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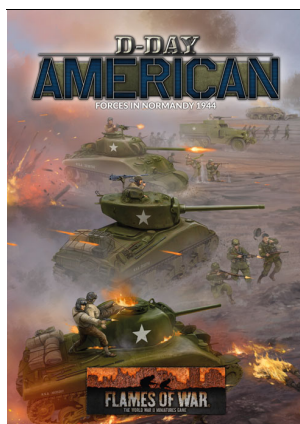
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Axis of Attack: Across the Aure Valley

By Jason Moffatt

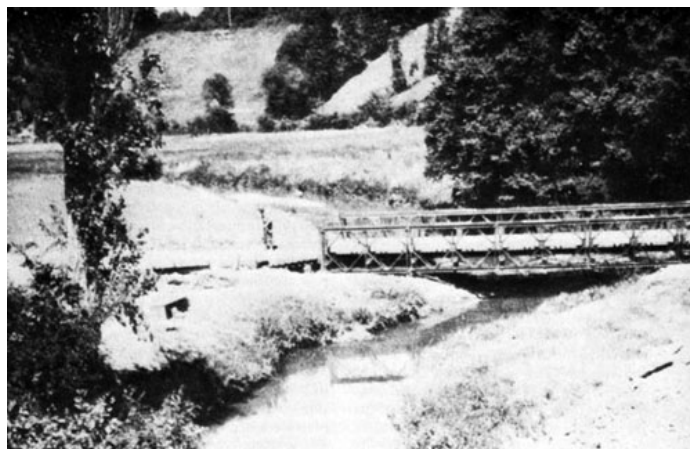
Following their bloody introduction to Normandy at Omaha Beach, the US 29th Division must now spearhead the attack inland, towards St. Lo. Are these, still "green", soldiers up to the task? Or will their wily opponents throw back the invaders?

June 1944: On D-Day the "green" soldiers of the US 29th Division had undergone their baptism of fire upon "bloody Omaha" beach. Demonstrating great courage, and under the inspirational on-the-spot leadership of commanders like General Cota, the 29ers had battled their way inland. However staunch German defense had thrown the timetable of the entire US V Corps into chaos. It would not be until D+3 that their D-Day objectives would be reached.

On D+1 the commander of the 29th Division, General Gerhardt, or "Uncle Charlie" to his men, ordered his weakened 116th and 115th Regiments to mop up pockets of enemy resistance near the beach. After finally capturing the seaside village of St Laurent in the morning, the 115th moved west.

They cut the main highway south from Vierville, blocking German reinforcement by this route. Meanwhile the battered 116th cleared stubborn defenders from the bluffs overlooking Omaha beach. They were then dispatched on a rescue mission to save the 2nd Ranger Battalion at Point du Hoc. The rangers had been struck by a strong German counterattack and were battling for their very survival.

On D+2, the relief force finally fought their way through to the rangers. Continuing west along the coastal highway the 116th secured the seaside resort of Grandcamp in a bloody battle.



Many of the GI's reckoned the fighting at Grandcamp had been fiercer than that of the D-Day landings. A few miles south, the 175th Regiment, temporarily attached to the 29th Division, followed a parallel line of advance. After a tough battle on the outskirts of La Cambe, the 175th captured the village. They pressed westward, finally entering their ultimate objective, Isigny, the following morning. The 115th had meanwhile struck south from the beachhead, through the confusing maze of hedgerows, and captured Longueville without a fight.

With the US beachhead increasingly secure, it is time for Phase Two of the invasion plan to be put into action. The 29th Division's main objective is St. Lo, a key road junction some 20 miles south of Omaha. The village of Couvains a few miles north of St. Lo, is adjudged an excellent intermediary objective. "Uncle Charlie" has determined his men will advance across the flooded Aure valley, although whether it can even be crossed is uncertain. On the night of 8 June, patrols are sent out from Longueville to reconnoiter for a crossing. The 115th Regiment moves to the vicinity of Canchy in preparation to lead the advance south next morning. Reports from the patrols show little sign of enemy opposition, but also little sign of viable crossings through the marsh. Can the US forces get across the flooded valley, and if they can what will they find awaiting them amongst the hedgerows and fields on the far side? Is it here that the US invasion, already badly delayed, will at last be checked by determined German opposition?



