

The Americans in Brittany (4)

"Operation Hands Up!"

By David Bickley

Introduction

In this fourth and final scenario in the series exploring aspects of the American campaign in Brittany in 1944 I have turned my attention to a planned, but never executed, amphibious and airborne assault on the German occupation forces on Belle Ile, in the Queberon Bay. The assault was planned in order to neutralise the German positions, particularly artillery, overlooking the proposed sites for a 'Mulberry' style port facility planned for the beaches of Queberon Bay. That the operation was never put into effect is due solely to the unexpected German collapse in Normandy and the success of the American thrust into Brittany. But, it might have taken place...

The Situation

The D-Day Planners foresaw a situation in which failure to open Chanel Ports to Allied shipping due to German resistance would lead to problems in keeping their forces supplied. To counter this they envisaged the construction of further Mulberry-style artificial harbours in the Quiberon Bay region. They were assured by the Naval planners that such construction must be completed by 1 September or else the Autumn storms would make it extremely hazardous to tow the component parts from Britain. In the face of the possibility that the American ground forces might not have thrust through to the southern Brittany coast by that date, Planners developed a combined air and seaborne assault plan to seize the strategically important Belle Ile, in Quiberon Bay, and neutralise its garrison and heavy guns. Thus, Operation Hands Up was conceived.

The plan called for an airborne landing under Lt General 'Boy' Browning comprising the British 1st Airborne Division and the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade supported by a seaborne landing of the Special Service Brigade. When a bridgehead had been successfully secured the British 52nd Infantry Division would be airlifted onto the island. This combined force was tasked with holding out for 14 days until the American Third Army broke through to the area, rendering the German position untenable. Naval support was earmarked, including H.M.S. Rodney, H.M.S. Roberts, three Cruisers, three Destroyers and three Frigates, to neutralize the shore batteries. The task force would be strengthened by anti submarine escorts, transport ships and landing craft.

On the appointed day the operation would begin at midnight when pathfinders of 1st Parachute Division and 1st Polish Brigade dropped to mark the landing zones. They would be followed by two parachute brigades at 0100 hours. By 0600 hours the planners expected the naval contingent to be offshore of the

invasion area and by 0700 hours the first wave of the glider-borne element of the 1st Airlanding Brigade was to be in action. They would be followed by the 878th US Airborne Engineer Aviation Battalion, the remainder of 1st Airborne Division, a glider lift of 1st Polish Parachute Brigade, and the Vannes Airfield Control Advance Party. The task of the Engineers was to make the airfield at Vannes operational within D+2 and to establish two other additional airfields in the area.

The German coastal artillery emplacements were to be captured by a combined air and seaborne assault. The British 1st Parachute Brigade would land shortly after 0600 hours on the eastern side of the Island, seizing the high ground and effectively cutting Belle Ile into two. Shortly afterwards a regiment of 29th US Infantry Division would land on the beaches and capture the guns. Their success would be reinforced by the US 80th Infantry Division landed by sea.

But, in reality none of this was put into action, as the Americans easily passed through the Rennes region and forced the decision on the military leadership of Overlord to press on for Le Havre and the northern Chanel ports, which in any case were much nearer the fighting in Northern France than Quiberon Bay. So, Operation Hands Up was consigned to the great 'what if...' file of history. Our scenario concerns this latter action in the plan, combining as it does air and sea borne landings, together with British and American elements: something for everyone I would hope and a change of scene from endless D Day and Arnhem scenarios.

Playing the game

The game lasts 15 turns. The German player begins by deploying his forces on a map of the tabletop layout ~ see below. The HQ, Heavy Flak artillery and one Infantry Battalion must be placed in the fort and built up area surrounding it. If he wishes he may add the strongpoint to the fort or built up area, or, he may place it overlooking the beach area. The remaining German forces may be positioned according to his wishes, though none may actually be on the beach area. The German player[s] objective is to hold off the Allied attacks and maintain the artillery in working order.

The Allied attack begins in Turn Two when the Allied player[s] identify their landing zone[s] and the first drop of British paratroops begins ~ see Rapid Fire!2 pages 102 - 103, sections 17.4 - 17.6. After Turn Six the first troops of the American amphibious assault may arrive on the beaches ~ see Rapid Fire! pages 104 - 107, sections 18.1 - 18.7; 18.10 - 18.18; 18.19 - 18.20. The Allied objective is simply to capture the artillery

and render it useless, then hold their position against German counter attacks until the end of the game.

Winning the game.

The German player(s) will win the game if, after the end of Turn 15, they still hold the artillery position and the guns are in working order. If they hold their position but the guns are inoperable due to Allied attacks, they have a winning draw.


The Allied player(s) will win the game if, at the end of turn 15, they have destroyed the German artillery and hold the artillery's position against German counter attacks. If the Allies have rendered the guns inoperable, but do not hold the artillery positions, then they have a losing draw.

