



BATTLEFIELD WALKAROUND

1. DARKEST DECEMBER—THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE 1944

The scenarios for Darkest December (DD) are played on three different mapsheets, depicting the terrain in and around the village of Hotton. The three maps do NOT link. Instead, they represent separate playing surfaces for the scenarios that use them. The maps are referred to as 'Hotton', 'Melines', and 'Quatre Bras Crossroads' and are marked accordingly.

1.1 Locale—The village of Hotton lies in the Ourthe river valley at the junction of the roads from Marche, Barvaux, Grandhan and Manhay. During Hitler's *Wacht am Rhein* offensive, aka "The Battle of the Bulge", the town would represent a key road junction as well as an important river crossing.

Hotton would become a battlefield on 21 December 1944. The night before, forward elements of the German 116th Panzer Division slipped between Task Force Hogan and Task Force Tucker, both from the American 3rd Armored Division. The surprise enemy encroachment made contact with the main road between Hotton and Soy, knocking American plans on their keester. General Rose's strategy—to send the 3rd Armored down the main N15 Liège-Bastogne road—was rendered untenable when word came up the line around 0850 hours that 'many German tanks' had reached the road north of Hotton and were bearing down on the town. This was no drill, evidenced when small arms and mortar shells began falling in Hotton proper. German tanks entered the fray, soon knocking out two American Shermans east of the Ourthe. But just as the leading Panther was put into gear to continue the advance, a lone American tank-destroyer appeared on the opposite bank and put it out of action.

German grenadiers filtered into Hotton but were stopped short of the Ourthe crossing by 'a hailstorm of fire', thrown up by men of the 51st Combat Engineers Battalion. American force of arms again made its presence felt when a counter-attack was launched east of Hotton, along the Soy road. This pressure forced German tanks to pull back from Hotton. Fighting swirled around Hotton, Samrée and the Baraque de Fraiture crossroads. Another attempt to seize Hotton and its bridge by *coup de main* was attempted during the evening of 21 December, when a reinforced Kampfgruppe Bayer hurled itself against the town. But again the attack broke down in the face of heavy American firepower.

The commander of 116th Panzer, von Waldenburg, later regarded the reverse suffered in and around Hotton as the turning point for his division during the battle. The General stated bluntly, "Our own casualties

for the battle of Hotton were heavy; several of our tanks were lost through enemy artillery, others were damaged. Gradually the troops came to realize that what was to have been the deciding blow must have failed or that victory could not be won; with that, morale and then efficiency began to suffer."

1.2 Land Forms—Viewing the three mapsheets as one whole, the highest ground is found on the QUATRE BRAS CROSSROADS map, at Level +50. The terrain generally slopes downward, to the Ourthe river valley in the village of Hotton, and the all-important crossing depicted by the bridges in hexes E16-E17 on the HOTTON map.

1.3 Terrain Forms—Most of the three maps consist of Open Ground (e.g., HOTTON K2; MELINES F11; and QUATRE BRAS CROSSROADS G7). Note that much of the open terrain also happens to be on Hills, at various levels. These Hill hexes are treated as Open Ground with the exception of any LOS and movement costs for entering higher (or Precipitous Terrain hexes) terrain.

After taking Open Ground and Hills into account, the most common terrain found on all three maps is Woods. Some of these wooded areas are quite dense, rendering some portions of the maps almost impassable. The dense woods on the QUATRE BRAS CROSSROADS map are cut into by numerous Paths (e.g., hex E15), allowing Personnel to move through this terrain as if it were Open Ground (noting any changes in level).

All three maps feature Water in the form of a River on the HOTTON mapsheet (e.g., hex T15), and Creeks on both the QUATRE BRAS CROSSROADS (e.g., hex O19) and MELINES (e.g., hex J6) maps. Note that ALL water hexes on the HOTTON map are treated as River hexes.

The QUATRE BRAS CROSSROADS map also contains some Brush (e.g., hex O9) and Orchard (e.g., hex L7) terrain-types.

In addition to Woods, the MELINES map contains Orchard (e.g., hex H8) terrain as well as Sunken Roads (e.g., Q8). This map also has a Path in hex A11 and Hedges (e.g., hexside I11/I12).

Cliffs are found on some hexsides on the Hotton map (e.g., hexside M23/M24). Some Precipitous Terrain (i.e., more than a Level +10 change when entering one hex) is also found in Hotton (e.g., entering hexes L23 or M23 from hex L22).