US Briefing

After two days of hard slog, lugging heavy weapons and ammunition on foot, your unit's D-Day objectives have at last been reached. Much-needed transport vehicles, landed at Omaha beach on the previous day, have arrived to offer your weary soldiers some relief. This night you and your men have been moved to the little village of Canchy at the edge of the flooded Aure River valley. Early tomorrow, yours will be one of the first units to wade into the mire, probably poking sticks in front of them, as they lead the attack south towards St. Lo. It won't be easy, since arriving in Normandy your men have come to expect "a Kraut behind every bush", and with good reason. But you must fight your way south before the enemy can be reinforced. If that happens, regardless of how deep the Aure valley marsh is, you and your men will be up to your necks in it!

German Briefing

For three days your scattered and increasingly isolated forces have battled bravely and skillfully to slow the encroaching American tide. Yet the task seems hopeless with the ragtag force at your disposal: you've got artillerymen with no artillery, useless guns without ammunition, and not enough bicycles to go round. Unless your men are reinforced, and soon, the enemy may break through in the direction of St. Lo. It will take all of your tactical skill and expert use of the terrain, but you must delay the US advance in the hope that reinforcements can reach your unit. and swing the tide of battle in your favour. Then, perhaps, these foolhardy and inexperienced Americans can be driven back the way they came.

Where is the Luftwaffe?

Allied air superiority is total. Not a single German plane can get anywhere near the battlefield.

The German player may not receive any Aircraft Units for the entire campaign.

Fallschirmjäger Reinforcements

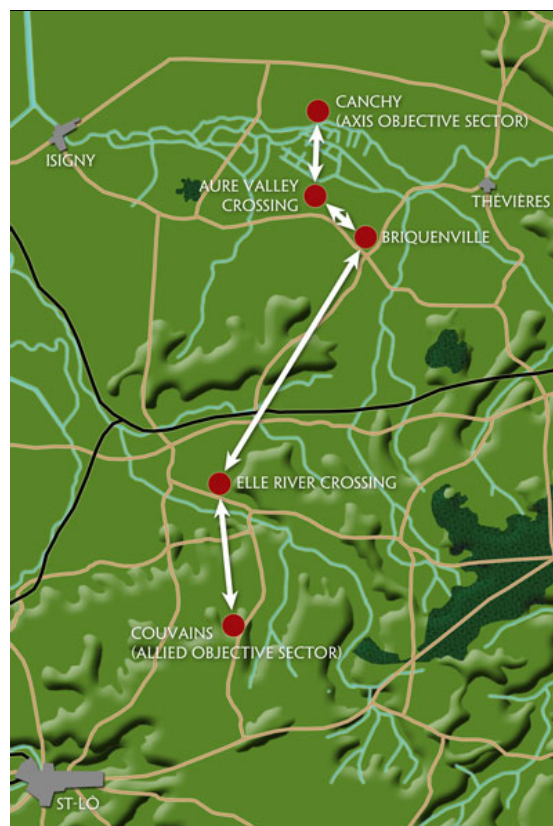
Even as the shattered but unbowed German troops conduct a fighting withdrawal, reinforcements are rushing to their aid from Brittany - not just any reinforcements but the renowned paratroopers of 3. Fallschirmjägerdivision! But Allied air strikes mean it is uncertain when they will arrive, if they arrive at all.

At the start of the third mission of the campaign, and every subsequent mission, the German player rolls a die. On a roll of 6 Fallschirmjäger reinforcements have arrived in your sector, you may field a single full-strength Fallschirmjäger Platoon for this game. The platoon is in addition to your normal support choices and comes at no points cost.

Situation Report

At the start of the campaign the US forces are jumping off from their assembly point around Canchy, attempting to cross the flooded Aure Valley.

Use the Axis of Attack rules (Axis of Attack Campaign rules PDF) to play this campaign.



The US Player starts the campaign with 6 victory points. The German player starts the campaign with 0 victory points.

Terrain

Beyond the marshes of the river valley, the countryside is a chequerboard of small fields bordered by thick hedgerows and narrow lanes: bocage country.

