

Bocage Attack by David Newport

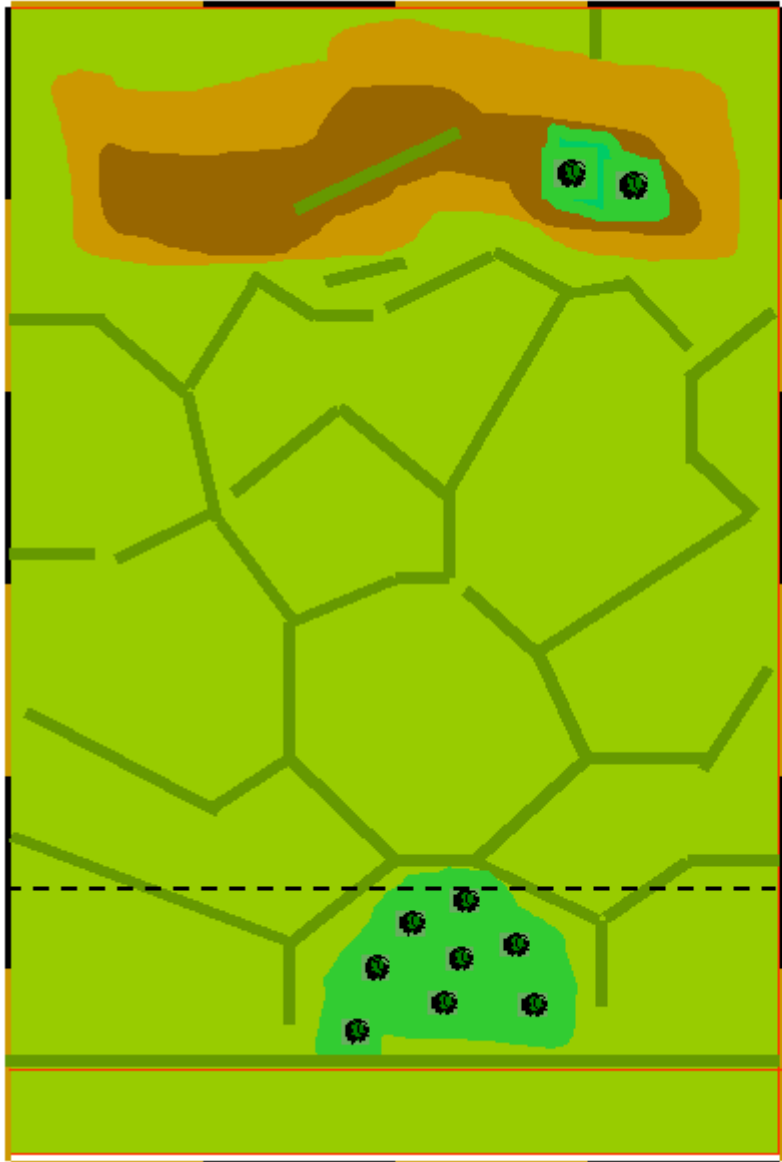
Normandy Hedgerows

In June and July 1944, the U.S. forces attacked through some of the best defensive terrain in Europe, the Bocage of Normandy. Over the centuries of cultivation, the Norman farmers had moved all of the rocks and debris from their fields into hedgerows that served as both boundary markers and protective fences. The resulting Bocage hedgerows consisted of dense vegetation atop thick earth/stone bases, not only giving good cover and concealment, but also blocking almost all vision. In combat the result was to chop the battlefield up into many small mini-fortresses, each one enclosing a cleared field. This came as a shock to the Allies, many of whom envisioned a "hedge" as a waist high decorative bush. The extreme defensive value of the bocage should not have been a surprise, because similar terrain exists in Britain, and English citizens often visited Normandy before the war. However, the Allies failed to use this information in their planning. The battle for Normandy and the Cotentin peninsula became a two month battle of attrition. Also, small ridges and hills gained importance because they allowed observation points above the surrounding terrain.

