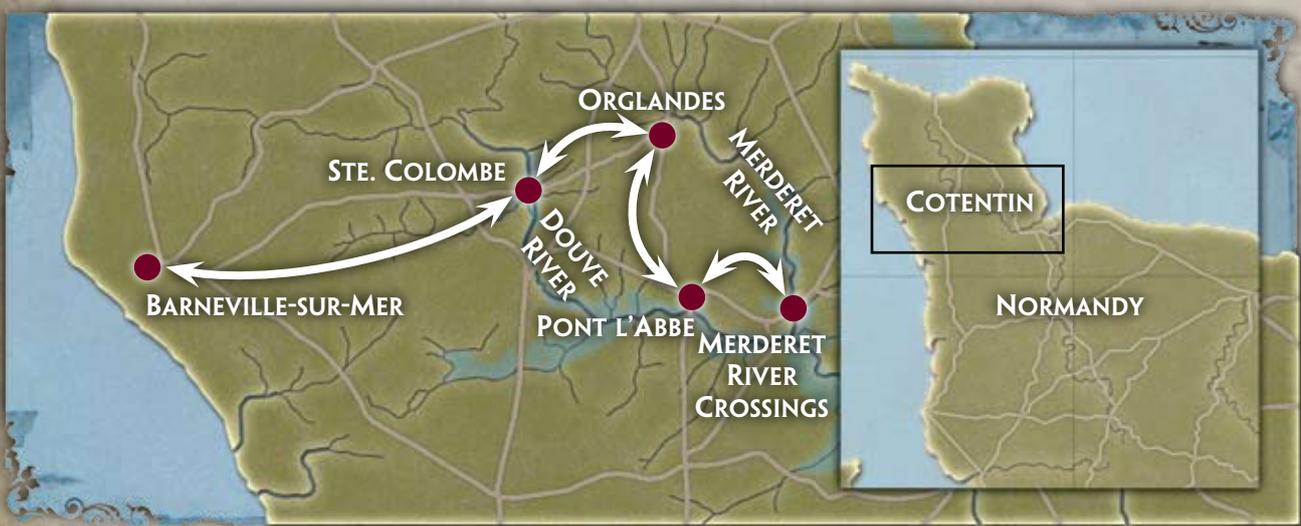


# AXIS OF ATTACK: CUTTING THE COTENTIN

In a race against time, US troops must battle their way across the marshlands and hedgerows of the Cotentin Peninsula to cut the German supply lines to *Festung Cherbourg*.



June 1944: As the rest of the US Army's VII Corps, under General Joseph 'Lightning Joe' Collins, streamed ashore at Utah Beach on D-Day, paratroopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> 'All American' Airborne Division battled to clear vital causeways leading inland from the invasion beaches. A few kilometres inland more paratroopers captured the village of Ste. Mère-Eglise, an important communications centre, while others fought a bloody battle to secure bridges across the Merderet River at Chef du Pont and La Fièvre.

By 9 June, the Merderet River crossings had still not been captured, prompting the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne's commander, General Ridgeway, to order an all-out assault directly across the La Fièvre causeway. Under constant enemy fire, troops from the 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment and 507<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment charged across the narrow 500-yard long causeway and seized a foothold on the far bank. By nightfall, after much hard fighting, a bridgehead had finally been secured.

VII Corps was tasked with capturing the city of Cherbourg, at the tip of the Cotentin Peninsula, to provide the Allies with a port for resupplying their beachhead. In the days after D-Day, however, the attacking 4<sup>th</sup> 'Ivy' Infantry Division

made only slow progress against formidable German defences around Montebourg that blocked the most direct route to Cherbourg.

In response to this delay, on 9 June, the US First Army commander, Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, revised the plan of attack: while the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division continues its attack northwards, other VII Corps units will now drive west across the Cotentin to the coast, cutting the German Seventh Army in two and preventing supplies and reinforcements from reaching the defenders of Cherbourg in the north.