All battles, except those in the Aure Valley Crossing sector, are fought on a 4'x3'/120cm x 90cm table using the Bocage rules from D-Day: British. There is no terrain chart for this campaign, instead construct your battlefields using the terrain guide given for each sector. The entire campaign is fought in bocage country so, unless otherwise specified, remember to liberally cover any open areas on your table with small fields bordered by hedgerows with a few narrow lanes running between them.



US Forces

The attack south was led by the 115th Regiment from 29th Infantry Division. Travelling mostly on foot, the GI's slogged their way through the Normandy bocage, occasionally assisted by divisional engineers, tanks, and artillery. Later, the 116th Regiment would be moved up from reserve to carry the attack.

*To represent these forces you could field a US Assault Company from **D-Day: American**.*

German Forces

Although almost smashed to pieces by the D-Day landings the shattered remnants of 352. Infanteriedivision fight on courageously against the US advance towards St. Lo. In this defense the Germans are employing whatever forces can be thrown together in ad hoc kampfguppen. The troops are no longer fighting from fixed defensive lines of fortification, however, instead using the Normandy terrain for ambushes and delaying actions.

*To represent these forces you could field a German Beach Defence Grenadier Company from **D-Day: German**.*

What If Forces

Alternatively, you could play a "What If" campaign to see what would have happened if different forces had fought across the Aure valley, and use whatever company you have.

Canchy

The picturesque village of Canchy has assumed a grimy, martial appearance. A steady flow of heavy vehicles trek mud along the main road, and soldiers clomp amongst the few buildings. Here is the jumping off point for a US attack to the south, across the marshes.

Victory

If the German player reaches Canchy they have won the campaign. By driving the US forces back across the Aure River they now have a good chance of bottling up the US troops within their own beachhead. The US Army will never capture Couvains, let alone St. Lo, if they can't even fight their way out of their lodgement area!



Aure Valley Crossing

The valley bordering the Aure River has been flooded to form a natural barrier against the long-anticipated Allied invasion. Additionally, since D-Day the retreating Germans have blown the few causeways that cross it in an effort to further hinder inland advance of the US forces.

Terrain

Missions fought in this sector are fought on a normal sized (6'x 4'/180cm x 120cm) table.

The narrow Aure River runs across the table parallel to the US player's table edge. Flanking the river on both sides is an area of marshland at least 12 inches/30cm wide. Both the marsh and the river are Difficult Terrain. The remainder of the table is divided up by two or three drainage ditches (also Difficult Terrain) and a few ordinary hedgerows.

Western or Eastern Crossing

At the outset of the campaign only, the US player may choose either a western or eastern crossing of the Aure valley. The western crossing is wider but undefended, the eastern crossing is narrower and defended by German outposts guarding the approaches to Trevieres.

If the US player takes the western crossing no battle is fought in this sector. Instead the campaign advances directly to the next sector – Briqueville. However, a western crossing requires the assistance of the 121st Engineer Combat Battalion with their "Weasels" and bridging equipment. To represent the loss of time making this difficult crossing count this as a mission having taken place. Additionally, the US player must deduct 5 points from their victory point total for using this route.

If the US player takes the eastern crossing the campaign begins with a No Retreat mission, on the terrain described above, with the US player as the attacker. If the US player wins, the campaign advances to the next sector – Briqueville. However, if the US player loses their force has been repulsed from the eastern crossing. They must backtrack and use the western crossing as described above with the accompanying loss of victory points and time.



Briqueville

The quaintly monikered village of Briqueville, has been turned into a veritable fortress by the troops occupying it. The proximity of Briqueville to a major crossroads, on the road leading south from Trevieres to St. Lo renders the village strategically important to both sides. Control of the crossroads cannot be achieved without first securing the neighbouring settlement.

Terrain

From each of the table edges a road runs to meet at the crossroads positioned in the centre of the table. Close by, in the defender's half of the table are six to eight buildings from Briqueville. The rest of the table is covered in the ubiquitous hedgerows of the bocage country.

Elle River Crossing

The Elle River at first glance seems an unlikely place to set up a defensive line. The river itself is little more than a stream, ten feet wide at its widest point and eminently fordable. However, the steep and wooded southern bank offers plenty of concealed positions. From here well-sited defensive strong points can turn the northern bank into a killing zone.

