

“Engage Over Open Sights!”

153rd Field Regiment RA at Maisoncelles, Normandy Operation ‘Bluecoat’, 3rd August 1944

A Scenario for *‘Battlefront: WWII’*
By R Mark Davies

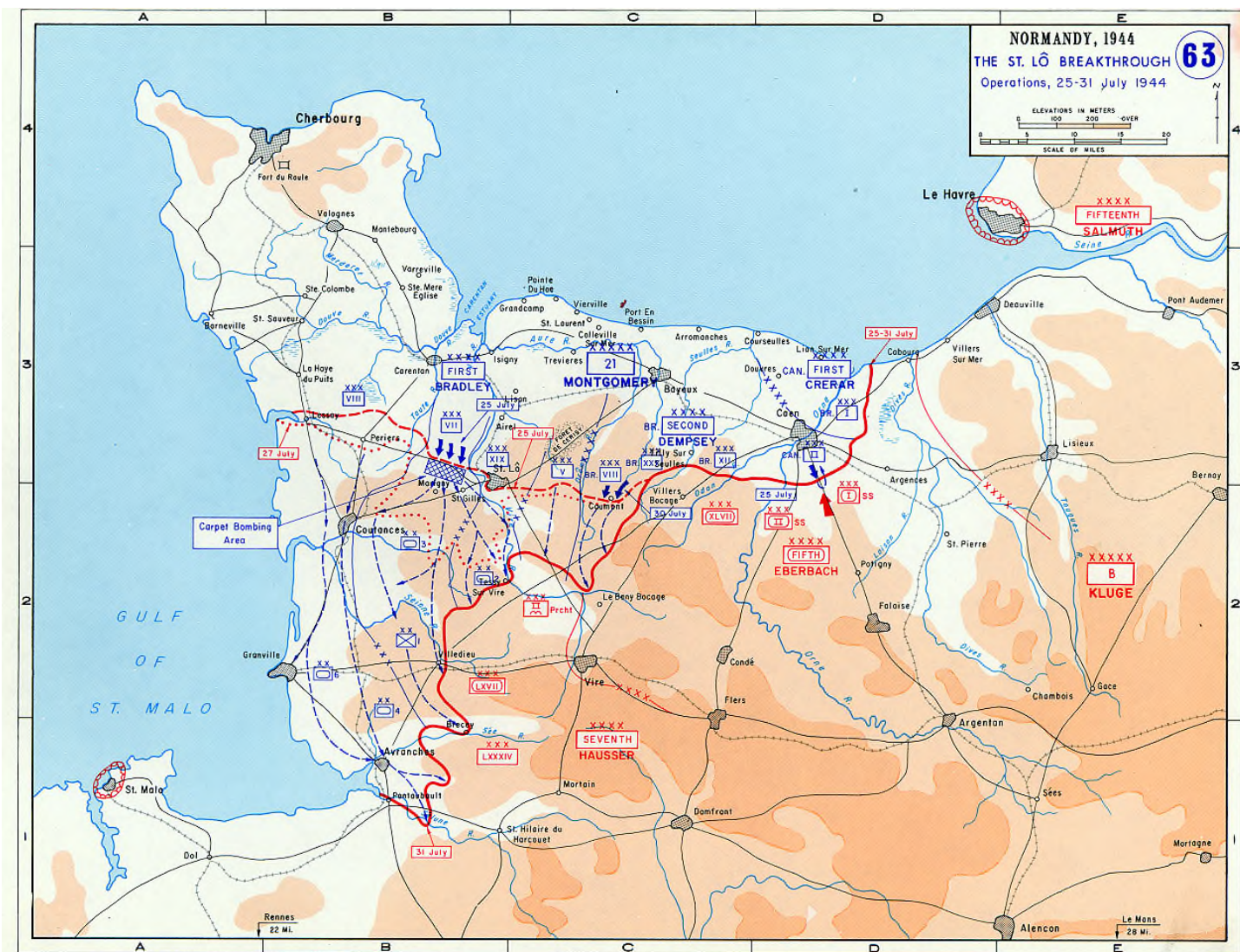


Historical Background – ‘Operation Bluecoat’

Following the titanic battle of Operation ‘Goodwood’ (17-19 July 1944), seven of the nine German *Panzer* Divisions in Normandy were now concentrated in the area south of Caen, defending against any further British/Canadian drive south to Falaise. With the Germans’ attention fixed on Caen, the time was now ripe for Bradley’s US 1st Army to break out of western Normandy.

On 25th July, 1,500 bombers of the US 8th Air Force plastered the German positions west of St Lô, almost completely destroying the *Panzer-Lehr-Division* and *275. Infanterie-Division*. Then, preceded by a massive artillery barrage, the US 7th and 8th Corps drove southwards to commence Operation ‘Cobra’. Within two days, the Americans had broken through, were passing through Coutances and were driving hard for Avranches – the gateway to Brittany. Patton’s US 3rd Army meanwhile, was being shipped across the English Channel to Normandy, ready to exploit the breakthrough.

With the Americans forging ahead in the west, Dempsey’s British 2nd Army was now ordered to launch its own offensive to support the Americans’ exposed left flank. The three British Armoured Divisions (7th, 11th & Guards), having made good their losses suffered in Operation ‘Goodwood’, were now rushed westward to form the armoured punch for the new offensive – Operation ‘Bluecoat’. The plan for was for 2nd Army to break out of the sector between Tilly-sur-Seulles and Caumont and to drive southward to Vire and Flers, thus protecting the exposed American left flank and drawing the German counter-attack onto themselves, rather than the American spearheads. In detail, O’Connor’s VIII Corps, consisting of 11th Armoured Division, Guards Armoured Division, 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division and 6th Guards Tank Brigade, would attack from Caumont toward Vire and Flers. Bucknall’s XXX Corps meanwhile, consisting of 7th Armoured Division, 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division, 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division and 8th Armoured Brigade, was to attack from Tilly-sur-Seulles toward Villers-Bocage, Aunay-sur-Odon and Condé-sur-Noireau.