The German player(s) need to be dogged in defence yet have the capability for decisive counter attack. They must decide whether to concentrate forces in the built up area and artillery fort; perhaps to deploy


British Forces

BRITISH 1ST PARACHUTE BRIGADE

Brigade HQ
CO + 7 figures, PIAT, 2" mortar

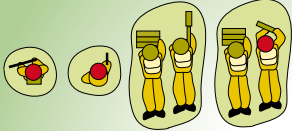





1st Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers
CO + 9 figures, flamethrower, 2 x demolition charge

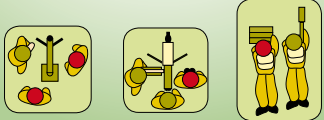


.....and two British parachute battalions as below:

BRITISH PARACHUTE BATTALION (38 figures)

<p>HQ Company CO + 5 figures, PIAT, 2" mortar</p> 	<p>A Company 8 figures</p> 
<p>B Company 8 figures</p> 	<p>C Company 8 figures</p> 

Support Company
8 figures, 3" mortar, Vickers MMG, PIAT

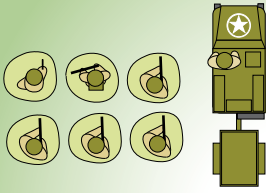
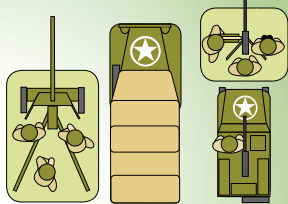

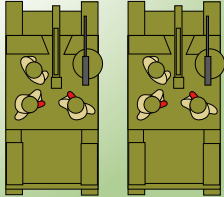


troops to repel the expected amphibious attack; perhaps to destroy possible airborne landings as they happen.

The Allied player(s) need to be bold and decisive to achieve their objective. How near the artillery fort might they land? Is there a possibility of a direct strike to the heart of the German position? How close to the post can the amphibious troops attack?




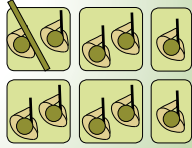
American Forces

US INFANTRY REGIMENT

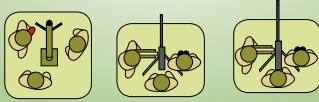
<p>Regimental HQ 6 figures, Jeep & trailer</p> 	<p>Regimental Support Company 6 figures, 57mm AT gun, 30 cal MMG, prime mover, Jeep</p> 
<p>Engineer Company 10 figures, Bazooka, flamethrower, 2 x demolition charges</p> 	<p>Artillery Battery 2 x M7 Priest SP (105mm) or 2 x towed 105mm howitzer</p> 

...and three American infantry battalions as below:

US INFANTRY BATTALION (45 figures)

<p>HQ CO + 5 figures, 60mm mortar</p> 	<p>Rifle Company 10 figures, Bazooka</p> 
<p>Rifle Company 10 figures, Bazooka</p> 	<p>Rifle Company 10 figures, Bazooka</p> 

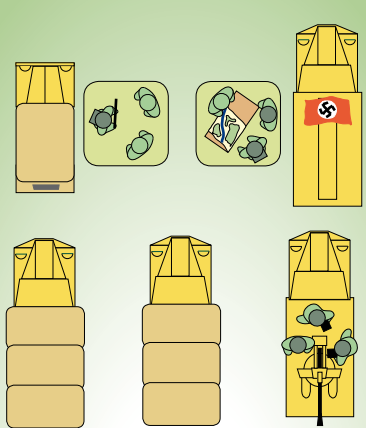
Heavy Weapons Company
9 figures, 50cal HMG, 30cal MMG, 81mm mortar



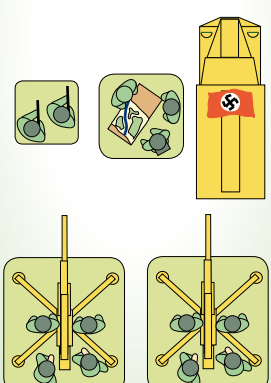
German Forces

.....and two German garrison battalions as below:

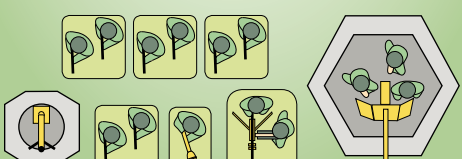
HQ
6 Figures; staff car, radio car, 20mm AA SP, 2 x Opel Blitz or similar



3./708(Einheit)Marine Flak Abteilung
CO + 12 figures, 2 x 75mm AA gun, radio truck




Strongpoint
CO & 15 Figures, 50mm PAK (open emplacement), 81mm mortar (casemate), MMG




GARRISON BATTALION (50 Figures)


HQ
CO + 5 figures




1st Company
8 figures, Panzerfaust



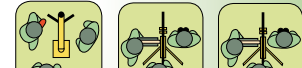
2nd Company
8 figures, Panzerfaust



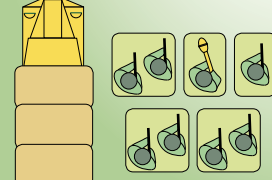
3rd Company
8 figures, Panzerfaust



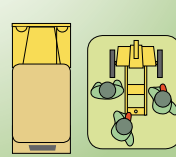
4th (Heavy) Company
9 figures, 2 x MMG, 81mm mortar



