



Lesson 3: Estimates and planning

Reference: **FM 101-5**

Study assignment: Read **FM 101-5**, Sections I-II

How do we choose a battle plan?

What follows may seem sort of fussy for reenactors, but the planning process we use to choose among options for a mission is essential. There are lots of possible ways to defend ground or crack an enemy position, but only a few of them are worth trying. Actually, that's not true. Sometimes you're given an objective that suggests no good planning alternatives, and you are obliged to choose the one least likely to be a disastrous rout and substitute prayer for planning. That's a joke, okay? Well—sort of.

I go through this process every year for the Gap field exercises, and will continue to do so until I've managed to train somebody else to do it or I suffer a massive stroke, whichever comes first. It's not as hard as it sounds, and it has the advantage of making sense. I guess any process

Nothing spurs adaptability like a genuine lack of planning.

—**Doctrine Man**

this obscure should be *fun* (as long as nobody gets killed, which would be in poor taste). To lighten things up, I will include words of wisdom from a contemporary Hero of Facebook, a mysterious personality called Doctrine Man. This humorist appears to

have suffered a soul-sucking tour of duty writing doctrine at the Pentagon or TRADOC or some other minimum-security nut house, and maintained his sanity by producing cartoons, lists of twisted wisdom, coffee cups, tee shirts, and challenge coins.

Our example

Rather than citing a bunch of check lists and outlines crafted by exhausted intellects of the 1940's, we will begin with an example and carry you through the process of defining the mission, framing estimates, comparing and selecting options, and settling for a general plan.

Let's start with a general situation. Readers of this guide are assumed to be the commander and staff of the 116th Regimental Combat Team, 29th Infantry Division (a little loyalty to the homeys, and I had to choose some appropriate unit). It's October 1944, just north of the border between France and Belgium. The division is continuing its attack to the north toward the Scheldt River against slowly stiffening resistance. More details will come in later steps.

The 116th RCT is organized as follows:

