

# BATTLE FOR VERTEFEUVILLE RIDGE OPERATION BLUECOAT



# US 301<sup>ST</sup> BTTN BRIEFING

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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 1<sup>st</sup> East Hampshires, supported by an armoured squadron from the 1st Pentland Yeomanry, P Battery 203<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment Royal Artillery and a company of infantry from the US 301<sup>st</sup> 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.

A company from US 301<sup>st</sup> have been promised to support the British attack. In the days before the attack the two officers commanding the British and American bttns to be involved in the attack, Lt Col Edward Simcox of the 1<sup>st</sup> East Hants and LTC Robin Callendar of the 301<sup>st</sup>. The meeting, which also included Maj Bob Krantsky, the US Bttn Exec Officer had an uneasy start.

'They've told me what you're about, Colonel', began Callendar. 'They say I'm to help if I can. I'll tell you straight, I don't like the look of that bit of real estate, not one little bit. And my tankers feel the same.'

There was silence – not one shred of an offer of practical assistance.

Simcox decided to project his ideas in their entirety at once and see what reaction that would bring. He presented to the Americans the same outline plan as he had left with his officers. 'The plain fact is,' he concluded, 'I don't much like what's on your flank , either, but even if I throw my full weight to the left, I still need assurance that the right is secure – that ground to your front is taken care of. Either the gunners can plaster it, or

they can smoke it – but better it should be occupied. Particularly that orchard. I've not the strength to do it. Have you?

'Yeah', said Callandar, shifting in his chair.

'What d'y know, softly mused his Exec – and waited.

Callandar put shrewd questions about the composition of Simcox's battalion and its experience – seeking in an instant to evaluate its potential and matching its quality to his own standards of military competence.

'See here, Colonel' said Callandar at last. 'I'd like to help and seems you are talking straight. Your figures check with what I'm told. If I can be sure your guys will keep pace with me, I'm prepared to see what I can do to take out that orchard. But its got to be simultaneous – no you waiting for me or me waiting for you. Most of the latter. I'll add,' he said ruefully, 'we failed there once on our own.'

Simcox was on the verge of retorting that the 1<sup>st</sup> East Hampshires waited for no man in battle, least of all for Americans, but he held back, superimposing his prewar training upon that of conditioned, soldierly belligerence. Another peacetime habit supervened. This man, it seemed, was adopting the bargaining position of a dyed-in-the-wool businessman.

'Look', Simcox responded. 'I always say a square deal's the one that satisfies both parties. I was a banker before becoming a soldier. It's as much in your interests to clear that orchard with my help as it's in mine to do it with yours. If I hadn't come along now you might have been told to try ait again on your own tomorrow or the next day. I'm prepared to put a company – plus – along the edge of the orchard in a joint attack – with artillery and tank support shared. As security I'm even prepared to put that company under your command, if you feel that's necessary – thought I'd rather it didn't 'cos I think it will be affected by what goes on elsewhere on my front.'

There was another pause.

'D'you drink rye Colonel?' asked Callendar. 'Fraid we've go no scotch.'

'About that company you've just offered...,' he added, 'I'll get back to you on that.'

Callandar, on passing a report of this meeting up to Division, got the following note back from MG Stafford LeRoy Irwin, O/C 5<sup>th</sup> US Inf Div.

'Robin, we've got to help the Brits and Simcox seems better than most of the ones I have had to deal with, but the point is after Goodwood I don't think the Limeys are up to this. They don't seem to learn. We get it wrong for sure – look what happened to the Division a couple of weeks back - but then we do it different. We learn from our mistakes. I don't think Brits are going to be able to pull off this attack on the ridge, and, in scheme of things it is not so important anyway. Just Monty gabbing the limelight and the supplies. Whereas we have another attack coming. You have got to help Simcox for sure, but not too much. We are going to need your company for what is coming. Hold the ground, keep pace with the advance, fire the artillery but don't risk the men.

### **American Victory Conditions**

Major Victory – survive action with 10 squads and actively support the British

Minor Victory – survive action with 8 squads and actively support the British

Defeat and a training job at Camp Benning – survive action with 6 platoons, less than 6 = court martial

### **Friendship and Friction: A Note About Game Mechanics**

This game works on rolling 9 dice at the start of each go to acquire 'orders'. One order allows a unit to be moved, fired or something else. Not all dice results give orders and there are never enough orders to do everything one wants. This problem is more acute for the Allies as they have a bigger force.

