

Graignes Church aka "The Alamo"

Excerpt from the History of the 82nd Airborne Division actions in Operation Overlord

Everyday the pressure on our small pocket held by the 1st Platoon/ B-Company/ 507th PIR/ 82nd Airborne Division in the vicinity of Graignes has grown. On the 8th and 9th of June it included mechanical patrols of motorcycles, small jeep like vehicles, or a lone armored car. On the 10th several run ins with the Germans occurred, one of these was an ambush of a 2 truck convoy headed for the 17th SS PGD. We were able to "liberate" several cases of food, some medicines, and several documents (source of the 17th SS intelligence) from the trucks before they were consumed by fire. The supplies were brought to Graignes at the center of B-Company's assigned sector.

Just after mass started in the Church on the morning of the 11th, the rude Germans started probing Graignes from the south. The Germans were caught in the open and cut to ribbons with MMG and squad fires. A couple of our precious mortar rounds delivered the coup de grace catching several squads milling about at the edge of the woods adding wood to steel projectiles. We all knew they would be back with a vengeance. Capt Brummitt moved the outlying defenses closer to the Church which had become a combination observation tower, platoon command post, aid station and refuge for the civilians. The Platoon called it "The Alamo"

The houses west of town (group A) were abandoned as well as the small knoll to the north of town. The forces there were moved to a strongpoint at the intersection of 3 hedges and supported by a dug in MMG to the east. The squad manning a foxhole to the south west of town on the bocage row pulled back to group D house. The squad in group C houses moved to The Alamo to act as the reserve and provide security to the east as the village inhabitants prepared to evacuate.



The next assault would be the last, with only 3 mortar rounds left between 2 mortars, and just 5 bazooka rockets for the 2 teams, the plan was to hold The Alamo as long as possible and then infiltrate to the northeast thru the tree line from the corner of the church yard. Capt Brummitt expected another leg infantry assault possibly supported by an 88mm Flak 36 setting up in the distance. Since the 17th PGD was in the area, some halftrack or tank support was also possible, but the previous assault arrived in trucks and Capt Brummitt expected another such assault. If tanks showed the withdrawal was to start immediately, even if it meant those units in buildings B & D head down the road thru town and set up a anti-armor ambush outside town (off board). The MMG in the woods would cover the withdrawal and leave its position as the last unit passes.

The assault, as all assault usually do, started with the 88 firing at Group A buildings. The shot missed and landed somewhere east of town. The first set of halftrack mounted infantry could be heard to the west. Capt Brummitt waited to climb the steeple until either the steeple was hit or the Germans lost interest in shooting at the one obvious observation platform that could see the surrounding terrain clearly (and in turn be seen from any direction). The secondary observation was 2nd squad from building group D for cuing the Capt to chance looking out the steeple to target the mortars. I did not appear that the halftracks were coming down the road, but rather cross country north of the road, in line with the orchard. Unable to see/target anything for the first turn, everyone hunkered down and watched their fire zones for any sneak attack. The Germans continued to attack with the 88 with several phase intervals between shots – one hitting the west most building in group A and the third round scored a direct hit on the steeple collapsing the tower onto the church roof with some debris falling into the church. Fortunately, the civilians were in the north end (fewer windows), the squad was checking out the windows of the southern arm, and Capt Brummitt in the west wing near the stairs up to the steeple. After the dust settled, the Capt scampered up the stairs as far as he could, knocking some rubble near the lip of the newly created opening to look out to the west. The 88 was turning to the away from the town and the prime mover could be seen maneuvering in the vicinity, one less thing to worry about. This view and one from the 2nd squad some dust in the neighborhood of the tree surround field to the northwest suggested vehicles in that area. Capt Brummitt did spot a vehicle dashing towards the northwest corner of the orchard and shouted down to the mortar pits below in the church and rectory yards.

The second turn opened with more sounds of tracked vehicles to the south of the east-west bocage row near the road. Unable to get high enough to positively identify this force, Capt Brummitt targeted one mortar on the northwest corner of the orchard suspecting a halftrack was disgorging infantry troops or trying to get over the wall into the orchard for cover. Indeed the halftrack was able to make it over a partially collapsed portion of the wall and was proceeding towards the gate on the east side. The mortar round landed short, but not enough to catch the halftrack which proceeded, shaken but not hit towards the gate. The second platoon of German halftracks advanced west across the open toward the bocage and the road intersection near group A buildings. A couple of halftracks were spotted unloading troops just west of the intersection between the road and the bocage. Capt Brummitt targeted the intersection with the other mortar and fired the last two mortar rounds over two

