

# SHAN'S PANZER IV PRIMER

Mid-War Edition

**T**he Panzer IV is my favorite tank of WWII. There isn't a really a logical reason for this, I just like it. I like it a lot! So naturally I set about running it in *Flames of War*, first thing, as the armoured support for my Panzergrenadiers.

But the sticker shock! The Panzer IV G is a full 170 points, nearly twice the cost of most other medium tanks, including the ever-handy Panzer III. To make matters worse, they are pretty fragile. Front armour six is quite nice, but a few good rolls from even moderate anti tank weapons and you are out your expensive investment. And side armour of three is positively unwholesome for your crew's health. The less expensive Panzer IV F<sup>2</sup> still weighs in at 150 points, and at front armour five is even more vulnerable to anti-tank weaponry. The up-side of the Panzer IVG, besides looking amazingly cool, is the impressive penetration of the KwK/40 gun. 11 AT in *Flames of War* terms, which is the highest of any medium tank mid war. It is positively lethal. Additionally, it is crewed by Germany's finest Veterans, who are what really make the tank the killer that it is.

Needless to say, my first couple of outings with the Panzer IV were less than stellar. The Panzer IV is expensive so you don't get many of them, and they are fragile so you lose them quickly. This combination is a recipe for disaster. As I learned to work with its limitations, and to maximize its strengths, I have been surprised at the success that I have had with this expensive piece of tin foil. In fact this is the tank that taught me "best practices" of *Flames of War* armoured warfare. But first—some pertinent facts.

Mid-war, the price tag of the Panzer IV G (or F<sup>2</sup> for that matter) dictates its use in a *Flames of War* game. At 2000 points, you can base your army around the Panzer IV, but at the more commonly played 1500 points, it is a real struggle to squeeze even a single platoon into a list at a hefty 510 points. Whether you are taking Panzers or Panzergrenadiers, this many points virtually forces you to use the Panzer IV as your main Anti-tank asset. Unless you have an unusual list design, this is the role your Panzer IV will play, at least for the early stage of the battle.

Now to be sure, the StuG F/8 is superior at these armoured duels thanks to its superior armour. In fact the only advantages that the Panzer IV has over the StuG are an extra machine gun, and a turret, which can also be a disadvantage! Additionally, if you were determined to run a platoon of four Panzer IV G's, you would might wish to consider 3 Panthers, which are 50 points more in cost as 4 Panzer IV G's—680 points versus 730 points, but are almost immune to mid-war era anti-tank guns (frontally at least).

For points reasons, one platoon of Panzer IV's is usually all that you get, and the platoon size is almost always best at the minimum of three. This allows enough points for the other units, particularly for a back-up AT unit such as PaK 38's, and anti-infantry specialists.

Now that you have your army list with 3 Panzer IV G's, it's time to

talk tactics. Again, the nature of this tank dictates the smart way to play. First of all, unlike the sturdy StuG's, or the overpowering Panther, the Panzer IV's can be quite easily penetrated by common allied guns. There is no need to flank the Panzer IV, it can be destroyed frontally. At the same time, the Panzer IV's 75mm KwK40 gun will easily tear through allied medium armour, and is capable of challenging even the heavy armour of the Churchill or KV series. But not if you are destroyed first. It is vital to keep the

Here are some photos that better illustrate what you are trying to do. First the wrong way. Panzer IV's engaging in the open, at close range, versus some Shermans.



This would be the better way to open the engagement--long range and hull down.



Panzer IV's alive. Additionally, you will likely need several turns of stationary fire to defeat allied tank units, which tend to be more numerous than your paltry three gun tanks. This means that you can't engage them under even circumstances, you must stack the odds.

In the first phase of the game your goal is to clear out enemy tanks and tank destroyers. The keys at this point of the game are maneuver and firing position. Although WWII tanks fight best stationary, the Panzer IV must use its maneuvering advantage to get into a favorable firing position first—getting the first volley is critically important. The tanks that open fire first almost always win the tank duel. Your ideal is to fire first at full rate of fire on the enemy, destroying multiple tanks at range before they roll a single to hit die. This greatly cuts down on the odds against you and increases the chance that your tanks survive to see the next phase! The Panzer IV's can also hold a good position a turn longer than would be safe for allied tanks thanks to the Stormtrooper move. Effectively you can see the results of your shooting before you decide if you need to move out. If you roll badly and he moves up a second platoon of tanks, attempt to Stormtrooper out. If you destroy his entire tank platoon, and he feeds another into the firing range, then you stay put. Maneuvering to the firing position a turn before your opponent can get set up is actually where you win the game. The rest is just rolling dice.