1.3.1 Buildings—There are two villages represented on the three DD maps. The hamlet of Melines is found on the map by the same name. It consists of a handful of HOUSE type buildings, all Level +10 high. The village of Hotton is much larger, and consists of buildings north and south of the Ourthe River. Most of these are also Level +10 high (e.g., A19) HOUSE type structures. Also found in Hotton are TOWER type buildings (e.g., F14), evidenced by the large YELLOW center-dot in their hexes. The Notre Dame de Consolation church (hex B17) contains a STEEPLE. A handful of INTERIOR WALL hexsides (e.g., building E20-F19-G20 has two such hexsides) are found in some multi-hex buildings (e.g., C21; B18; F19; and B23). While most of the structures in Hotton are gray, MASONRY types, some BROWN buildings are also found in Hotton (e.g., building H6). Some of the roads in the village are Hexside Roads, with Buildings with Roads represented to depict the narrow village terrain and restricted LOS and travel ramifications.

1.3.2 Other Man Made Terrain—Wall hexsides are found on the Hotton map (e.g., hexside C23/D22). The Hotton map also has High Wall hexsides (e.g., F12/G13). The Melines and Quatre-Bras Crossroads maps contain Unpaved roads only. The Hotton map has both Unpaved (e.g., D1) and Paved (e.g., F13) roads.

Hedges (e.g., hexside E22/F21 on the Hotton map) carve up the terrain into smaller 'fields' on the Melines and Hotton maps. Paths are also evident, mainly on the Quatre-Bras Crossroads map (e.g., K20). Orchards are sparse, but are found on all three maps (e.g., hex H14 on the Hotton map), and running along roads (e.g., hex I8 on the Melines map) and along the edge of the Ile de Loneux in Hotton. Treat hexes with less than the usual complement of orchard symbols normally for all purposes.



One of the most important terrain features, the Ourthe bridge at Hotton, also happens to be man-made. Treat any LOS that enters hexes E16, E17 AND E18 as if crossing a Wall hexside IF it touches the Wall art along the road in those hexes.

Example: A unit firing from hex F16 to E18 would treat the unit in E18 as if behind a Wall hexside.

Embankments can be found on the Quatre-Bras Crossroads (e.g., C3) and Hotton maps (e.g., L10). The Railroads running along the top of them have not further effect on LOS or combat (nor does the Railroad affect other hexes it runs through). A unit moving from a same-level higher hex like R10 can enter Q11 as if moving ALONG the Embankment since they are at the same height (i.e., Level +10 higher than the ground level of hex Q11). The same applies when entering B7 from B6 (and vice versa) in the Quatre-Bras Crossroads map (and C2 to C3).

1.4 Terrain Rules—The following rules are provided in addition to the terrain rules presented in the main rulebook and apply ONLY to the DARKEST DECEMBER mapsheets.

1.4.1 Dirt and Paved Road—Some roads depict Paved roads (gray art; e.g., Hotton F13) and Dirt roads (tan; e.g., Hotton G21 and ALL roads on the Melines and Quatre-Bras Crossroads maps). The ONLY difference between the two is that Hedgehogs, Foxholes, and AT Ditch emplacements may NOT be set up in a Paved road hex.

1.4.2 River and Terrain—River hexes may NOT be entered unless crossing the Ourthe River bridge. Creeks are treated normally.

1.4.3 Map Labels—Many hexes bear labels. Each map is labeled, using the largest typeface found on the maps, as “Hotton”, “Melines”, or “Quatre-Bras Crossroads”. Use these as the main identifying name of each mapsheet. Other labels consist mainly of road and place names, added for historicity. These labels include arrows pointing off-map to identify nearby important locales and orient the game maps within a larger, regional context.

1.4.4 Contour Hedges and Walls—Any time a Hedge or Wall is found EXACTLY along a hexside/contour combination (e.g., hexside B23/C24 on the Hotton mapsheet) a Blind Hex is ALWAYS created by the Hill contour to LOWER LEVEL units unless the firing unit is ADJACENT.

Example: A unit in Hotton hex G27 cannot see one in the GROUND LEVEL of hex B23. It can see one in the ‘second story’ (i.e., on a Level +10 marker) in B23.

1.4.5 Cliff Blind Hexes—Cliff hexsides ALWAYS create at least one Blind Hex to non adjacent units.

1.4.6 Orchard LOS—Any LOS that enters a hex containing one or more Orchard symbols is affected as if it touches Orchard art in the hex, whether it touches it or not. Touching more than one Orchard symbol in one hex has no additional effect on LOS or combat.