Preceded by massive preparation by heavy bombing and artillery, Operation 'Bluecoat' got underway on Sunday 30th July. XXX Corps immediately found the going between Tilly-sur-Seulles and Caumont extremely tough. The Germans had had six weeks to fortify the area and had prepared the ground well. Minefields soon slowed the advance to a crawl, despite the best efforts of the Royal Engineers and the 'Funnies' of 79th Armoured Division. As a consequence, the town of Villers-Bocage, only a few miles beyond the start-line, did not fall to 50th Division until 2nd August. To make matters worse, Erskine's 7th Armoured Division then became hopelessly entangled with the 50th Division as they attempted to take the lead. They then made slow progress against the dogged German 276. *Infanterie-Division* as they attempted to break through to Aunay-sur-Odon. Exasperated at the heavy casualties and lack of progress and coming under increasing pressure from Monty for results, Dempsey finally sacked Erskine and one of his brigadiers (the infamous 'Loony' Hinde) on 4th August. General Bucknall, commanding XXX Corps, was also to be sacked following 'Bluecoat'.

On the right of XXX Corps, 43rd (Wessex) Division, despite the support of 8th Armoured Brigade, was halted by a determined and well-positioned defence by elements of 276. *Infanterie-Division* in the dense *bocage* and on the steep slopes surrounding the high, wooded ridge of Mont Pinçon. The high ground finally fell to a bold *coup de main* by tanks of the 13/18th Hussars in the early hours of 5th August.

In the VIII Corps sector, things were progressing rather more to plan, despite the best efforts of the German defenders. The 15th (Scottish) Division, supported by the Churchill tanks of 6th Guards Tank Brigade and the ubiquitous 'Funnies' of 79th Armoured Division, quickly broke through the

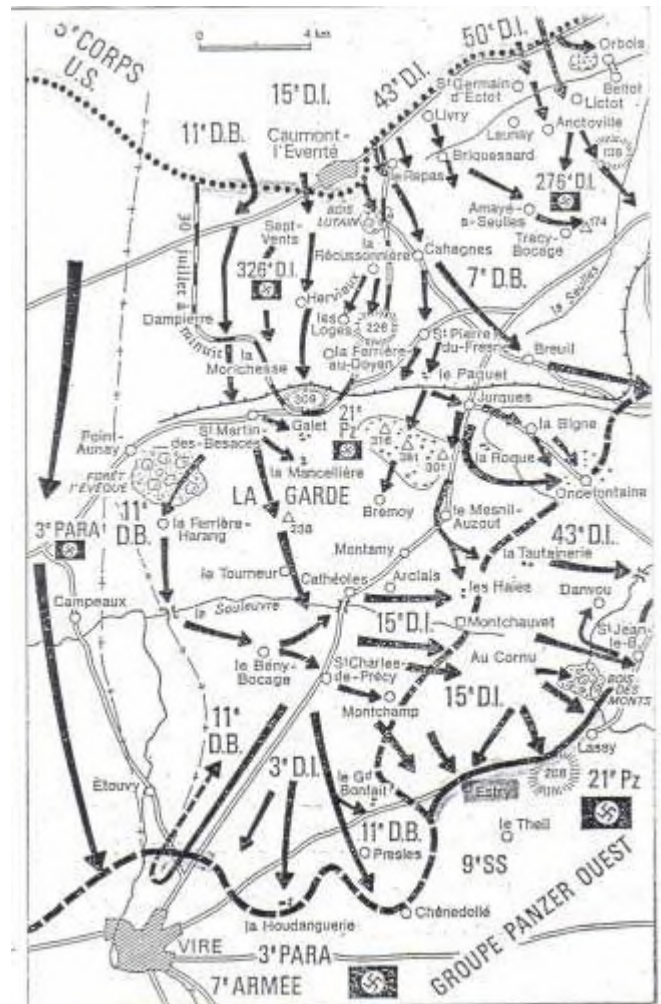
crust of the defending 326. *Infanterie-Division* and by the afternoon, had achieved their initial objectives – Hills 226 and 309. However, a counter-attack by just three *Jagdpanther* tank-destroyers of *Schwere-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654* against 6th Guards Tank Brigade succeeded in completely destroying a squadron of Churchills on the slopes of Hill 226. Nevertheless, the Germans failed to exploit this incredible success and left Hill 226 in British hands. However, on the morning of 31st July, a rather more serious threat appeared from the east, in the form of 21. *Panzer-Division*, reinforced by the *Jagdpanther* battalion. At dawn, Hill 309 (soon to be known as ‘Coldstream Hill’) was subjected to an intense bombardment, followed by strong German attacks. These continued throughout the day, but the Scottish infantry and Coldstreamers’ tanks held firm. 21. *Panzer-Division* had dashed itself to pieces against Coldstream Hill and was forced to retire.

A few miles to the west, the 11th Armoured Division was breaking out. The town of St Martin-des-Besaces was liberated at mid-day on 31st July and the armoured cars of 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment were pushing on southward, through undefended wooded hills and into the deep valley of the Soulevre. Incredibly, an intact and undefended bridge was discovered by the Household Cavalry

and this fact was soon transmitted back to General Roberts, commander of 11th Armoured Division. Electrified by this news, Roberts soon had armour racing to the scene and the bridge was firmly in his hands. As the Guards Armoured Division moved up to cover his open flank, the ‘Black Bull’ of 11th Armoured Division was soon in full charge across the Soulevre.

On the morning of 1st August, having crossed the Soulevre, a strong armour-infantry battlegroup from 11th Armoured Division pushed on into Le Bény-Bocage, swiftly overcoming enemy resistance there. With the town secured, another battlegroup pushed further east, to cut the main Villers-Bocage to Vire highway at the crossroads of La Ferronnière (incorrectly identified on British maps as ‘St Charles de Percy’, which in fact, lies about a mile east of the highway), while Household Cavalry patrols pushed on as far as Presles. The Guards Armoured Division meanwhile, was encountering strong resistance south of St Martin-des-Besaces from elements of 326. *Infanterie-Division* and 21. *Panzer-Division*, but was still pushing on and by evening had reached the Soulevre at Le Tourneur. That night, the infantry of 3rd Irish Guards managed to cross over the Soulevre at of Le Tourneur, with the intention of moving east, along the southern bank of the Soulevre, to take the vital bridge at Cathéolles.

