

Busting the Bocage **30 June 1944**



Historical Background

The hedgerow country of northwestern France, *The Bocage*, presented a trying challenge to the U.S. Army in 1944. During the Normandy invasion, U.S. forces faced a stubborn German Army defending from an extensive network of small fields surrounded by living banks of hedges bordered by sunken dirt lanes. German forces fighting from these readymade defensive positions were, at first, able to curb most of the American advances and make the attempts very costly. For the U.S. Army, busting through the difficult Bocage country required tactical, doctrinal, and organizational ingenuity.¹

Situation

The date is 30 June 1944. Your platoon has been tasked with clearing determined German defenders from a section of bocage (approximately 200-yards by 200-yards). Over the past three days, every attempt to assault this field has failed. Based on lessons learned, you must lead a combined arms team to overcome the tenacious Nazi resistance and clear the hedgerow.

The Terrain

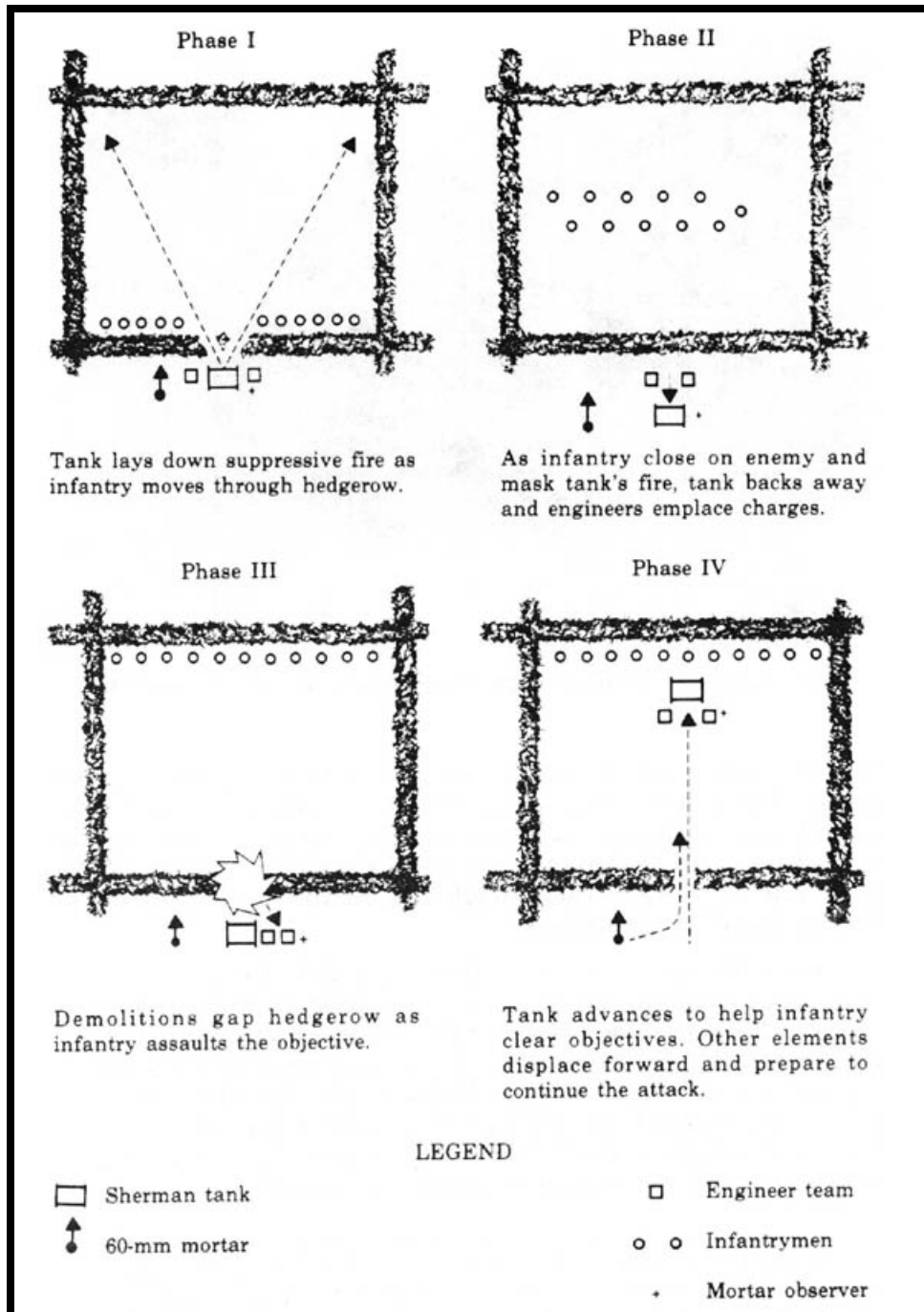
For centuries, Norman farmers had followed the practice of enclosing the plots of their arable land, pastures as well as orchards, with thick hedgerows. The hedgerow country in the U.S. sector started about ten miles inland from the Normandy beaches and extended in a wide swath from Caumont on the American left to the western coast of the Cotentin Peninsula. The hedgerows are sturdy embankments, half earth, half hedge. At their base, they resemble dirt parapets and vary in thickness from one to four feet, with heights that range from three to fifteen feet. Growing out of this earthen wall is a hedge that consists of small trees and tangles of vines and brush. This vegetation has a thickness of between one to three feet and varies in height from three to fifteen feet. Originally intended to serve as fences to mark land boundaries, to keep in livestock and to prevent the erosion of the land by sea winds, the hedgerows surround each field, breaking the terrain into numerous walled enclosures. Because the fields are small, about 200 by 400 yards in size, and usually irregular in shape, the hedgerows are numerous and set in no logical pattern. Each field has an opening in the hedgerow that permits access for humans, livestock, and farm equipment. For passage to fields that are not adjacent to regular highways, numerous wagon trails run through the hedgerows.²

