

BATTLE FOR VERTEFEUVILLE RIDGE OPERATION BLUECOAT



431 INF BTTN SIT. REP.

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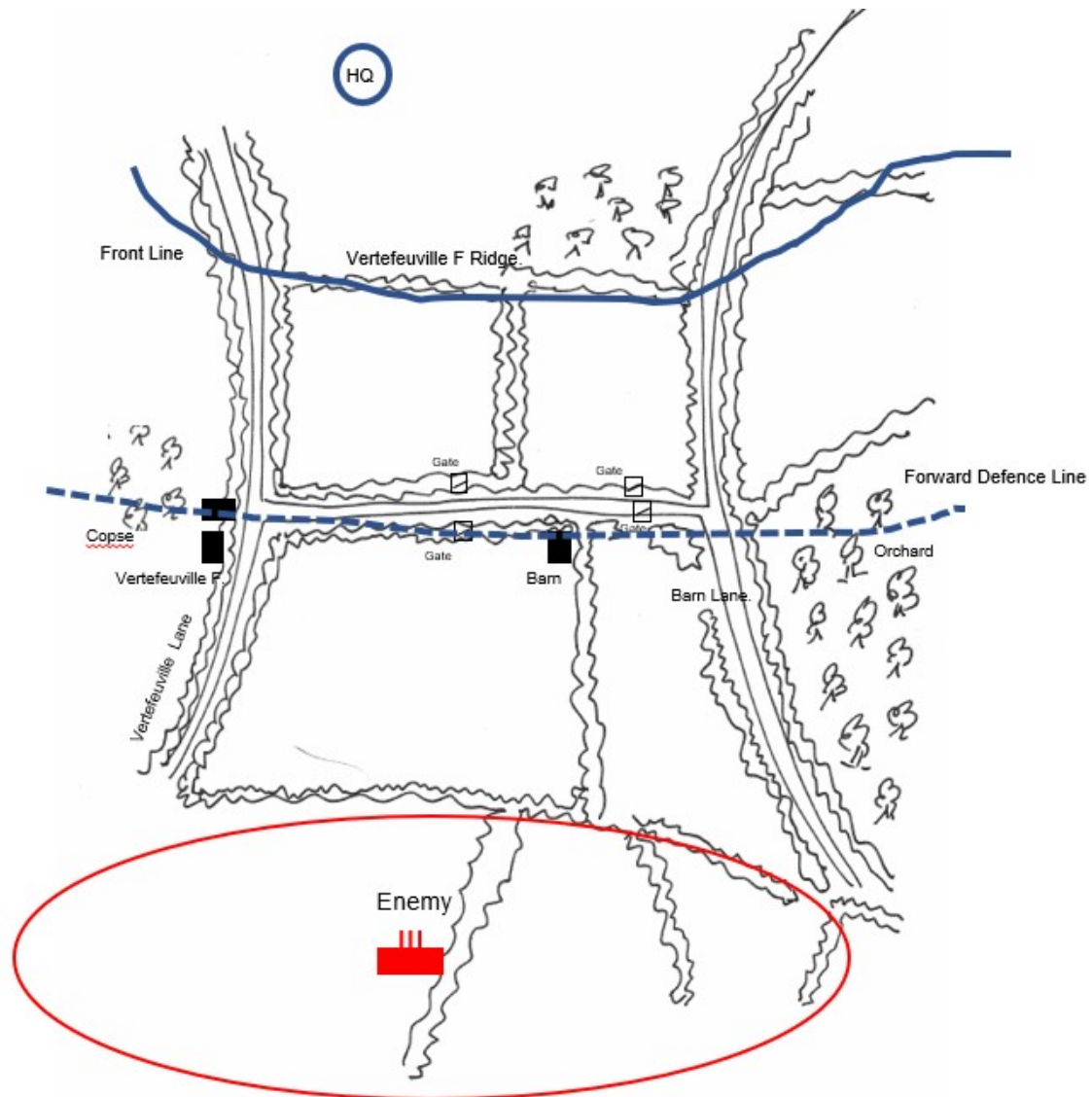
The action at Vertefeuville Farm is the fictitious encounter between the 431st German Infantry Battalion and elements from 11th Armoured Division in Operation Bluecoat, as described in Kenneth Macksey's novel Battle (1974). The book explains how the British put together an infantry attack and how the Germans receive it.

