

Bloody Gully. 3rd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment faces Real opposition, 13th June 1944

First, please do not confuse this action on the 13th of June 1944 with 'Bloody Gulch', the action which involved 'Easy Company', and appeared in an episode of 'Band of Brothers'. In fact, the Easy Company action took place at the same time, but about 2 kilometres north of this one.

The 3rd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment (506 PIR) was in Divisional Reserve on the 12th June 1944, after its success on D Day and afterwards. Now west of Carentan, this brief period of rest was rudely interrupted by a German counter attack by elements of 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, supported by 6th Fallschirmjager Regiment, against the 1st Battalion, which was only just contained during the afternoon.

Colonel Sink, the CO of the 506th, decided that it was time to return to the offensive, and the 3rd Battalion was to take part in a Regimental assault at dawn on the 13th, and brought by lorry to the outskirts of a burning Carentan around midnight.

The movement up to the start positions for the attack was slowed by bombing from individual German aircraft, which though ineffective, did disrupt the line of march. Plans to re-supply 3rd Battalion were overlooked in the confusion of the advance, and the events of the 13th were to be coloured by severe shortages of ammunition and mortar rounds, so much so that ammunition was begged or borrowed from the truck drivers who had brought the men to Carentan.

A Regimental briefing at 0200 hours on the 13th brought both good and bad news. The good news was that both 65th Armoured Artillery Regiment (M7 105mm Howitzers) from 8th Infantry Division, and two platoons from 70th Tank battalion (9 M5s) would be providing support for the attack. The bad news was that the opposition was probably the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, 6th Fallschirmjager Regiment, and possibly tanks of 6th Panzer Division.

The attack plan was for the American artillery to lay down a barrage, which, it was fondly hoped, would neutralise the opposition, and then the infantry assault would go in. But before any of that could happen, there was the continuing problem of getting the paratroopers to their start line. It had been decided to move across country from Carentan, with 2nd battalion, 506 PIR on the left flank, and 501st PIR on the right.

The start line was to be east of a sunken lane, with banks up to 3 metres high on both sides, and topped with heavy foliage, but the advance, bisected by dense and high hedges on the advance, had resulted in several of the 3rd battalion's platoons losing touch with their fellows, and being late to their start positions, in several cases, not arriving until the action was already well under way. To the north a minor road formed the boundary of the battalion's attack axis.



Bloody Gully 2019. Author's collection

The intention was for 3rd Battalion to attack the high ground to the west of the sunken lane, the crest rising about 25 metres to the crest, and the plateau behind. As the sun rose, everything looked peaceful, perhaps in itself an indication of the quality of the troops the Americans would be facing. The men of the 6th Fallschirmjager Regiment were experienced fighters, with an excellent Esprit de Corps.



6th Fallschirmjagers at Carentan

Author's Collection

Things started to go wrong from the first moment of the attack. Before the artillery barrage had opened up, the lead platoon of M5s started to move in single file along the road at 3rd battalion's northern boundary, evidence that the lack of interdisciplinary and combined arms tactics at this point of the Normandy campaign was widespread. (And in fact this flaw continued in some Divisions until very late in the war)

Of course, the density of the hedgerows made it difficult to deploy the tanks anywhere else for this action, but confidence amongst the paratroops was not increased when the tanks started to use their turret machineguns on the men of 3rd battalion.

Then the American artillery barrage began, and after 12 rounds from each howitzer, stopped. (Re-supply problems were not limited to the paratroops) Worse, many rounds fell short, causing American casualties.

Nonetheless, it was now time to commence the infantry attack. On the northern flank, beside the road, Company H now started forward. The field they were moving across was itself lacking in any cover, so the infantry tended to funnel along the hedgerows on the right and left sides. As the infantry moved forward, they noticed that the Company that should be advancing with them, north of the road, was conspicuous by its absence. 3rd Battalion's right flank was completely exposed. As Company H reached the half way point towards the crest, German machinegun fire opened up, pinning the whole Company down.

2 platoons of I Company 3/506PIR leaves the gully for the crest.



Fallschirmjagers in position at the crest.

In fact, as the Company north of the road had begun their advance, they found themselves facing four StuG IIIs of 17th SS Anti-Tank Battalion, and were forced back only yards after advancing from their start line, with heavy casualties. One of the StuGs now moved out onto the tarmac, as the leading M5s rounded a slight bend on the road. The StuG, at a range of around 100 metres, put two armour piercing rounds through the lead M5, and such was the velocity of the rounds, and thinness of the M5 armour, that both shots went right through, and knocked out the M5 following behind.