The Germans were now beginning to move reinforcements to the area of the British penetration. The *II. SS-Panzer-Korps*, consisting of 9. *SS-Panzer-Division ‘Hohenstaufen’*, 10. *SS-Panzer-Division ‘Fruntsberg’* and *Schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 102*, was ordered to move from its positions south of Caen, to the Vire sector. *Hohenstaufen* was on the move by mid-afternoon on 1st August, but *Fruntsberg* and the Tigers of *Schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 102*, were not ready to move until nightfall. *Hohenstaufen* was ordered to head straight to the heart of the problem – the British bridgehead at Le Bény-Bocage and the bridge at Cathéolles.

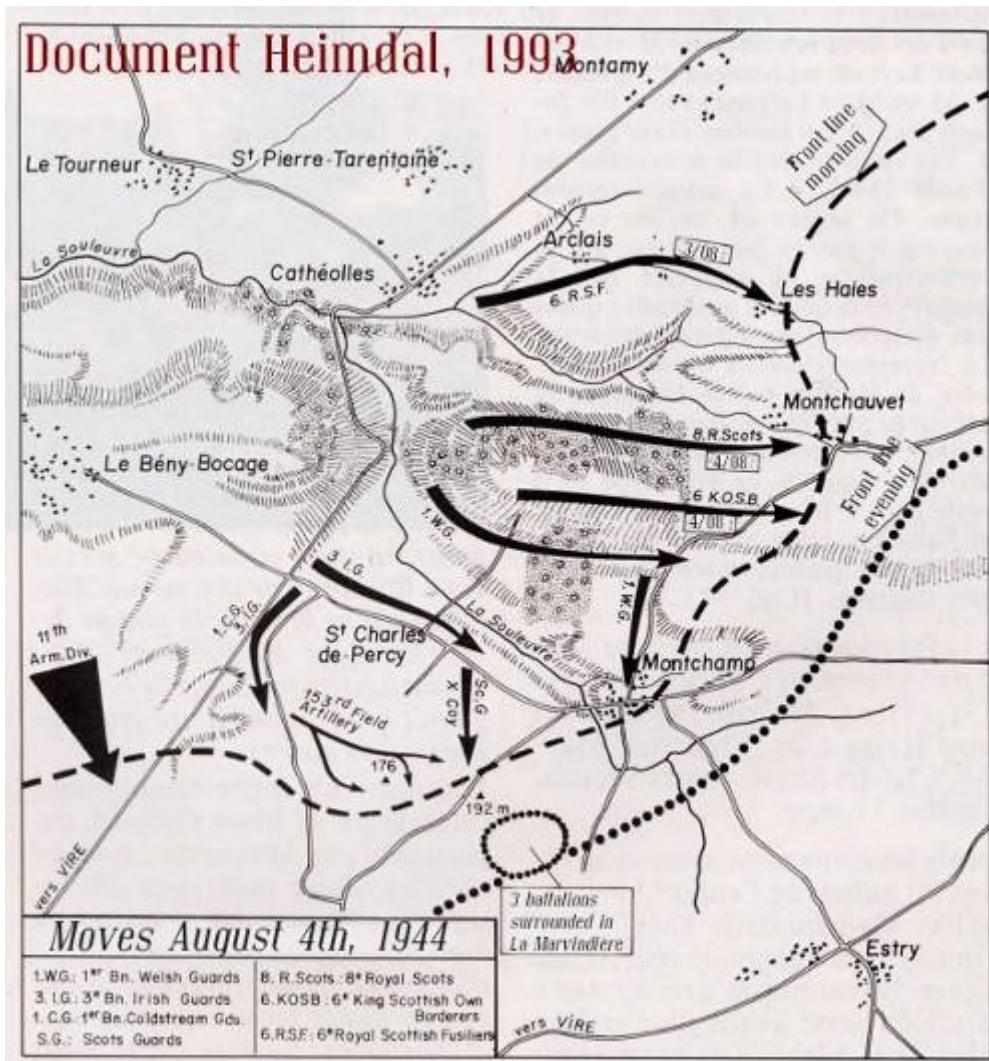


On the morning of Wednesday 2nd August, the Cromwell tanks of 2nd Welsh Guards probed towards Cathéolles; successfully capturing the bridge intact and linking up with 3rd Irish Guards on the southern bank. However, they were soon ambushed and came under heavy fire from elements of *Hohenstaufen*, who had reached the high ground of Drouet Hill, which overlooks Cathéolles from the south-east. Nevertheless, one Welsh Guards squadron managed to reach St Charles de Percy, though this village was also now found to be in the hands of *Hohenstaufen*. The 1st & 2nd Grenadier Guards also soon managed to cross over the Soulevre at Cathéolles and pushed on to gain a foothold on the Drouet Hill. The 3rd Irish Guards meanwhile, pushed back the remaining enemy from south of Cathéolles and expanded the bridgehead south to La Ferronière, thereby linking up with the bridgehead of 11th Armoured Division.

At 0245hrs on Thursday 3rd August, the 153rd Field Regiment (Leicestershire Yeomanry), Royal Artillery, being the self-propelled artillery regiment of Guards Armoured Division, was ordered to move south, to cross over the Soulevre at Cathéolles and deploy into firing positions on the plateau surrounding Point 176, at Maisoncelles, to the south of St Charles de Percy. At the same time, the tanks of 1st Colstream Guards were also ordered to cross over, with the intention of supporting the infantry of 3rd Irish Guards in the same area. The tanks of 2nd Irish Guards and the infantry of 5th Coldstream Guards meanwhile, were ordered to join 2nd Welsh Guards and to drive south-west for La Marvinière.

However, all of these movements were ordered in complete ignorance of the locations of *Hohenstaufen* combat elements. As 2nd Household Cavalry had already declared the area clear (having passed through two days earlier, before the arrival of *Hohenstaufen*), it was assumed that the area south of St Charles de Percy was largely clear of the enemy, whereas in reality, the area was now crawling with elements of *Hohenstaufen's 'Kampfgruppe Meyer'* (consisting of a battalion of Panther tanks and a regiment of SS panzer-grenadiers).

In the heart of this confusion, the Sexton self-propelled guns and disarmed Sherman OP tanks of 153rd Field Regiment reached their battery positions at Maisoncelles without incident and as dawn broke, were soon starting to respond to calls for fire from their FOOs nearby. They naturally assumed that regiments of Guards tanks and battalions of Guards infantry were between them and the enemy. Little did they know that they were now in the heart of 'Indian Country'...



