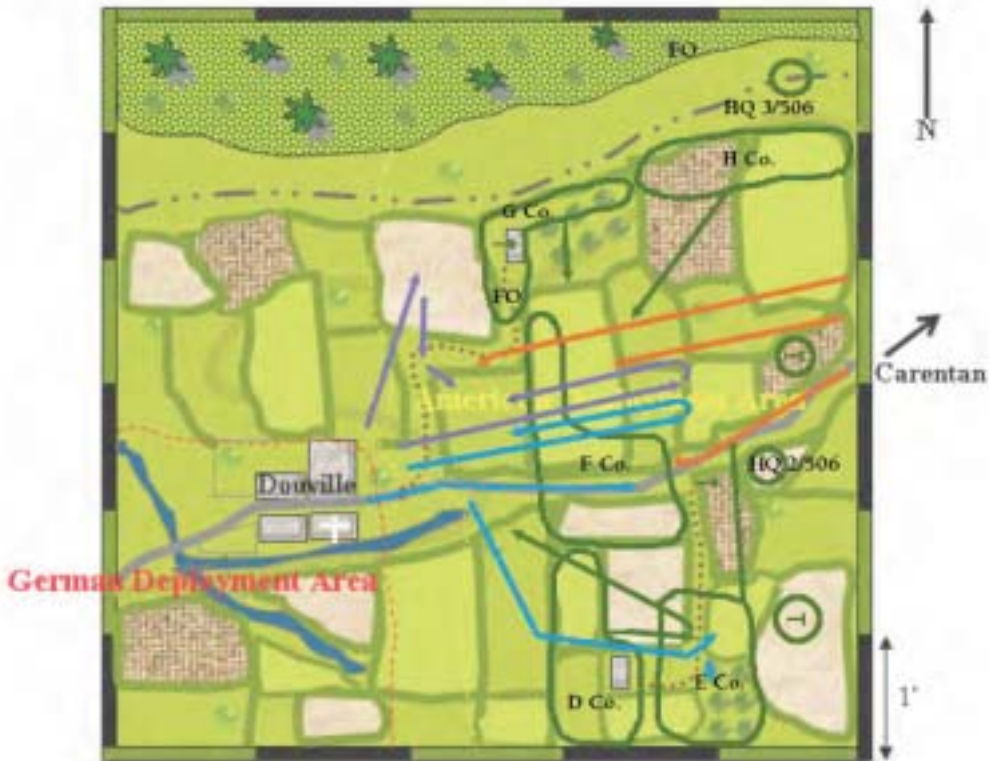


Carentan Counterattack June 13, 1944

This after action report is based on Mark Hayes' *Counterattack at Carentan* scenario found on the Battlefront Scenarios page. It is based on the German counterattack against the positions of the American paratroopers of the 506th at Carentan and the subsequent relief of that force by a task force from the 2nd Armoured Division.



Map shows initial placement of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 506th, and their move to the center to block the German attack. Purple arrows represent the attack and retreat of the German panzergrenadiers and fallshirmjaeger, blue arrows show movement of Stugs.

Red arrows represent the arrival of the American armoured task force.

Carentan After Action Report



Above: Looking east up the Carentan road from Douville and the German start line.

Below right: Panzergrenadiers advance from start line.



At 12:15 p.m. the German forces begin the advance from their starting line in and around Douville. The German commander elects to lead with his panzergrenadiers, keeping his armour, towed guns and flshirmjaeger company in reserve in and behind the town. Sending 1st and 2nd Co. across the dirt road and into the fields north of the Carentan road, the Germans at first encounter no opposition. The 3rd PzGr Company, traverses northeast and enters the field of tall crops bordering the dirt road. The remaining troops cautiously breach the first row of bocage, and with machineguns and mortar covering their advance, approach the second.

The Germans have unknowingly chosen to hit the American line at its most thinly defended. The American commander, tasked with defending the road to Carentan, was faced with a fairly wide front to hold with his depleted forces. His major concern was that the enemy might try to outflank them, either through the bocage country to the south or with a rapid advance of his armour via the open terrain bordering both sides of the railway bed, using the railway bed itself to hide this approach. To guard against this he elected to place the bulk of his forces on the flanks, with F Company thinly holding the center as well as guarding the less likely attack line straight up the Carentan road. One 57 mm antitank guns was positioned at the intersection of the paved road and most easterly dirt road and the second in the small group of

buildings just south of the railway bed, where it has a clear line of sight down over the bocage to the west and along the southern edge of the railway bed. One of the FOO's was placed on the edge of the swamp north of the railway bed to watch for movement there and the 3rd Battalion commander made his HQ on the edge of the railway bed to help guard this approach, spotting for his mortars placed further back and closer to the main road.



D and E Companies were positioned in depth on the south flank and G and H in the orchards and along the bocage bordering the railway bed to the north.

