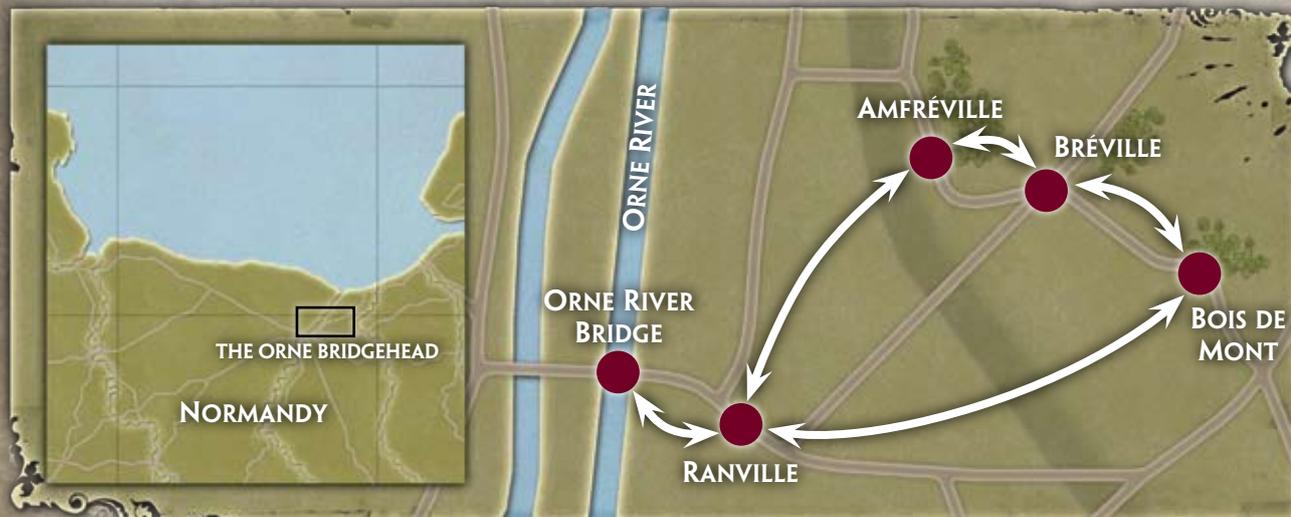


# AXIS OF ATTACK: THE BRÉVILLE GAP

D-DAY  
CAMPAIGN

Strong German forces are poised like a dagger to strike at the heart of the Orne bridgehead.



June 1944: In the early hours of D-Day troops of the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division of Major-General Richard 'Windy' Gale dropped by parachute and glider into Normandy. They seized key bridges and villages in the area between the Orne and Dives Rivers on the eastern flank of the invasion beaches, forestalling German counterattacks from this region. Later that day Lord Lovat's commandos fought their way through from Sword Beach to reinforce the hard-pressed paras.

In the days that followed, the troops of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division clung precariously to the bridgehead they had seized east of the Orne River, resisting German counterattacks of varying intensity at points all across the bridgehead. In particular, a build-up of German forces in the village of Bréville, strategically situated atop the Bavent ridge, proved a major thorn in the side of the British and Canadian troops.

The understrength 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion, occupying the woods of the Bois de Mont, came under daily attack from the Germans in Bréville from 8 June. The Germans, tough grenadiers of 346. and 711. *Infanteriedivisionen*, sought to force a gap in the Allied perimeter through which they could reach the bridges over the Orne River and Caen Canal. Even as the first of these probing attacks were repelled, more were brewing against other Allied positions within striking distance of Bréville.

Can the Allied perimeter hold against these strong and increasingly determined attacks? Or will a crack appear through which the German forces can strike at the bridges? Here, east of the Orne, amongst the grassy meadows and peaceful orchards, the very fate of the Allied invasion hangs in the balance.

## ALLIED BRIEFING

Your hard-pressed troops have battled courageously against the odds to complete their daring mission of seizing a bridgehead across the Orne, but now your units are woefully understrength and the men are tired. Yet, somehow, they must hold on a little longer.