(which had clearly broken the standard distances between vehicles, and had paid the price.) Both tanks caught fire.



M5 Platoon moves up on the right flank



StuG III springs its surprise.

The news that the right flank of the 3rd Battalion was exposed came as an unpleasant surprise to Colonel Sink. A further unpleasant surprise was that the attacks by both G and I Companies had also been stopped by heavy German small arms fire from the crest, 200 metres away.



Heavy German fire stalls the American attack

Further confusion for I Company was caused when troops appeared on their left flank. These were fired on until it became clear that they were Americans, from 1st Battalion, out of their deployment area.

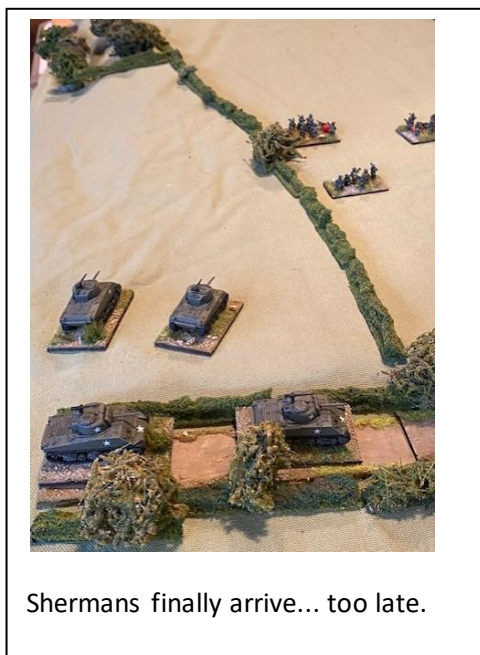
Now would have been the time for the 60mm mortars attached to each platoon would have earned their keep, but while ammunition was short for the infantry, there were almost no 60mm mortar rounds to be had at all. It soon became obvious that the Germans were not having supply problems for their mortars, which made life very uncomfortable for G Company, in the centre of the American position. This was too much for the Americans, and G Company fell back, as best it could, to the sunken lane. Calls for artillery support from the M7s fell on deaf ears, but the remaining rounds from the 60mm mortars did manage to subdue the German machineguns in an orchard on the left of the American attack, which had been bringing destructive flank fire on G Company's attack.



The Americans fall back to Bloody Gully

By now, along the sunken lane, the casualties were mounting up to a critical number. Wounded men were being tended to as best they could by medics, who were questioning where all these injured soldiers were coming from. Men who were there would say that during the whole war, they never again saw that number of wounded in such a confined space. The sunken lane had justified its nickname, given by the men who were there, 'Bloody Gully'. It was 1130 hours.

As this confusion and carnage was taking place, a platoon of G Company, which had got lost moving up earlier, arrived, and was immediately thrown forward. The German machineguns in the orchard, which were thought to have been neutralised by the 60mm mortars, now revealed that they were just waiting for a better target, and now they had one. The platoon went to ground, taking casualties as they did. They also attracted the German mortars, and for 20 minutes they had a very uncomfortable time before from the south arrived a platoon of four Shermans from D Company, 66th Armoured Regiment, 2nd Armoured Division. They arrived on the road beside the farm, and the entrance to Bloody Gully. Seeing the machinegun fire coming from the orchard, they brought down both HE and machinegun fire on the German positions, causing the Germans to cease fire, and allowing the remaining 3rd Battalion men on the slopes to fall back to Bloody Gully.



The firing died down, and there was just the sound of the wounded in Bloody Gully. Eventually the casualties were cleared, and the remnants of 3rd Battalion fell back, to be replaced by 1st Battalion of the 502nd. When the butcher's bill was recorded, there were only 28 unwounded, killed or missing in I Company, and similar numbers in the other two. It would be a few days before replacements could bring the battalion back to some form of efficiency.

Before you play the scenario... please read this!

Realistically, this was a poorly planned attack, which expected men who had not sufficient supplies of ammunition to take an objective which had not been sufficiently reconnoitred or softened up by artillery.

That they were facing opponents who were every bit as good as they were, in prepared positions, and with clear fields of fire provided the final confirmation of potential disaster for the Americans.

In theory, being provided with armoured support, in the form of the M5s should have given the men of 3rd Battalion, 506 PIR the edge, in spite of the shortcomings, but lack of co-operation and the nature of the dense hedgerows probably would have doomed the support to failure even before the appearance of one German assault gun.