The firing position itself is vital. Because you cannot rely on your armour to stop shells, you need to rely instead on your most powerful asset—crew skill. Out in the open, you will be hit on a 4+. This is not good considering how much more the PIV costs than the allied tanks that are hitting it half of the time. At long range, and in a hull down position, you are only hit on a 6+. Every pip on the die save one is an "out" for you. That is very good odds, and that is how you must fight—cautiously. Never get caught in the open. Always try to shoot the enemy in the open while you are in cover and at range—this is the goal. The powerful KwK/40 gun has an amazing AT of 11, which is the greatest penetration of any medium tank in the mid war period, and will take an inevitable toll on the enemy just so long as you can hit them, and keep from being hit yourself. Keep in mind that difference between being hit on a 5+ versus being hit on a 6+ is not 16% more hits as you may think. It means double the number of hits! If you have range and cover, you take three hits, if only one or the other, you take six!

The perfect situation will see you arrive at a fighting position first and go hull down, perhaps even gone to ground. Ambush is also excellent. The enemy will be engaged at long range—32 inches away is perfect. The goal is to force them to shoot at you needing a "6" to hit, while you only need a "3" or a "4" to hit back. As a perk, you will make more armour saves at long range, but the "to hit" number is your real saving grace. From this position engage the enemy until he is destroyed or retires. If he tries to move away and return in another sector, shadow him and take up a new firing position. Never offer him a fair fight. The only other reasons to move are if he ranges in with artillery, or manages to outflank you with a second unit. If this happens, withdraw to a second position and engage again. If the enemy has two units of armour and flushes you out of cover in this way, you are in trouble. You need to take a toll at range.

Although you are playing with dice here, the odds are in your favor that you can take out several of his tanks, perhaps several of his platoons before you take any losses at all. If you manage to eliminate his tanks and mobile anti-tank assets, then you can shift into phase two—which I lovingly call Rampage.

Allied tanks being what they are, you are more likely than not to see multiple platoons of them.



This is what he wants to see happen while you are shooting at his other platoon.



With his main threats to your Panzers removed, you can now cease the game of cat and mouse, leave cover, and move aggressively to attack his softer targets, including Machine guns, Infantry, transport, artillery, mortars, and everything else that has likely been giving the rest of your force fits. This is a wholesale reversal from the previous phase, with your Panzer IV's leaving the refuge of cover and trying to maximize the destruction that they can wreak. It is also what sets them aside from Marders, for the most part. If you are playing with Panzergrenadiers it is quite likely that they will have several urgent fires to put out, and will need immediate support. Whether they do or not, though, your goal is now to savage the enemy, destroy platoons, and gut the enemy's



ability to harm you. I do not advocate pushing forward in an assault on an objective. Let the lesser tanks or infantry do that work while the Panzer IV's support them and eliminate platoons. The Panzer IV's are never truly expendable. Avoid static anti-tank guns unless you can out-manuever them and eliminate them without them being able to shoot—and be aware that some have turn-tables! In general anti-tank guns are something to flow around and should be left to other units to deal with.

If you have reached this stage of the game with your Panzers intact, you are likely the victor!

Look closely at this one. There is a 2" zone of control that the infantry exert. The enemy light tanks are actually at the farthest point they can be pushed to without making an assault. If they assault the infantry, they cannot be shooting at the tanks (by rule). Also, any Panzer IV's within 4" will get defensive fire to support the infantry in such an assault—which will be against the light tank's side armour. Ouch! This forces the light tanks to just bang away at your front armour, or else get exploded from giving you a free turn of shooting.



Here is another view of infantry in position to protect some Panzer IV's from a flank attack.



Coordination with other units is vital. Panzer IV's are not heavy tanks, and cannot operate well on their own—never in phase 1, and only sometimes in phase 2. Obviously artillery support is wonderful when trying to eliminate enemy tanks in a duel, as is a screen of friendly AT guns. But infantry is probably the most valuable of all, as infantry can, just by being there, prevent outflanking of the Panzer IV's. Putting a unit of infantry on the anticipated firing position can give big dividends as they will mutually support each other. The Panzer IV's will add their machine guns to defensive fire against infantry, their main guns in an assault from light tanks, and the infantry can occupy the position to absolutely prevent flank shots on the Panzer IV's, unless the enemy is willing to risk the assault.

Two simple tubes of mortars for smoke are your Panzer's best friend. These are used to even further reduce incoming enemy tank fire by forcing them to move. They are terrain on demand! I can't overstate how much of a force multiplier these can be, as they are a very inexpensive unit that can buy time and survivability for the Panzer IV's while the KwK/40 does it work. Two tubes is better than four, in this case, as the extra smoke template that four tubes creates is often inconvenient. Two tubes lets you make smoke only precisely where you want it.

At the end of the day artillery or infantry will be needed to deal with some very dangerous threats, such as 17 lbs., or super heavy tanks, such as the KV-1E, which are simply too powerful to tackle with just one unit of Panzer IV's. Ganging up multiple platoons on one of his is always a good tactic, and the Germans excel at it.