Briefing for Lieutenant Colonel J S Atkins, Commanding 153rd Field Regiment (Leicestershire Yeomanry), Royal Artillery, Guards Armoured Division

Situation – 0845hrs, Thursday 3rd August 1944, Point 176, Maisoncelles

Your regiment was given the order to move south of the Soulevre at 0245hrs this morning and, having passed over the river at Cathéolles, moved into its new firing positions on the Maisoncelles Plateau (Point 176) at 0630hrs. Your batteries have begun firing, responding to calls for fire from your FOOs.



However, utter confusion seems to be reigning in the division. Brigades seem to have become completely mixed and nobody seems to be able to give you a firm answer as to where friendly units are located, let alone the enemy!

As if to answer that question, 'P' Battery, deployed to your right-front, has just sent back an urgent situation report. They have enemy tanks visible to their front!

Mission

You are to defend your position, with the intention of preserving the guns.

Execution

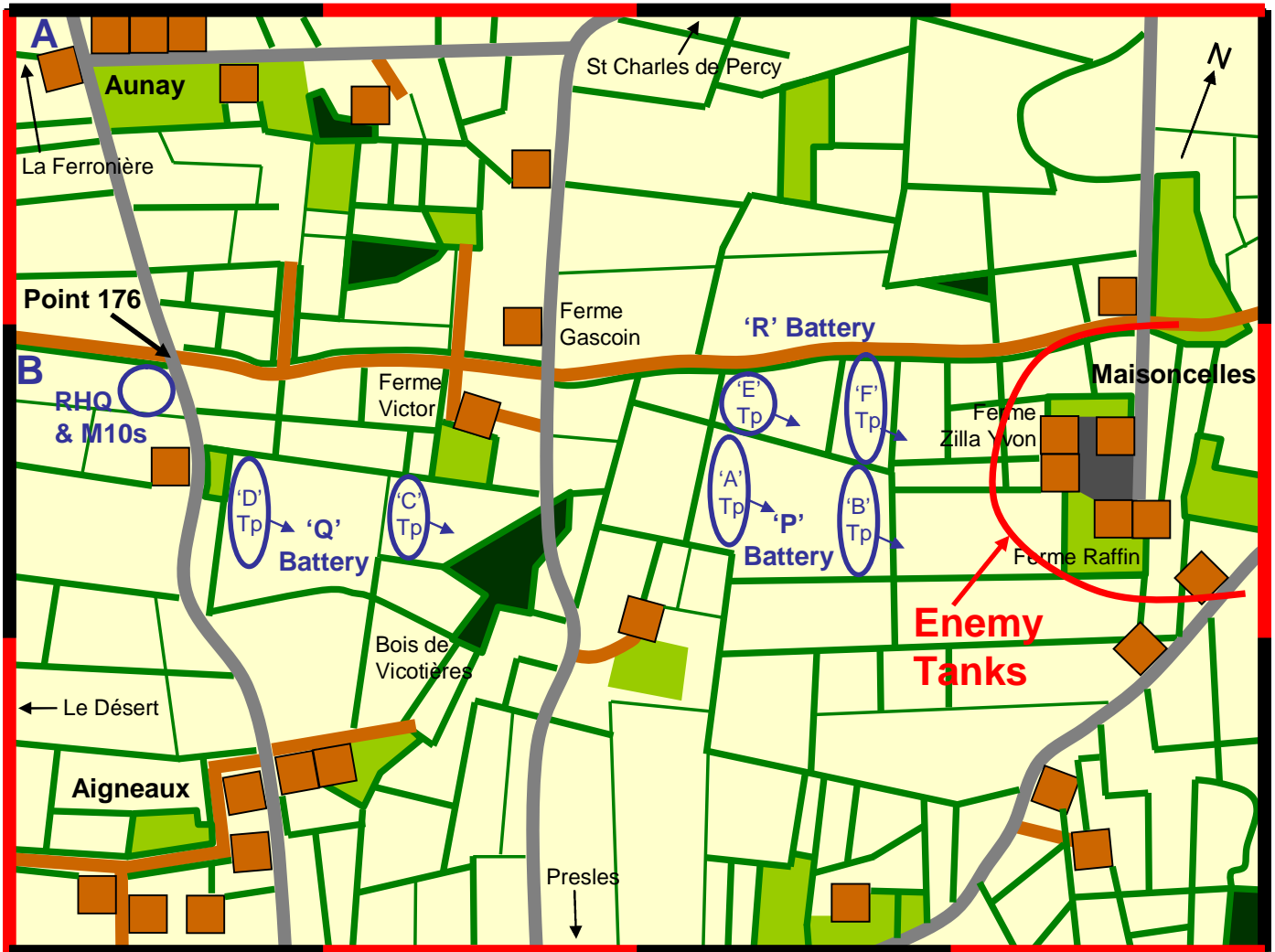
General Outline

- You are to defend your gun-positions if you can. If facing overwhelming force, you are simply to save the guns! Your units may exit the table at Point 'A' or Point 'B'.
- The enemy is too close to engage indirectly with your 25pdrs. Your regiment must therefore fight as self-propelled anti-tank guns.
- A single section of self-propelled Bofors guns from 94th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment is deployed with 'Q' Battery. This is directly attached to the 'Q' Battery ME. While not much use against German tanks, they may prove useful in helping to fight off infantry.
- A Troop of M10c self-propelled 17pdrs from 'Q' Battery, 21st Anti-Tank Regiment, commanded by Battery Sergeant-Major Woolley, is co-located with your headquarters. These should be more than a match for any German tank. The M10cs are equipped with the latest APDS ammunition, so may use the better gun factors shown on the unit card. Woolley's Troop may be directly attached to 153rd Field RHQ or may operate as an independent Troop-sized ME.

Deployment

- Your forces are deployed as per the map. You have been taken by surprise while engaging in indirect fire missions, so there is little time to re-deploy for anti-tank defence.
- Each battery is deployed as two Troops (half-batteries). 'P' Battery has 'A' & 'B' Troops, 'Q' Battery has 'C' & 'D' Troops and 'R' Battery has 'E' & 'F' Troops. Each Troop position is shown on the map.