This scenario is not based on a specific battle, but represents a generic struggle near the end of the campaign, when the German forces have been reduced by attrition. A reinforced U.S. battalion is attacking a weakened German battalion on a front of about a mile.

The American order of battle represents a battalion that has been brought up to strength for a large attack, hence there are no losses. The full company of Shermans is a luxury, as typically one platoon was assigned per battalion, rather than one company. The extra tanks can be justified for the start of a major offensive in a critical area.

The German forces represent an under strength battalion holding the section of front. Most of the support weapons are on hand, especially the mortars, but the battalion can muster only one company worth of infantry. By this time in the campaign, the Germans were extremely low on replacements, and while they could keep the guns manned they were almost out of infantry. No FO's are attached to the battalion, to represent the poor state of communications present at the time. The Germans are heavily dependent on land lines and runners at this point, and removing the FO's is a good way to represent this. The StuG III's are attached in order to give the Germans some armor to play with. Often you will read about the defense of a sector being based around one or two assault guns, which would be one model. A second model was added to balance the Shermans on the American side.



-  Bocage Hedgerow
-  Cleared Woods
-  Level 1 Hill
-  Level 2 Hill
-  U.S. Start Line
-  Approximate German Start Line



Terrain and Scenario Notes

- All of the thick green lines are Full Bocage hedgerows. The terrain is set up so that the U.S. player must fight across at least 4 of these to reach the hill, and the map is 3 fields across. Feel free to vary the exact setup of the hedgerows keeping these ideas in mind.
- There are no roads, to force the combat through the hedgerows.
- All of the gaps in the hedgerows are considered Defiles for the purpose of triggering Opportunity Fire (p.33 of the rulebook).
- The fields enclosed by the hedgerows are clear, although there can be crops for visual effect, they are not high enough to affect line of sight.
- As this is a non-historical scenario feel free to vary the exact setup of the hedgerows keeping these idea in mind. Each field should be clear, surrounded by the high hedges of the bocage. You can make the fields either regular or irregular in shape. Put some gaps in the hedgerows (the farmers had ways of entering their fields).
- To simulate the confusion inherent in this situation, it is best played with an umpire.
- Each division on the map edge represents 12", giving a total table size of 4' x 6'.
- The game starts at 1200hrs (Turn 1) and finishes at the end of the 1800hrs turn (Turn 12). Unlike normal Battlefront time scale, each turn represents 1/2 hour to reflect the slower pace of operations in the defensive terrain.
- The U.S. player moves first.

Victory Conditions

The U.S. player must capture the hill by the end of turn 12. To do this:

- The U.S. player move at least one unit onto the hill at some point in the game (the Germans have uncontested possession of the hill at the start of the game and the U.S. player must occupy it).
- AND there must be 3 or fewer German units on the hill at the end of the game.
- AND if there are any German units on the hill at the end of the game, the U.S. player must have 3 times as many units on the hill.

The game is a draw if:

- The U.S. player has moved onto the hill and continues to occupy it with at least one unit.
- AND The German player has 3 or fewer units on the hill.
- AND the number of U.S. units on the hill is not 3 times as many as the number of German units on the hill.

The Germans win if:

- No U.S. unit has moved onto the hill during the course of the game.
- OR German units are on the hill but no U.S. units are on the hill at the end of the game.
- OR more than 3 German units occupy the hill at the end of the game.

