

Warfare at Reading 2014:- Juniville June 10th 1940.

My first outing as Umpire and hosting the annual "Big Game".

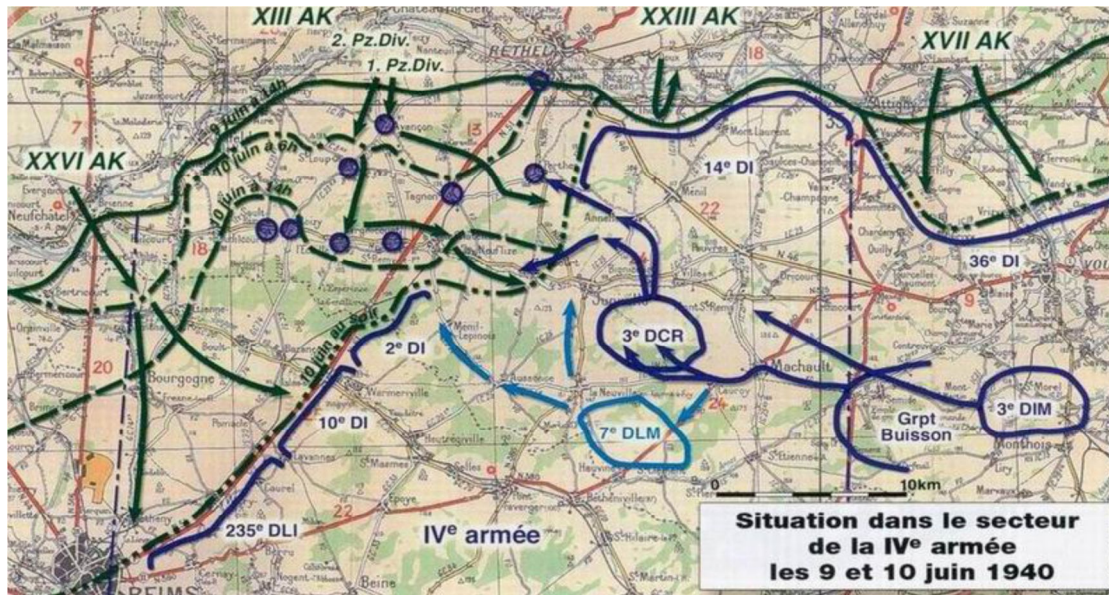
The German offensive is prepared for the 9th June morning. During this battle, 5 French infantry divisions and about 160 tanks are facing 4 Panzer Divisions (about 1200 tanks) and 14 Infantry Divisions. The French 10^e DI is attacked by 3 infantry divisions (3.ID, 23.ID and 298.ID). The French 2^e DI will have to stop 2 Panzer Divisions (1.PzD and 2. PzD supported by 29.ID(mot)) and 3 infantry divisions (17.ID, 21.ID and 52.ID). The French 14^e DI is attacked by 3 infantry divisions (73.ID, 82.ID and 86.ID). The French 36^e DI is opposed to 3 infantry divisions (26.ID, 10.ID and SS-Polizei) whose task is to open the way to the 6.PzD and 8.PzD supported by 20.ID(mot). Each French division has to defend a front of 20 km whereas such a division should normally only defend a front of 5-7 km.

Initially, the XIII.AK and the XXIII.AK (17.ID, 21.ID, 73.ID and 86.ID) are facing the French 2^e DI and 14^e DI. The German infantry divisions have the task to break the French lines between Château-Porcien on the West and Attigny on the East to establish strong bridgeheads across the Aisne River in order to enable the Panzergruppe Guderian to pierce deep in the French lines. This Panzergruppe is composed of the XXXIX.AK(mot) (1.PzD, 2.PzD and 29.ID(mot), General Schmidt) and the XLI.AK (6.PzD, 8.PzD and 20.ID(mot), General Reinhardt). The odds do not seem in favour of the French troops. One anecdote is that the German artillery is reinforced by 5 French 220mm heavy mortars captured north of the Aisne River, with 5000 shells. Ironically they will cause important losses among the French troops. The 2^e DI is attacked by the 17.ID and the 21.ID, leading to heavy street fights in Château-Porcien and the southern part of Reims. No German bridgehead can be established; at each attempt the French troops launch a vigorous counter-attack that defeats the Germans. About 500 German POWs are captured by the 2^e DI.

