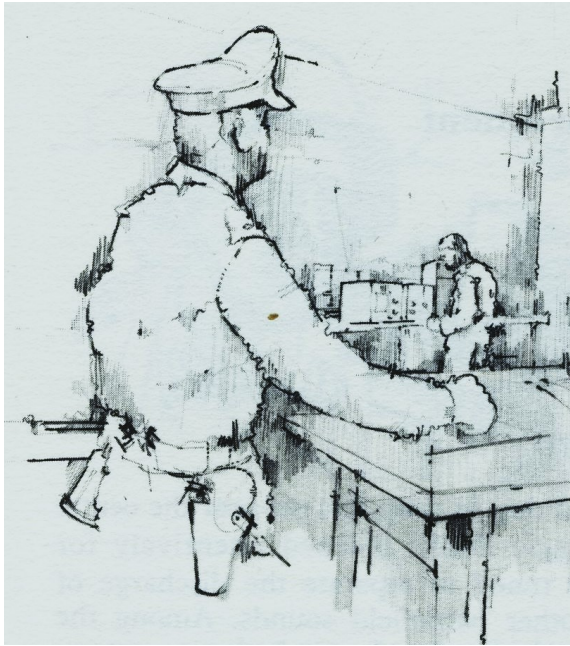


BATTLE FOR VERTEFEUVILLE RIDGE OPERATION BLUECOAT



O GROUP 1ST EAST HAMPSHIRE

"I feel very strongly that a three-division attack now on Second Army's will be worth more than a six-division attack in five days' time" cabled Eisenhower to Montgomery. On 28 June Montgomery gave orders for 'Operation Bluecoat' to commence on 30 June 1944.



The action at Vertefeuville Farm is the fictitious encounter of elements from 11th Armoured Division in Operation Bluecoat, as described in Kenneth Macksey's novel *Battle* (1974). It concerns an infantry battalion, the 1st East Hampshires, supported by an armoured squadron from the 1st Pentland Yeomanry, P Battery 203rd Field Regiment Royal Artillery and a company of infantry from the US 301st Battalion and how they plan and execute an operation to seize a

farm and the ridge on which it abuts as a small part in a multi-divisional attack.

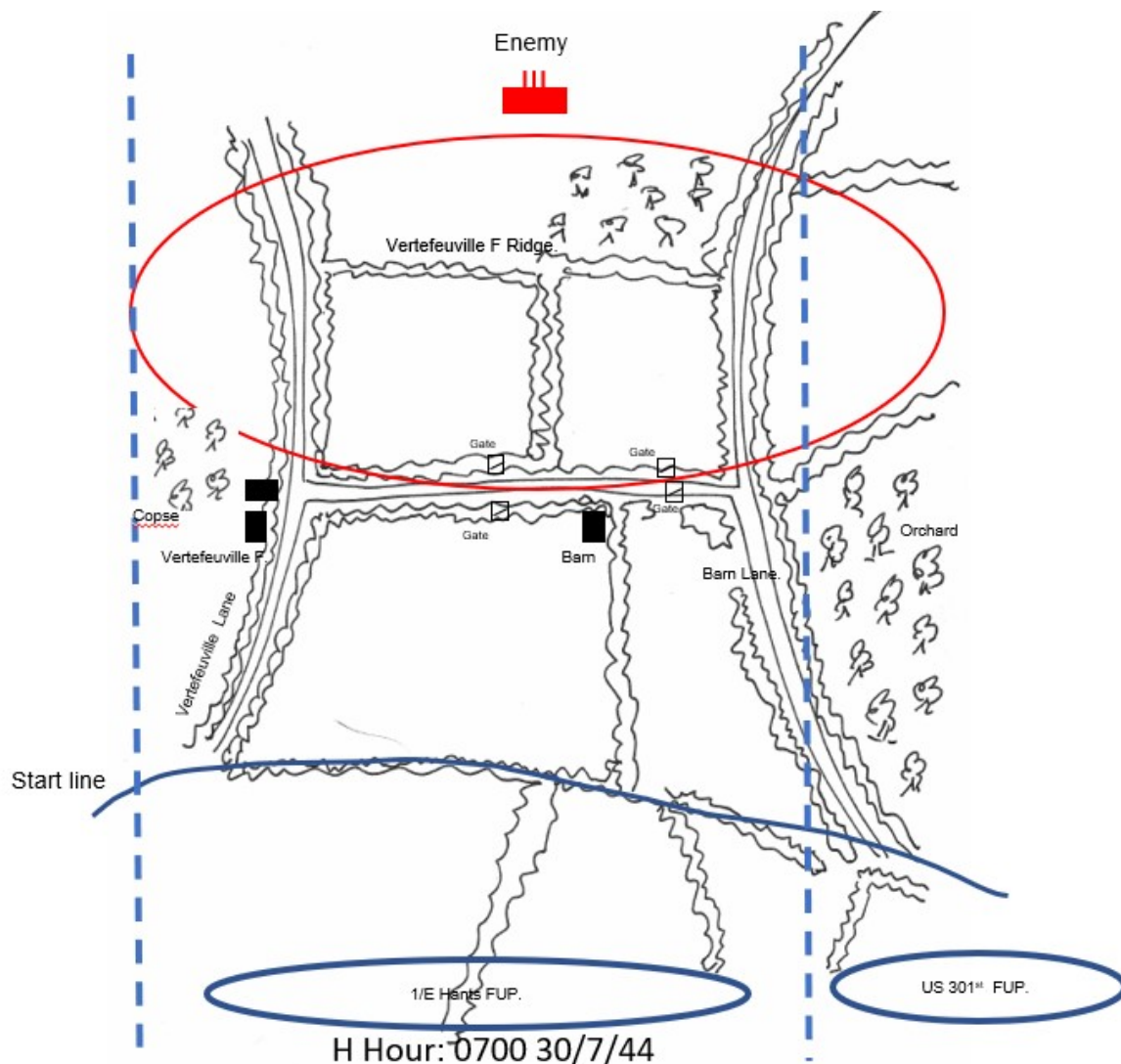
The officer commanding the infantry battalion at the centre of the operation lays out a plan for a three-company, two-up attack, supported by armour, on a German-held ridge in heavily bocaged country. This is reproduced in full in case you wish to use his plan. You are however invited to make your own plan should you wish, but this cannot affect the timing of the assault or alter the role or sector of the Americans.