- Each Troop of two Sexton models must be deployed in line, with no more than 2 inches between them.
- Battery Commanders' Sherman OP tanks must be placed with one of the Sexton Troops in the battery.
- All Sextons are facing roughly East.
- No Sextons may start the game conformed to a hedgeline – they have been firing indirectly from the middle of fields.
- No vehicles may be in hull-down positions at the start of the scenario.



Enemy Forces

- Details are sketchy, but one of your OP halftracks was heading East toward Maisoncelles, when he reported encountering Panther tanks at the farm on the outskirts of Maisoncelles, which lies some 300m forward of 'P' & 'R' Battery's forward positions. Enemy strength was not reported.
- Your Intelligence Officer tells you that from bodies and documents recovered at Drouet yesterday, your opponents are most likely from the 9th SS Panzer Division, which seems to have moved onto the division's front within the last 24 hours.

- Strong enemy forces have been reported moving up through Estry, some miles to your front and you have spent the last hour or so shelling them.

Friendly Forces

- Your order of battle is listed at Annex A to this briefing. All British units are classed as 'Experienced', except for BSM Woolley's Troop of M10c tank destroyers, which are classed as 'Veteran' (all other M10c are classed as 'Experienced').
- Joe Vandeleur's 3rd Irish Guards are holding the La Ferronnière crossroads to your rear and are moving into St Charles de Percy on your left. However, the sounds of battle from that area are now clear and it seems like they're having a hard fight.
- Both the 2nd Household Cavalry (armoured cars) and the 2nd Welsh Guards (armoured recce) have apparently already passed through this area and have reported it clear. However, there has been no sign of either regiment. It is thought that the 2nd Welsh Guards are forward of you, in the Estry area, while the 2nd Household Cavalry are scouting further afield.
- Elements of 1st Coldstream Guards are moving towards Le Désert on your right. You have a FOO operating forward with them and you are presently trying to contact him, to see if you can get some help from the Coldstreamers' tanks.
- The remainder of Major Wilson's 'Q' Battery, 21st Anti-Tank Regiment is still moving up from Cathéolles. You have asked BSM Woolley to get onto his battery net and request urgent assistance.

Predicted Reinforcements

- **Turn 6** – Major Wilson of 'Q' Battery, 21st Anti-Tank Regiment arrives at Point 'A' with **x1** Crusader OP Tank and **x2** M10c. BSM Woolley's Troop may continue to fight as a separate ME, or may be absorbed into the Battery ME. Any losses suffered by Woolley are then absorbed into the Battery ME.
- **Turn 9** – the last remaining Troop of **x2** M10c arrives at Point 'A' to reinforce Major Wilson's battery. These are immediately added to Wilson's ME and may not act as an independent ME.

Fire Support

- You are operating at the extreme tip of the advance and it is therefore highly unlikely that artillery support will be forthcoming.

Air Support

- There is no RAF 'Tentacle' co-located with you, so even if air support was available, you have no way of communicating with them.

Game Sequence

- The scenario lasts for twelve turns.
- The Germans have the first turn.

Victory Conditions

- Only the German player amasses Victory Points in this scenario. Victory or Defeat is therefore decided by the performance of the German player, based on the chart below:
- **1 VP** for each enemy Artillery Battery with greater than 25% casualties.
- **2 VP** for each enemy Artillery Battery with greater than 50% casualties.
- **3VP** for each enemy Artillery Battery with greater than 75% casualties.
- **3VP** for possession of Point 176 (i.e. the only side with Undisordered units within 6 inches at the end of the game).
- **Lose 1VP** for each KO'd German tank.
- **Total German Victory** – for having 10+ VPs.
- **Partial German Victory** – for having 5-9 VPs.
- **Partial British Victory** – for having 1-4 VPs.
- **Total British Victory** – for having 0VPs or less.

BATTLEGROUP
153rd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery
(Leicestershire (Prince Albert's Own) Yeomanry),
Guards Armoured Division
 Lieutenant Colonel J S Atkins

Command
 x1 Sherman V OP Tank BR-31

MANOEUVRE ELEMENT
'P' Battery (129 Field Battery)
 Major, Lord Willoughby de Eresby

Command
 x1 Sherman V OP Tank BR-31
 x4 Sexton SP 25pdr Field Gun BR-26.1

MANOEUVRE ELEMENT
'Q' Battery (130 Field Battery)
 Major R Hoare

Command
 x1 Sherman V OP Tank BR-31
 x4 Sexton SP 25pdr Field Gun BR-26.1

MANOEUVRE ELEMENT
'R' Battery (131 Field Battery)
 Captain, The Honourable F Cawley

Command
 x1 Sherman V OP Tank BR-31
 x4 Sexton SP 25pdr Field Gun BR-26.1

ATTACHED TO RHQ, 153 FIELD REGIMENT

Elements, 'A' Troop, 94th Light AA Regiment, Royal Artillery

x1 Morris C9B SP 40mm Bofors AA Gun BR-P15

REINFORCEMENTS

MANOEUVRE ELEMENT
'Q' Battery, 21st Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery
 Major S A Wilson

Command
 x1 Crusader III OP Tank BR-P36
 x6 M10c 17pdr Tank Destroyer BR-14



Briefing for SS-Obersturmbannführer Otto Meyer, Commanding Kampfgruppe 'Meyer', 9. SS-Panzer-Division 'Hohenstaufen'

Situation – 0945hrs, Thursday 3rd August 1944, Estry

Your Kampfgruppe is presently in the vanguard of II. SS-Panzer-Korps, which has been rushed from the Caen sector of the front to meet the penetration of the line by British forces south of Caumont. Your orders were originally to proceed to Le Bénv-Bocage and there establish a defensive line along the valley of the Soulevre. However, it is now clear that the British are already south of the river and are engaging your forward elements at St Charles de Percy and Cathéolles. Enemy reconnaissance forces have also been encountered as far south as Presles.

Your new mission therefore, is to cut the head from the snake – destroy those forces that have penetrated south of the Soulevre and prevent any more British units from getting any closer to Vire.