During the afternoon two breaches will be opened and enlarged in the French lines. West of Reims 6 assault groups from the 3.IR (21.ID) crosses the River on a lock in Nanteuil despite heavy losses. This breakthrough allows the Schützen of the 3.IR to take some hills south of Nanteuil and to cut the Avançon-Reims road. Immediately the engineers of the 21.ID build a bridge over the Aisne to allow the tanks to cross the River.

A second breach is made east of Château-Porcien which is now threatened to be encircled by the two breakthroughs. The front is broken in this area despite the resistance of the II/31^e RI. The garrison in Château-Porcien will fight until being out of ammunition and surrendered only after violent close combats, delaying the building of an engineer bridge for about 6 hours. A counter-attack is rapidly organized with the 1st company of the 23e BCC (Renault R35 tanks), two infantry platoons and two dismounted cavalry platoons but it fails due to heavy bombardment from the German artillery and aviation as well as a very efficient anti-tank artillery destroying 9 from the 13 R35 tanks. At 7h00, the German have achieved a bridgehead south of the Aisne River, deep of about 5 km from Château-Porcien to Avançon. The engineers build bridges for Guderian in Château-Porcien and Taizy.

On 9th June evening there is an animated discussion between General De Lattre (14^e DI) and General Klopfenstein (2^e DI). The first one would like to mount an immediate counter-attack, being aware that the German tanks will soon spread from the bridgehead but the second one wants to retreat 3 km south and does it. General De Lattre is therefore forced to reinforce his left flank which is not covered anymore.



It initially started out as an idea between myself and Bob Hart who helped iron out the scenario and air support timings, then Martin got involved and offered to supply some of the troops i.e “KG Kruger” and “Groupe Salanie” and also did the excellent terrain. We were a bit short on players this year but ran it all the same.

I was umpire and French second Division Commander and counter attacking forces from 7e DLM and 3e DCR, Stephen Uden was the overall french commander of 73rd Infantry Regiment holding the river line. Gary Loosen ran the 21st Infantry Regt and Luftwaffe whilst Martin Small commanded the Panzers and helped run a stall at the show.??

The game involved the sweeping assault of 1st panzer Division and there subsequent crossing of the Retourne river (which is actually a stream), however I did find out purely by accident that the river was dammed and flooded and thus posed an obstacle to the Panzers and thus why they needed bridges capturing intact. Orders were written and sent to players, the French Commander was given the option of blowing x4 bridges and thus decided to secure his Left flank by blowing the x3 bridges at Bergincourt shown bottom left of map, and also the bridge between Nueflize and Alincourt. The French commander also mined and barricaded all the others. This proved a problem later on in the game for the French counter punch.



Turn 1 started with an Artillery barrage from 1st Panzer Division's 105mm Light Battalion attached to 1st panzer Regt and its attached 150's plus the attached Corps artillery which was allocated for the opening Barrage. The 17th Infantry Division also threw in their attached Regimental guns and bombarded Tagnon. A Stuka squadron was allocated the destruction of Neuflize in the centre of the French line. Whilst an omnipresent spotter plane, a HS-126 watched on. The German player managed to kill outright seven of eight stands situated in Neuflize, this included the Battalion commander of the III Bn 73rd Infantry Regiment and attached MG platoon. The ruins can be seen in the picture above in the centre of the picture.