"Now the ground has been explained to you and you've an idea of what is in store" said Lt Col Edward Simcox, OC 1st Bttn East Hampshires to his O Group. "Information on the enemy, while profuse about his higher organization and optimistic that we are faced by a single, understrength division, is mighty short of what matters. You've got the overprinted maps, but we've nothing positive concerning his armour - only that it's pretty clear no Panzer Division's in range though there's every reason to expect some SPs to turn up. It's also pretty clear to me that we can expect him to base his defence of

the left on Vertefeuille Farm; of the centre on the tall trees that cover the crest and on the right where the lane joins the orchard at the junction with the Americans.'

He paused, adding emphasis to each area by pointing to the large-scale map propped up before them.

'The front's covered by the usual sort of mortar DF. There's a rash of 'em that come down just this side of the lane. I think, too, we can expect the usual reception in the obvious FUPs - so we'll avoid them as much as possible. Finally the whole place is stiff with mines - theirs and ours with no guarantee the Sappers will lift even all of ours before daylight. Any questions so far?'



'I gather there's some sort of worry something might be holed up in the barn?' prompted Garston.

'Yes. As you know, David, Frank Davis will be sniffing around after dark, and you'll all be told the result when he gets back. There could well be something there, if only by night. Any more? Sorry, but we must push on. There's so little time and I doubt even now if all your chaps will have the chance to view the ground before we start tomorrow.'

Simcox flicked a page of his notebook. 'Well, you'll have gathered 11th Armoured Div, as part of VIII Corps, is going to attack to the south of Caumont. Fifteenth Scottish are going in on our left and the American 5th Division is taking part on our right. Some of you have already met Major Bob Krantsky of their 301st Infantry. He's here to ensure liaison and generally make sure we don't get all snarled up. Bob, I gather we'll have your Colonel's plan quite soon but that he intends to attack a little apart from us, taking out the orchard from the west?'

'Sure, sir. That's what he said on the telephone a moment ago. I guess he'll start a little after you, though, in order to let the dust from your bombardment settle. But it'll only be a matter of minutes.

OK,' said Simcox. 'Now, on our own front we've adopted the new system of grouping, mixing the armour in heavier proportion to ourselves, and that's why 'A' Squadron of the Pentlands is with us along with the rest of the regiment's tanks coming on behind. The division has been told to protect the right flank of the British attack while our brigade has the task of securing the division's right - so we may have the more important and perhaps the most lucrative role. We've been given a lot of extra artillery, some Flails and some Crocs too.'

He turned another page, looked round his officers to gauge their mood and ponderously announced the battalion's role.

'1st East Hampshires will seize and hold the Vertefeuille Ridge. Let there be no digressions in the interests of improvised flexibility.'

They laughed and the diligent underlined their notes while others drew heavier chinagraph marks upon the talc covering their maps.

All right - Method,' went on Simcox, using the regulation term. 'We will advance two up, 'A' Company on the right, 'C' left with 'B' in reserve. Objectives, Phase I. Right, line of Barn Lane from junction with the orchard to crest of the ridge. Left, Vertefeuille Farm with exploitation into the copse. Phase II. 'B' Company to pass through 'C' Company on the left to secure the Crest Copse, moving on my order. Start line, line of the hedge which is the existing FDL. 'A' Squadron of the Pentland Yeomanry will be under command and will allocate a troop each in support of 'A' and 'C' Company - the remainder of the squadron will give general support and, of great importance, will position itself to deal with any German armour coming into action across the ridge. OK, Philip?'

'Fine Colonel,' said the tank commander. 'I'll probably keep what's left to me fairly central - the Firefly troop in particular - and be ready to go with 'B' Company when you commit them.'

'I'll come to that later. In the meantime the fire support we may expect is pretty extensive. I'll just mention that fighter bombers have promised to take on the enemy mortar and machine-gun positions as from first light and then over 700 heavy bombers and 850 mediums will be sharing out their wares between our Corps and XXX Corps - of which our division gets the direct help of 300 mediums which will bomb a box some 4,000 yards beyond the start line. They'll not start bombing, however, 'til two hours after H hour. On the other hand, you'll also be pleased to hear that they will use fragmentation bombs to avoid that ghastly cratering we saw near Caen. Brian Culpepper will now say what the gunners can do for us. Brian!'

