The Cauldron / Gazala, 1942
A *Flames of War* Mega-Game Scenario

After the British success in Operation Crusader at the end of 1941, Rommel had been pushed all the way back to Cyrenaica and the key fortress of Tobruk was relieved after a long siege. He swiftly regrouped, and returned to the offensive, pushing the British 8th Army back to the Gazala Line shielding Tobruk.

There an uneasy equilibrium returned, with the British forces secure in their Gazala Line, a deep belt of minefields interspersed with fortified "boxes" manned by combined arms forces forces, which stretched from Gazala on the Mediterranean to Bir Hachiem deep in the desert.

Both sides used the pause to build up their forces, and in late May Rommel struck again, pushing his mobile German and Italian forces south, around Bir Hachiem and striking into the rear of the British position. What ensued was almost a month long series of battles, as each side attempted to eliminate the other's mobile forces. Bir Hachiem, held by Free French forces, held out much longer than expected and Rommel was soon short of supply and trapped within the 8th Army position. He fell back to a position that became known as the Cauldron, with the 150th Brigade box and extensive minefields to his rear and British armored forces to his front.

British forces moved deliberately (but slowly) to defeat him, launching a series of ill coordinated attacks on his positions. Seeking to secure supply, he turned most of his forces on the 150th Brigade, which resisted valiantly but eventually succumbed to the whole weight of the Afrika Korps. Finally ready, the 8th Army launched Operation Aberdeen, meant to be a coordinated attack on the Cauldron, on June 5th. In a day of desperate fighting, lack of coordination doomed the assaults and the 8th Army reeled back. This represented their best chance to eliminate the Axis threat in North Africa.

This scenario uses a large tabletop to show a scaled down version of the area of heavy fighting. Although an Allied defeat, the battle saw intense fighting and could easily have gone the other way. It also offers the opportunity to field a wide variety of interesting and unique Mid War desert units.