Terrain

The very narrow river runs across the centre of the table parallel to the German player's table edge. The river is Difficult Terrain and is bordered on both sides by a clear area approximately 4"/10cm wide along its entire length. In the US player's deployment zone, running parallel to the river is a sunken road. In the German player's deployment zone is a long low hill covered with woods. The rest of the table is bocage country.

Thunder along the Elle

"Uncle Charlie" orders a brief pause in the advance for the 29ers to rest and reorganize. This allows the US divisional artillery to be brought forward but also allows the German defenders to register their own artillery on the American positions. Prior to the commencement of the attack both sides lay down heavy artillery fire. The US "Redlegs" employ a creeping barrage in an attempt to dislodge the tough Germans. On the German side, every available howitzer and mortar in the sector hit the US assembly areas with a well-timed barrage.

*In the first mission, only, fought in this sector, both players may conduct a single Preliminary Bombardment (Pages 26 to 27 of **Normandy Battles** rulebook) at the start of the mission.*



Couvains

Couvains is a fairly unremarkable Norman village clumped around the road leading south in the direction of St. Lo. Little more than a waypoint on the route north or south, and not especially defensible, if US forces succeed in crossing the Elle it would be wiser for the German forces to abandon the village without a fight. They can then fall back to better positions on the approaches to St. Lo itself.

Victory

If the US player reaches Couvains they have won the campaign. The German forces appear to be in headlong retreat. But you'll have little time to rest on your laurels, "Uncle Charlie" expects you to be in St. Lo in no time!



The Conclusion of the Aure Valley Campaign

On 9 June, the 115th Regiment strike south across the flooded lowlands of the Aure Valley. The 3rd Battalion's advance grinds to a standstill in the thick mud, until divisional engineers with the aid of "Weasels"— amphibious vehicles— rig up improvised bridges across the swamp. The 3rd Battalion make the crossing, followed at midday by the 2nd Battalion. Meanwhile, a couple of miles to the east the 1st Battalion's attempted crossing at a narrower point in the swamp is repulsed by dug-in German defenders.

The men of the 1st Battalion are forced to backtrack and use the same crossing as their comrades.

Safely across the flood lands, that afternoon the three columns of 29ers press on into the bocage country. The 3rd Battalion marches into undefended Columbières before continuing south to La Folie and digging in for the night. The 1st Battalion encounters enemy resistance at Briqueville that would not be finally overcome until the following morning.

Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion clears small but stubborn enemy pockets at Vouilly and Callette Wood before finally reaching Le Carrefour at 0200 hours. The men of the 2nd had been marching for twenty hours and were dog tired, they literally collapsed into the fields alongside the road without digging foxholes or setting up proper defensive posts. Now disaster befalls them as a retreating column of German infantry and self-propelled guns stumbles upon the slumbering 29ers and opens up a murderous fire, inflicting heavy casualties and scattering the battalion into the darkness.

The following day the mauled battalion is reorganised and reinforced and with the 1st and 3rd Battalions continues south unmolested. The regiment reaches the line of the Elle River near St Marguerite-d'Elle by morning, 11 June, and spends the day resting and reorganising in readiness for an attack across the river the next day.

On 12 June, behind a creeping artillery barrage like those of the Great War, the 115th Regiment attempts to cross the narrow Elle River. The 29ers are met by heavy and accurate fire from the opposite bank and only the 3rd Battalion succeeds in getting across. However by midday an enemy counterattack, with armoured support, forces the battalion to make a fighting withdrawal to avoid being cut off.



In an effort to restart the stalled offensive tanks of the 747th Tank Battalion are committed to the fray but these too are stopped by accurate enemy fire, this time from anti-tank guns. In desperation, the 116th Regiment is now ordered to force the crossing, their attack jumping off not long before sunset. Finally, these fresh troops break through the staunch German defensive line. The next morning the US troops exploit their hard-won success, pressing forward through a thick fog against evaporating German defenders and capturing St. Clair and Couvains. St Lo is now only a tantalising 5 miles away.

Fighting a Multi-player Campaign

If you have four players you can combine ***Axis of Attack: The Advance to Cerisy Forest*** with ***Axis of Attack: Across the Aure Valley*** to fight a multiplayer campaign. Will the US V Corps attack succeed in pushing inland from Omaha? Or can the wily Germans stop the American advance in its tracks?

Last Updated On **Tuesday, January 11, 2022** by Wayne at Battlefront

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