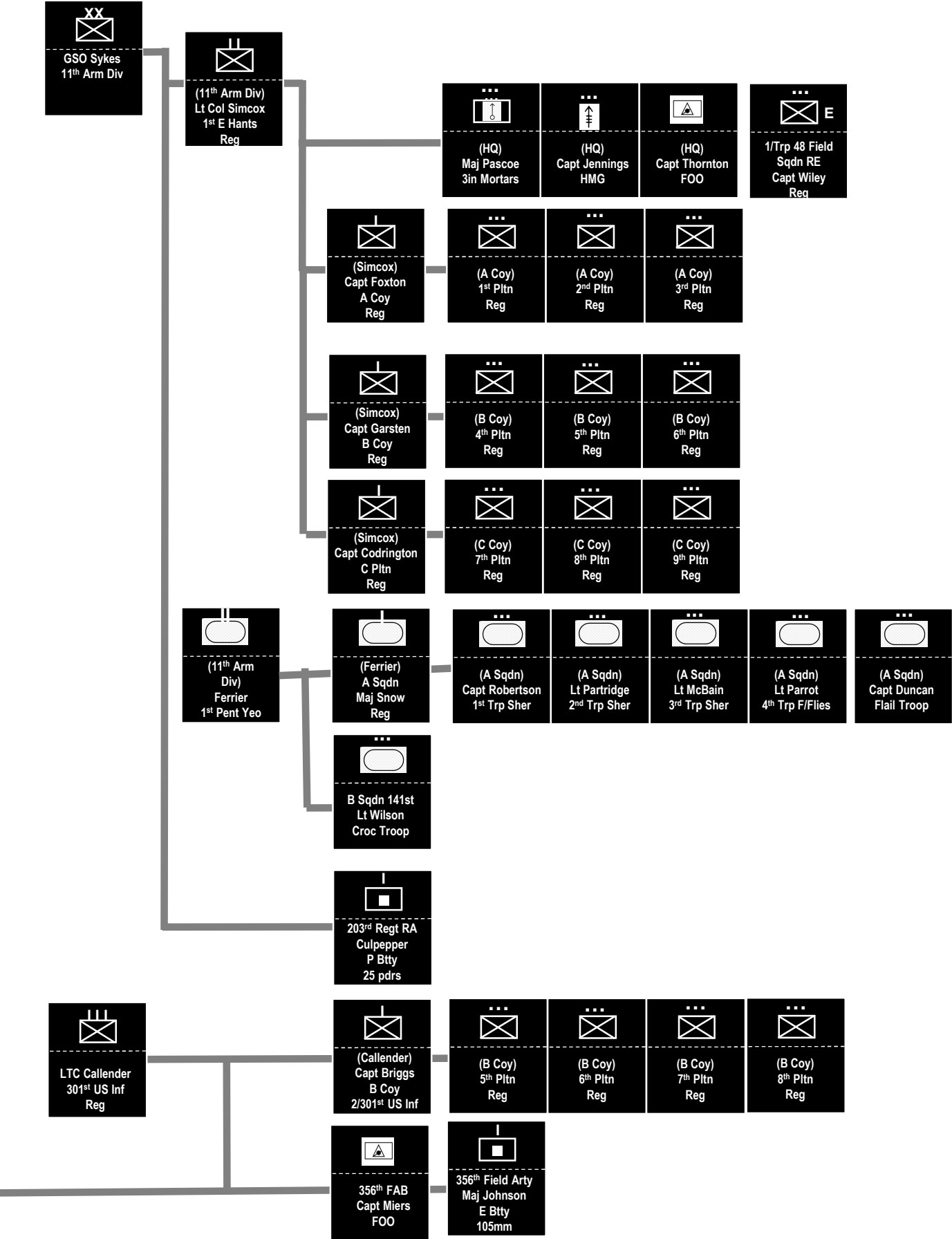
The Colonel sat down, his place at the map taken by the Gunner, who clutched a formidable-looking table of Fire Support Tasks.

'This all looks very complicated, I know,' he began apologetically, 'but in fact the speed of events has led to an arbitrary sort of plan being superimposed by the CCRA - so arbitrary that we've got a smaller share than 29th Brigade on the left. They've - Corps

that is - have gone for simplicity - counter-battery work from now onwards, linear barrages here - and here to be supplied by the Field Regiment and a concentration by a battery of mediums from 8th AGRA on Vertefeuille Farm.' He pointed to each target in turn, marked by lines and crosses on the map. 'Of course, in addition there are the Americans. They are going to put concentrations on the orchard timed to fit in with our movements as well as their own. Now, the timing of these concentrations is precise and cannot be interfered with during the initial assault - which is Phase I in the division's plan. After that, however, we can pick opportunity targets - those which seem most demanding of attention. Your Colonel and I have chosen places that look as if they might give trouble. I believe I'm right in saying, too, that you're keeping back your mortars for special tasks.

'Yes - I'll deal with that now, Brian, if you've finished. OK. Freddy!' Simcox turned to Pascoe, the replacement mortar platoon commander. 'Your chance to make friends. I'll want one of your sections to put smoke on Vertefeuille Copse from H minus 5 to H plus 15 and thereafter maintain normal rates of fire on the same target up to H plus 40 or until success at the farm is reported. The remainder of your platoon is to maintain fire on the crest line where the lane crosses on the right there. Do that from H until H plus 40 and then await my orders. So much for fire support ...'

ALLIED ORDER OF BATTLE THE ATTACK ON VERTEFEUVILLE RIDGE
OPERATION BLUECOAT 30 JULY 1944



Patrol Report 30/7/44

Davis Patrol

(DESIGNATION OF PATROL)

TO: Vertefeuville Farm Barn, near St Charles De Percy

MAPS: Caumont & Mt. Pinçon

A. Size and Composition of Patrol

6-man patrol Lt Davis, Cpl Parker, Pvts Cain, Trefall, Carver, & Bardsley

B. Mission

Determine EN presence along lane and at barn in centre of 1/E Hants sector

C. Time of Departure

0130hrs 30/7/44

D. Time of Return

0243hrs 30/7/44

E. Routes Out and Back

Along bank next to lane and back again, avoiding lane and suspected arty registration points in meadow.