Special Terrain rules:
- Buildings – the few buildings present in the area were used by both sides for defensive cover. Any stand touching a building should be treated as in concealing terrain and bulletproof cover.
- Escarpment – the escarpment areas dominated the areas near the coast. Escarpment vertical areas are difficult going, except at gaps (passes and wadis). The area above the escarpment (within 4") provides concealment to any team on them, and no team may see or be seen from the other side of the escarpment unless it is touching the edge. Stands touching the edge may see and be seen from the lower level.
- Ridges – most of this area was flat, open desert interspersed with areas of soft sand. The few areas of high ground were of great tactical significance and tended to see heavy fighting. Line of sight may be traced to or from a ridge area, but not through it. Ridge areas are difficult going, and provide concealment to infantry and man packed gun teams within them.
- Soft Sand – the area close to the coast was covered with areas of soft sand and coastal dunes. This is impassable to wheeled vehicles and jeeps, and counts as difficult going for tracked and half-tracked vehicles. The rest of the tables not occupied by other terrain is hard smooth desert, which is treated as road.
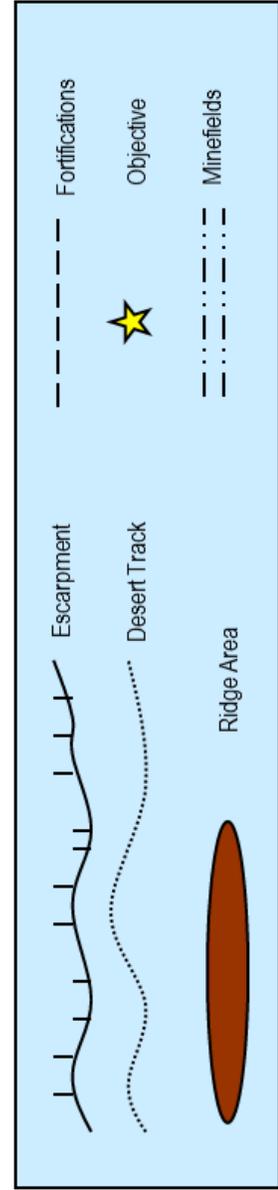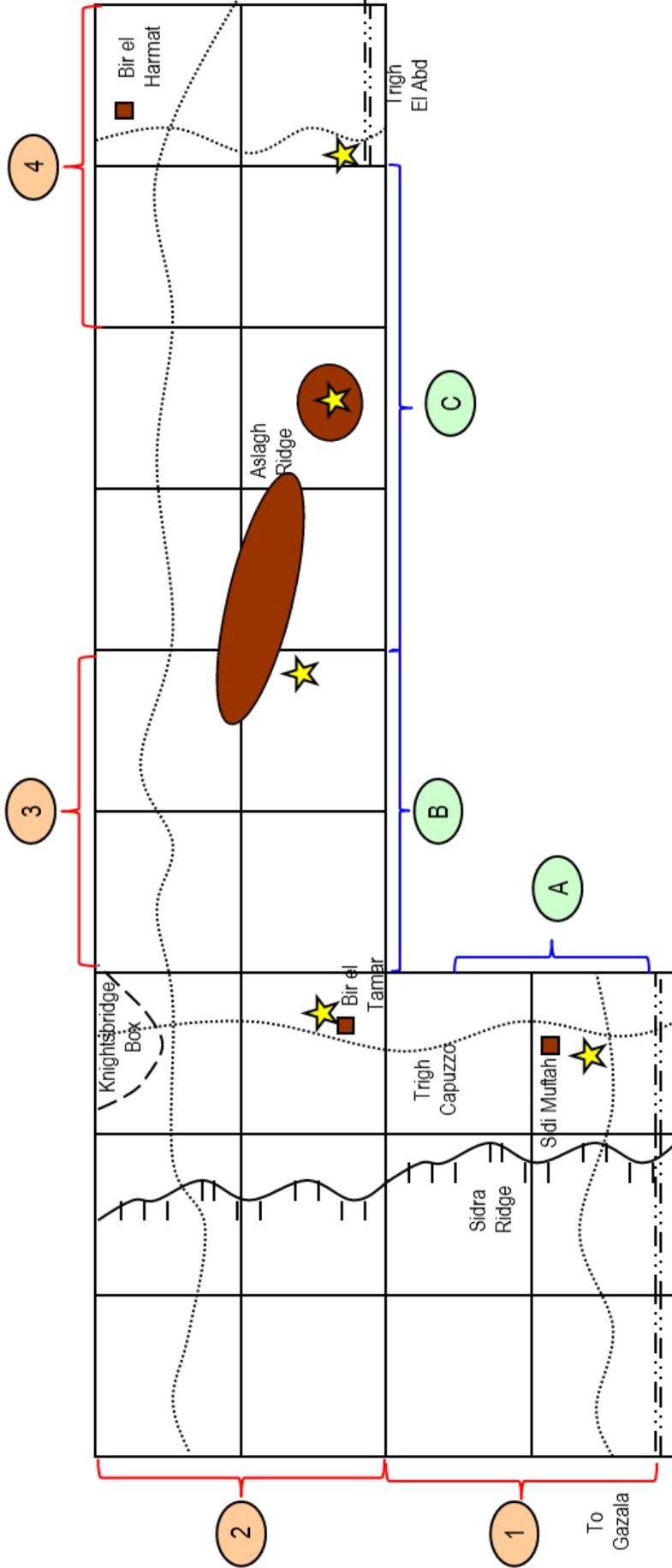
Deployment:
As the game starts with no forces other than the Knightsbridge box garrison on the table. Both forces will arrive on the table edges as noted – in the deployment area noted in each force's deployment instructions.

The Allied forces will take the first turn.

Map:

FOW Mega-Game
The Cauldron (Gazala) – June, 1942

Bir el Harmat

Trigh El Abd

Aslagh Ridge

Knightsbridge Box

Bir el Tamar

Trigh Capuzzo

Sidra Ridge

Sdi Muftah

To Gazala

Legend:

Escarpment

Desert Track

Ridge Area

Fortifications

Objective

Minefields

Forces:

Axis Forces –

21st Panzer Division –

	Rating: units are rated as specified in the list **Core List:** Panzer Company list from North Africa – must follow 21st Panzer restrictions **Points:** 1500 **Added units:** Rettemeier warrior at no cost as company commander **Prohibited units:** Panzer III L, M or N, or Panzer IV F2 or G, or Tiger I tanks; Rocket Launcher Battery; Fallschirmjager units; PaK40 ATGs; Lorraine Schleppers **Deployment:** enter on turn one from deployment zone A