On the night of 9 June, two regiments of General MacKelvie's 90<sup>th</sup> 'Tough Ombres' Infantry Division will move into the Merderet bridgehead, the jumping off point for an attack to the west. On the morrow they will pass through the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division's lines and strike the first blow in the drive to cut the Peninsula. Can these untried troops succeed in their vital mission against the understrength German forces? Or will a determined German defence be able to hold open the route to the north long enough for vital supplies to reach Cherbourg?

## THE BATTLE FOR UTAH BEACH

The outcome of the US landings at Utah Beach on D-Day, although never really in doubt, will affect the impetus of the later attacks to cut the Peninsula.

*If both players agree, they may play the Battle for Utah Beach (page 22) prior to beginning the campaign. The victory points each player wins in the battle will be added to their starting victory point total for the campaign. Additionally, if the US player loses the mission, the movement of their troops from the beach to the bridgehead is delayed. For the first mission of the campaign only, they must remove a single platoon, chosen at random, from their force for the duration of the battle.*





## US BRIEFING

The amphibious landings over Utah Beach in conjunction with the airborne landings have secured your lodgement area. Now, 'Lightning Joe' has chosen your unit to lead off the attacks to cut the Cotentin. The Germans in the area are a hard-bitten bunch and the bocage terrain is tough going but you must cut the coastal road at Barneville-sur-Mer, on the far side of the Peninsula, before the defenders in Cherbourg are substantially reinforced. Any delay could mean an unnecessarily protracted siege of Cherbourg, and until that port is in Allied hands the whole beachhead is endangered!

## GERMAN BRIEFING

The Allied landing at Utah Beach has thrown your forces into disarray—High Command is issuing orders one day and countermanding them the next! Now, reports are reaching you of a build-up of US forces in their recently-acquired Merderet bridgehead - an attack seems imminent. Against this backdrop of chaos you must marshal your few available resources and attempt to keep open a supply corridor up the western side of the Cotentin Peninsula to Cherbourg. This supply route will help sustain the defenders in denying the port to the enemy. Throw the American interlopers back across the Merderet River if you can. If you cannot, then slow them down to keep the supply route to *Festung* Cherbourg open for as long as possible.

### 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.*

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## SITUATION REPORT

At the start of the campaign the US forces are jumping off from their bridgehead at the Merderet River crossings and attempting to capture Pont l'Abbe.

*Use the Axis of Attack rules (page 237 of the Flames Of War rulebook) to play this campaign. The first battle of the campaign is fought at Pont l'Abbe, using the Hold the Line mission with the US force as the attacker.*

*The US player starts the campaign with 10 Victory Points. The German player starts the campaign with 0 Victory Points.*

## TERRAIN

Beyond the flooded marshland bordering the Merderet and Douve Rivers, known as the *Prairies Marecageuses*, the countryside is a checkerboard of small fields bordered by thick hedgerows and narrow lanes: bocage country.

*All battles, except those in the Ste. Colombe sector, are fought on a 48"/120cm x 36"/90cm table using the Bocage rules. There is no terrain chart for this campaign, instead construct your battlefields using the terrain guide given for each sector. The entire campaign is fought in bocage country so remember to liberally cover any open areas on your table with small fields bordered by hedgerows with a few narrow lanes running between them.*

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## US FORCES

The first abortive attacks west from the Merderet River bridgehead were made by the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Within a few days this division was sidelined in favour of units from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division (325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment, 505<sup>th</sup> and 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiments) and the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (39<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Teams). These troops, with armoured support from the 746<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, carried the main thrust across the Peninsula.

To represent these forces you could field a US Parachute Rifle Company, or Glider Rifle Company from *D Minus 1*, or a US Rifle Company from *Festung Europa*.

## GERMAN FORCES

The first US attacks to cut the Peninsula fell upon the grenadiers of 91. *Luftlandedivision*. Later, units from both 77. *Infanteriedivision* (in the north) and 243. *Infanteriedivision* (in the south) opposed the US advance. As it gained momentum these weary divisions were gradually reduced to the level of *Kampfgruppen*, ad hoc combat groups.

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 Cotentin Peninsula and use any company you have.