F. Terrain

Gentle incline towards EN position. EN have significant height advantage. Heavy bocage. Impenetrable to armour, v. diff for inf with very few gaps. Not possible to see through it. Ground sodden after recent bad weather

G. Enemy

Previous intel reports suggest we are facing Btn strength supported by SP guns, & Regt arty. Nothing to add or detract from this assessment

H. Any Map Corrections

Nil

I. Miscellaneous Information

Sketch map attached

J. Results of Encounters with Enemy

EN noise alerted us to presence of MG outpost guarding lane. In seeking to go to ground Bardsley triggered a trip wire mine. EN fired 3 flares and the MG - identified as MG34 - opened fire. It fired high. Americans to the west, hearing the

firing then further illuminated the area with flares. EN then bombarded area with 81mm mortars. Orders given for patrol to each fire 5 rounds and then break off and return to lines. This coincided with US Arty switching from flares to HE. HE fire judged to be inaccurate but it did cover our escape. No damage believed to be inflicted on EN.

K. Conditions of Patrol

Bardsley wounded but we were able to drag him to safety.
Everyone else unhurt

L. Conclusions and Recommendations

Vertefeuville Farm Barn defended with mines and MG. EN mortars have several registered fire points in area. Position of EN MG not located. Americans quick to call for arty. Unclear whether strength of EN defence points to a strength or a weakness in that part of the line