Panzer IV F<sup>1</sup>. I also love this tank. It is however, a different tank from the one described in this strategy guide. The Panzer IV F<sup>1</sup> is much less expensive than the later models of the Panzer IV, and is primarily an anti-infantry weapon by doctrine, although it has decent anti-tank capabilities, especially when pitted against most 1942 era opponents. Besides being dirt cheap for a German medium tank, the Panzer IV F<sup>1</sup> is the only German tank to be capable of indirect fire. This is a tremendous virtue in two circumstances. The first is when fighting AT guns that rely on their gun shields. You actually can outrange a Lancia and destroy it quite easily with 3 Panzer IV F<sup>1</sup>'s. It is also wonderful at punishing moving platoons, such as those just entering as reinforcements, or those trying to take up a better firing position. In most open, "anything goes" play, such as a tournament, this tank is also frequently edged out by the Panzer III and the later model Panzer IV's. It is however a great tank when grouped in a platoon of three, and can shut down an infantry army on an open flank all by itself.

The Panzer IV G on the attack. The phases are exactly the same on the attack, but there are some new wrinkles. First of all, the Panzer IV's likely represent the main AT in you army, and the most valuable ambush targets. For this reason they should be held back a bit, and screened by recon and other units. They do not lead the way, but cover from behind. They still need to maneuver to a good firing position to support your assault units, and are still primarily tasked with destroying enemy tanks. However with the constant arrival of enemy reserves and ambush units, the phases can shift from the first to the second, then back to the first, and so on. Every time a new armoured threat appears the Panzer IV's should re-start the first phase drill, find cover with a good field



Anything that throws smoke can be your best friend.



You will almost always be outnumbered when facing a tank company. Smoke templates let you change the equation fairly dramatically. If the Panzer IV's are firing first--the Shermans return fire could be cut below half even before they roll a die.



The smoked platoon's rate of fire is half because they have to move. The other Shermans are for your PIV's to deal with. After all, PIV's make their own kind of smoke too. (cont.)



of fire, and set up in overwatch for your other units. After those units are destroyed, it can go back to Rampaging with the assault units, but may be forced back to the cat and mouse phase as more enemy units arrive.

Late War the Panzer IV G is in a entirely different category. It's points have dropped enough that you can run multiple platoons of four or even five Panzer IV G's. It is also no longer the dominating anti-tank weapon that it once was, although it is still quite formidable. Sound tactics still apply, but much of the points-driven advice simply no longer applies. As a true medium tank it can and should be employed in numbers, and can now be freed

This works just as well on very large units, which are overwhelming looking at first.



Try to see how many T-34's can draw line of sight now. Ask yourself--can 3 hull down, first firing PIV's deal with that many cons c r i p t T-34's? Looks way better of a situation than head to head now doesn't it?



The smoked platoon's rate of fire is half because they have to move. The other Shermans are for your PIV's to deal with. After all, PIV's make their own kind of smoke too.

from its AT work to attack infantry and other targets, instead of being forced to exclusively deal with tank threats. More powerful anti-tank units can be purchased for that role, such as the Panther, Jagdpanther, King Tiger, Tiger I, and so on. I think that the Panzer IV G is a better investment in late war, overall, although its frontal armour is now nearly obsolete against the heavier guns of both the Russians and Western allies. So the same tactics still apply, you just need a bigger firing position to work with, and may have more of need to shelter your Panthers there instead.

Although for a long time I considered the Panzer IV G a pointaholic tank, I kept trying, and once I religiously adopted these simple tactics my victory rate went through the roof--much to the surprise of my opponents who were used to regularly thrashing me when I played Panzergrenadiers. Even better, I now use this same doctrine no matter what tank I am using, whenever and wherever possible. Even the Tiger tank fights hull down and at range when I play it.

When I wrote this guide, *Festung Europa* had just come out, so 90% of it is mid-war oriented. Late war I have learned to take large--as in maximum--size Panzer IV platoons if at all possible, and use them in a much more freewheeling, flank seeking manner than the buttoned down manner that I wrote about here. Basically late war I use them just like Veteran Shermans, trying to use volume of dice + maneuver to destroy things, rather than sit hull down and fire back. That tactic still applies, but some opponents are now simply too powerful for this--the IS-2, Churchill Croc, and other new tanks must be engaged from the flank. Other tanks--like the T-34/85, are actually better dealt with at close range, ideally popping off a huge volley of death (hopefully from ambush), in the attempt to wipe them out before their superior armour and gun start to take their toll. Of course I would **always** want to be hull down to engage a superior tank. But the range is now a decision between the immediate impact of the (much larger when I run them) late war Panzer IV's, versus the longer term survivability of a long range gunnery duel. And of course...there is always the "blast them with 10 dice then slink off via Stormtrooper" maneuver to fall back on if you don't like the results of your shooting round.

**And of course, my signature image: PIV's hiding behind a small ridgeline. A terrain feature that NEEDS to be on more FoW boards, simply to represent undulations in the earth.**



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