You have just received a report from one of your smaller groups – they have encountered a British armoured artillery group, in regimental strength, deployed and firing at Point 176, the plateau south of St Charles de Percy. It is a mystery as to why an artillery regiment should be deployed so far forward, but this is too good an opportunity to miss!

Mission

You have ordered the local commander to attack immediately, with the intention of destroying as much of the British artillery as possible.

Execution

General Outline

- The commander on the ground has only limited forces at his disposal and you do not have anything else spare to send him. Nevertheless, he has in your opinion, sufficient forces for the task – a company of panzer-grenadiers and two platoons of Panthers.
- The rest of your battlegroup is already fully committed in the area of St Charles de Percy, Montchamp and Drouet Hill and your artillery has already been tasked to fire concentrations on targets in that area.

Deployment

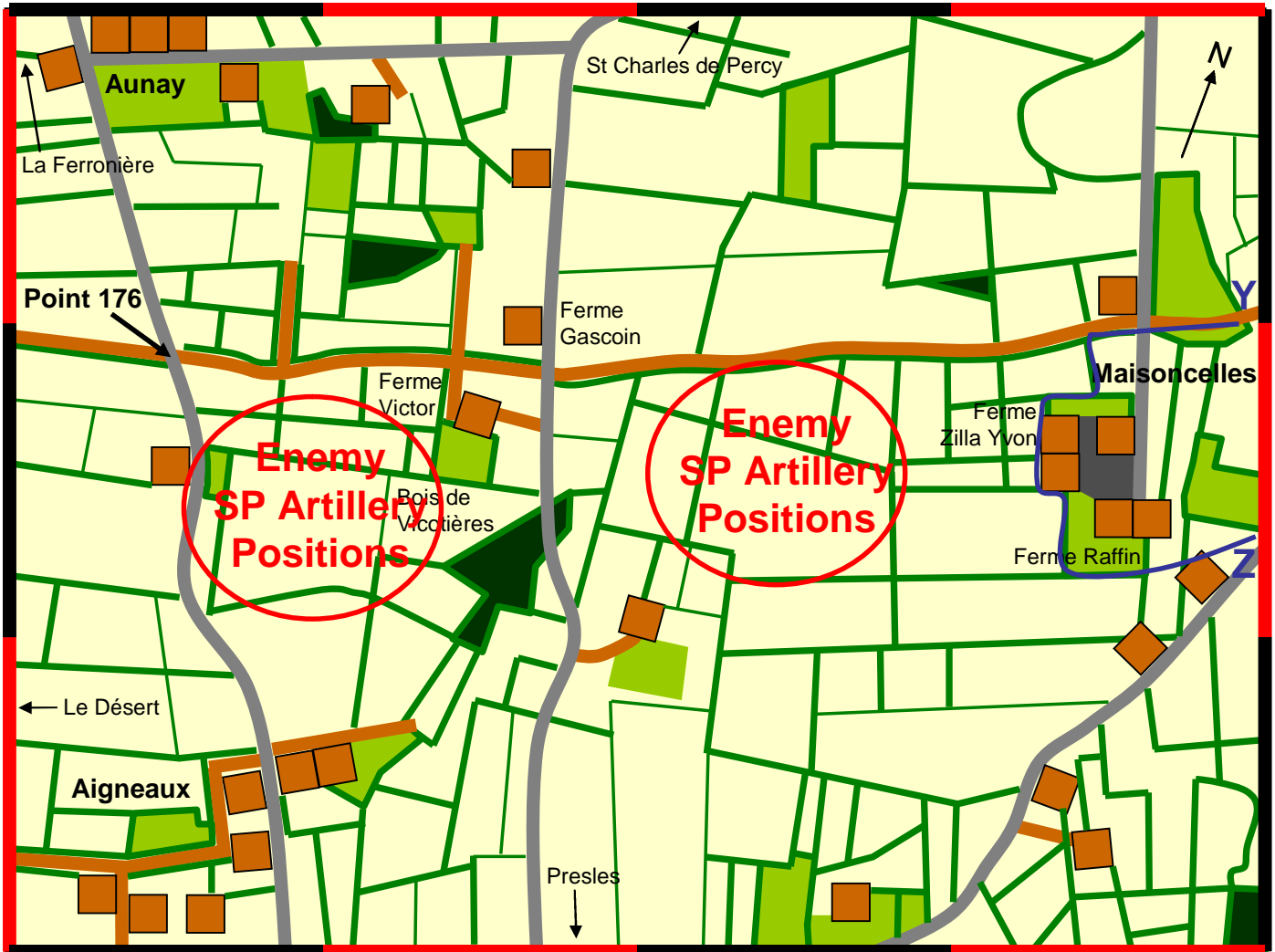
- All German forces are deployed in and around the Raffin Farm and Zilla Yvon Farm at Maisoncelles, within the area defined by line Y-Z on the map.
- All units start the game in Improved Positions if Troops or Hull-Down if Vehicles.

Enemy Forces

- Enemy forces in the Point 179 area are thought to be a full regiment of armoured field artillery, with approximately a platoon of tanks in support.



- Enemy infantry and tanks are present in approximately regiment strength in the La Ferronnière/St Charles de Percy area, with another regiment-sized group fighting on the Drouet Hill, to the north of St Charles de Percy.
- Enemy tanks and armoured cars are also reported to the south.



Friendly Forces

- Your order of battle is listed at Annex A to this briefing. All units are classed as 'Veteran'.
- The rest of your battlegroup is fighting at St Charles de Percy and Drouet Hill.
- Elements of 21. Panzer-Division and 326. Infanterie-Division are operating on your right.
- Your left flank is presently 'hanging in the air' and is not in contact with friendly units. However, 10. SS-Panzer-Division 'Fruntsberg' will shortly be moving into this area, to block any further moves by the enemy towards Vire.

Fire & Air Support

- There is no fire support available for this attack. The local commander will have to do the best he can with his organic 8cm mortar section.