Engineer Company
8 figures, Panzerfaust, light truck



Gun Company
3 figures, 75mm infantry gun, prime mover




Above: A Priest battery lurking in a wood (Ready to Roll models).
Right: German advanced dressing station (Small Scale Scene car and figures. Ambulance of unknown origin)

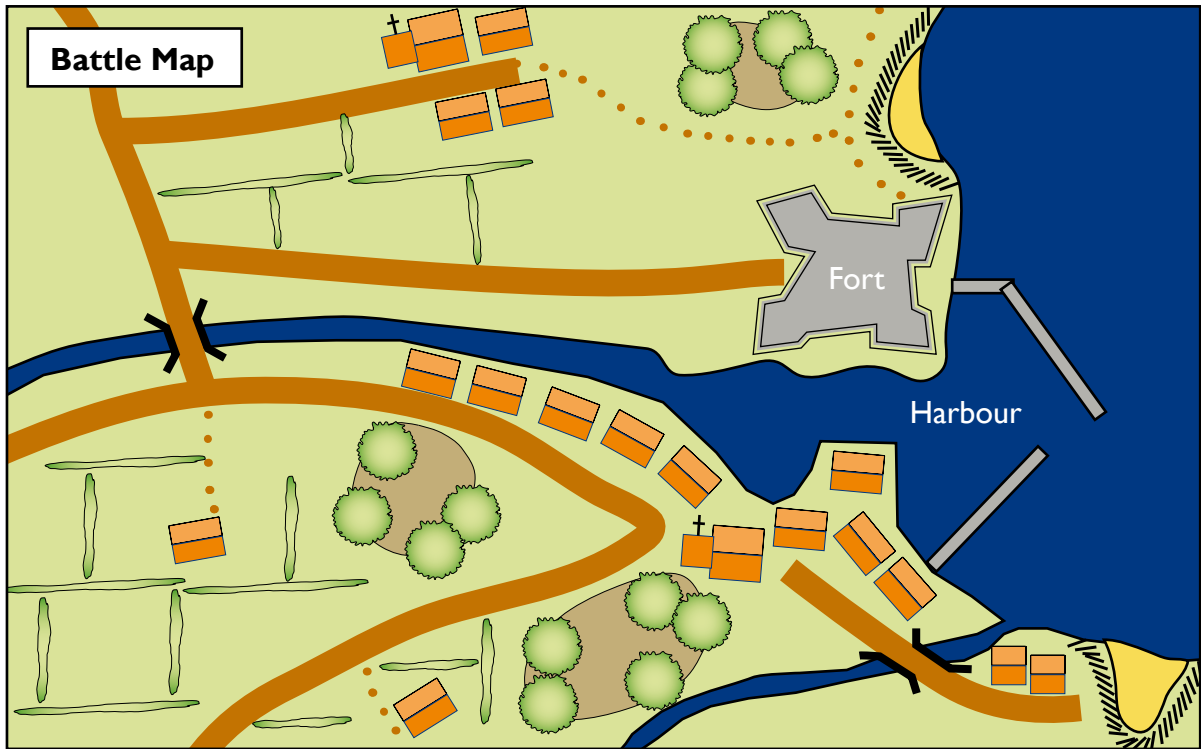
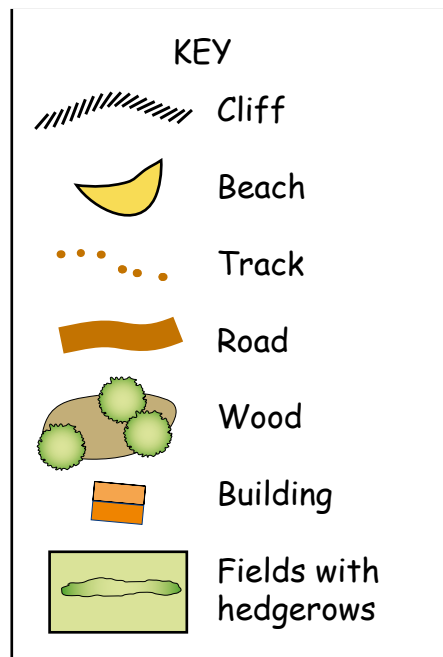


Table is 8' x 5'

Afterword

I hope that Rapid Fire! Players have enjoyed these series of scenarios drawn from the American Campaign in Brittany in 1944. If you have played out one or more scenarios, or even the whole four, why not write up your games and send them into Colin, preferably with pictures, for inclusion on the site at some future event? Better still, submit your own scenario for inclusion here. The Rapid Fire! Gaming community is a large and talented one, so, don't sit back waiting for others, give it a go yourself!



Left: German command Group.
Valiant Miniatures and Ready to Roll
Opel radio truck.