Turnbull: AAR

The Dulles Wargaming Club gathered on 26 April 2014 to play an adaptation of a Final Combat skirmish scenario for Micro Melee. The forces were increased to historical proportions, but certain concessions were made to maintain play balance. Roger acted on behalf of the 505/PIR and Mike and I opposed him with a company from the 1058th Grenadier Regiment.

Historical Background

Amid the chaos that characterized the airborne operations on the morning of 6 June 1944, Lieutenant Turner B. Turnbull and 41 men of 3rd Rifle Platoon Company D were dispatched by Colonel Benjamin H. Vandervoort to take up blocking positions just north of Neuville Au Plain in anticipation of a German counter-attack at Ste. Mère-Eglise. Turnbull strategically placed his heavy weapons and made sure his men were spaced out behind a massive hedgerow. Later, Colonel Vandervoort delivered two 57mm anti-tank guns, which Turnbull sited to fire down the main road.

Little more than twenty-minutes passed when the platoon spotted a group of U.S. paratroopers escorting German POWs waving orange signal flags. The prisoners were walking along the road toward them in a column of twos, casually singing and whistling. Realizing it was a ruse, Turnbull's men unleashed a hail of fire. However, they severely underestimated the enemy strength, which was actually in excess of 190 men. As the morning wore on, Turnbull's platoon was reduced by accurate German mortar and small arms fire. Supported by the Panzerjäger Abteilung 191 with at least one self-propelled gun and several obsolescent tanks, a German flanking maneuver threatened to encircle the platoon. Consequently, Turnbull and his men were forced to withdraw. In spite of this, they managed to slow the German advance toward Ste. Mère-Eglise, which provided a measure of tactical relief.¹

Game Preparations
Prior to the start of play, Roger plotted the location of his Right Flank on a map. The units were hidden and held off board for most of the game. Mike and I collaborated on our strategy. This game actually combined two scenarios into one. The Left Flank involved Lt Michaelman's rifle squad, supported by a machine gun and bazooka team. Historically, this group dashed across an orchard and occupied two barns, in an attempt to delay the German advance. My plan was designed to pressure Michaelman's squad with an under-strength platoon, supported by two StuGs. At the start of turn three, another squad entered from the west edge of the board, pressuring Michaelman from the flank. Mike was tasked with capturing the large hedgerow that was supposedly defended by the balance of Turnbull's platoon. Mike decided to move through the woods to limit his casualties, with assistance from two Marder IIs.
German 2nd Platoon with supporting StuGs

**Turns 1 & 2**
As the game began, the U.S. ATG that started suppressed, made its troop quality rating (TQR) save and re-crewed the gun. German 2nd Platoon, minus 3rd Squad, doubled timed across the open field towards the orchard. Simultaneously, Michaelman and his men moved quickly through the orchard to the barn. Mike moved 1st and 3rd Platoon cautiously to a large section of bocage and ordered one Marder to assist 2nd Platoon in the orchard. By the end of the second turn, Michaelman's squad reached the farm complex and proceeded to fire on 1st Squad/2nd Platoon as it deployed along the hedgerow. My two StuGs entered the fray and raced to support 2nd Platoon.
Turn 3
At the start of turn 3, Michaelman was free to begin his exfiltration. 3rd Squad/2nd Platoon entered the game from the west edge of the board, and the StuGs moved swiftly along the hedgerow. Mike decided the Marder couldn't risk a showdown with the 57mm ATG positioned in the road by the town. So, he reversed his course and joined his mates moving on Turnbull's Right Flank. Turnbull seemed to be in the town with line of sight to Mike's advance, because a pair of 60mm mortars began lobbing shells. The most catastrophic event for the Germans was the loss of its company HQ unit. Not only did we lose his leadership, but we also lost the support of our 8.0cm mortar battery. However, Mike was undeterred and continued towards his objective.
Turn 4
By the start of turn 4, Michaelman's squad was running for its life. The accompanying units (machine gun & bazooka) had been cut down attempting to escape. 3rd Squad/2nd Platoon dashed towards the large gray barn at the south end of the orchards and fired on Michaelman as he began climbing over the hedgerow. Although the U.S. squad took some casualties and became suppressed, it fired back and crushed 3rd Squad. Roger rolled a "1" and 3rd Squad suffered eight damage points. This caused its TQR to be reduced and its fire power factor to be halved. It also caused him to be suppressed for one phase. Because Michaelman's squad was suppressed for the maximum (6) number of phases, Roger ordered him to attempt an escape. By rule, an imperiled unit must move 60-yards away from the danger. His men clamored out of the orchard and took cover in the ditches along the road. 1st and 2nd Squad, with the Platoon HQ, continued to pursue Michaelman, as they jumped into the orchard and raced towards the hedgerow.
**Turns 5 & 6**

Michaelman's squad began to regain its composure, and it appeared he might recover from the suppression. But the Germans were relentless in their pursuit and fired again. Michaelman was barely hanging on, when a depleted 3rd Squad finally caught up and engaged him in melee. By rule, if an escaped unit is re-engaged before the expiration of its current suppression, it is eliminated. That was Michaelman's fate. So, the Germans won the *Left Flank*. But the game was far from over.

Mike's two platoons had suffered a number of casualties from an invisible foe. He ordered his Marders to pound suspected positions, where Turnbull might be observing their advance. But the Germans were not certain they had located the lookout. The Marders were now adjacent to the bocage that was to be taken, but as turn six came to an end, the infantry was still trailing behind and Turnbull's platoon had not revealed its hiding place. The *Left Flank* force approached the town of Neuville Au Plain and a second 57mm ATG roared to life, knocking out one StuG. This meant that Mike would not be able to get the help he needed in time to deal Turnbull a death blow. Turn six came to a close and Roger was still alive. So, he won the *Right Flank*.

**Debrief**

During the debrief session, Roger revealed his strategy. He was fearful of the German artillery and opted not to defend the hedgerow directly. He tucked one squad into a corner of the bocage and pulled the remainder of them back far enough that they would be safe from stray mortar rounds. Turnbull occupied a tall building next to the church. We believed he was in the bell tower, but Roger never does the obvious. This massive game was played in three hours. All agreed the game flowed quickly as our forces maneuvered and fired. In discussing the balance and what could be changed, it was decided that circumstances were influenced as much by chance (dice) as by tactics, and that the scenario was very well balanced.
The StuGs exit the orchard.