Signature

Lieutenant

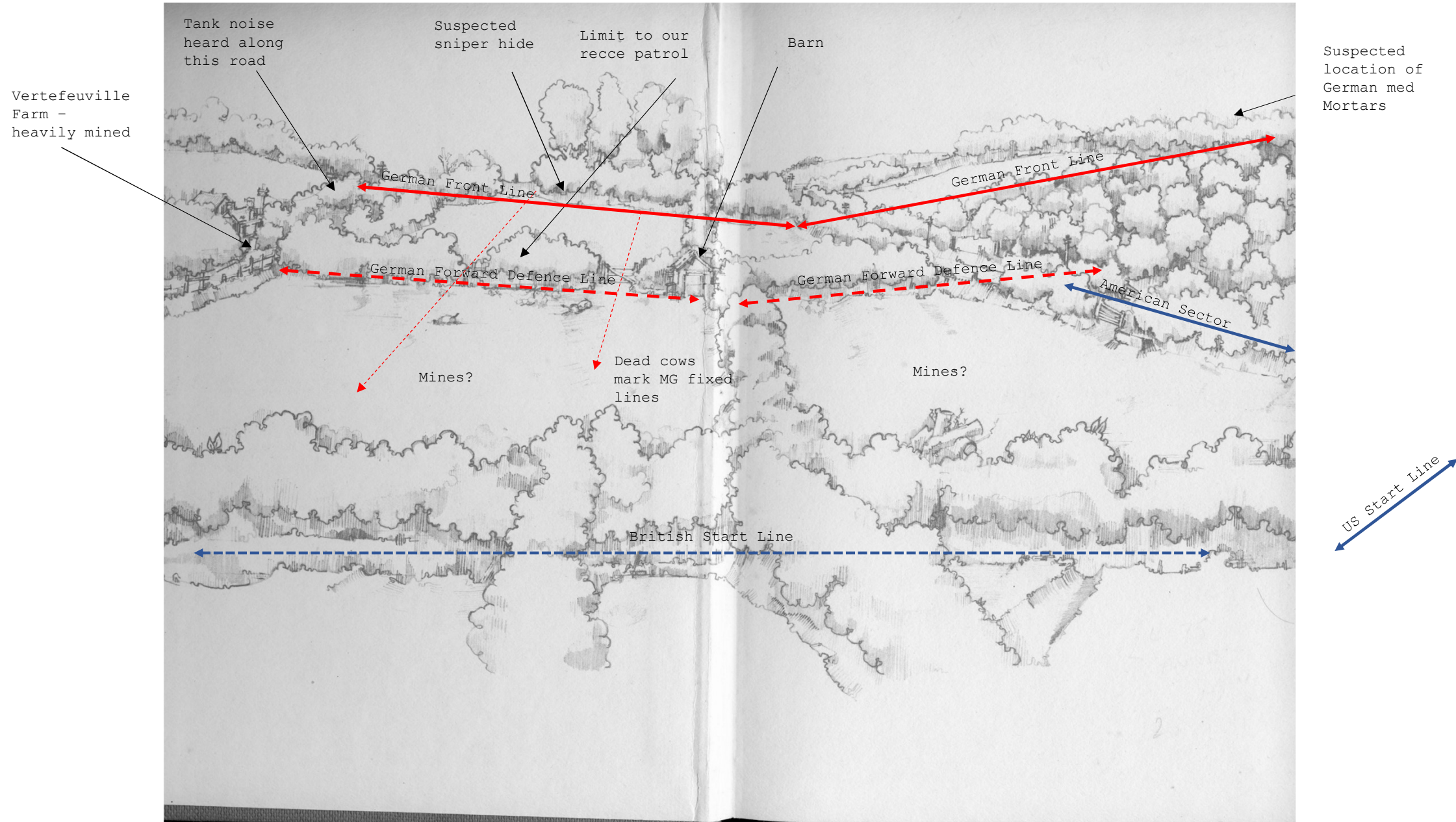
Rank

5th Pltn B Coy 1st E.Hants

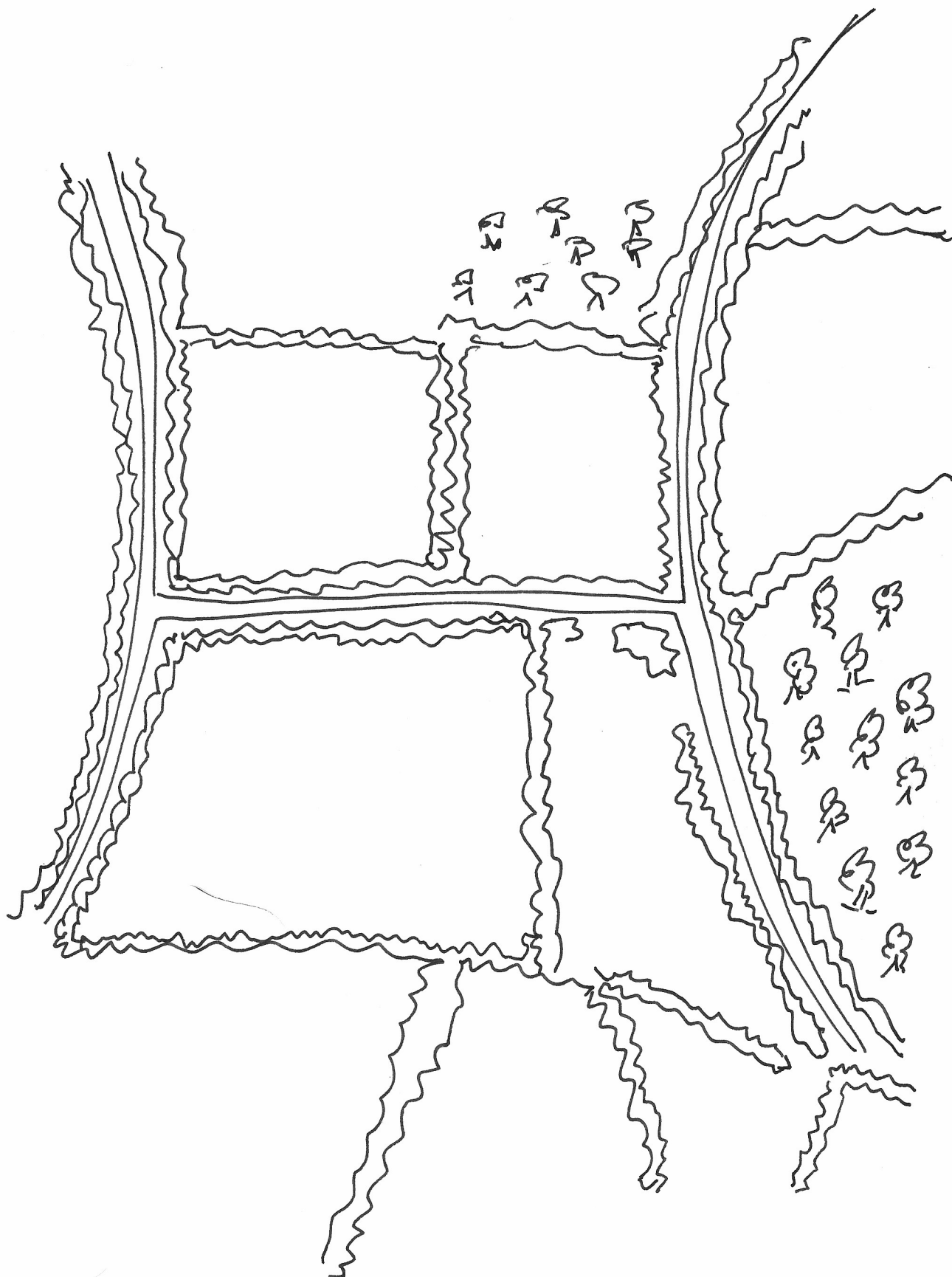
Organ Unit of Patrol
Leader

Distribution

Lt Col Simcox O/C 1st E Hants
Maj Pascoe, Mortar Section, "
Capt Jennings, MG section, "
Capt Thornton, FOO, "
Capt Foxton, A Coy "
Capt Garsten, B Coy, "
Capt Codrington, C Coy, "
Maj Snow, O/C A Sqdn 1st Pentland Yeomanry
Lt Wilson, B Sqdn, 141st Arm Div
Capt Culpepper, P Btty, 203rd Regt RA
Lt Col Callender, O/C 301st US Inf Regt



GERMANS



ALLIES

1st Battalion, East Hampshire Regiment Orders

Ground

Within our operational sector the terrain is open fields bordered by dense bocage type hedges. The ground slopes upwards to the South, giving the Enemy the advantage of visibility across the whole area. On the left, West, is a lane leading to Vertefeuville Farm. The farm has an associated orchard or copse to its immediate South East. In our centre, the ground is divided into two fields, the larger to the East, a smaller one to the West. The road to Vertefeuville farm borders the easterly farm. Barn Lane forms the western boundary of the smaller field. The two fields are separated by bocage hedges. Both are, we suspect mined. A barn is situated in the South Western corner of the larger field, adjacent to the East-West lane. Gates are present which will allow access from the fields adjacent to this lane to both the North and South. However, we anticipate these being mined.

The bocage hedge on the western edge of Barn Lane is the operational boundary which connects our forces to the US 301st Infantry Division. We have full use of Barn Lane, with all US troops operating in the orchards which extend to the right, western, side of that hedge.