1.5. LOS and Movement Examples—The following examples clarify Lines-of-Sight on the DARKEST DECEMBER mapsheets.

On the Hotton mapsheet:

a) A squad in hex Q12 cannot see one in T10. One in R11 also cannot see T10. both can see a unit in V9.

b) A unit in B23, on the ground level, cannot see into B21. The building in B22, along the LOS, blocks it. If the unit was instead on the ‘second story’ (i.e., on top of a Level +10 marker) in B23, it would still be unable to see into B21 due to the building in B22 (which creates a Blind Hex in B21).

c) A unit on a Level +10 marker in hex B23 can see units in hexes A24; B24; A25; B25; A26; C24; D24; and so on. If the unit was in the ground level of hex B23, it could only see into the adjacent A24; B24; and C24.

d) Due to the intervening Interior Wall hexside, a unit in the ground level of hex G20 cannot see into the ground level of F19. It may NEVER see into the Level +10 location of F19, even if the Interior Wall hexside was absent. A unit in the ground level of G20 DOES have an LOS to the Level +10 location of G20 (i.e., its hex, accessible for movement from the ground level).

e) A unit in hex I14 can see one in J12, and applies the effects of the Hedge hexside I13/J13 along its LOS.

f) A unit in the Level +10 location of hex F14 can see Level +10 hexes like O6 and O7. It can also see units ALSO in Level +10 locations of buildings like C15 and B14. It can ALSO see into Level +10 hexes like D24.

g) A unit in hex J20 firing at one in J15 pays for the Orchards in hexes J16 AND J18.

h) In the case of an AFV in hex D1 firing at one in D8, BOTH receive the benefits of Hull Defilade.

i) A unit in E15, firing on one in E18, treats the E18 as Open Ground, i.e., there is no effect from the Wall portions of the bridge.

j) A unit in G20 (ground OR Level +10 location) may fire at F18 with NO effect from the Interior Wall hexside F19/G20.

k) A unit in hex Q24 may fire at and see one in S24. There is no effect from the Woods in R23 or R24 (i.e., the LOS from Q24-S24 is clear).

On the Melines mapsheet:

a) A unit in hex H8 can see one in E7 due to the Contour effect along the hexside G8/H8. If it was in I9, instead, it has no LOS to E7.

b) A unit in hex A11 can see into A8 with no effect along the LOS of the Woods in hexes A9 or A10.

c) A unit in hex F9 can see a unit in F14 (and all other same-level hexes at Level +20 unless

otherwise blocked.

d) A unit in hex F9 cannot see one down in the Sunken Road in G14 or H13. A unit in hex H14 CAN see down into the adjacent Sunken Road hexes G14 and H13.

e) A unit in hex L7 can see down into and along the Creek, into and through hexes K7-J6-I6 and L8-L9. The Bridge in L9 creates a Blind Hex into the Creek location at Level -10 in hex L10. If the target unit was in an UP position in L10, the bridge would be treated as if a Wall hexside was along the LOS from L7 to L10.

f) A unit in hex C12 pays for BOTH the Woods AND the Hill when entering hex C13.

On the Quatre-Bras Crossroads mapsheet:

a) A Personnel unit may move along the Path from D20-D19-D18-E18 paying ONE Movement Point per hex. Thusly, it could start in hex D20, and reach as far as hex E14 if using Running movement and staying on the Paths in hexes D20-D19-D18-E18-E17-E16-E15-E14.

b) A Personnel or vehicle unit could move as follows: B7-B6-B5-B4-C4-C3-C2 at the cost of ONE Movement Point per hex entered. It is considered to be moving along the top of the railroad Embankment.

c) A unit in hex C5 cannot see one in hex A6 due to the Blind Hex created by the Embankment in B5.

d) A unit moving from hex M19 to M18 represents moving into Precipitous Terrain.

e) A unit in hex A13 cannot see on in hex A15 due to the Woods in A14 along the LOS.

1.6 Bulge Gamers Guide—A new Battle of the Bulge Gamers Guide is being prepared for late 2004. It will be chock full of historical and gaming articles for the Bulge enthusiast.

1.7 Bulge Expansions—New ATS Battle of the Bulge battlefields are coming soon! Owners of DARKEST DECEMBER will have the opportunity to expand their Bulge gaming with additional historical maps and scenarios set on them. Check our website soon and often (www.Criticalhit.com) for release details for these and all upcoming ATS items.