Optional Rules

- **I want the Tanks.**

The order of battle is designed for 3 U.S. players, each of whom controls one company team with attached tanks and Forward Observer. There always seems to be one player who only wants to control tanks if they are on the table. Just for him, you have the option of keeping the Sherman company at full strength instead of breaking it down and attaching it to each of the company teams. He gets the extra command tank, but to better represent the poor state of armor/infantry coordination, he is not allowed to discuss movement, fire, targets, or tactics with the other players (this must be enforced by the umpire or German player). Essentially, he runs an independent armored company that no one can communicate with.
- Use the optional Bodge rules described on our playtest [engineering](#) page. Equip some of the tanks with hedgecutters or dozer blades. If you are really nice, you can give the U.S. player a platoon (3 stands) of combat engineers US-20 (3 stands) as attachments and allow them to set up breaching demolitions for the first row of bodge before the game begins.
- Use the optional playtest [machine gun grazing-fire](#) rules. These can be nasty, as the Germans are well-equipped with machining.
- Pre-game barrage
Some players asked about getting a preparatory barrage for the Americans. I don't include one in the scenario for the reason that they were usually ineffective. The opening barrage was usually focused on the first 500-1000 yards in front of the American lines. However, the Germans, would typically hold this zone with light forces and have their main line further back, where it would be unaffected by the barrage. I require the Germans to set up at least 10" from the American start line, and smart players will not have their main line of forces deployed that close. An optimum zone for them is about 20-30" back or more, which would be safely out of range of the barrage. If you want to let the Americans have a barrage, allow one only within 20" of the start line, and tell the German players about this restrictions on the barrage as they were well aware of how the Allies used their artillery. See how effective it is under these restrictions, and you will see why I left a prep barrage out.
- If the Germans need an extra boost, let them target the gaps in the hedges as pre-registered artillery points. (p.36)

Play tips

Germans

The **only** thing that counts towards victory is control of the hill. The Americans have to fight through numerous hedgerows to get to the hill. The way to blunt their advance is to defend forward with a few troops, force the Americans to deploy to deal with them, then withdraw to a main line of resistance. On this line you can try to hit the Americans hard, again forcing them to deploy to deal with the defense. When their firepower starts to make itself felt, fall back to the next hedgerow line. Don't withdraw until forced to, but **DO** withdraw when it gets too hot. You can cause casualties with hidden troops and your mortars, then fall back once the Americans are about to overwhelm your line. Due to the fragmented nature of the terrain, you may not have to fall back in one field. Hold that field for a while and put in some flanking fire on the attackers. With good deployment and some luck, the battle will not even get onto the hill, but most likely there will be some fighting over at least part of it. I've seen a game where the Americans didn't even set foot on the hill!

One player was particularly good at the recommended tactics. He managed to inflict 50% casualties on two attacking company teams, all while losing only one stand. He had to make a last stand on the hill to cover for his partner, who lost the other two companies of troops by not giving ground when it was time to do so. By waiting for American numbers of troops, tanks, and artillery to come to bear on him, he lost 2/3 of the German forces and caused fewer casualties than he took, even in defense-friendly bocage.

Americans

The defense has some great terrain on their side. After you take one hedgerow or field, there is another one ahead of it and you have to do it all over. The key is to find the defense, pin him down quickly with your artillery, mortars, and tanks, and maneuver your infantry to take him out. Use liberal amounts of smoke from the mortars. Against a dug in enemy, the artillery can do the killing and suppressing while the smoke can limit his ability to hurt your maneuvering units. It's going to be a bloody mess anyway, as hidden MGs are all over the map, and you have to expose yourself to them in order to move forward and maneuver against known enemy units. The faster you can move, the less time the Germans have to fall back and get a new line set up, and the more defenders you will kill in place. Keep the defense disorganized, and you can reach the hill and take it. Get bogged down fighting for the next hedgerow and you will not even get the chance to attack the hill.

I recommend a two up, one back strategy for the company teams, feeding the reserve team in to reinforce success and get to the hill. Attacking in a line abreast sacrifices depth and exposes more American troops to enemy fire, leaving perhaps insufficient combat strength to carry the day if a hole opens up in the defenses. Timing is important on deploying the reserves, but a fresh infantry company backed up by a platoon of tanks can rip a small hole wide open and expose the defense American firepower in depth.