Both Vertefeuville Land and Barn Lane extend southwards, crossing the Vertefeuville Ridge to the East and West of two fields which divide them to the South of the East West lane. It is this lane which is our first Phase objective. The ridge further South is our second Phase Objective.

The ground is wet due to recent weather.

Situation

The enemy are defending in this sector with one battalion of infantry with supporting self-propelled guns which can be expected to serve in a dual anti-armour and anti-personnel role. We anticipate that they will have mortar support and some artillery support with fire plans for pre-registered targets on key points such as road junctions. We also anticipate that the area is mined extensively.

In addition to our battalion, we have support from one Company of the US 301st Infantry Division who are operating immediately to our West in the orchard that is adjacent to Barn Lane. We have close support from the Shermans of A Squadron of the Pentland Yeomanry with additional support provided by specialist armour in the form of a troop of Crocodiles and of flail tanks. One platoon of the ubiquitous Royal Engineers will provide assistance.

Mission

The battalion is to capture Vertefeuville Farm and the ridge to the South. The attack will be conducted in two phases. The Phase One will be the capture of Vertefeuville Farm and the East-West lane which extends to the orchard. US forces will simultaneously advance to clear the orchard in their sector as far as the junction of Barn Lane and the East-West lane. The battalion will attack following a preparatory barrage of smoke.

Phase Two will see the release of reserves to attack and capture the ridge and the copse.

C Company

C Company, along with allocated supporting units, will attack on the axis of Vertefeuville Lane to capture the farm. Its operational boundary will be 100 yards to the West of Vertefeuville Lane.

C Company will be supported by 1 Troop of the Pentland Yeomanry and the Crocodile Troop commanded by Lieutenant Wilson. One section of Assault Pioneers will be attached to C Company.

A Company

A Company will attack across the smaller field to the East of Barn Lane with the objective of capturing the barn and the East-West Lane from that barn to the junction of Barn Lane. Their attack will be preceded by flail tank Troop of Captain Duncan whose mission is to clear a passage for them. They have use of Barn Lane with their operational boundary being the hedge to the immediate right, West, of the lane. Their left hand boundary is that shared with C Company. However, they are to restrict their operations to

A Company will be supported by 2 Troop of the Pentland Yeomanry. One section of Assault Pioneers will be attached to A Company.

The flail tank Troop is to withdraw to the Start Line once they have cleared a path as far as the East-West Lane. There they will stand in readiness, awaiting further orders.

A and C Companies will consolidate on their Phase One objectives, ready to provide support to Phase Two as directed.

Pentland Yeomanry

Of the remaining two Troops, No. 4 Troop will remain in reserve on the Start Line to support Phase One by acting in an anti-AFV role as targets present themselves. They will be released upon my command.

B Company

B Company will remain in reserve during Phase One of the operation. Phase Two will see B Company released to attack from Vertefeuville Farm against the ridge. Using the farm and the associated copse, they are to advance South before performing a pivot to the West, forming up on Vertefeuville Lane to then attack the ridge from the East.

B Company will have 3 Troop of the PY attached along with the Vickers MG platoon under Captain Jennings. These units will take part in Phase Two of the operation. One section of Assault Pioneers will be attached to B Company.

The Crocodile tanks committed to Phase One will continue to provide close support during this second phase of the operation. When attacking onto the ridge orange smoke will be used to identify our positions to avoid friendly fire incidents.

Artillery & Mortar Support

Fire plans will be provided to deliver immediate fire against the following targets (please see attached map):

1. Vertefeuville Farm
2. East-West Lane, West of the Barn
3. Hedge junction on the Vertefeuville Lane

Smoke

Immediately prior to H-Hour, smoke will be laid as per the fire plan on the attached map (please see attached):
225 yards: Plot 1, 100 yards North of East-West Lane, from the barn to the junction at the South end of the orchard.

150 yards: Plot 2, 100 yards due North of Vertefeuville Farm

100 yards: Plot 3, 200 yards North of the junction of Barn Lane and East-West Lane.