431st Infantry Bttm is part of the attenuated 326th Division. This Division has been tasked with holding a nine-mile front near Caumont. It is in the aftermath of Operation Goodwood and at a time when the Americans are beginning to penetrate towards Avranches. The German position is one of needing to contain all threats to the exclusion of all else, or, as von Kluge's Chief of Staff put it 'Army Group B will endeavour to prevent a breakthrough by recklessly exposing the fronts which are not being attacked'

'You will' ran Maj Jurgen Irkens' orders from Div HQ 'relieve an SS formation on the Caumont front. This sector is categorised as 'passive' having earlier offered successful resistance to the 5th US Divisions initial probing attacks. You will still be facing troops of the 5th US Div but they have suffered heavy casualties and not much is expected of them. There is no armour against you. The enemy will drop, or fire over, leaflets. No one below the rank of major will pick them up. These leaflets invite you to desert and enjoy the amenities of British prisoner-of-war camps. Remember that if you do you will be taken to England and run the risk of death by the V-1. After than you will be shipped to the United States or Canada for life-long labour. Or you may be exchanged for a British or American paratrooper, tried by court-martial and shot. In any case your families will

suffer in consequence, exclusion from the German *Volksgemeinschaft* being the least of their resulting troubles’.

Irkens has occupied a prominent ridge in heavily bocaged terrain and has three infantry companies and some supporting SP guns to deploy along this front



Irkens is aware that he is now also faced by the British and the sector to his front is changing from passive and quiet to one of activity, movement to their front, a background rumble of tanks and an increase in the comings and goings of planes above.

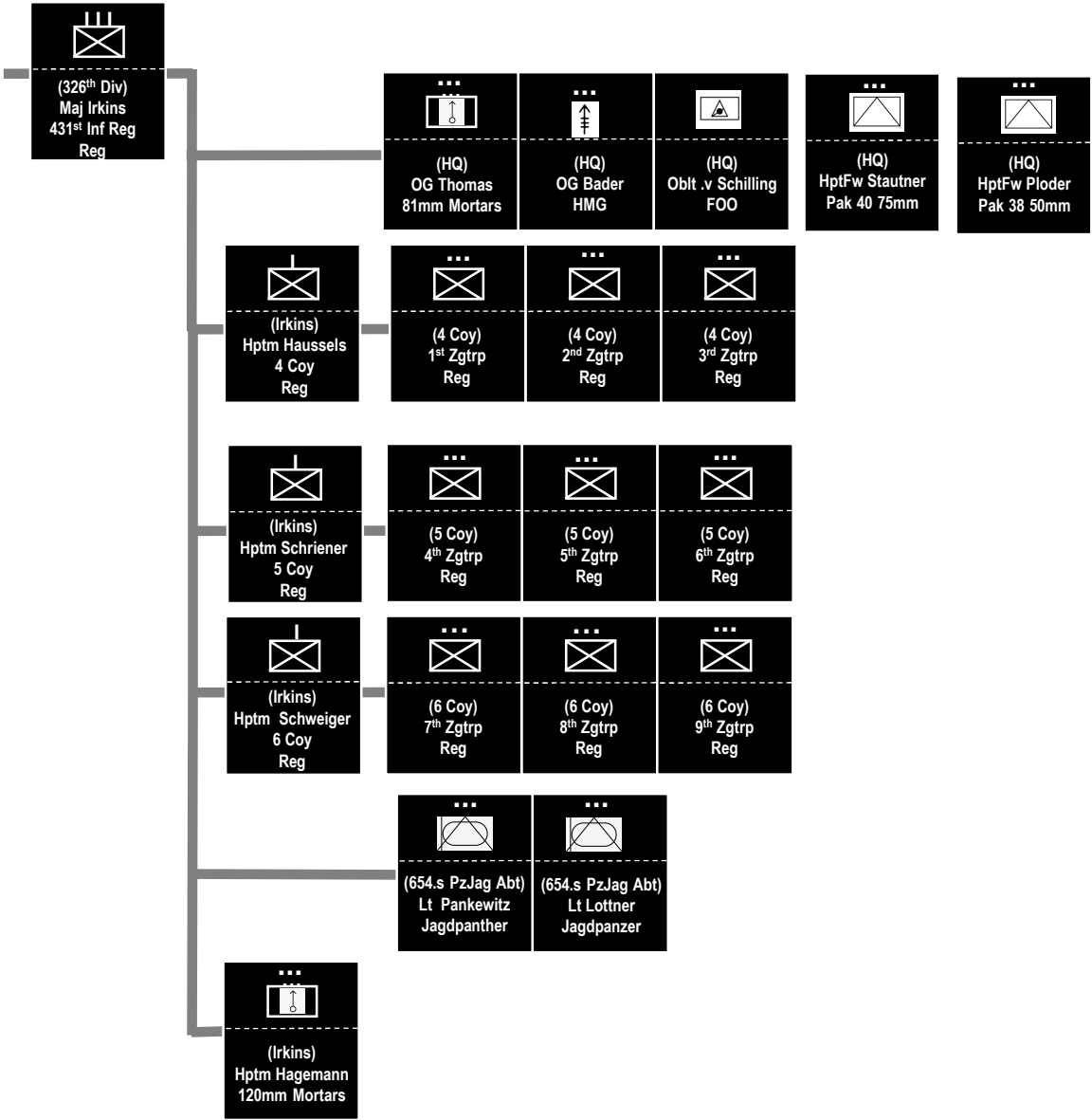
Irkens last night issued the following orders: 'For tonight a special degree of watch is ordered. From statements of prisoners from the British 1st East Hampshire Regt the enemy will attack our positions tomorrow morning, 30th July, at 0400'