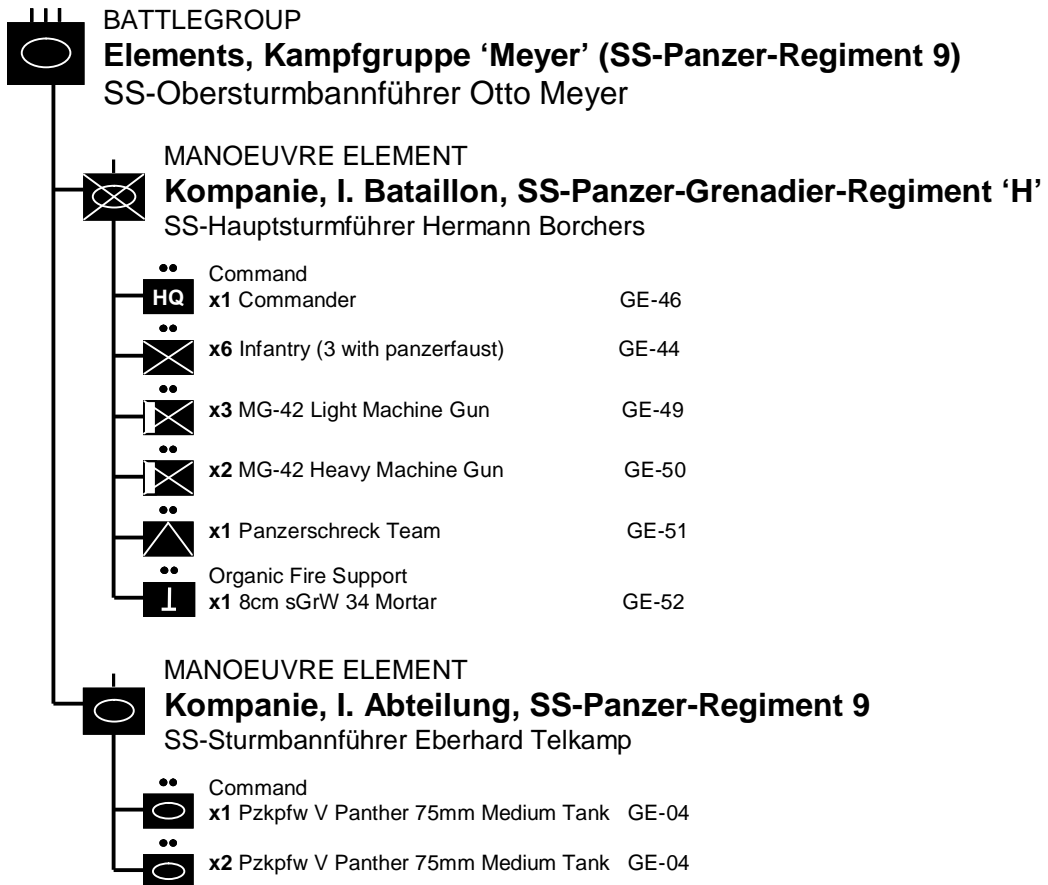
- Needless to say, there is no support available from the Luftwaffe.

Game Sequence

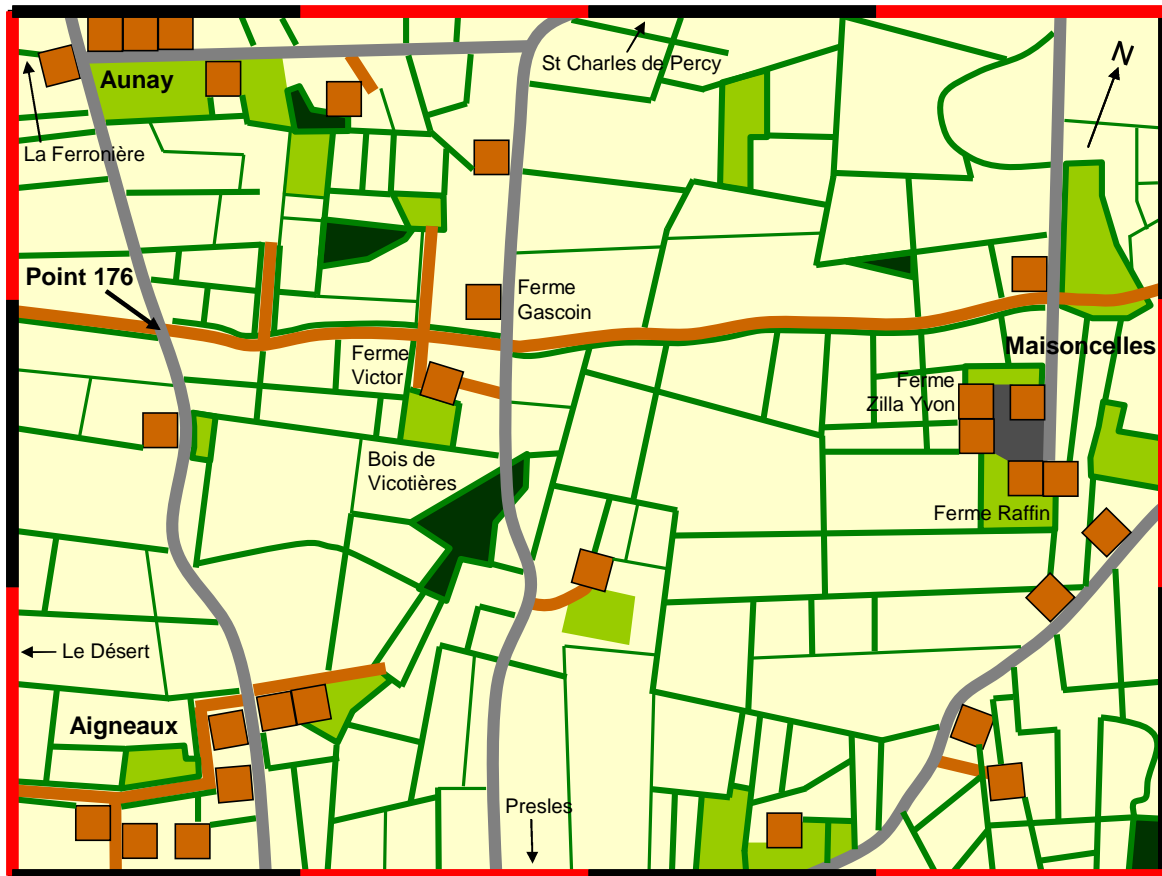
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- **3VP** for possession of Point 176 (i.e. the only side with Undisordered units within 6 inches at the end of the game).
- **Lose 1VP** for each KO'd German tank.
- **Total German Victory** – for having 10+ VPs.
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Terrain Effects