Nonetheless, for both the wargamer and the military historian, we can learn as much about combat, and how to handle troops in difficult situations when there is little chance of success, as we can when there is a good chance of victory, and probably we end the engagement better, and more thoughtful, for the experience.

If you only game to win, being the American player is not for you. If you game to learn, then you will be rewarded by playing this game.

So, assuming you are still ready to play this scenario, here we go.

Playing the Scenario

The game starts at 0630 hours on the 13th June 1944. The rules used are the new 'The War on the Ground' set by Anschluss Wargames. The scale is 1:1. The table size is 1 metre by 1 metre. Each turn is 10 minutes. The game lasts 30 turns.

Game Forces

American

On table:

Start Location

G Company, 3rd Battalion, 506PIR. + FOO (65 th Armoured Artillery Regiment)	B
H Company, 3 rd Battalion, 506PIR. + FOO (65 th Armoured Artillery Regiment)	C
I Company, 2 Platoons, 3 rd Battalion, 506PIR.	A
70 th Tank battalion, 1 Platoon (4 M5s)	D

Off Table

1 Battery, 65th Armoured Artillery Regiment. (6 M7 105mm Howitzers)

Reinforcements

I Company, 1 Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 506PIR. Arrives turn 15 at Point G

D Company, 1 Platoon, (4 Shermans) 66th Armoured Regiment, 2nd Armoured Division.

Arrives at turn 21 at Point F

German

On Table: May be deployed anywhere along the Crest line.

10th Company, 2 Platoons, 2nd Battalion, 6th Fallschirmjager Regiment + 2 FOO

12th (heavy Company), 2 MMG Platoons, 2nd Battalion, 6th Fallschirmjager Regiment

1 StuG IIIIG, 17th SS Anti-Tank Battalion

Start Location: E

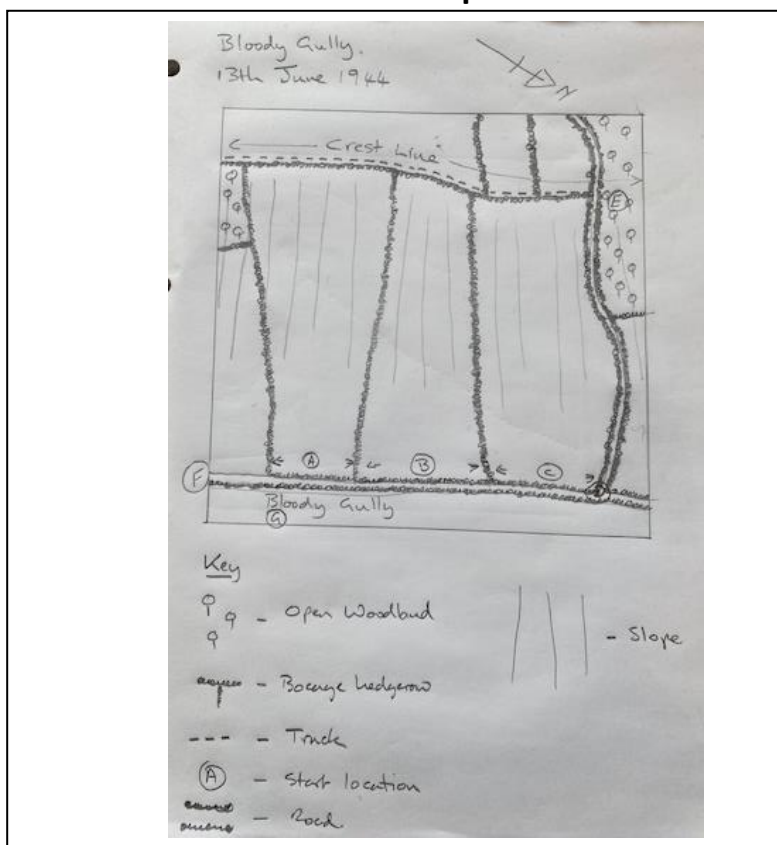
Off Table

12th (heavy Company), 2 Mortar Platoon (4 80mm Mortars each, 2nd Battalion, 6th Fallschirmjager Regiment

Scenario Special Rules

1. The American off table 105mm battery may fire for turns 1 and 2. It may fire again, but only if an 18-20 is rolled on a D20, each time it wishes to do so.
2. All German elements are dug in at the start of the game.
3. The 'Confusion of Battle' in 'The War on the Ground' rules applies for German units.
4. American 60mm mortar elements may fire once each, after which small arms values **only** may be used. (reflecting shortage of ammunition)
5. No armoured vehicle may cross a bocage hedge line
6. Elements in the sunken lane (bloody Gully) may not be observed from beyond it.
7. German FOOs may be deployed anywhere along the track.
8. American FOOs may spot for the off table US 105mm battery only.
9. The coloured chits on the bases of elements indicate that the element is either Dispersed (white), Scattered (orange) or Shattered (red) according to 'The War on the Ground' rules.
10. Orchard and Woodland are both 'Open'.