With 4am came the planes, guided in by marker flares, the bombing is heaving and terrifying. For now it is the units to the east that are getting hit.

Irkens' Intelligence Officer Lt Kurt Barentz makes the following report

The enemy presses hard along the entire divisional front but there is only fragmentary information from the right where infantry and tanks have advanced, in places, up to 2,000 metres. There is no contact with either Regiment or Division or the other battalions. An attack is starting to our front and we are having trouble getting through to our companies and to our guns.

GERMAN ORDER OF BATTLE THE DEFENCE OF VERTEFEUVILLE RIDGE 30 JULY 1944



Überwachungsbericht

SEKTOR:

431 Inf Battn position centre sector

1) Einheit

MG section in night-time watch position at Barn. Oberfusiler Braun and Fusiler Staedler

2) Zeitpunkt der Beobachtung

0207hrs 30/7/44

3) Feindlicher Kontakt

British patrol (4 men?) spotted when they triggered a mine. Their approach had been along Barn Lane with presumed intention of probing our position at Barn and beyond.

4) Verschiedene Informationen

Sketch map attached of British positions

5) Ergebnisse von Begegnungen mit Feinden

We opened fire. Flares were fired from behind our position. Then En flares fired. Estimate that En arty originated far to right of assumed British positions. En HE followed flares. Fire inaccurate. British patrol withdrew 0220 with at least 1 wounded man. They were not able to probe the barn.

6) Schlussfolgerungen und Empfehlungen

British arty fire did not seem to be in support of the patrol, but rather indicated it did not know what was going on. The flares it fired made the situation worse for the patrol