116th Infantry Regiment

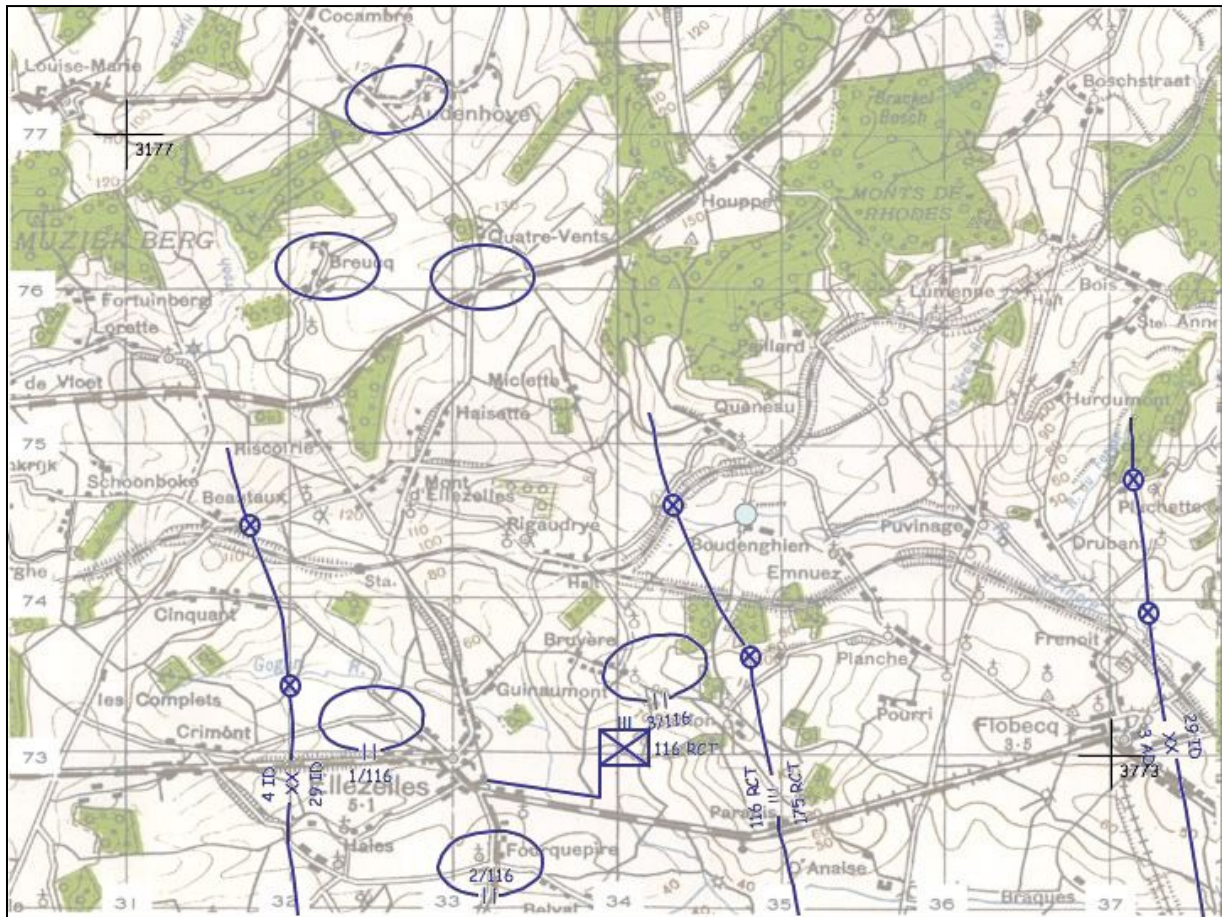
Company A, 747 Tank Destroyer Battalion

You have recently received replacements, and the rifle companies are at about 80 percent strength.

At 0330 9 October, the teletype comes alive and delivers the following order from division:

AT 0530 10 OCTOBER, 29TH DIVISION WILL CONTINUE ADVANCE NORTH. 116 RCT WILL SECURE ROAD JUNCTIONS AT BREUCQ, QUATRE-VENTS AND AUDENHOVE, PREPARE TO CONTINUE ATTACK ON ORDER.

First we need to get a closer look at the situation, which will require a map. Here is a map with some overlay shapes showing the general area of operations, boundaries, and assigned objectives.



You are commanding officer, 116th Infantry RCT (regimental combat team, which means your regiment plus augmentations). You have a full, seasoned staff to assist you in the planning process. First step: evaluate the mission. From that point, the commander takes charge, and uses the staff estimates to assist him in coming up with the best plan.

The commander's estimate

The commander's estimate is ongoing with the principal staff's estimates. In this example, because of the limited focus of reenactor exercises, we will focus on the estimates of the commander (you), the S-2, and the S-3.

A look at **FM 101-5**, Appendix I reveals the general flow of the commander's estimate:

1. **MISSION.** This is the assigned mission, and since it comes from “higher” we have to follow it pretty much as stated or go steel pot in hand to the next guy in the chain.
If there are several parts to the mission, establish priority. Some missions involve either stated or implicit intermediate objectives that are necessary for completion of the task, and these need to be identified now.
2. **SITUATION AND POSSIBLE LINES OF ACTION.**
 - a. Considerations affecting possible lines of action. What will affect your decision? Possible factors include relative combat power and available reinforcements; time and space available (v. required) to accomplish the objective; terrain; dispositions of your troops and the enemy’s, supply and evacuation, and weather.
 - b. Enemy capabilities. The S-2 should have made this information available in his estimate. What possible things can the enemy do that would affect your operation?
 - c. Own courses of action. What are the possible ways you can accomplish the mission? Note that every option has to offer an outcome in which the mission is completely accomplished. There may be only one option; this is rare, but don’t feel you have to make up silly alternatives just to say you have some.
3. ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE LINES OF ACTION. What can the enemy do to respond to each of your possible options? Here you are mentally “wargaming” each possible course of action against the enemy’s capabilities.
4. COMPARISON OF OWN LINES OF ACTION. Based on your analysis, which of your courses of action has the highest probability of success?
5. DECISION. This is a concise statement of the course of action you have decided upon. The result is called the “commander’s intent”, and the S-3 will consolidate this intent decisions with information from the other principal staff and turn it into a field order.