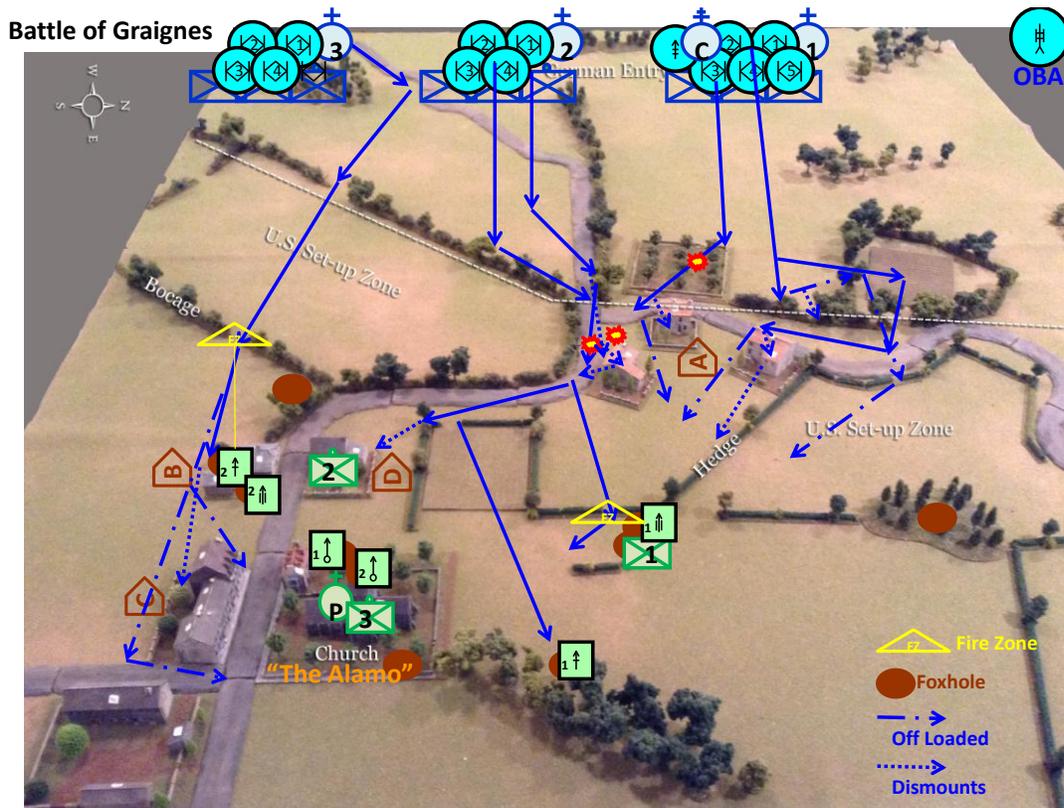
APs – the first doing no damage, but the second landed just off the left rear of a passing halftrack, disabling the vehicle abeam the southern house in group A. Meanwhile the first group of halftracks unloaded some of their troops to the north of the bocage across the road from group A buildings and others continued thru the tree lined field to the road. The mortar teams, out of ammunition moved toward the shelter of The Alamo, dropping their tubes inside the door and moving to the short east and west wings of the church. The German squad in the orchard halftrack dismounted and moved towards the westernmost building in group A to clear it. The squad in the disabled halftrack searched the building just paces away, expecting an attack from that axis. Staying behind the armor was more comforting than exiting into the street if it was an ambush.

As the third turn started, the third German mounted platoon arrived on the road. The first German platoon spent the third turn clearing the north and west buildings in group A, observing the knoll to the northeast of group A, and moving the halftracks into the north center field and the field immediately west of group A buildings. The second PG platoon prepared to continue down the road towards Graignes and clear the southernmost building in group A. As Hans Knoble followed his squad out of the disabled halftrack across the road, the 1st squad's attached MMG concealed in the woods opened up on them, decimating a majority of the squad. Hans survived by being the last out of the vehicle, he climbed back in the vehicle under cover. Another 2nd PGD squad moved down the road and by the end of the turn all group A buildings were clear, observation and firing positions were set up on the second floor of each, and the MG42 MMG was setting up south of the bocage across from group A. The third PGD platoon turned off the road once clear of the woods and headed south cross-country at half speed towards a break in the bocage. Once thru the gap they continued across the field towards the opening in the west side of the bocage around the field. Approaching the second gap they increased to full speed to rapidly close on group B buildings. The US 2nd squad's MMG in the southwest corner of group B had a fire zone on this gap, but knew they did not have a chance to hurt a halftrack, but the bazooka team on the other side of the building group could. 2nd squad in the large building in group D spotted at least one halftrack approaching the buildings across the road and sent a rifle grenade its way, which missed.

Starting in the fourth turn the phases were filled with lots of action. Finally both sides started to realize what they were facing. In previous turns the lack of an elevated observation platform (the church steeple) prevented the paratroops from spotting (identifying) the approaching Germans. Both sides were also limited by the multiple tree lines and bocages criss-crossing the battlefield and the fire discipline of the paratroopers (or maybe the lack of ammunition limited their options). As it developed, both sides lacked sufficient heavy weapons to significantly provide a deciding conclusion.

