down at the left drive sprocket. A dozen feet of track lay spooled out ahead of the tank.

"A mine! We ran over another stinkin' mine!" Jeff pounded his fist against the turret roof in frustration. "Is anybody hurt?"

"Bill and I are okay," replied Frank.

"All fine in the turret," added Scotty.

"Of all the lousy luck," lamented Jeff. "This is the second time in a row!" He suddenly remembered the SPG and quickly shoved aside the self-pity. "We've still got an assault gun to deal with, so let's pull ourselves together and get on with business."

Jeff picked up the binoculars from where they had fallen on the turret roof and scanned the last direction he had seen the SPG traveling. Friendly fire guided his eyes to its new location, to the left of the tank at medium range. It was still hull-down and presenting a frontal aspect, but its movement revealed several features that identified it as a StuG IIIg.

"It's a Sturmgeschutz III, moving at 10 o'clock range 800 yards. If he fires at us from there, we'll be dead meat for sure. Rotate the turret and fire the smoke mortar. Frank, keep working on that machinegun."

As the turret swung to the left and the smoke mortar fired, Jeff grabbed the anti-aircraft machinegun and began spraying the area directly in front of the disabled tank. He got off three long bursts before it suddenly quit.

"I don't believe this! Now this gun is jammed too!" he cried out as he tried to clear it. "What else can go wrong?"

"Don't say that!" said Eddie. "Are you trying to jinx us, Sarge?"

Jeff ignored the question and looked again toward the SPG. It had stopped in its new position, still facing their left flank. It seemed to lead a charmed life as it continued to survive the fire directed at it by several Shermans.

"Eddie, give me some coaxial advancing fire to the left. Frank, how are the repairs coming?"

"It's jammed up pretty good," Frank replied. "I'm still working on it."

"Same here," Jeff replied. "For god's sake, Eddie, don't jam the coaxial. It's the only one we've got."

The staccato sound of the coaxial machinegun was the only reply. Jeff worked the bolt on the .50 caliber MG frantically, and it suddenly came loose. He fired a short burst to confirm it. The jam was cleared.

He looked up again at the SPG through the rapidly thinning smoke screen. It appeared to simply be sitting there, doing nothing. Just as he was about to call Scotty for another mortar round, the StuG III was rocked by a direct AP hit. The hatches popped open and the crew scrambled out in the face of considerable small arms fire. With the destruction of the assault gun, the firing soon stopped. The encounter was over.

Jeff climbed out of the turret and leaned out over the left side of the hull. The main had exploded under the left front bogie assembly, breaking the track and damaging one of the wheels. With the track gone, the bogie wheels were sunk deep into the soft earth. Bill climbed out of the hull hatch and looked at the damage as well.

"Bill, you promised me you'd wait for the engineers," Jeff moaned in mock disappointment. "Now we have to wait here for a recovery vehicle while the task force goes on without us."

"Listen to you," Bill objected. "You're not the one with the numb rear end. We can't keep doing this, you know. My doctor says it'll give me hemorrhoids."

Jeff laughed. "Oh, well, we can't have that now, can we? I'd have to make you the commander just so you could stand up all day. Still, it's too bad this had to happen so close to the objective area. Call me old fashioned, but someday I would like to finish the day with the rest of the task force instead of being towed away and patched up."

"Next time, Sarge. Next time for sure."

Jeff climbed back up into the turret and called for assistance on the radio. "Well guys, it wasn't too bad of a day until this happened," he said to the turret crew. "What was our final score?"

"We got two infantry squads and two trucks," replied Eddie. "But it's hard to forget the Panther that got away."

"Well, we'll just work on our firing drills a little more," said Jeff. "I'm sure there will a next time, and by then we'll all be older and wiser. Until then we might as well kick back and relax. As far as you're concerned, the day is over."

*A scenario comes to an end in one of two ways, either you run out of daylight or you run out of luck. This scenario is an example of the latter. PATTON'S BEST is an exercise in probabilities and chance, and even the best-played game can end in tragedy*

*if the dice turn against you. In this case the crew of the Iron Mule was lucky. The tank was disabled but repairable and no crew members were injured. If you must end a scenario the hard way, then this is the way to do it.*

*After a scenario in the campaign game ends, all surviving crew members can attempt to increase their skill rating as described earlier. In this instance the skills of Sgt. Petraska, gunner Eddie and assistant driver Frank increased to "7", "7" and "4", respectively. The next division refit period is September 2-10, and if this crew can survive that long they will be able to trade in their M4A1 for a more modern Sherman variant, perhaps one of the late-model M4A1s with the 76mm gun. They will also be trained to use the Sherman's gyrostabilizer, giving them the ability to fire the main gun while moving. Although this is still almost a month away, it gives campaign players a near-term goal to look forward to.*

*This scenario ended with the task force capturing nine map areas and one exit area for a total of 38 victory points. Enemy kills for the day consisted of seven light weapon squads/machinegun teams, seven trucks, two half-tracks, one SPG, two Panthers, and three anti-tank guns. Friendly losses were two tanks and three infantry squads, light by comparison. This scenario netted a total of 72 victory points, an outstanding victory for the 4th Armored Division. For Sgt. Petraska and his crew it was technically a defeat, however, because they failed to complete the scenario. Nonetheless, these are the kind of defeats that are easy to live with. There's a long war ahead and as long as Sgt. Petraska and his crew are still alive at the end of the day, it's a victory to me. In the campaign game, these kind of victories are the only ones that matter.*



## SO THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN PLAYING

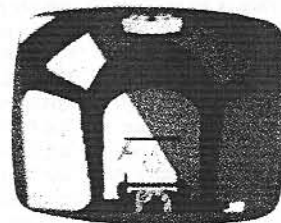
Titles Listed: 167

Total Responses: 794

Rank:	Title	Pub	Rank Times		
			Last On	Time	Freq. Ratio
1.	Advanced SL	AH	1	17	3.9
2.	Russian Campaign	AH	6	46	2.7
3.	Third Reich	AH	2	46	2.4
4.	Diplomacy	AH	8	18	2.3
5.	Kremlin	AH	—	1	1.9
6.	Up Front	AH	7	4	1.8
7.	Cassino	AH	—	1	1.7
8.	Empires in Arms	AH	13	9	1.6
9.	Britannia	AH	3	2	1.4
10.	Civilization	AH	12	5	1.3
11.	Air Force	AH	—	1	1.2
12.	St. Nazaire	AH	4	5	1.2
13.	Squad Leader	AH	9	46	1.2
14.	VITP	AH	20	4	1.2
15.	B-17	AH	5	18	1.1
16.	Bulge '81	AH	—	1	1.1
17.	1830	AH	—	1	1.1
18.	Fortress Europa	AH	—	1	1.1
19.	Russian Front	AH	—	1	1.1
20.	Patton's Best	AH	16	7	1.0

The most notable thing about this issue's survey of what's being played are the number of games that have been featured in *THE GENERAL* lately that are on the listing: *KREMLIN*, *THUNDER AT CASSINO*, *BRITANNIA*, *RAID ON ST. NAZAIRE* and *DIPLOMACY*. Either the readers are discovering these gems through these pages, or our selections for features lately have been "spot on". And, if this survey is to be used as a guide, this issue should be immensely popular for five of the games covered herein are on this list. Too, after some months where the various modules of *ASL* tended to dominate the survey, not one appears on this one—a fact that I am sure will change as folk start playing the new desert module.

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is only half  
the fun!"



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