The intelligence estimate

While you start the mental exercise of the commander's estimate, your S-2 will be assembling the intelligence estimate (needed to tackle 2b of the commander's estimate). Let's see what the overworked intelligence officer is doing:

Sources

Enemy information comes from a variety of sources – some from division or higher, some locally developed. These include:

- a. Usually from higher headquarters, with some unavoidable delay (and often some *avoidable* delay):

Aerial photos, interpreted by specially trained analysts. Most of the photos are not just random tourist shots (it’s a big world out there), but result from specific taskings to the aerial reconnaissance squadrons from Corps, Army, Army Group, or occasionally from SHAEF. Analysis is of original photographs, flat or stereoscopic, visible spectrum and near infrared.

Areas selected for photo packages are those the tasking command level considers important at a given moment and in the near operational future. However, there is a downside to blanket

coverage of a critical area: too many missions alert the enemy that you are interested in that stretch of ground. To avoid this gift of an intelligence signature to the Germans, air assets are often dispersed on secondary missions to avoid tipping off the objective.

b. Signal intercepts, again from higher level signal organizations, may provide information on enemy locations and activities. This is actually a complicated procedure, not just like a police stakeout or an FBI bugging of a Brooklyn social club. Transmitting sources can be located by triangulation (that is, two monitoring stations some distance apart finding the directs of maximum signal strength from a given source and locating it where the direction lines cross). However, there are a lot of transmitting sources out there, and both sides tend to send out dummy signals to confuse the issue. In addition, headquarters (the juiciest signal sources) tend to move around a lot to avoid location, and when they will be in place for a while will try to shift from radio to wire.

Signal operating procedures can make the task difficult. After a while, units in the field learn to change their call signs regularly to avoid being identified and tracked by little ears.

Human intelligence is a later euphemism for “spies.” These may be members of the notorious “Red Chorus” that infiltrated the German high command down to OSS operators, *Maquis*, or just refugees or POWs who have information to trade. Downside here is that there is a lot of noninformation and, worse yet, the kind of misleading reports now called “disinformation.” It’s generally up to G-2 at higher levels to sort it out.

c. More locally generated:

Observation of areas to the front of the outpost line (OPL) can produce some useful news. Enemy movement is often evident, for example, as well as noises at night when outposts become listening posts. The sudden appearance of fresh earth may indicate “spoil” – dirt produced by digging fortifications, which is why we always camouflage it as soon as possible. On the other side of that coin, patches of dead vegetation may indicate failure to replace natural camouflage as it turns brown.

An increase in *enemy activity* (probes, infiltration patrols, harassing fire) may signal a change in enemy intentions. A lot of probing of the OPL at night may be a leading indicator of enemy offensive action (or just restlessness).

In the course of these daily adventures, *prisoners* may be captured. This is a case of human intelligence that we may sample before sending the PWs to the collection points in the rear for the entertainment of G-2. Knowing who is across the field looking at you is always useful.

We may also send out *patrols*. This is mostly a matter of reconnaissance patrols, not an attempt to get into a fight (hard to put across to reenactors) – just a closer look or listen. As S-2, you might get approval to send out probes like this. (Sometimes higher HQ may try to micro-manage things like this, and it isn’t unusual for division to come up with a requirement that goes down to company level.) A recon patrol will always have instructions on what it is to find out (we call this shopping list the EEI, or “essential elements of information.”)