[21st Panzer Division] _____

15th Panzer Division –

	Rating: units are rated as specified in the list **Core List:** Panzer Company list from North Africa – must follow 15th Panzer restrictions **Points:** 1500 **Added units:** none **Prohibited units:** Panzer III L, M or N, or Panzer IV F2 or G, or Tiger I tanks; Rocket Launcher Battery; Fallschirmjager units; PaK40 ATGs; Lorraine Schleppers **Deployment:** enter on turn one from deployment zone C

[15th Panzer Division] _____

Ariete Armored Division –

	Rating: units are rated as specified in the list **Core List:** Carri Company list from North Africa **Points:** 1500 **Added units:** none **Prohibited units:** German allied platoons **Deployment:** enter on turn one from deployment zone B

[Ariete Armored Division] _____

British and Commonwealth Forces –

32nd Army Tank Brigade –

Rating: units are rated as specified in the list
Core List: British Infantry Tank Company list from North Africa
Points: 1500
Added units: none
Prohibited units: Sherman or Crusader III tanks, Daimler or AEC Armored Cars, Deacon SPAT, Heavy Anti-Aircraft platoons
Deployment: enter on turn one from deployment area 1

[32nd ATB] _____

22nd Armored Brigade –

Rating: units are rated as specified in the list
Core List: British Light or Heavy Armored Squadron list from North Africa
Points: 1500
Added units: none
Prohibited units: Sherman or Crusader III tanks, Daimler or AEC Armored Cars, Deacon SPAT, Heavy Anti-Aircraft platoons
Deployment: enter on turn one from deployment area 3

[22nd AB] _____

2nd Armored Brigade –

Rating: units are rated as specified in the list
Core List: British Light or Heavy Armored Squadron list from North Africa
Points: 1500
Added units: none
Prohibited units: Sherman or Crusader III tanks, Daimler or AEC Armored Cars, Deacon SPAT, Heavy Anti-Aircraft platoons
Deployment: enter on turn two from deployment area 2

[2nd AB] _____

10th Indian Brigade –

Rating: units are rated as specified in the list
Core List: Indian Rifle Company list from North Africa
Points: 1500
Added units: none
Prohibited units: Sherman or Crusader III tanks, Daimler or AEC Armored Cars, Deacon SPAT, Heavy Anti-Aircraft platoons
Deployment: enter on turn one from deployment area 4

[10th Indian] _____

Cauldron Defences:
The Afrika Corps had been trapped in the Cauldron position for some time, and had used the nearby minefields and defenses to hastily fortify their positions. Each Axis force may deploy two sections of minefield within 24" of their deployment area.

Gazala Line:
A portion of the action was fought next to the original British Gazala line. This area was a so-called mine marsh – treat that area of the battlefield as being covered with minefields (except where crossed by desert tracks).

Knightsbridge Fortifications:
The western edge of the British Knightsbridge box appears on the eastern table edge. It is treated as barbed wire, followed by minefields.

This portion of the box is defended by an entrenched Guards Rifle platoon (which may not leave the box area). A battery of 4 25-pounders supports the position from off-table, they may be called in by the platoon command team and measure their range from the edge of the table within the box.

Weather / Airpower:
The weather did not play a role of any significance in the action.

At this stage of the war, the Axis had concentrated significant airpower in the theatre (redeployed from the eastern front) and held a clear aerial superiority. At the time of the Cauldron action, though, much of the Axis air forces were engaged in suppressing the area of Bir Hacheim to the south. To reflect this, each turn commencing on turn 2 the Axis CiC rolls 1d6 and on a 5+ receives one flight of Stukas. Roll for the number of planes normally.

Rommel:
The Axis may field Rommel at no cost – the German CiC controls him directly.

Winning the Game:
The Allied objective was the destruction of the trapped Axis mobile forces, by penetrating the Cauldron position. Axis forces were on the defensive, until they had regrouped and resupplied now that the enemy forces to their rear had finally been eliminated.

To reflect this, the Allied forces must control one of the five objectives on the battlefield at the start of their turn, after turn three.

If the Allied forces fail to control an objective by turn six the game ends in an Axis victory.