German resistance has proved stubborn, particularly that emanating from the village of Bréville. There, substantial enemy forces are well-situated to strike against your perimeter at points of their own choosing. If they can achieve a breakthrough, it would be no exaggeration to say that the security of the entire beachhead could be in danger. You must repel all enemy thrusts from Bréville and marshal your strength to strike back. This nest of Nazi vipers must be eradicated, and it must be done soon!

## GERMAN BRIEFING

The Allied invasion caught your forces off guard, and the British paratroopers quickly seized the bridges over the Orne River and Caen Canal. But you have one ace up your sleeve, a strongly-held position in Bréville from where you can probe the Allied bridgehead in force, searching for a weakness. If one can be found, your hard-fighting troops may be able to strike through in the direction of the Orne River bridge. The recapture of this key crossing would trap the enemy in their own bridgehead where they could be smashed to pieces. The way would then be open to attack the main body of the Allied invasion force beyond the river.

### WHERE IS THE LUFTWAFFE?

Allied air superiority is total. Not a single German plane can get anywhere near the battlefield.

*The German player may not receive any Air Support for the entire campaign.*

## SITUATION REPORT

At the start of the campaign the German forces are striking out from Bréville against one of the neighbouring Allied positions.

*This is an Axis of Attack campaign. Use the rules on pages 237 to 239 of the Flames Of War rulebook to play this campaign.*

*The first battle of the campaign is fought at either Amfréville or Bois de Mont at the choosing of the German player, using the Hold the Line mission with the Germans attacking. Both sides begin the campaign with 0 Victory Points.*

## TERRAIN

The terrain east of the Orne River, unlike many other areas in Normandy, is not Bocage country. Instead it is comparatively open, dotted here and there with woods and settlements in a fairly typical Western European fashion.

*Once you have placed sector-specific terrain for the battle, use the Western European Terrain Chart on page 243 of the Flames Of War rulebook to generate additional terrain features.*

## ALLIED FORCES

The initial airborne landings around the Orne River were conducted on D-Day by the men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. Later that day they were reinforced by the commandos of Lord Lovat's 1<sup>st</sup> Special Service Brigade moving up from Sword beach. Over succeeding days the commandos together with the paras battled to consolidate the bridgehead, occasionally supported by tanks of the 13<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> Hussars. On the night of 10/11 June elements of the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division, including the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Battalions Gordon Highlanders and the 5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch, arrived to reinforce the bridgehead. These were followed by more commandos, this time from the 4<sup>th</sup> Special Service Brigade.

To represent these forces you could field a British Parachute Company or Airlanding Company from *D Minus 1* or a Scots Rifle Company or British Commando Company from *Festung Europa*.

## GERMAN FORCES

The troops garrisoning the area of the airborne landings were from 711. *Infanteriedivision*, with elements of 21. *Panzerdivision* in the form of *Kampfgruppe von Luck*. Very quickly following the invasion these troops were reinforced by 346. *Infanteriedivision* moving in from the Le Havre area. The strong forces holding Bréville were composed mainly of 857. *Grenadierregiment* and 858. *Grenadierregiment* of 346. *Infanteriedivision*. These grenadiers carried the bulk of the counterattacks, supported by a small number of Panzer IV tanks from *Kampfgruppe von Luck* as well as their own StuG and Marder self-propelled anti-tank guns.

To represent these forces you could field a German Grenadierkompanie or Pionierkompanie from *Festung Europa*.

## WHAT IF FORCES

Alternatively, you could play a 'What if' campaign to see what would have happened if different forces fought in the Orne bridgehead and use any company you have.

### THE BATTLE FOR SWORD BEACH

The outcome of the British landings at Sword Beach on D-Day was very important to the Allied troops within the thinly-held Orne bridgehead. Sheer weight of numbers meant that the British must ultimately prevail on Sword Beach. However, any reverse suffered by the British in that battle, even if temporary, could have had far-reaching effects—Lord Lovat's Commandos may have been delayed in reaching the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division and Allied attempts to consolidate the bridgehead may have suffered a serious setback.