2. Format for the S-2 estimate. Again we have a general formula not much altered since WW2. This is what the S-2 estimate includes (from **FM 101-5**, Form 2):

1. SUMMARY OF THE ENEMY SITUATION.

- a. Enemy activities in forward areas and new identifications.
- b. Movements, concentrations, and establishments in rear areas.
- c. Terrain and weather as they affect the enemy.

2. CONCLUSIONS.

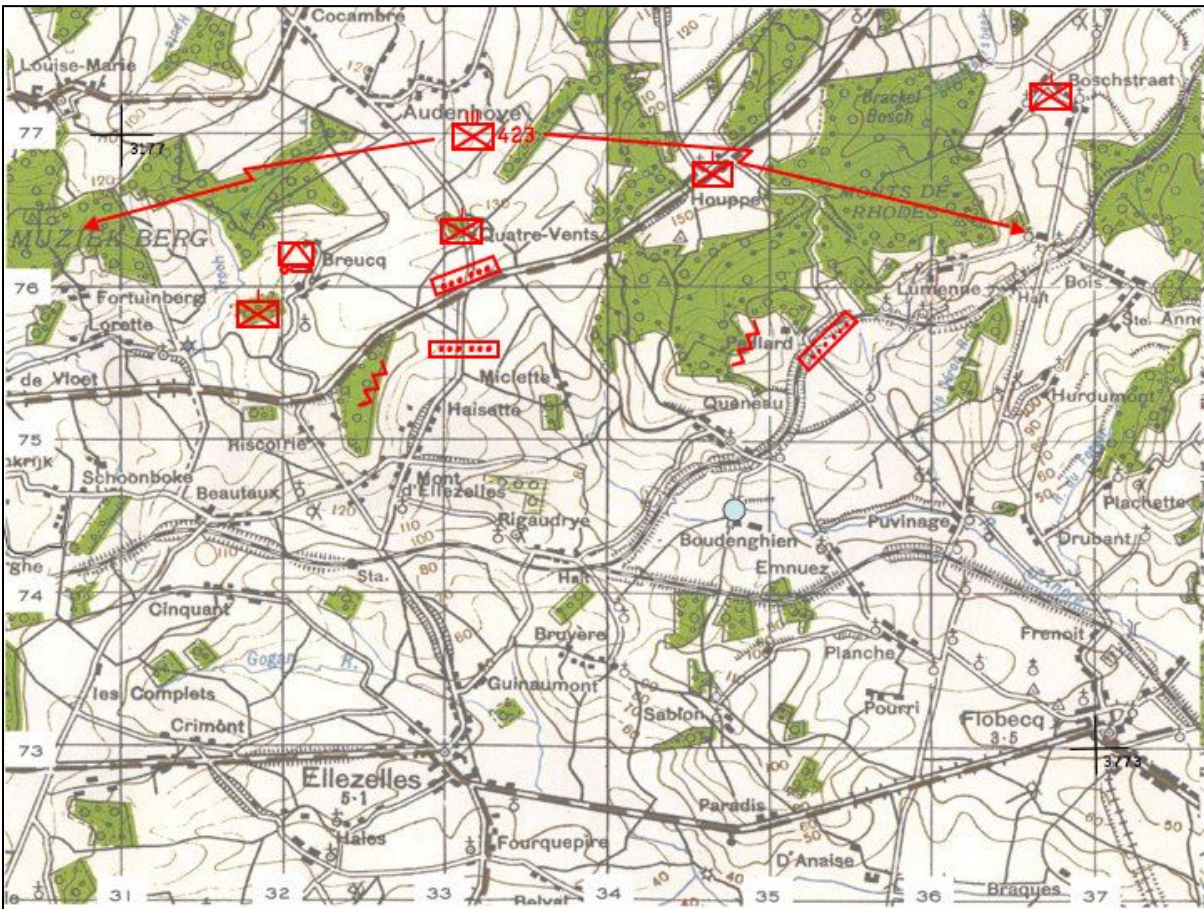
a. Enemy capabilities. An enumeration of the lines of action open to the enemy which may affect accomplishment of the mission of the command. [Translation: What you would do if you were the enemy, bearing always in mind that you are not.]