Game Map



Unit Organisations on table for 'The War in the Ground' for this scenario

Range Up to...	Falschirmjager Infantry Platoon HQ Section 1944-45 (Effective 3)							Points: 5
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200
Assault Rifle + LMG	15	12	10	6	5	3	1	1
Panzerfaust (pen18)*	9	14						

Either small arms OR panzerfaust may fire. *1 shot only from panzerfaust

Range Up to...	Falschirmjager Infantry Section 1944-45 (Effective 3)							Points: 5
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200
Assault Rifle + LMG	15	12	10	6	5	3	1	1
Panzerfaust (pen18)*	9	14						

Either small arms OR panzerfaust may fire. *1 shot only from panzerfaust

Range Up to...	Fallschirmjager MMG/HMG Section 1944-45 (Effective 3)								Points: 6
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200	1800
2 MMG/HMG + Rifles	13	15	13	12	12	9	6	6	4

Range Up to...	US Para Company HQ Section 1944-45 (Effective 3)							Points: 5
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200
SLR + SMG	13	11	9	7	5	4	1	
Bazooka (HEAT) (10)	6	10	16	20				

Either small arms OR bazooka may fire.

Range Up to...	US Para Platoon HQ Half section 1944-45 (Effective 3)							Points: 4
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200
SLR+SMG	6	4	3	2	1	1		
Bazooka (HEAT) (10)	6	10	16	20				

Either small arms OR bazooka may fire.

Range Up to...	US Para Infantry Section 1944-45 (Effective 3)							
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200
SLR+ BAR	12	9	8	7	5	4	1	

Range Up to...	US Para 60mm Mortar Team 1944-45 (Effective 3)							
	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200
60mm Mortar	-	5	5	5	5	5		

M3 Stuart



Armour	Front -4	Side -2	Rear - 2
Target Size	Front - C	Side - B	Rear - D
Speed	Offroad - 32	Road - 58	
HE Effect	Direct - 4	Indirect - N/A	

Penetration:	250	500	750	1000	1250	1500	1750	2000	2500	3000
37mmL53	8	7	7	6	6	5	5	4	3	1

Range:(metres)	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200	1800
MMG	+4	+6	+5	+5	+5	+4	+3	+3	+2

Notes: Hull & Turret MMGs. Smoke Dischargers. Fire factors can be combined against a target AND can be combined with the Direct HE factor against soft targets. Vehicle may be designated OP tank. May be fitted with an AA MMG,

M4A2 Sherman



Armour	Front -7	Side -4	Rear - 3
Target Size	Front - B	Side - A	Rear - D
Speed	Offroad - 26	Road - 42	
HE Effect	Direct - 8	Indirect - 6	

Penetration:	250	500	750	1000	1250	1500	1750	2000	2500	3000
75mmL41	11	11	10	10	9	9	8	7	5	2

Range:(metres)	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200	1800
MMG	+4	+6	+5	+5	+5	+4	+3	+3	+2

Notes: Hull & Turret MMGs. Smoke Dischargers. Fire factors can be combined against a target AND can be combined with the Direct HE factor against soft targets. May be fitted with an AA MMG,

StuG IIIG



Armour	Front -6	Side -2s	Rear - 2
Target Size	Front - C	Side - B	Rear - D
Speed	Offroad - 20	Road - 40	
HE Effect	Direct - 8	Indirect - 6	

Penetration:	250	500	750	1000	1250	1500	1750	2000	2500	3000
75mmL48	13	12	12	11	11	10	10	10	8	6

Range:(metres)	50	100	200	300	600	800	1000	1200	1800
MMG	+4	+6	+5	+5	+5	+4	+3	+3	+2

Notes: Hull MMG. Smoke Dischargers. Fire factors can be combined against a target AND can be combined with the Direct HE factor against soft targets. May be fitted with an AA MMG

Figures used for this game are as follows:

Infantry: Pendraken Miniatures

M5s: Arrowhead Miniatures

Shermans: Victrix Ltd

StuG IIIG: Takara (World Tank Museum)

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