When the American commander realizes that the thrust of the German attack is falling on his center, he immediately sends D and E Co. north to reinforce. As the platoon of F Co. holding the line at that point buckles and breaks under the weight of the German attack, the Germans unleash the first of their Stugs. Rightly suspecting the enemy would have positioned their AT guns at the eastern road junction, the Stugs exit the road early, but position so as to maintain a line of sight up most of that section of the paved road and prevent reinforcement enfilading his attacking infantry.

Above: D and E Cos. redeploy to the center.

Right: Stug platoon deploys along the Carentan road to cover possible enfilades.





On the north flank PzGr 3rd Co. moves into the tall crops and hunkers down. The American FOO spots them entering the field but fails his call for fire as they breach the bordering bocage. G Co. maintains its positions, while H Co. redeploys in depth in the orchard in preparation for the expected attack. Meanwhile in the center, with the first line of bocage secured, the Germans unleash the rest of their Stugs. One platoon moves in to support the center while the rest continue to demonstrate along the Carentan road and to the south, successfully tying down D Co. and keeping them from joining E in the center. From the Douville tower the German FOO begins directing his 105's on the American lines.



Above: H Co. paras redeploys to hold off PzGr. 3rd Co.

Left: Stugs unleashed.



Above: Americans scramble to redepoly AT gun as Panzergrenadiers push to secure the next line of bocage.

With the German armour committed to the south and center the Americans scramble to reposition one off their 57 mm. The 2nd Pzgr. Co. pushes home its attack as the American paratroops attempt to fall back to their new line. The 3rd Battalion commander calls in the first of a series of devastating mortar strikes on the attacking Germans. The attack falters.

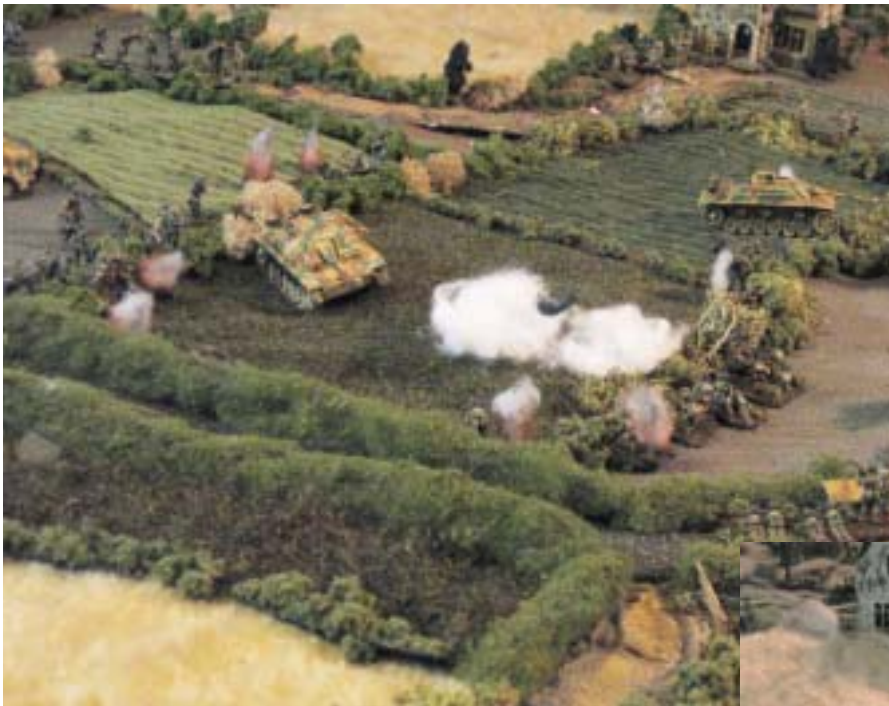
Along the Carentan road the American line has consolidated at the next line of bocage and reinforcing units from E Co. begin to arrive. The Americans form a second line of defence behind the bocage on the Carentan road to prop up the first as the Germans, now supported by their Stugs, battle across the open fields.

Below: E Co. bolsters F Co.'s line as Germans press home their attack.





Above: On the southern flank D Co. deploys in depth in a wheat field, and with nothing but bazookas, prepares to hold off the Stugs advancing on this front. In the background the battle in the center rages.



As the German numbers in the center begin to thin, the German commander throws his veteran paratroops into the fight and, seeing that their attempt to hold the Americans in their positions to the north has now run its course, moves 3rd Co. out of the tall crops to also reinforce the main fight. 506th's H Co. moves to the center, enfilading the large open fields that have now turned into a killing ground.

Left: The killing ground.

Below: 3rd Pzgr. Co. exits tall crops.



With time running out the Germans commit their towed guns to the attack in hope of breaking the stalemate. A large smoke screen is laid down by the 105's to neutralize H Co's enfilade fire as the Stugs breach in support of the German paras attempting to force the next line of bocage.



The American 57 mm gun that had moved to reposition is knocked out by a Stug before firing a shot, while accurate American concentrations brought down on the Douville steeple KO first the German FOO and then their battalion commander.

A Stug cautiously advances up the Carentan road, but falls victim to an American bazooka he never sees, which fires in enfilade through the bocage from the cover of the tall crops bordering the road. The Stug burns fiercely, effectively blocking the road. A second Stug, on the south flank, ventures onto the side road and is engaged by the remaining 57 mm as it tries to cross.