(1) A statement of the relative probability of adoption of the foregoing lines of action when such statement can be justified. [Translation: a scientific wild ass guess, but don't get pinned down.]

(2) Reasons justifying statements made in (1) above.

That's pretty simple. Unfortunately – as always – it's the simple things that are hardest. Let's go through an example of the problems facing the S-2 of the 116 RCT in our hypothetical case.

Information available to the S-2: Division provides the following, shown as an overlay:



This shows information from all available sources. At **Appendix I** is the terrain analysis. Let's start compiling the estimate of the enemy situation. Now let's see the S-2's estimate:

Intelligence Estimate
HQ 116 RCT vic ELLEZELLES
9 Oct 44

1. SUMMARY OF THE ENEMY SITUATION.

a. Enemy activities in the forward area.

Area to front of OPL continues to be occupied by elements of 423 Infantry Regiment, a veteran unit recruited from Thuringia and part of the 377 VGD. This regiment saw service in Russia, and was transferred to the Western Front in August 44. The 423 has seen extensive combat since arrival with little reinforcement and little time to rest and refit. PW information suggests heavy casualties in COBRA, largely without replacement; strength estimated 50o/o.

Company size elements of the 423 have been recently placed near BREUCQ (322762), QUATRE-VENTS (332763) and HOUPE (346767); reports of another company vic. BOSCHSTRAET (367772) are unconfirmed and may not be from the 423. Aerial recon also reports an unknown size unit of halftrack-mounted 75mm antitank guns vic. BREUCQ. This unit appears to have moved to its current location o/a 7 Oct.

Aerial recon indicates minefields of unknown extent and composition vic. 322755 and 322761 in 116 RCT sector and 353756 in the 175 RCT sector. Since these are across roads in areas clear of cover, they are believed to include antitank mines.

On 7 Oct patrols indicated presence of spoil indicating recent entrenchment at three locations: 326753 at wood line, and at 348757 in 175 RCT sector. These may indicate forward deployment of company level units already identified.

b. Movements, concentrations, and establishments in rear areas.

Enemy forces in sector are currently regrouping after a long period of retrograde. Reports indicate a Kampfgruppe, about battalion size, of the Panzer Lehr Division approximately 30 miles in enemy rear.

c. Terrain and weather as they affect the enemy.

Enemy occupies high ground generally favorable to defense along heights MUSIEKBERG-MONTS DE RHODES. These positions provide observation and fields of fire along terrain corridors in sector.

Weather continues dry, visibility excellent, factors that allow the enemy to bring accurate fire on any attacking forces.

2. CONCLUSIONS.

a. Enemy capabilities. Enemy in sector may attack, defend, or retire. Any of these may affect the regiment's operations.

b. (1) Relative probabilities of enemy courses of action.

Probability of attack is considered low, because of unfavorable enemy force ratio. Withdrawal is more likely, but is not supported by any collateral intelligence. Highest probability is that the enemy will defend on his current line.

(2) Justification.

Enemy force ratio is unfavorable for attack, and there is no indication of movement of assault forces closer to the current line. Withdrawal is inconsistent with recent construction of fortifications and with the introduction of tank destroyer assets in sector, a move that suggests they are staying in place unless forced out of current positions.

This estimate says, basically: "The enemy is in rough shape, but his position is strong and there is a need to stop the rearward movement long enough to get reorganized. Evidence suggests he will fight it out for the moment.

Commander's estimate

Again, the staff estimates are secondary and advisory in nature: the commander makes the final decisions. But we don't want commanders flying by the seat of their pants in combat, relying on intuition to make critical decisions. There are a few examples in history of great captains

One decent course of action is worth three crappy ones.