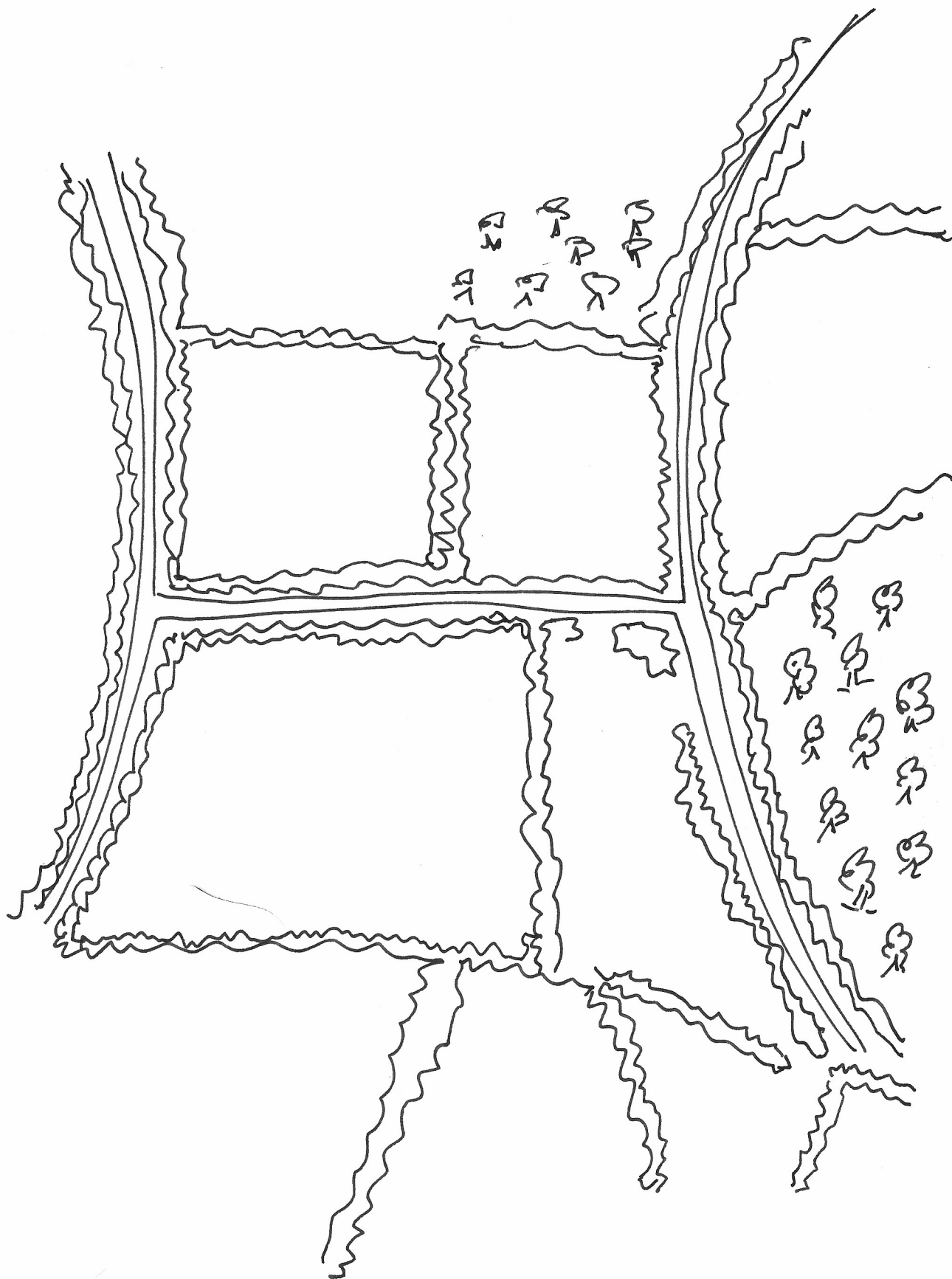
If a 6 is rolled on the order dice it means that order can be used or it can be 'banked'. Up to 6 orders can be banked. Banked orders give an advantage to the all important initiative roll that takes place each turn. Winning the initiative means you can fire first. With 6 banked orders there is a +6 modifier to the two dice roll (2D6) for initiative.

Forces want to bank order chits (up to a max of 6) as quickly as possible and then not use them if they can help it.

Tension will come between the US and the British player on how the order dice are divided each turn. The British player rolls the dice and it is up to him to give as many as he pleases to the American, except that the American can always fire his artillery and has first call on the dice as far as this is concerned (if artillery is to be fired in a round it must be the first thing that is done). It cost 2 orders to fire on a new target and 1 order to continue to fire on an existing target. The order cost is cheaper if the target is preregistered. Please identify (without conferring with the British player) 3 pre-registered targets on the plotting map supplied in your copy of the British Briefing. The American also has a guaranteed claim on an order chit if he wishes to move his company commander or his FOO. When it comes to moving the American company, the American Player will be completely dependent on British generosity.

As a further point of friction there is a specialised order called a 'company order'. Each company commander automatically gets a company order, and, if spent, it is renewed for free each turn. Company orders can have a critical effect as they allow you to repeat something you have already done – like fire again on a unit that is almost breaking. What is not free, however, is the cost of using a company order. This is randomly decided and can be nothing, or one or two regular orders. Using company orders can easily and inadvertently eat into the supply of banked orders, with bad effects for the sense of momentum and even worse effects for British / American collaboration.

GERMANS



ALLIES



## **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.