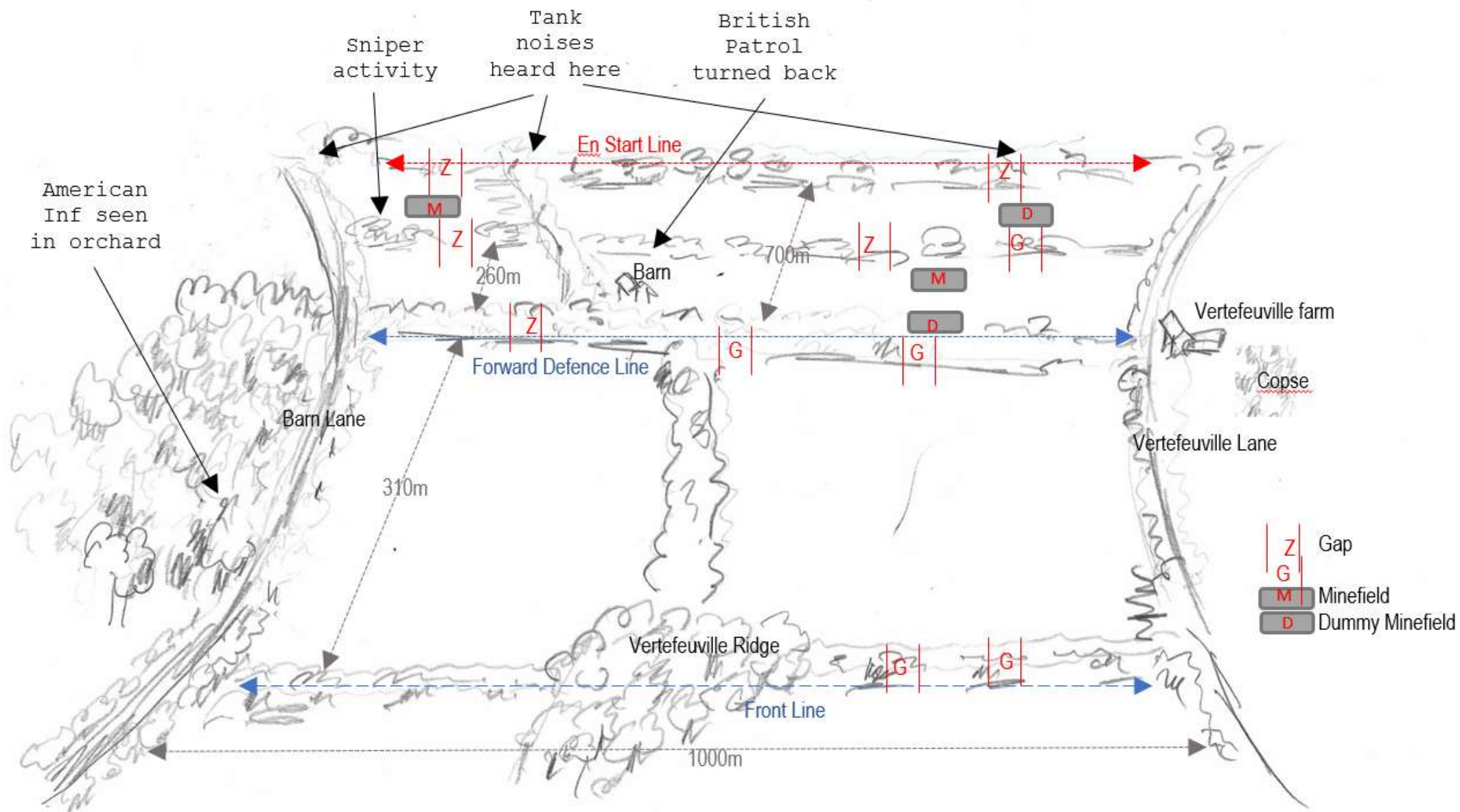


Oberfusiler
Rang

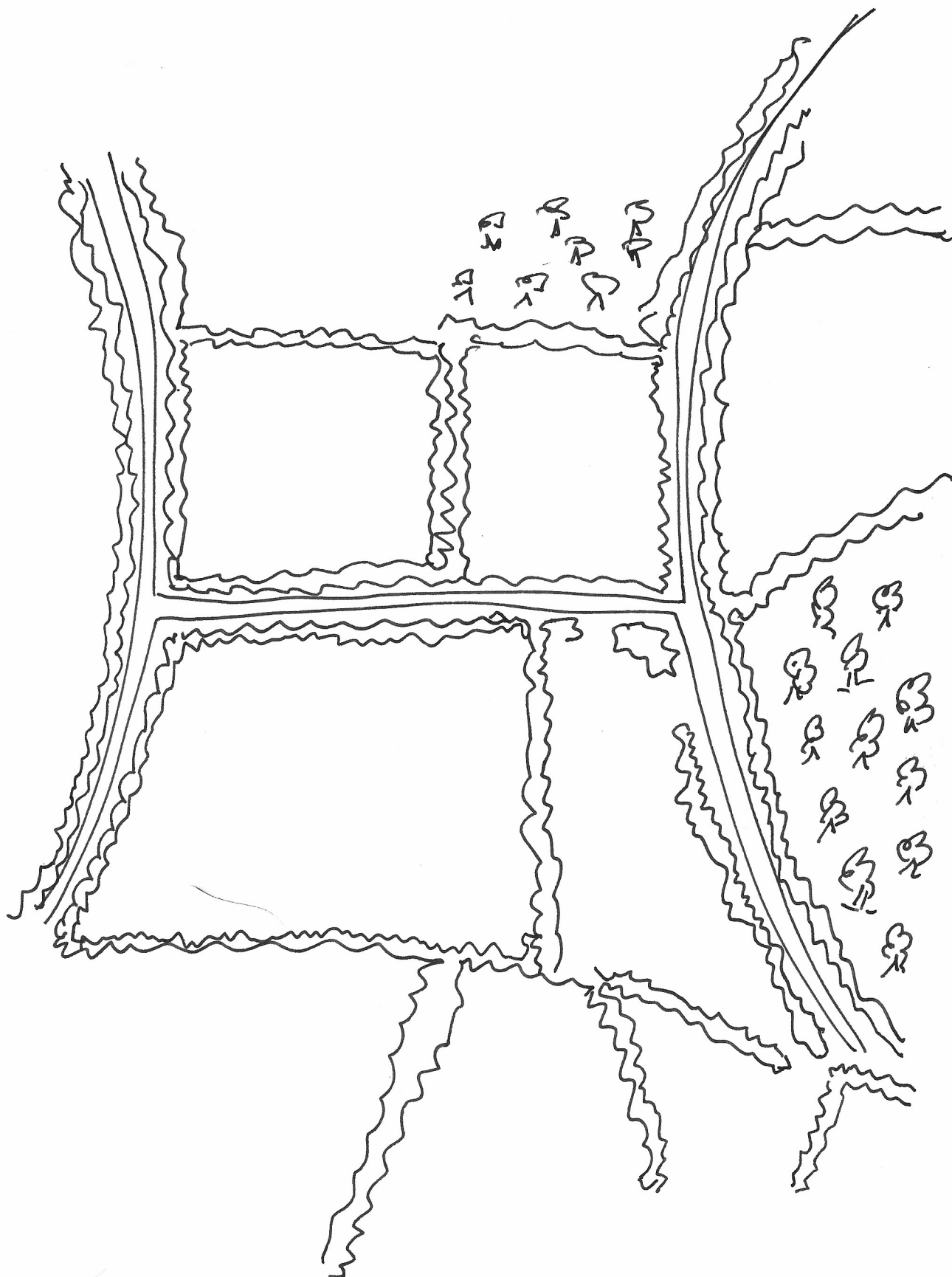
MG Zugtrupp, 431 Inf Battn
Organeinheit des Patrouillenführers