—Doctrine Man

who had a magical *coup d'oeil militaire* (see Map Reading, Lesson 5), and simply sized up a battlefield at a glance. I don't recommend that approach.

The form for the commander's estimate (still taught pretty much this way) seems, once again, to be dull and fussy. In fact, it simply prevents making a decision for the wrong reasons and without rigorous thought. Combat outcomes depend on intelligence, courage, and luck. Courage is between you and your inner self, and luck is a famously fickle mistress.

Now glance back at page 3 for the commander's estimate format provided by **FM 101-5**.

Example: Based on the S-2 estimate and other staff estimates (which I'll spare you), here is a typical commander's estimate:

1. MISSION. The 116th Infantry RCT will secure the town of AUDENHOVE. The terrain and current enemy situation require the establishment of two intermediate objectives (BREUCQ and QUATRE-VENTS) that must be secured before sufficient force can be brought on the main objective. For purposes of this analysis, BREUCQ will be OBJ 1, QUATRE-VENTS will be OBJ 2, and AUDENHOVE will be OBJ 3.

2. SITUATION AND POSSIBLE LINES OF ACTION.

a. Considerations affecting possible lines of action. OBJ 1 must be attacked in one bold stroke to avoid enemy reinforcements from the Panzer Lehr Division being brought to bear in time to influence the operation.

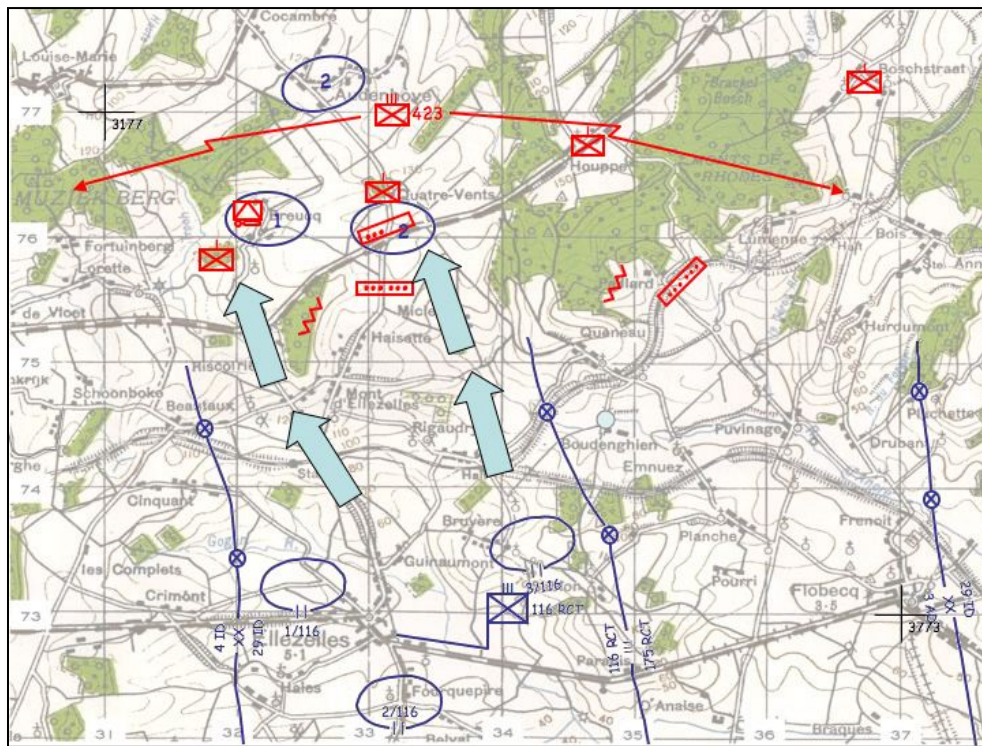
Relative combat power appears to be marginally favorable. 116 RCT is on good shape, and has been reinforced by Company A, 747 TD BN from V Corps assets.