*If both players agree, they may play the Battle for Sword Beach (page 31) prior to beginning the campaign. The victory points each player wins in the battle will be their starting victory point total for the campaign.*





## BRÉVILLE

The village of Bréville is situated atop the northern end of the Barent Ridge with commanding views east and west over much of the Allied bridgehead. Possession of the village by German forces effectively drives a wedge between the Allied troops to the north, south and southeast. The village serves as a platform from which the Germans can launch counterattacks in the direction of the Orne River Bridge, although their ability to do so is dependent upon breaking through the British troops in nearby Amfréville or those patrolling the road to Ranville from the woods of the Bois de Barent. All of these factors make Bréville a vital objective to both sides and one which the German forces realise must be held at all costs.

### TERRAIN

The German player's half of the table contains a dozen or so buildings from the village scattered around a crossroads. Ordinary hedges border much of the village. A road leads across the table and exits via the British player's table edge. Straggling alongside the road are three or four more buildings, elsewhere is open meadow.

### LATE ARRIVALS

Perceiving a temporary weakness in the German defences Higher Command gathers the troops for the attack on Bréville hurriedly. Perhaps too hurriedly, as the men must make a forced march to reach the starting line and some units may not make it in time.

*In any battle in Bréville in which the British player is attacking, they must roll a die before deployment. On a roll of 1, one of their platoons fails to make the starting line in time and the British player must select one platoon in addition to those specified by the mission to be held in Reserve at the start of the game.*

### CONTROL THE BATTLE

During an inspection visit Field Marshal Rommel pronounced that 'Whoever holds this ground will control the battle'. The village's pivotal location means that so long as it is in German hands they may choose where they strike next.

*Any time the German player wins a battle in Bréville as the attacker, they may choose which sector they advance to next, either Amfréville or Bois de Mont.*

### VICTORY

The capture of the village by British troops signals the end of any strong German resistance in the Orne bridgehead.

*If the British player wins a battle in Bréville as the attacker they have captured the village and won the campaign. The Allied bridgehead east of the Orne is, at last, secure.*

## AMFRÉVILLE

At its southern-most extremity the little village of Amfréville is separated from Bréville by a few hundred metres making it an ideal jumping off point for attacks against Bréville but also making it highly vulnerable to German counterattacks.

### TERRAIN

A long road runs down the centre of the table flanked for much of its length by orchards and a couple of farms on either side. At one end of the table are a few buildings from the edge of the village.

### DIVERSIONARY ATTACK

The buildup of German forces within Bréville is such that, at the outset of the campaign, they have the strength to launch a diversionary attack in conjunction with their main attack elsewhere. The unsuspecting British won't know where the main attack will fall!

*If the German player loses the first game of the campaign, they may declare this to have been a diversionary attack. If they do so, the next mission of the campaign, and the main German thrust, takes place in Bois de Mont using the Hold the Line mission with the German force as the attacker.*





## BOIS DE MONT

The woods of the Bois de Mont offer an ideal jumping off point for patrols or attacks on the surrounding areas. Within the woods is the large Chateau St. Côme and attached thoroughbred stables that have produced many a famous derby winner. Not far away is the much smaller summer bungalow of the mayor of Bréville. Either of these buildings could be used as a command post, if they can be held! Not an easy task given the surrounding woods.

### TERRAIN

The table is divided into two halves by a road running from one player's table edge to the other. In the centre of one half is the large chateau and a few smaller buildings housing the stables. A long wide driveway runs to the road. At the back of the chateau, towards the Allied player's table edge is a broad meadow, elsewhere are scattered woods.

In the other half of the table near the Allied player's table edge is the bungalow surrounded by scattered woods. A sunken lane flanked by imposing hedgerows runs from the building to the road.

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## RANVILLE

The central position of Ranville in relation to the northern, eastern and southern sectors of the Allied bridgehead make this village an ideal site for Divisional Headquarters. In addition, its proximity to the bridge over the Orne River means that any German thrust at the bridges that penetrates this far must be stopped here. Close by the village are the fields known to the Allied paras as Landing Zone N, still strewn with the debris of the Allied airborne landings.