Briefing for Officer Commanding German Infantry Kampfgruppe

Situation

The Germans are occupying a hill that dominates the local bocage area. It is essential that you retain this hill to allow us artillery observation into the surrounding area and deny this to the Americans. It looks like the Americans are preparing a major attack with a reinforced battalion.

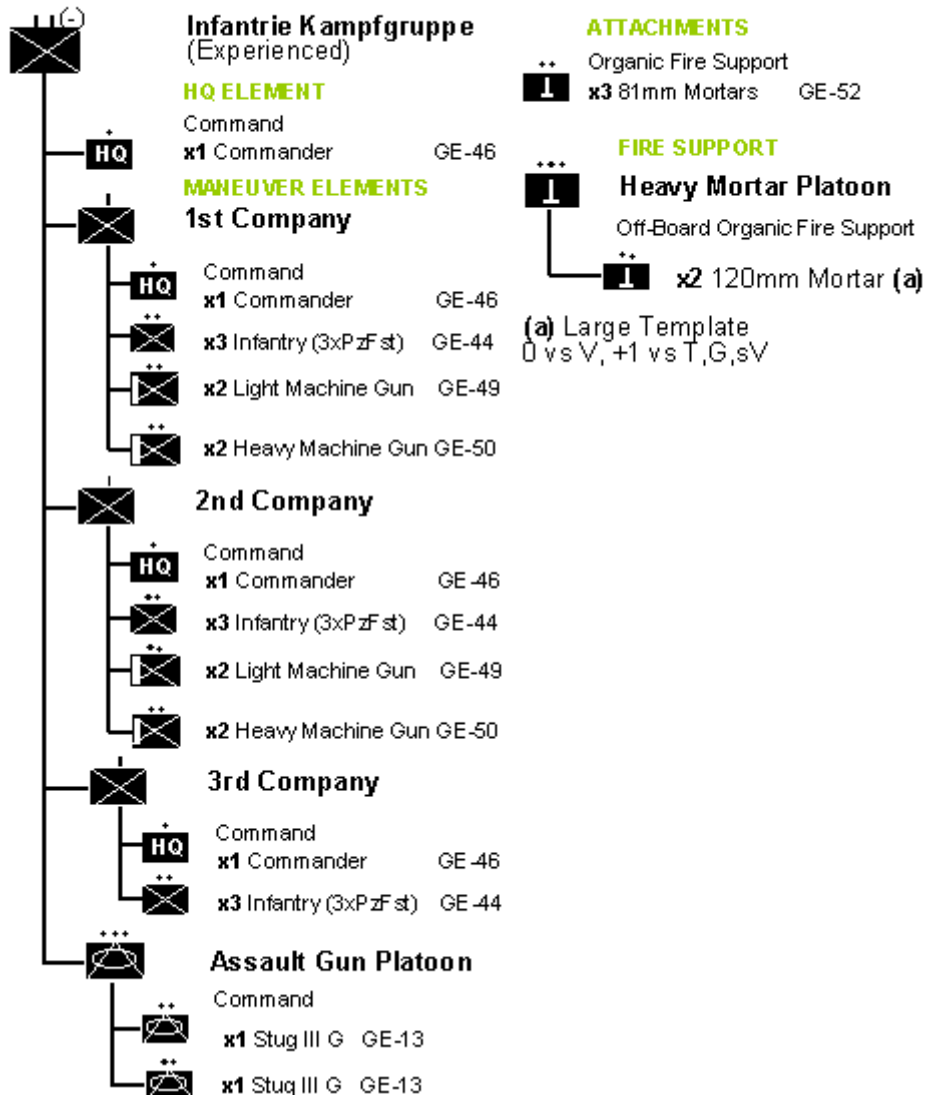
Mission

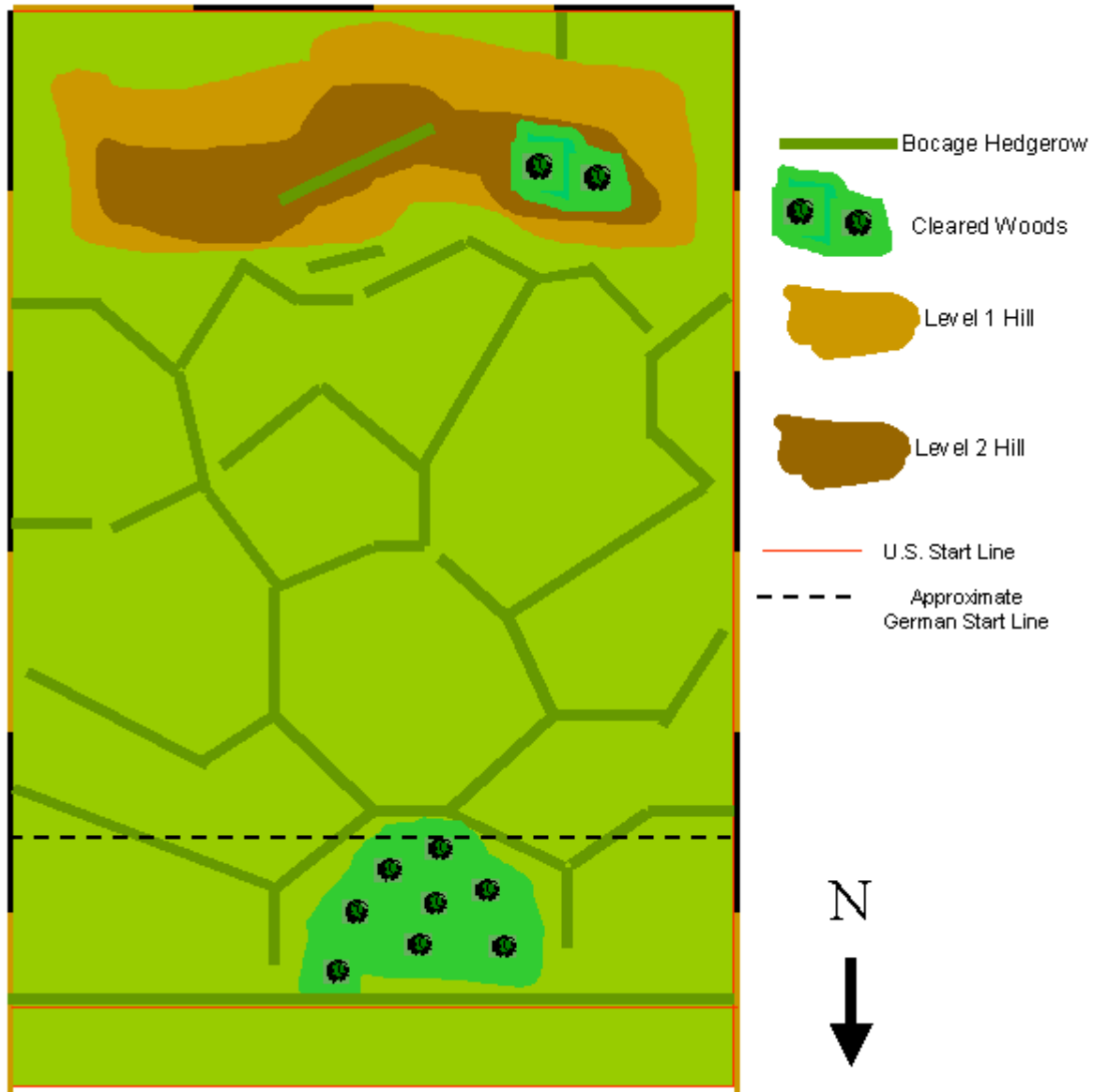
You are to defend the hill and inflict maximum casualties on the attacking U.S. forces.