However, terrain favors the enemy to the extent that our possible axes of advance supported by heavy-duty roads end at the commanding ridge line MUSIEKBERG-MONTS DE RHODES, a feature that affords extensive observation and fields of fire against any advance.

b. Enemy capabilities. The enemy's capability to attack is limited to raids and spoiling attacks, but there is little indication he plans anything but the toughest defense possible. Maneuver room in sector is limited, so we would expect him to defend in place.

The apparent AT capability beyond the organic antitank elements of the infantry regiment (unknown small number of HT mounted 75 PAKs) is a problem for attack along any corridor, but in particular on the roads that follow the low (western) compartment. We would expect his AT capability to be concentrated there, and intelligence suggests this is the case.

c. Own courses of action. The sector is limited in maneuver space to two axes. The first follows the roads running up the valley to the ridge line CINQUANT-MONT D'ELLEZELLES, which split, one road to BREUCQ and the other to QUATRE-VENTS - that is, to OBJ 1 and OBJ 2. The second follows the ridge line SABLON-RIGAUDRYE-QUATRE-VENTS in the eastern part of the sector.



Course of action 1: Regiment attacks with two battalions abreast on axes ELLEZELLES-MONT D'ELLEZELLES-BREUCQ and SABLON-RIGAUDRYE-QUATRE-VENTS to secure OBJs 1 and 2, with axis 1 (western) weighted with armor elements (one company or two platoons of M18's); after securing OBJs 1 and 2, combined attack to secure OBJ 3.

Course of action 2: Same as COA 1, but eastern axis weighted.

3. ANALYSIS OF OWN LINES OF ACTION.

a. COA 1 takes advantage of the road net for speed and ease of movement. However, there is only one main road, and side roads cannot be used except for detours. Enemy can concentrate fire on the road, to some extent counteracting the advantage of speed. In addition, armor moving along the road is vulnerable because of good observation and fields of fire from the high ground CLINQUANT-QUATRE VENTS; there are also problematic road cuts that restrict maneuver of armor and increase vulnerability, and the TDs cannot as a practical matter bring their fires to bear in support of the infantry attack until late in the movement. This axis has as its principal advantage the fact that it is the shortest route to OBJ 1, and for this reason the enemy is likely to concentrate his defensive power on it.

Planning assumptions are an admission that you're clueless.

—Doctrine Man

b. COA 2, since it is mostly cross country or on unpaved roads, is somewhat slower than the route of COA 1. However, it avoids long traverse of exposed ground under enemy observation, and there is no practical way to block this axis because of the increased room for maneuver. By weighting this attack, the threat to OBJ 2 is obvious to the enemy; if QUATRE-VENTS falls, BREUCQ will be difficult to hold, and it is possible the enemy will shift forces from west to east as the attack develops, taking pressure off the eastern attack.

In essence, both attacks must be made simultaneously to meet the mission requirements; the choice is whether to weight the east or the west attack with armor.

4. COMPARISON OF OWN LINES OF ACTION.

COA 1, while it allows for extra speed due to available road net, is the most vulnerable to enemy fire, particularly for TDs; their effectiveness is likely to be limited in any case due to terrain.

COA 2 appears more likely to succeed by bringing maximum force to bear on OBJ 2 and possibly drawing enemy resources from OBJ 1.

5. COA 2 is the preferred line of action.

Concept of operation: Two battalions will attack abreast using parallel axes, with armor assets attached to the right flank battalion. Battalions will secure OBJs 1 and 2 and, on order, combine to secure OBJ 3. The remaining battalion will form the reserve and be prepared to cover unexpected enemy response and/or exploit developments.