Turn 2 saw the advance of the 21st Infantry Regiment on Tagnon, home of the French 73rd Regimental HQ and attached HQ Company. Hidden in the woods South of Tagnon were further troops and a 47mm AT gun and one of the three French Artillery observers. It was this observer who managed to call down the artillery support of the attached 23rd Corps and one of the few escaped heavy 155 batteries from Divisional Arty who had successfully managed to prepare gun positions

throughout the night and early morning. These surviving guns were random and relied on an umpire roll for general support at -1, if successful they were deemed dug in and ready to fire battery shelling only missions.

1st Panzer Regiment sent a battalion to probe the woods ahead of themselves and clear the way through the gap. Whilst this was going on 1st Panzers Armoured Recce Battalion's armoured cars were probing North East and came on the board. The final rounds of artillery was brought down Tagnon resulting in the deaths of all who dwelt there, (going to ban Gary from rolling dice in any of my games again) one sole survivor a squad of motor cycle recce troops decide to bug out.



The aftermath of Tagnon as 21st Infantry clear the ruins and prepare to clear the railway crossing of its road block, to allow passage of traffic.

7e DLM (mechanised light Division) a recently reformed Division of ex Cavalry men in tanks sent in a counter attack to stem the German tide (this was the point Richard arrived). Unbeknown at the time they were not aware of the mined and barricaded bridges and assumed they could cross the river. A quick analysis showed the rail bridge was still intact and the Hotchkiss H39's made their way across the bridge in column. Whilst the AMR 35's of the Divisional Recce probed for a route across the river.



The Omni- present German eye in the sky couldn't allow the sneaky French this chance and thus called in the panzers attached artillery Battalion who concentrated all their 105's on the head of the column. Successfully managing to knock out the lead French tank but missing all the rest. The French tanks deemed it best not to try an push past a knocked out tank on a rail embankment and subsequently pulled back across their own side.



At this point a hoard and they can be called a hoard descended on our humble table and we gained four new players, two on the German side on two on the French, we broke of gaming to describe the game its rules and how it plays and then went through a couple of turns with them. To be honest from this point on not a lot of gaming was done due to the sheer numbers of people dropping by to chat and discuss the game, and rules etc. I gave out exactly 99 hand outs to the public, I printed off 100 and didn't think I would need that many.

A view of the whole of the 1st Panzer Regiment forcing its way through the defile between the shattered remains of Tagnon and Le Chatelet sur Retourne. As can be seen a platoon of Pz 1's can be seen screening the outskirts of the town to the right of the mass of tanks. The Schutzen Commander (Martin)decided it was prudent to

send in his Kradschutzen company on a sweeping arc around Tagnon and head for the forest in the centre to prepare for an assault on the neuflize bridgehead.

The German Panzer Commander seemed to become all British and set up for a deliberate set piece attack on the River, and launched an Artillery barrage with all guns on the woods along the river. The umpire stepped in to roll for the French and subsequently rolled a 1 just as the French Commander (Stephen) came back from shopping to see his troops retiring under the onslaught.



However the French commander did manage to turn round the troops in time to watch the oncoming panzers and its attached armoured Infantry form up for the attack. A flurry of 25mm rounds from hidden guns saw several Sdkfz 251's brew up and caused their occupants to debus.





A view from the other side of the board and elements of the 14e BLM and its associated WW1 vintage armoured cars attempt to dual with the forward elements of 1st Panzers armoured Recce Bn and losing, they attempted to see what was over the ridge and found 20mm AP rounds, so went back minus one armoured car a Laffly 50AM.



A view from the rear of the 1st panzer Recce Bn. On the table at back can be seen the town map, these are footprints of the actual town seen on board with the troops laid out on it (usually hidden from view in a box), when artillery fire is called down casualties are removed and not shown to the opposing player. When a sector is destroyed that part of the template was cut out and placed on board with associated rubble for effect. Sunday came round and we deemed we only had approx. two more turns to go before we knocked off, and we found that the attached Engineers and its associated armoured engineer vehicles (scratch built purely for this game by Martin) could not

get into position in time. We called a halt at this time and looked at packing up and going home.