A poor maneuver check changes a suppression into a disorder, and it retreats into an orchard where D Co. dispatches it at close quarters.



*Top: German guns are brought in.
Center: Final push.
Bottom: Ambushed on road.*



Above: Shermans enfilade remaining Stug. Below: 3/41st Co. advances with Priest in support on right.

The Fallschirmjaeger, supported by a Stug, push to the next line of bocage as the armoured task force from 2nd Armoured Division arrives on the field. The same bad maneuver roll that did in the Stug on the south flank also forces another Stug into retreat, however, and the northern side of the bocage row holds. Shermans quickly move up to enfilade the Stug from the Carentan road, and suddenly turrets seem like a much better idea. A ring of steel forms around the next field that the Germans would be forced to cross as elements of 3/41st Armoured Company advance with Priests on the Americans' right flank.





The German 75 mm antitank gun positioned to watch the main road opens fire on the Shermans, but despite stellar shooting which disorders both tanks and drives one off, it is unable to knock them out because of the burning Stug obscuring the line of sight. With the arrival of the American reinforcements the German commander realizes that the initiative is lost and orders his forces to withdraw to a more

tenable position. Under cover of smoke the German paratroops attempt to disengage. But a Priest rolls up to the bocage and dispatches two of the stands at close range.



The Americans now move into the attack, as the Germans retreat in disarray. The command Stug, unable to disengage, remains at a gap in the bocage as the Shermans pound it at close range. It succeeds in knocking out one of the enemy tanks, but is badly outnumbered, and is eventually knocked out in turn. The remaining paratroops, bolstered by the newly arrived American infantry, form up behind the bocage in preparation for a final push.

*Top: Sherman driven back by German AT fire.
Above: German paratroops attempt to withdraw under cover of smoke.
Right: Americans form up for final push.*





The German retreat to the field they first entered and circle the wagons. The 20 mm flak and 75 mm infantry gun, originally ordered to pull back, are returned to their former positions as the German line stiffens. One of the two remaining Stugs anchors the line while the second continues to retreat, disordered. The surviving German infantry, badly mauled but with 3rd PzGr Co. still in relatively good shape, pour back into

the field and take up positions along the bocage.

A Sherman chases down the retreating Stug and knocks it out in close combat as one of the Priests lumbers up and KO's the 20mm before it can go into action. But suddenly the German artillery finds its range and pulverizes the American line, knocking out eight stands of infantry in two rounds of shelling.

Above: Germans circle the wagons. Below: Sherman KO's a Stug as German off board artillery rips up the American line.





The Americans roll up on the Germans' northern flank as the battle rumbles to a close. On the final turn the Americans are held from advancing from the bocage line, but American armour is spilling over into the German positions from the north with nothing opposing it. A final tally of victory points gives the Americans 17 to the Germans' 13, handing the Americans a narrow margin of victory.

Last stand.

Analysis

All the players agreed it was a good, hard fought game. The American strategy of concentrating its forces on the flanks caused some problems early on as they scrambled to reposition, but in the final analysis proved a justified risk as they fairly easily reinforced and held the center.

German strategy was based on finding the route which would involve the fewest breaches of bocage, which was what led them to hit the American center. The moving of the PzGR. 3rd Co. into the tall crops to the north flank and the Stugs demonstrating to the south was intended to keep the American flanks held down in position, and they were successful in this for a time, albeit at the cost of removing their own forces from the fray. But the exuberance of the battle led the German player to advance his Stugs further than he had intended up the Carentan road and on the south flank, and in both cases the assault guns ran into trouble and were destroyed.

The close terrain made for some interesting fighting as units maneuvered with relative freedom, with the line of sight rarely extending beyond the next field. And the bocage served as strong defensive positions, easy to hold until the flank was turned forcing a fall back to the next bocage line.

The German artillery advantage was not well-utilized early in the game, but the Americans presented few targets, exhibiting good fire discipline until the Germans were at close quarters. When the Americans went on the attack and were forced to mass their troops for the final push, the German artillery was devastating. The Americans failed to make much use of their 60 mm mortars, which seemed always in the wrong place or on the move, but the off board 75's and on board 81mm's, once they found their mark, were a game-turner.

Although the idea of attacking up either of the flanks was abandoned early on, it may have more successfully allowed the Germans to get at least one of their Stugs off the east side of the board (especially along the north flank where there were few obstacles to the advance). Even one exiting would have gained the attackers another 5 victory points, which would have been enough to have won. The larger ME's of the German attackers favoured them in the accumulation of victory points, which seemed appropriate as it could be argued that the Germans were undergunned for the task. But in the end, as the victory point count shows, it was a close run thing and a well fought battle on both sides.



Above: German players examine American defences.

Below: Weekend warriors. From right to left: German players Tim Shannon and Ted Dymont, American players Steve Guthrie and Dawson Melo-Geldart and referee Bill Slavin.