## MERDERET RIVER CROSSINGS

The Merderet River and surrounding marshes form a formidable barrier between the US landing areas and the rest of the Peninsula. By driving the US forces back across it, the Germans can bottle up the US troops within their own beachhead. The supply corridor to Cherbourg would no longer be under threat.

### VICTORY

*If the German player reaches the Merderet River Crossings, they have won the campaign. The Allies will never capture Cherbourg if they can't even fight their way out of their lodgement area!*

## PONT L'ABBE

The small town of Pont l'Abbe guards one of only two highways that cross the Douve River to the south via a causeway across the river and the *Prairies Marecageuses*. The town is therefore critical to the German supply lines to Cherbourg and will be heavily defended.

### TERRAIN

Between 6 and 12 buildings mark the edge of the town and are placed in the defender's half of the table. The Pont l'Abbe-Valognes highway runs through these across the table from end to end. This is one of the few proper roads in

the region and is wide, straight and bordered by hedges of only normal dimensions, not the imposing bocage hedge-rows. Everywhere else is bocage country.

### 'TWO RABBITS'

'Lightning Joe' will not tolerate any 'malingering'. If his subordinates are not capable of capturing the town unaided, a heavy bombardment will be ordered to flatten it—one so heavy that 'only two rabbits will be left alive and one of them not looking very spry'. After that he'll sack the divisional commander and any of his regimental commanders who aren't getting results.

*If, in the first mission fought in this sector, the US player loses, VII Corps will order a bombardment that forces the German player to withdraw. The campaign moves to the Orglandes sector. However, as a penalty for their failure the US player must deduct 10 points from their Victory point total to reflect the re-organisation brought about by the replacement of their Divisional commander.*

### VICTORY

*If, at the end of the fourth game of the campaign, the US player has failed to advance beyond this sector, the German player has won the campaign. There is not enough time left to cut the Peninsula before first-rate reinforcements and large stocks of ammunition and supplies reach Cherbourg. It is now doubtful whether the port will be captured at all.*





## ORGLANDES

The town of Orglandes is of little military significance in itself however the high ground to the west offers a commanding position ideal for artillery observation.

### TERRAIN

Amongst the ubiquitous bocage the terrain rises gently forming a low hill in the centre of the table. The highway to Ste. Colombe runs across the table from end to end. This is one of the few proper roads in the region and is wide, straight and bordered by hedges of only normal dimensions, not the imposing bocage hedgerows.

### HIGH GROUND

The high ground in this sector overlooks the three bridges over the Douve at Ste. Colombe. If the US troops can gain possession of this high ground, heavy artillery can be moved up to bring the Germans guarding the Douve under a heavy bombardment.

*If the US player wins as the attacker in this sector, they have gained the high ground. In the next mission only, they may conduct a Preliminary Bombardment against the German forces in the Ste. Colombe sector. After that the artillery will be withdrawn as it is needed elsewhere.*

### VICTORY

*If, at the end of the fifth game of the campaign, the US player has failed to advance beyond this sector, the German player has won the campaign. There is not enough time left to cut the Peninsula before significant reinforcements and supplies reach Cherbourg. A long and costly siege to capture the port is now expected.*

## STE. COLOMBE

The three bridges over the Douve between Ste. Colombe (on the east bank) and Nehou (on the west bank) form an obvious and formidable defensive position. However it is also the last viable line of defence for the hard-pressed German forces before the west coast of the Peninsula.

### TERRAIN

*Missions fought in this sector are fought on a normal-sized (6'x4') 180cm x 120cm table.*

*In this sector the Douve River splits into three streams that cross the centre of the table parallel to the defender's table edge. A single road winds across the table roughly perpendicular to the streams, crossing them via three narrow bridges. The streams are Very Difficult Going except for a small ford (Difficult Going) that bisects all three rivers near the table edge.*

*At either end of the road are four or five buildings of Ste. Colombe and Nehou. The villages themselves are surrounded by bocage country.*

### COOKS AND CLERKS

Due to heavy losses of infantry and a lack of replacements the German forces are forced to draft cooks and clerks to fight.