Turns 4,5, and 6 were one long engagement almost without pause. The half tracks near group B buildings arrived with such speed both sides were surprised at what they found. One halftrack from the 3rd PGD platoon drove up to group B and dropped into a well concealed foxhole destroying the MMG there and swiftly engaging the men in the foxhole and in the halftrack in melee. The paratroopers had a slight advantage as they saw the halftrack come thru their fire zone and had grenades at the ready. The bazooka team turned around from watching the road and saw a halftrack present its flank it across the

compound and fired, just missing high, quickly reloading to fire again this time hitting the halftrack, but most of the PGD troops were out of the vehicle. The remaining halftracks concentrated fire on the group B buildings and the bazooka team. The 2nd bazooka team (one man left), although wounded and suppressed escaped out the gate and down the road to the rally point at The Alamo. Although outnumbered in melee, the MMG team suffered 2 killed and was able to evade out the adjacent building from there out the backdoor, across the street and into the house into the house that the 2nd platoon had just vacated. 2nd platoon just the phase before had been driven out of the house in group D the previous AP by concentrated fire from the 2nd PDG halftracks coming down the road from the intersection. Having noted the withdrawal of the mortar teams across the open field into the church they had climbed down to the ground floor and exited out the back gate, double timed to the vacated mortar foxholes and then into the church [The Alamo now held 2xsquads, 2x mortar teams, and Capt Brummitt's command team. No more of the platoon were to reach the church.] On the southern flank, the Germans managed to un-bogged from the foxhole and the dismounted squads with their escorting halftracks crossed the gap between group B to group C buildings. The halftrack not engaged at the fight at group B proceeded with caution as other bazooka teams were probably in the area. The final setup was the PGD troops in the buildings in group C and their halftracks split with 2 at each end east and west. As each unit arrived it added its fire to the others concentrating on the great doors of the church to little effect on the paratroops inside other than an occasional short lived suppression. The bazooka man never made it to the church as he was cut down in the street outside by the first arriving halftrack.



The first German PDG and their halftracks had established a base of fire suppressing the MMG in the woods and searching the surrounding terrain for other threats. Over several APs much of the north portion of the battlefield was examined and found empty of paratroops. 1st platoon continued to provide overwatch as the 2nd platoon halftracks (3 remaining mobile) advanced in the center one towards group D and the suppressed MMG team, the second and third thru the field south of the occupied group A buildings and the overwatching units in them. Hans had joined the lead vehicle to go thru the gap at the east side of the field. As this halftrack passed thru the gap, it came under fire (fire zone) from the bazooka team attached to the 1st squad of Capt Brummitt's platoon. The first rocket missed and the halftrack came to a halt just as the second rocket hit disabling the vehicle. The second 2nd platoon halftrack east of group A buildings proceeding toward the gap when 1st squad fired a rifle grenade at it hitting the LMG mount and causing the crew to bailout, the troops exited the vehicle and headed towards paratroop strongpoint. The second rifle grenade from 1st squad fell within the troops exiting the disabled halftrack south of the strongpoint – Hans' luck had finally run out.

The halftrack headed towards group D buildings dismounted the squad and headed to the east to overrun the suppressed MMG in the woods. 1st platoon PDG halftracks, supported by the MMG, poured fire into the strongpoint to suppress and eliminate 1st squad. First the bazooka team was wiped out and then 1st squad was suppressed in the face of overwhelming fire. The MMG team was overrun and captured. The final paratroop outpost was located in a group D building. A 2nd PDG squad assaulted the building driving the MMG team back across the street and suppressed. 2nd PDG squad pursued and captured it in a group B building.

At the end of turn 6 Capt Brummitt's platoon remnants were pinned in "The Alamo". Capt Brummitt's command group was suppressed for 6 APs that would have inhibited rallying the troops in the church over the remaining 2 turns to continue prevent the Germans from taking The Alamo.

Lessons Learned:

For large buildings under fire that contain multiple units distribute the units and randomly assign numbers to record the results of hits on casualties or suppression.

When an opposing force reaches Point Blank range an indicator of something suspicious (foxhole) exists by placing a chit at the location, however with fast moving forces can lead to surprises – like the halftrack nose diving into a foxhole before either sides realized it.

If defending, pull all units within the command radius to avoid getting outliers cut off and eliminated.

Consider giving general objectives in the scenario and providing specific objects to the sides once assembled to play. In this scenario the paratroopers' objective might be generally to delay the German advance, with reduction of level of victory for withdrawal of units before 8 turns. For the Germans the general objective would be to secure the town and later specifically to clear the church by turn 8. With

both sides knowing the church was the forcing function, in this case led to “The Alamo” situation and without sufficient heavy weapons easily allowed the paratroopers to concentrate forces there and the Germans having little chance of displacing them without reducing the church stone chip by stone chip.

Give the dice lots of room to roll or surfaces to bounce off to produce better rolls. Dice like lots of action!