Map Key

	Paved Road		Built-Up Sector
	Unpaved Road		Orchard
	Bocage Hedgerow		Woods
	Low Hedgerow		

Terrain	Concealment	Cover	Mobility		
			Troops	Tracked or Half-Tracked Vehicle	Wheeled Vehicle or Gun
Open	Nil	Nil	Full Speed	Full Speed	Full Speed
Woods	Dense Area	Soft	Full Speed	Half Speed & Bog	Half Speed & Bog
Orchards	Sparse Area	Soft	Full Speed	Half Speed	Half Speed
Built-Up Area	Dense Edge	Hard	Full Speed	Impassable	Gun: Half Speed Veh: Impassable
Bocage Hedgerow	Dense Edge	Hard	Breach	Breach & Bog	Breach & Bog
Low Hedgerow	Sparse Edge	Soft	Half Speed	Breach	Breach & Bog
Paved Road	Nil	Nil	Double Speed	Double Speed	Double Speed
Unpaved Road	Nil	Nil	Full Speed	Full Speed	Full Speed

- Paved Roads, unless marked with a Bocage Hedgerow border, are automatically bordered by Low Hedgerow.
- Unpaved Roads are not bordered by any hedgerows unless marked on the map.

- Note that most hedgerows will have occasional gaps and gateways to allow vehicular access from roads and farms. There will be significant numbers of breaches in the hedgerows to the rear and flanks of fields occupied by the British.
- If you are short of terrain or table-space, chop the top foot and the left-hand foot off the table, to make a 3x2 foot playing area.

Scenario-Balancing Options

Favouring the British

- Allow the Battery Commanders' OP tanks to be armed Sherman Vs.
- One source refers to a single Troop of 1st Coldstream Guards providing assistance. May therefore add an independent Troop ME of **x2** Sherman V tanks. Deploy on table at the start, with 153rd Field RHQ.

Favouring the Germans

- Add a further platoon of **x2** Panthers to the panzer company ME.
- Equip the panzer-grenadiers with Sdkfz 251 halftrack variants and add **x1** Sdkfz 251/9 75mm howitzer halftrack.

Paddy Green's Suggestions following play-testing of the scenario:

Second play through I placed the restriction on the Brits that Batteries would not retire unless they could spot German tanks, had spotted or suspected German troops to their rear, were locally outnumbered 2:1 with spotted German troop stands or could spot panicking friends. I also restricted Wooley's troop from moving forward until another Battery had suffered 25%+ casualties (having M10s roll forward on reports of a German sniper seemed unreasonable.)

Author's Note

This scenario is designed specifically for those of us who are daft enough to collect model artillery regiments, yet never seem to get them on the wargames table! Of course, normal people will not usually have access to large numbers of model self-propelled artillery pieces, so might feel that this scenario is beyond their means. However, I would urge you to reconsider – this is a very interesting and unusual scenario and is quick to play, given the lack of infantry and artillery. Provided that you make it clear to the German player, you can use other models in your collection (e.g. Kangaroos, Cromwells, Churchills or even trucks) as proxies to represent the Sextons. However, to avoid confusing the German player, I would try to keep all 'proxy Sexton' models the same and would avoid using M10s or Shermans, as they are already in the order of battle.

This scenario would also work well as a hypothetical Battle of the Bulge encounter – change the British forces for a US Field Artillery Battalion, equipped with Priests, backed up with M10, M18 or M36 Tank Destroyers.



La Ferronnière crossroads on 3rd August 1944
(La Ferronnière was mistakenly marked on British maps as 'St Charles de Percy')

Historical Outcome

Taken almost completely by surprise at Maisoncelles, 153rd Field Regiment suffered the loss of four men killed (including the Padre, the Reverend A S Pryor), thirteen wounded and eight captured. The regiment also lost four Sextons, one Sherman, two halftracks, a Jeep and four trucks completely destroyed, as well as a number of vehicles abandoned, but later recovered.

However, the Germans were eventually beaten off; primarily by the M10c tank destroyers of 'Q' Battery, 21st Anti-Tank Regiment, who destroyed three Panthers for the loss of one M10c. However, BSM Woolley and three others of the battery were killed and four others were wounded. All the dead were eventually interred at the Commonwealth War Cemetery at St Charles de Percy (photo below).

The battle at Maisoncelles represented the last time that a Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery was forced to fight a defensive battle at close quarters in NW Europe. The 153rd Field Regiment had received a bloody nose and had been temporarily unable to support the division, but survived the encounter and fought on until VE Day without a similar incident.

Maisoncelles was not the only setback suffered by Operation 'Bluecoat' on 3rd August: Following a high-level discussion/argument as to whether the US V Corps or the British VIII Corps was responsible for taking Vire, the British were finally given responsibility and the 2nd Northamptonshire Yeomanry were dispatched. However, the delay in taking Vire had allowed the Tigers of *Schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 102* to get there first! The Tigers ripped the Yeomanry Cromwells to pieces and pursued them all the way to La Bistière – almost overrunning HQ 11th Armoured Division in the process!

Despite the setbacks, Operation 'Bluecoat' forged ahead to Presles and the Perrier Ridge, which dominated the main east-west highway from Vire to Condé and Falaise. The British 3rd Infantry Division was also now coming up to bolster the newly-formed salient and on 5th August, the 1st Royal Norfolks from 3rd Division began relieving the 3rd Monmouths from 11th Armoured Division

at La Pavée, on the Perrier Ridge. The *10. SS-Panzer-Division 'Fruntsberg'* was soon flung against this position and a vicious battle developed over possession of the high ground (see Bry Barnard's excellent 'The Battle of the Normans' scenario).

Operation 'Bluecoat' therefore had virtually ground to a halt in the face of increasing opposition from *II. SS-Panzer-Korps*. However, it had successfully drawn three panzer divisions and a Tiger battalion away from Hitler's last-gasp counter-attack against the Americans, which was defeated at Mortain on 7th August. With the bulk of the panzer divisions now fighting in the west, the way was now clear for Monty to launch Operation 'Totalize'...



The author, parading with his cadet battlefield tour group, at St Charles de Percy in August 2009