### TERRAIN

In the Allied player's half of the table a road runs from end to end bisected near the middle by a crossroads where another road leads off the Allied player's table edge. Scattered around the crossroads are a few buildings and at either end of the long road are two large areas of woodland. The German player's half of the table is predominantly open terrain dotted with two or three wrecked Horsa gliders that provide Concealment to any team targeted through them but not Bulletproof Cover. Gliders are Very Difficult Going to teams attempting to move across them. In addition, scattered around the gliders are up to a dozen discarded parachutes, each covering an area no larger than 2"15cm across. These parachutes are Difficult Going.

### NAVAL GUNFIRE SUPPORT

The guns of the HMS Arethusa lying off the Normandy beaches are occasionally available to provide fire support to Allied troops in the bridgehead—when the bloody radios work!

*For all missions in Ranville, the Allied player may receive Naval Gunfire Support (page 15) at no cost.*

### FALL BACK!

If the German troops are repulsed at Ranville they will fall back via the axis along which they attacked.

*Any time the Allied player wins a battle in Ranville as the attacker, the next sector in the campaign will be the one through which the German player had most recently advanced, either Amfréville or Bois de Mont.*

## ORNE RIVER BRIDGE

The recapture of the bridges over the Orne River and Caen Canal will effectively cut off the already weakened British troops east of the Orne from reinforcement as well as threatening the flank of the British Second Army beyond the river.

## VICTORY

*If the German player reaches the Orne Bridges they have won the campaign, and an opportunity to strike at the main Allied force from an unexpected quarter!*



## THE END OF THE BRÉVILLE CAMPAIGN

On 10 June the German forces in Bréville demonstrate the dangerous threat they pose by attacking on several axes at once. A very strong attack with armoured support hits the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion in Le Mesnil but is beaten off, at a high cost to the attackers, with the aid of naval gunfire from *HMS Arethusa*. Meanwhile, in yet another of the almost relentless attacks upon the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion in the Bois de Mont, the Germans capture the Chateau St. Côte. To the north of Bréville, a strong German attack strikes the commandos in Le Plein, where it is thrown back, and Hauger, where the Germans almost breakthrough the defender's flank.

Most dangerously of all, however, the German's finally breakthrough a gap in the vicinity of the Bréville-Ranville road and strike across country toward the bridges. This perilous situation is rescued for the Allies by the 13<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion stationed in Ranville, who stop the German thrust, and drive off the attackers at the point of the bayonet. The 7<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion follow this victory up by clearing the Le Mariquet woods, where many of the attackers seek refuge. The long, hard-fought day closes with the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion in the Bois de Mont recapturing the Chateau.

Early on 11 June the first troops from the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division arrive in the bridgehead and immediately the 5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch move up to the Bois de Mont to reinforce

the hard-pressed 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion. From here the Highlanders launch a pre-dawn attack against Bréville but are beaten off with heavy casualties.

The next day the Germans again attack the Canadian paras in Le Mesnil, while a strong force, with armoured support, strikes the paras and Highlanders in the Bois de Mont. Low on ammunition and with the Chateau in enemy hands Lieutenant-Colonel Otway, the commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion, sends an urgent request for assistance. A company of Canadian paras rush to their aid and with their assistance the Germans are driven off, but the 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Brigade is now in a perilously weakened state.

Realising the Germans in Bréville have taken heavy casualties in the day's fighting, and suspecting the survivors will be exhausted from their exertions, Major-General Gale orders a hastily-prepared attack from Amfréville for that evening. The attack begins with a heavy artillery barrage, some of which falls short causing Allied casualties, including three senior commanders. With Bréville ablaze, troops from the 12<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion and the 12<sup>th</sup> Devonshires (an airlanding battalion), supported by armour, attack across open ground. After two hours of hard fighting, Bréville is captured. The victory has come at a heavy cost to the attackers but, at last, the most ominous threat to the security of the bridgehead has been eliminated.