Execution

Your forces consist of a depleted battalion and a platoon of assault guns. Fortunately, despite the fact that your battalion can only muster a company of infantry, most of your support weapons are still available, especially the mortars. Your forces are listed below.

Bocage 1944, German Forces





Starting Positions and Reinforcement Schedule

- You set up first. However, note that all deployment is hidden or done with markers.
- You may set up anywhere 10" or more South of the U.S. start line or at the next E-W hedgerow (whichever is closer). Note that North is at the bottom of the map.
- German units start dug-in/hull-down.
- German units start hidden. Use lots of dummies (up to 1 dummy for every real unit) or use hidden map placement.

Objective

Hold the hill. You win if you have more than 3 units on the hill at the end of the game OR if the U.S. player has not moved a unit onto the hill. If you have 3 or fewer units on the hill at the end of the game, and the U.S. player has moved onto the hill, the U.S. player must outnumber you by at least 3 to 1 on the hill or the game is a draw.

Scenario Notes

- Artillery Options

The two German off-board mortars may operate either as a single unit or as two separate fire missions. Their possible missions are:

1. Mortar section Shelling mission (1 template wide/0 vs V, +1 vs T, G, sV)
2. Platoon Concentration mission (1 template wide/+1 vs V, +2 vs T, G, sV)

No FO's are attached to the battalion, to represent the poor state of communications present at the time, The Germans are heavily dependent on land lines and runners and removing the FO's is a good way to represent this. The lack of FO's will mean that even though the German artillery is powerful, it is unreliable.

- The U.S. Player Moves first.
- Each turn represents 30 minutes of battle unlike the usual 10. This represents the slow and difficult terrain of the bocage. The game starts at 1200 and ends after the 12th German player turn at 1800.
- The German side is designed for two players. A third player can operate the assault guns and take overall command if needed.

Briefing for Officer commanding Reinforced U.S. Infantry Battalion

Situation

The Germans are occupying a hill that dominates the local bocage area. It is essential that we clear them from this terrain feature. Intelligence reports that a weakened German infantry battalion is defending this area.