Strategy

The pictures below indicate a few of the successful combined arms strategies employed by U.S. forces during the period known as *The Breakout*. To defeat a well entrenched enemy, it would ultimately require cooperation between engineers, armor, infantry and artillery, not to mention thousands of lives.

¹Closing with the Enemy by Michael D. Doubler; © 1994 University Press of Kansas.

² Ibid. page 34.

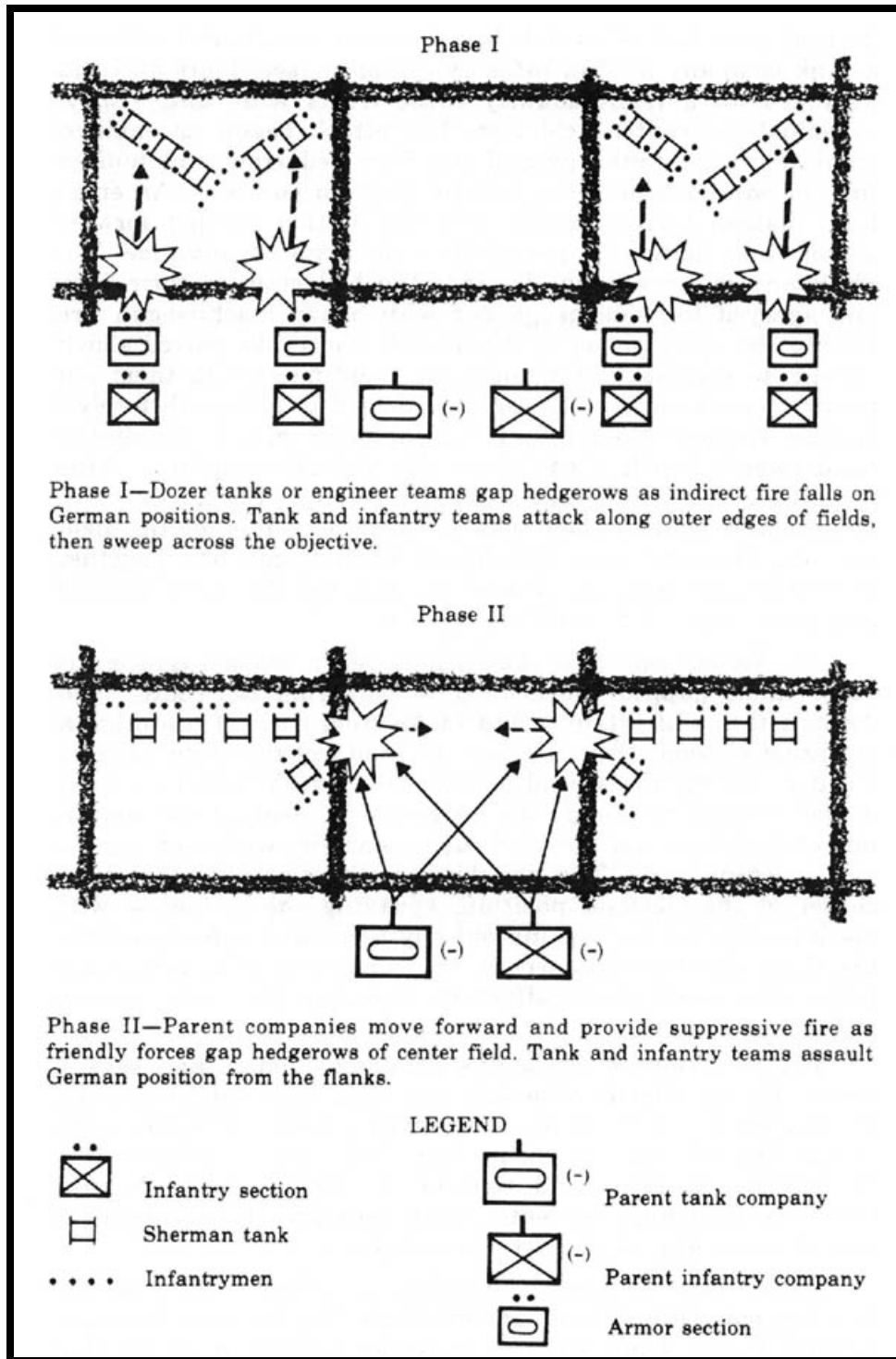


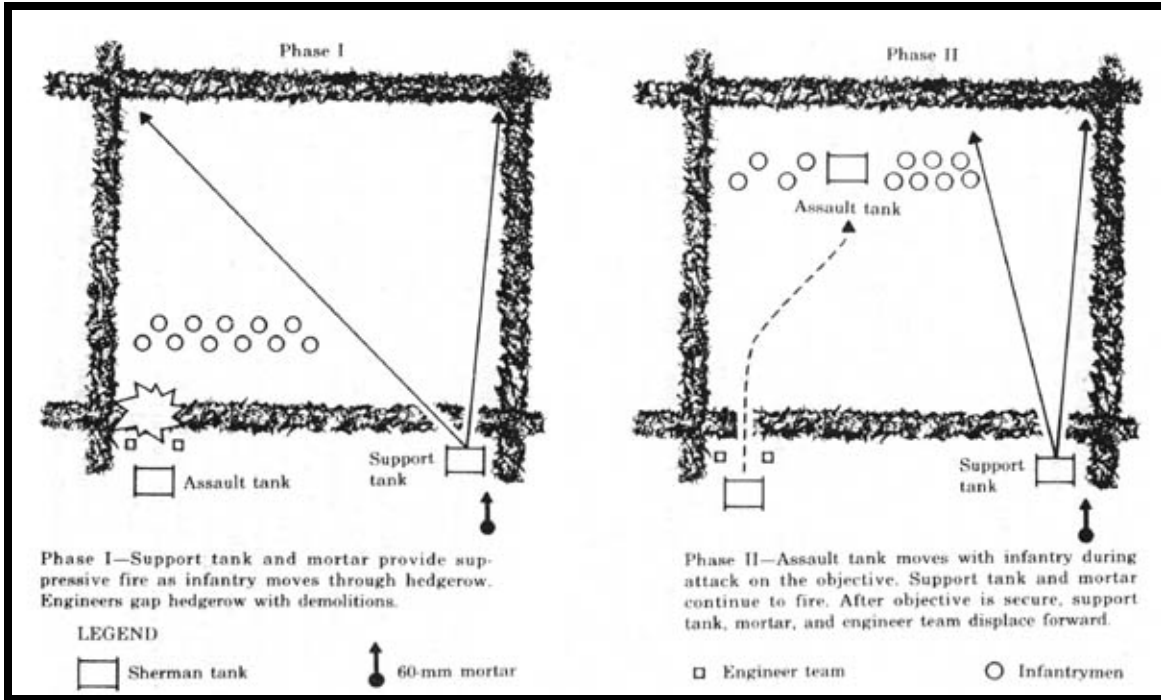
Tank lays down suppressive fire as infantry moves through hedgerow.

As infantry close on enemy and mask tank's fire, tank backs away and engineers emplace charges.

Demolitions gap hedgerow as infantry assaults the objective.

Tank advances to help infantry clear objectives. Other elements displace forward and prepare to continue the attack.





U.S. soldiers crouch behind a small hedgerow.

U.S. Order of Battle

1x HQ Section: 1 CO of professional TQ (Leadership 13), 1 sergeant of veteran TQ (Leadership 14), 4 riflemen of varying TQ from green to professional (2 d6 grenades).

2x 60mm Mortar Team: 2-man crew of regular TQ (1 d20 mortar bombs)

1x Engineer ½ Squad: 6-men of varying TQ from regular to veteran; equipped with 4 demolition packs for bocage destruction; One NCO with Leadership of 14.