*Before deploying for a mission in this sector the German player must roll a die for each platoon in their force. On a roll of 1 the platoon will be rated, for this mission only, at one Skill level lower than normal.*

### VICTORY

*If, at the end of the sixth game of the campaign, the US player has failed to advance beyond this sector, the German player has won the campaign. There is not enough time left to cut the Peninsula before a few vital supplies reach Cherbourg. The port will no doubt still fall, but there may be an unwanted delay before it is in Allied hands.*

## BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER

By cutting the coastal road running through the village of Barneville-sur-Mer the US troops have closed the final supply line, and escape route, for all German forces in the north of the Peninsula. Starved of critical supplies, *Festung Cherbourg* must fall, and fall soon.

## VICTORY

*If the US player reaches Barneville-sur-Mer, they have won the campaign, the capture of Cherbourg is inevitable and expected to be speedy.*



## THE END OF THE COTENTIN CAMPAIGN

The 357<sup>th</sup> and 358<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Teams of 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, strike out from the La Fièvre bridgehead on 10 June. Their advance is quickly halted by well-entrenched German troops from 1057. *Grenadierregiment* of 91. *Lufilandedivision*. The green American troops, most seeing combat for the first time, recoil and fall back in the face of heavy enemy fire from the hedgerows.

On 11 June the Division renews its stalled offensive but the going is slow. By the end of the day the 358<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team has surrounded but not captured Pont l'Abbe and the 357<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team is still battling near Les Landes. The next day the Division is bolstered by the arrival of the 359<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team which joins the fray between the other two. On 13 June, with the aid of these reinforcements, the Division struggles on to its initial objectives, including the capture of Pont l'Abbe after a concentrated Allied bombardment has all but levelled the village.

General 'Lightning Joe' Collins reacts to this disappointing performance by relieving the divisional commander and two of the regimental commanders of their duties. The 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division is reassigned to cover the northern flank of the advance, and the more seasoned 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions are assigned to carry the main thrust westwards.

On 14 June, the 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment and the 507<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne make good progress along the Pont l'Abbe – St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte road. Meanwhile troops of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division advance northwest to the Pont l'Abbe – Valognes highway. On the northern flank, however, the hard-pressed 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, now faced by the comparatively fresh 77. *Infanteriedivision*, continues to struggle through the difficult bocage country.

Everywhere else, German opposition to the drive is crumbling. The fighting has reduced 91. *Lufilandedivision* to a *Kampfgruppe*, a small battle group, and the battle-weary German units are in disarray and running low on ammunition. Taking advantage of this situation the troops of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division accelerate their drive westward on 15 June. However, that same day

the northwesterly advance of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division's 60<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team is checked by a strong German counterattack which temporarily drives the US troops back to their starting line along the Pont l'Abbe – Valognes highway. In the north, the hard-pressed 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division is further reinforced by the 47<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team. This unit drives westwards, despite harassment on the right flank of its advance, reaching its objective of the high ground near Orglandes.

Now, 'Lightning Joe' orders that the Peninsula be cut with all speed before the enemy can organise their defences along the Douve River between St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte and Ste. Colombe. On 16 June, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division reach St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte on the banks of the river. Observing a precipitate German retreat the airborne troops rush in and seize the town. Meanwhile, heavy artillery bombardments target the retreating Germans. By evening, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division have seized a deep bridgehead across the Douve River.

Further north as the 47<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team battles tough opposition for the high ground near Binville, the 60<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team, with armoured support, sweeps across country and enters Ste. Colombe on the banks of the Douve. Here, a hastily-organised crossing of the three river bridges in the area is halted by heavy artillery and direct fire from German forces in Nehou on the far bank.

The next day, the 60<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team advance west, across the Douve and through Nehou, and the 47<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team advance southwest from St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte. Meeting little organised German opposition, the US troops quickly overrun their original objectives and drive onwards, by the end of the day cutting the coastal road at Barneville-sur-Mer and Grand Huanville.

This rapid advance has cut the Cotentin Peninsula, and with it the German Seventh Army, in two. *Festung Cherbourg*, and all German troops north of the US lines are now isolated from resupply and reinforcement. The capture of a port from which the Allied beachhead can be resupplied is now just a matter of time.