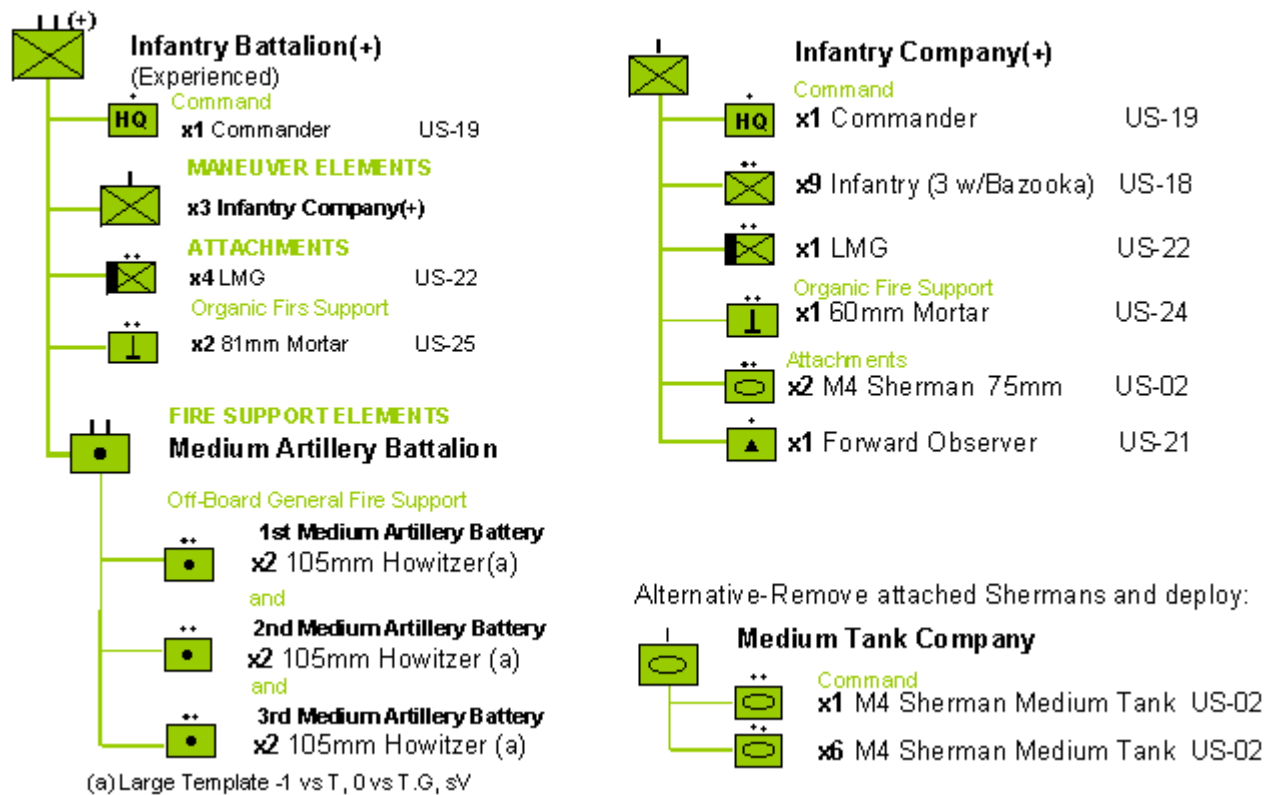
Mission

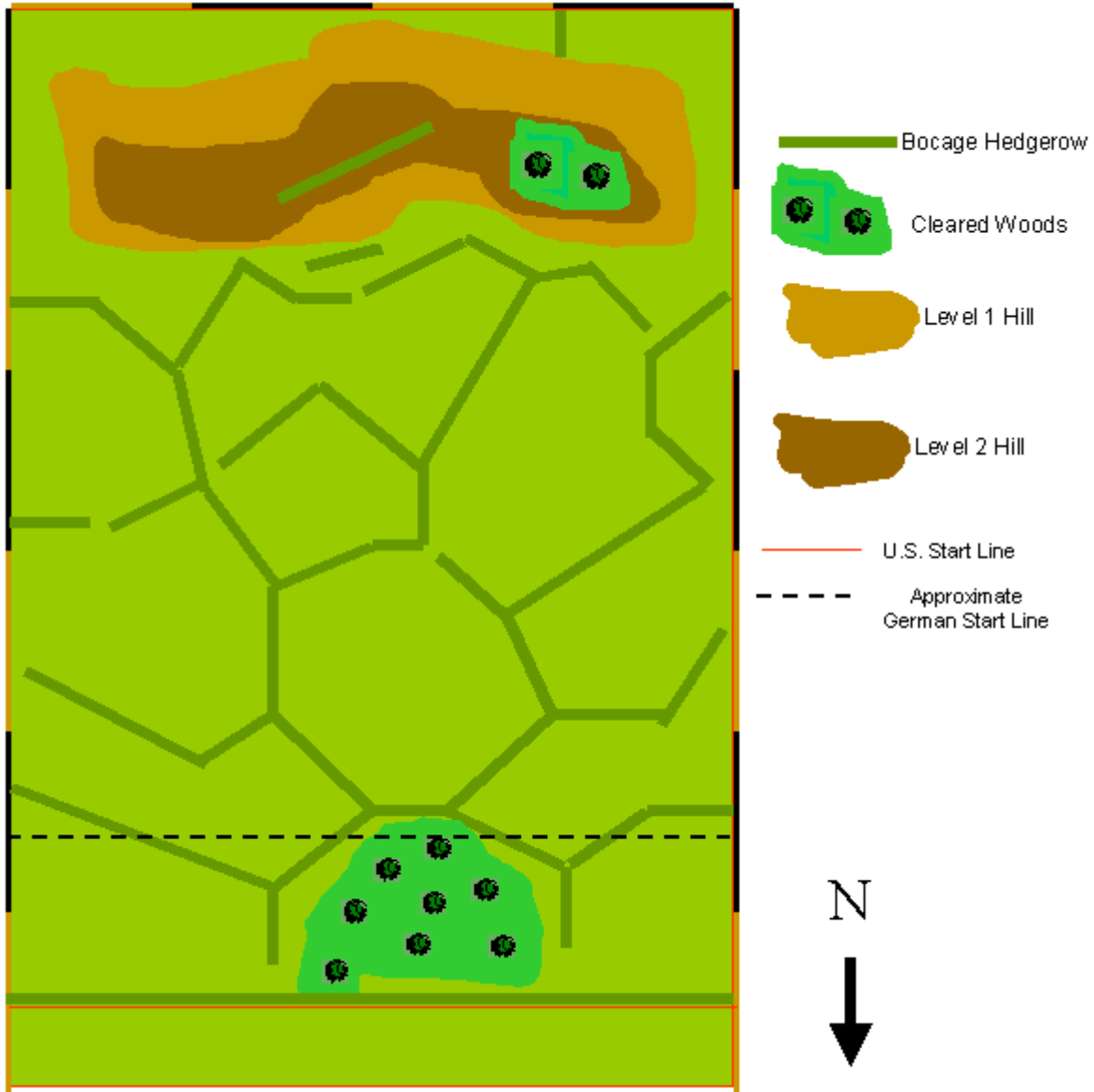
You are to drive the German forces from the hill and occupy it.