Associated US Objectives

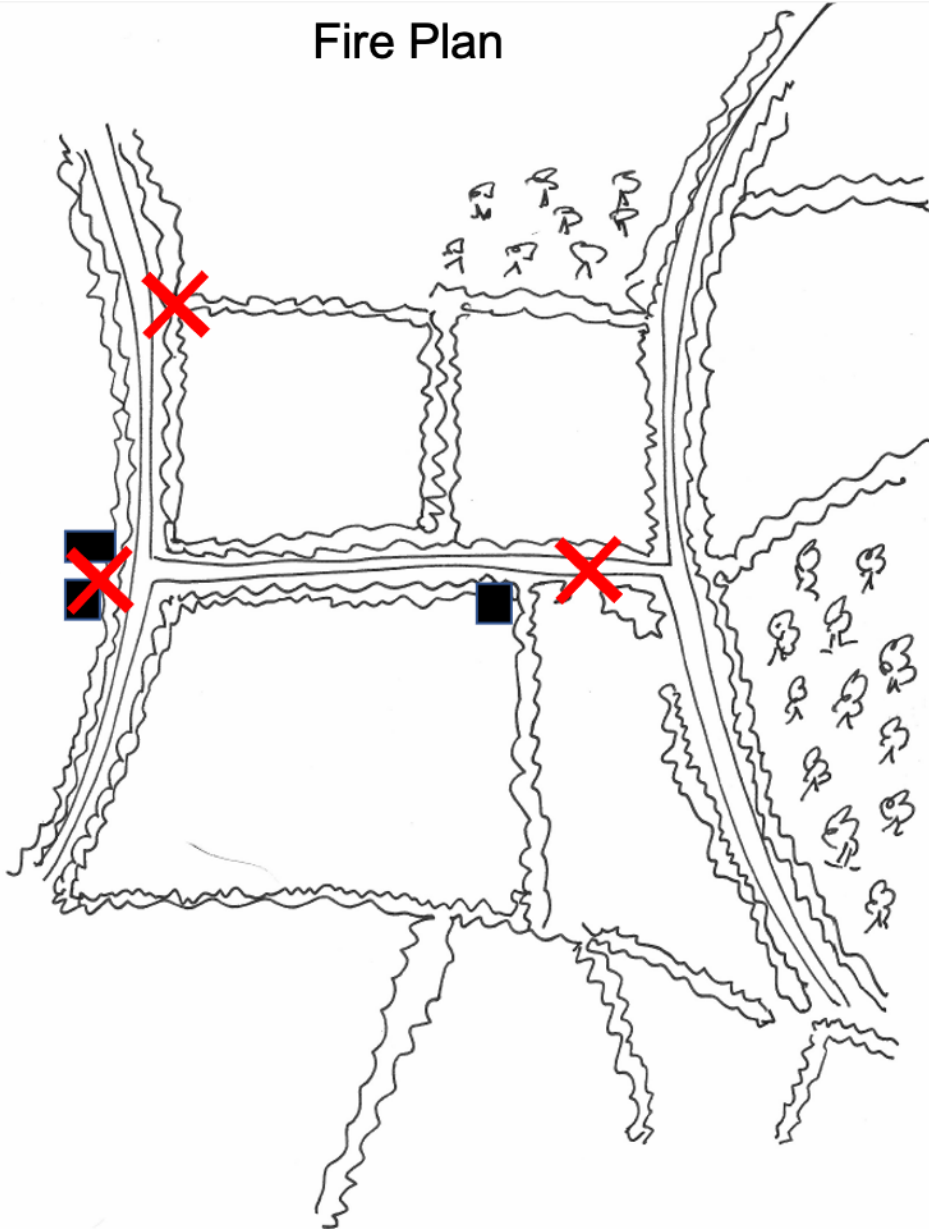
The US forces operating immediately to the West of the battalion are to advance through the orchard to the West of Barn Lane, clearing out all opposition and consolidating on the orchard's southern edge. From there they should be ready to support the attack on the ridge with fire. A smoke screen in the area of the orchard will be provided to cover their initial advance.

Our US colleagues should be aware that their role clearing the orchard is key to assuring the success of the attack on the farm and ridge. A secure right flank will allow us to attack knowing that this area is secure.

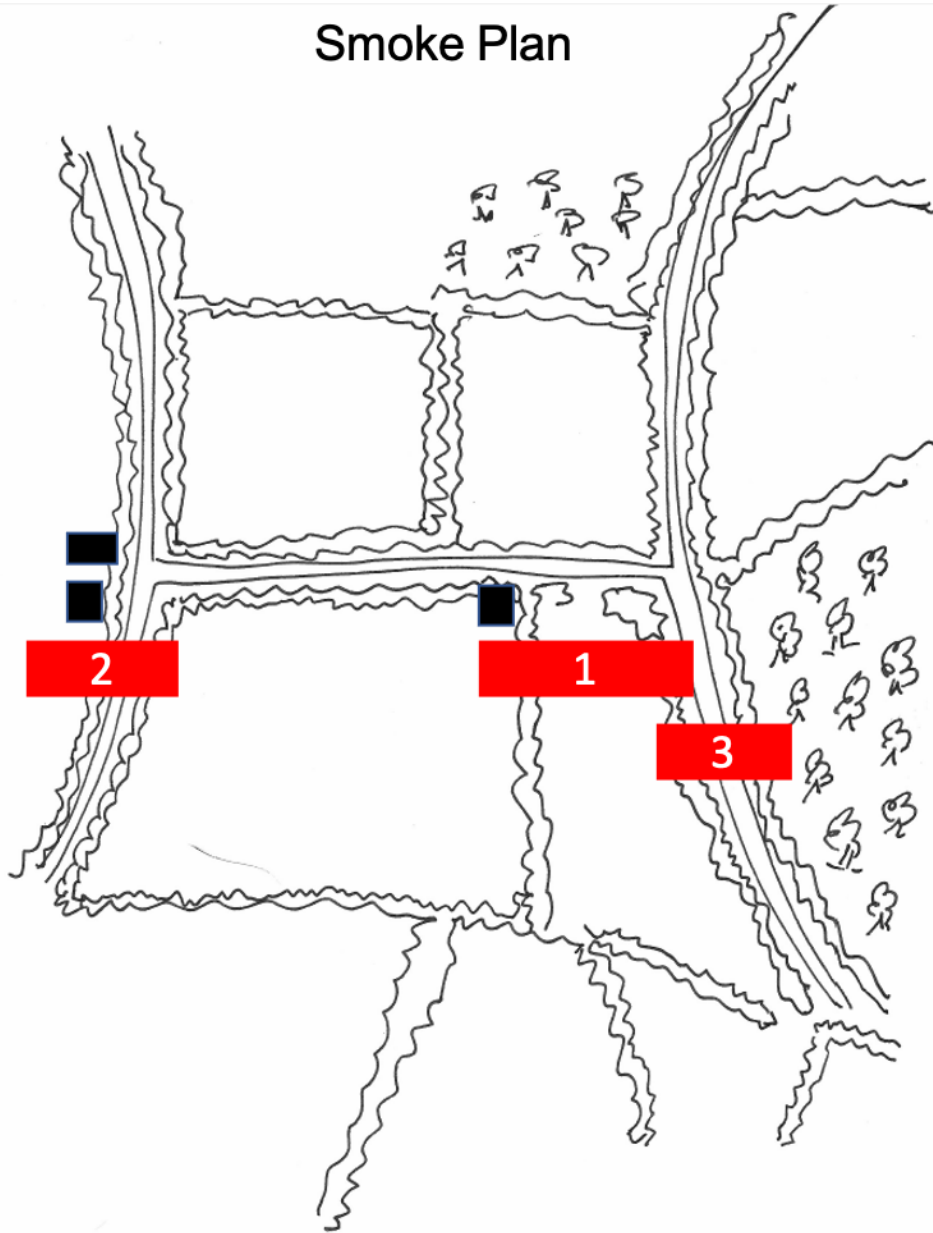
The main plan of attack is for the first phase of the operation to attack and capture Vertefeuville Farm and the East-West lane from the barn to the junction at the southern boundary of the orchard. One Company of British infantry supported by armour will be attacking in the area of Barn Lane and the field to its West. The second phase of the operation will be combined infantry and armour attack from Vertefeuville Farm onto the ridge from the East. US support here will be limited to engaging any German targets of opportunity. British troops on the ridge will use orange smoke to mark their positions to avoid friendly fire.