3x Infantry Squad: 12-men of varying TQ from green to professional; equipped with assorted small arms and 2 d20 grenades.

2x M4A1 Sherman tanks: 5-man crew of regular TQ; equipped with smoke, HE and AP.

German Order of Battle

1x HQ Section: 1 CO of veteran TQ (Leadership 14), 1 NCO of veteran TQ (Leadership 14), 2 riflemen of professional TQ (equipped w/ radio).

2x Infantry Squad: 10-men of varying TQ from regular to veteran; equipped with assorted small arms, 1 d20 grenades and 2 d12 panzerfaust 60 (2x NCO w/ Leadership commensurate with TQ).

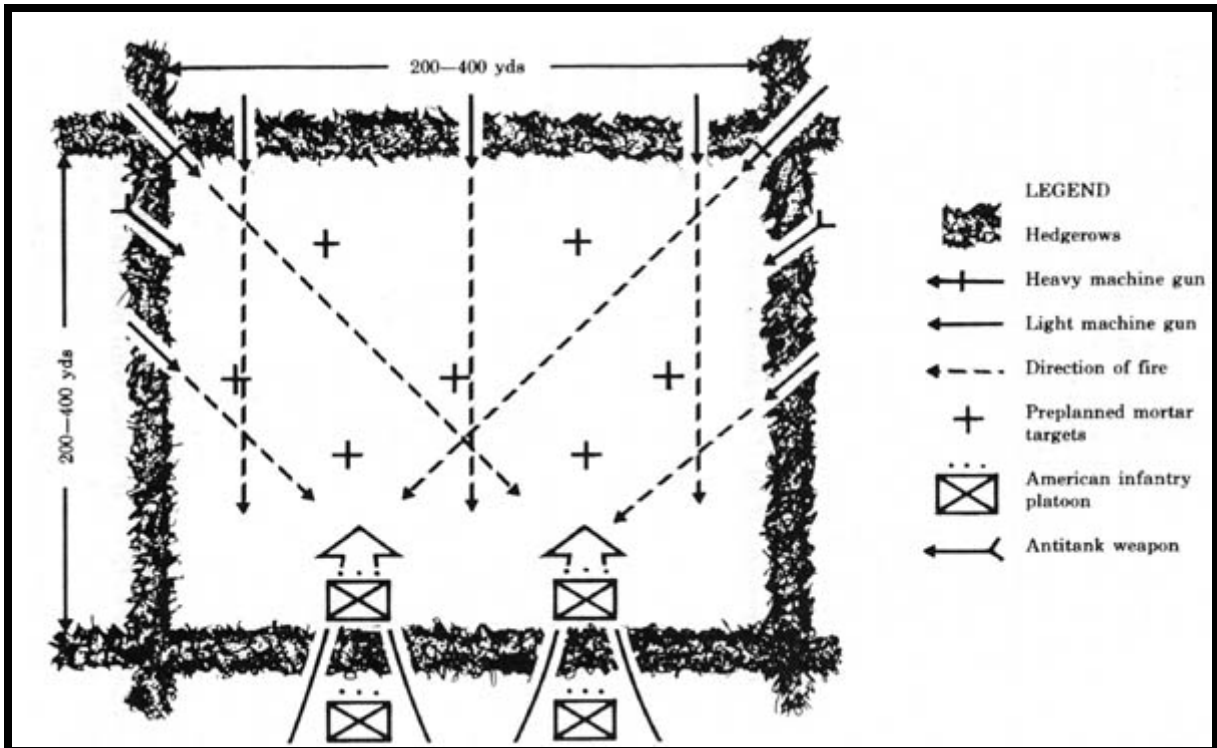
1x Heavy MG42 w/ Tripod: 3-man crew of regular TQ; equipped with 100 rounds (2-belts) of ammunition (Leadership of 12).

1x PaK 38: 5-man crew of professional TQ; (Leadership of 13)

OBA: 2x missions of 8.0cm mortar fire (2-tubes) w/ 65% availability; 2 registered points may be placed anywhere on the board. Fire cannot be adjusted.



Map: Busting the Bocage



NOTE: The hedgerow is approximately 10–15 feet high and tanks will be unable to provide suppression fire until it is breached by the engineers.

Set-Up

The U.S. player must approach from the bottom of the map, while the German may set up on the opposite row or on either flank.

Victory Conditions

The U.S. player has 10-turns to clear the bocage of German defenders. The German player must avoid U.S. victory conditions.