Execution

You are commanding a battalion of infantry, reinforced by a company of Sherman tanks. Your force represents a battalion that has been brought up to full strength for a large attack, hence there are no losses. Your forces have been split into three equal company teams. You have an artillery battalion supporting your attack and extra forward observers have been attached so that each company team can call artillery. Your forces are listed below.

Bocage, 1944 U.S. Order of Battle





Starting Positions and Reinforcement Schedule

- Your forces set up second.
- You may start your forces anywhere to the North of the line indicated. Note that North is at the bottom of the map.
- Alternatively, you may deploy two company teams on the map and keep one in reserve off the North Edge. This team may enter at your discretion during the maneuver phase of any turn anywhere along the North Edge.
- You may put up to 6 breaches in the first line of hedgerows (at your start line) at the beginning of the game.

Objective

Drive the enemy from the hill. To claim the hill:

1. At least one U.S. unit must have been on the hill (i.e. you can move on and then off again, but someone must move on at some point in the game).
2. No more than 3 German stands can be present on the hill
3. If Germans are present on the hill, the U.S. must outnumber the Germans on the hill by at least 3 to 1.

If there are 3 or fewer German stands on the hill, but the U.S. does not outnumber them by 3-to-1, the game is a draw.

If there are more than 3 units on the hill OR if the U.S. has never moved onto the hill, the Germans win.

Notes

- **Artillery Options**
The U.S. has 3 forward observers and 3x105mm artillery batteries. Each observer can call a separate fire mission using one battery, or all 3 artillery batteries can combine into a single mission. The possible missions are:
 1. Battery Shelling mission (2 templates wide/-1 vs V, 0 vs T, G, sV)
 2. Battery Concentration mission (1 template wide/0 vs V, +1 vs T, G, sV)
 3. Battalion Concentration mission (3 templates wide/0 vs V, +1 vs T, G, sV)
 4. Battalion Thickened Concentration (1 template wide/+1 vs V, +2 vs T, G, sV)
- The U.S. Player Moves first.
- Each turn represents 30 minutes of battle unlike the usual 10. This represents the slow and difficult terrain of the bocage. The game starts at 1200 and ends after the 12th German player turn at 1800.