Verteilung

Maj Irkens
Hptm Haussels
Hptm Schriener
Hptm Schweiger
Lt Pankewitz
Lt Lottner
OG Bader



GERMANS



ALLIES

BRIEFING:

MAJ. IRKINS. 431 INF REGT. (+)

GROUND

Orientation: North = Enemy / South = Friendly forces.

4/5/6 Coys 431 Regt hold the Vertfeuville Ridge (VR) and low ground beyond, (south) up to Vertfeuville Farm (VF).

FLOT = The bocage hedge running east-west from VF marks the extent of the Forward Defensive Line.

FLET = All ground north of this line, including the barn, is the enemy front line.

SITUATION

Enemy. Enemy forces compose the British 1st Hampshire Regt plus supporting artillery and armour. (Strength N/K) and US forces (Strength N/K).

G2 intel indicates the boundary between British and US forces is Barn lane, with British forces deployed to the east and US forces deployed to the west.

Friendly. 4/5/6 Coys 431 regt. Supported by artillery, (mortars), MMG, paks and armour in the form of Jagdpanthers from 654 Abteilung.

MISSION

To prevent any allied breakthrough in our sector. To hold Vertfeuville Ridge (VR) at all costs. In addition I have ordered we also hold our FLOT in strength.

Anticipated enemy attack is tomorrow morning, 30th July, at 0400hrs

EXECUTION

4 COY: LEFT (WEST) FLANK: area of operations from: Western Orchard, Barn Lane over to the central N/S bocage hedgerow.

Ambush positions in the FLOT bocage hedge and in the orchard.

Support = Pak 50mm. Ambush/Dug in on VR covering barn lane and any approach across the open field up to and along FLOT. The gap marked Z is to be noted as a potential enemy breakthrough site.

Engineering:

a) Barn Lane on the FLOT is to be mined.

5 COY: RIGHT (EAST) FLANK: area of operations from VF, Vertfeuville Lane over to central N/S bocage hedgerow.

Ambush positions in the FLOT bocage hedge and in VF.

Support = Pak 75mm. Ambush/Dug in on VR covering Vertfeuville Lane and any approach across the open field up to and along FLOT. The eastern gap marked G is to be noted as a potential enemy breakthrough site.

Support: 654.s PzJag Abt Lt Pankewitz Jagdpanther. Deployed on forward edge of VR within the central wooded area, to cover east flank and central gap marked G is to be noted as a potential

enemy breakthrough site. IMPORTANT; Enemy targets of opportunity are to be engaged in 4 COYs area of operations should such opportunities present themselves.

Engineering:

- a) Vertfeuville Lane on the FLOT is to be mined.
- b) The central gap marked G is to be noted as a potential enemy breakthrough site and is to be mined.

RESERVES:

6 COY + MMG : Held as the Battalion Commanders reserve.

654 PzJag Abt Lt Lottner Jagdpanzer: Held as the Battalion Commanders reserve.

FIRE PLAN.

Mortar Pre-Registered targets:

- 1) Barn in no man's land.
- 2) Gap Z on FLOT. 4 COY
- 3) Copse eastern flank 5 COY
- 4) Central Gap G on FLOT. 5 COY

FOO to be situated in the centre of Vertfeuville Ridge, on the edge of the wooded area, in a position to afford good observation of both 4 & 5 COYs areas of operations, as well as FLET.

OC 431 Regt.

Important Note: there is no map orientation. Therefore I have oriented to the ground with the Allies in the north and the Germans in the south, which seems to correlate to Op. Bluecoat.

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.