,

Fire Plan



Smoke Plan



Tweaks to O Group Rules for Bocage Game

1. Bocage: Three aspects, moving through, firing through, observing through.

a. Movement Through Bocage

AFVs move through bocage through gates (if wide enough) or via gaps created by artillery or by dozers or an engineer or assault pioneer placed explosive charge. There is one platoon of assault pioneers per battalion, which can be split into three sections. So a rifle platoon could have an assault pioneer section attached. As well as using explosives they have a very limited mine detecting ability. In a firefight they add 1D6 to the fire of the platoon.

AFVs move straight gates/gaps through but each vehicle must roll for the risk of bogging /getting stuck in all cases. Bogging/getting stuck occurs if any double is rolled. (Chance of bogging actually increases with use).

Treat wheeled vehicles as AFVs.

Effect of explosive charges and of dozer blade on bocage: Roll 1D6.

1: fail

2: gap passable by inf

3-6: gap passable by inf and AFVs

If a 1 or 2 is rolled, next attempt gets +1 on D6 roll. (Adam actually rolled 1, then 1, then 2 on his first outing with a Sherman with a dozer blade. The second vehicle though the gap then bogged!)

Infantry move through gates /gaps without penalty. If no gap/gate infantry move up to bocage in first move and halt. Next move they move through a distance of 1D6.

b. Firing through Bocage

All units move into contact with the bocage and halt. Next move they have found firing positions and may fire through.

If after firing AFVs 'jockey' they reduce the chance of being spotted but incur the -1 for having moved. Otherwise they stand an increasing chance of being spotted. Infantry cannot jockey, nor can towed anti-tank guns (Not even horse drawn anti tank guns).

c. Observing through Bocage

Bocage cannot be observed through from a distance.

All move up to the bocage and next move can observe. If they don't fire they are very difficult to spot. (Roll 2D6 spotting dice. Needs 4/5/6 on both dice to spot.)

2. Germans in pre-prepared positions

First time they fire they are very difficult to spot. (Roll 1D6 spotting dice. Needs 6 to spot.)

Thereafter normal spotting rules apply, but they are spotted on 5,6 not 4,5,6.

3. Preregistered targets for mortars and artillery.

Each side would have about 3 preregistered artillery targets, which must be marked on the map. The fact that a target is preregistered means that the gunners don't do their normal bracketing fire onto the target with one gun before firing for effect. This gives the enemy on the target less warning and less time to take cover, so the lethality should be improved. However, there is the same chance as ever that the FO cannot get through on his radio (although gunner comms were notoriously good). This translates in game terms to +1 on the accuracy roll, and an additional 1D6 on the first firepower roll.

The Germans, having been in position for some time, will also have 4 preregistered targets for their mortars. The Allies have had less time in position so have two preregistered mortar targets.

Mortars don't get any advantage firing onto artillery registered targets, and vice versa.

4. Mines

The Germans used mines extensively in Normandy but inland from the beaches they were not laid in large minefields. They laid small, marked minefields as well as dummy marked minefields. (Unmarked dummy minefields are not currently considered). Plus they laid mine clusters in places that looked promising, like choke points. All mined areas contained a mix of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, some of which were wooden and hence undetectable by mine detectors. All but flails and engineers/assault pioneers must roll 5D6 if moving in a minefield. After the first move in a minefield the troops can either forge ahead and take another 5D6 or retrace their steps and roll 1D6.

Flails will get through the minefield unscathed and cleared most, but not quite all, mines. So after a flail passage has been created any subsequent unit (except more flails) using the path rolls 1D6.

A platoon with attached assault pioneers will get through a minefield at a rate of 1" per move and rolls 2D6 each move.

Hand clearing to create a marked safe lane is very time consuming and is usually done under cover of darkness, so is not an option here.

5. Map Marking

A sketch map of the battlefield will be provided. It is fairly accurate, but not 100%.

Each commander must mark his inter battalion and inter company boundaries on it, as well as any objectives and phase lines. The Germans must also mark ambushes, minefields and mine clusters.