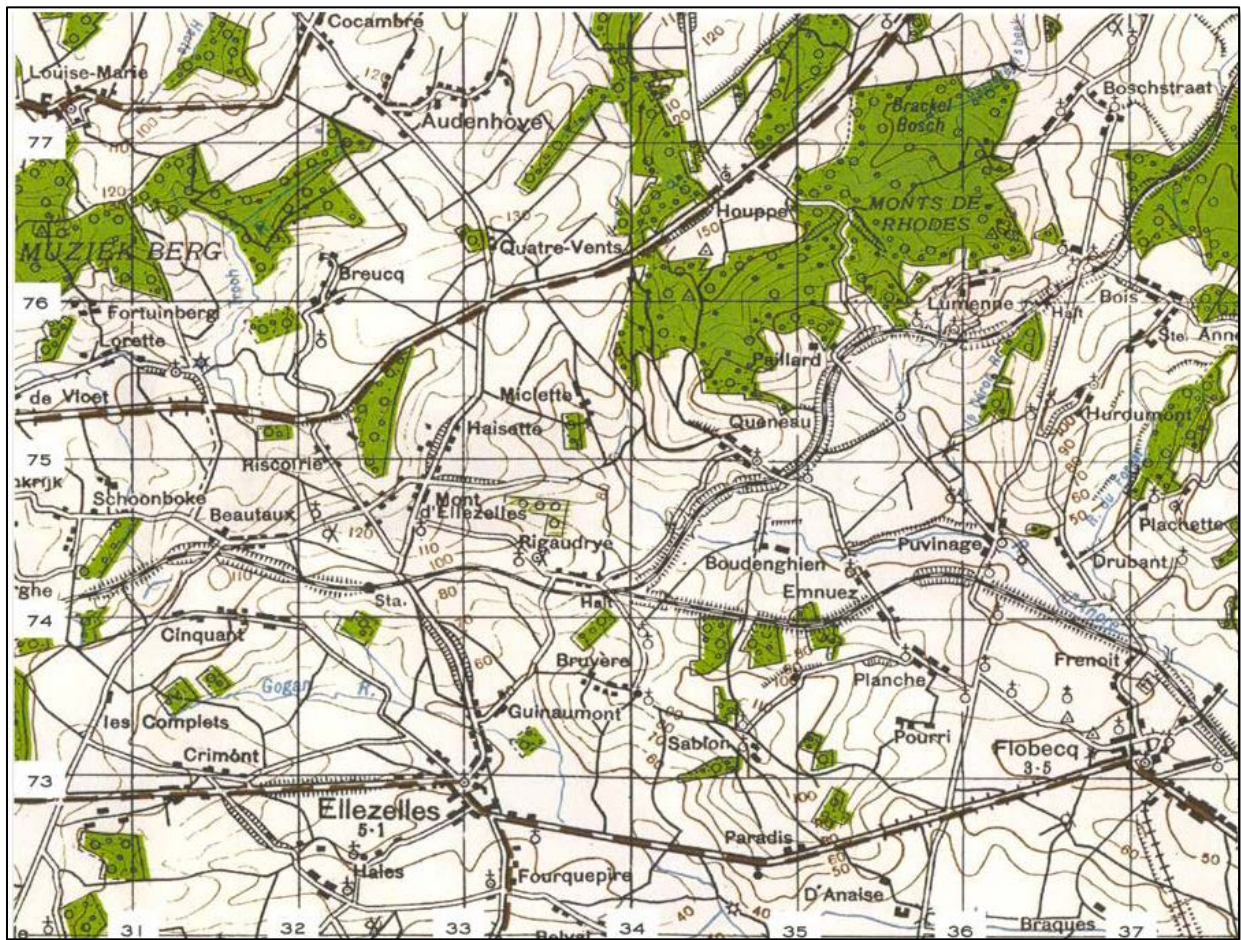
What next?

The course of action has been selected; now the commander and staff will turn that grand but vague plan into a Field Order. In Lesson 4 we will see how this is done.

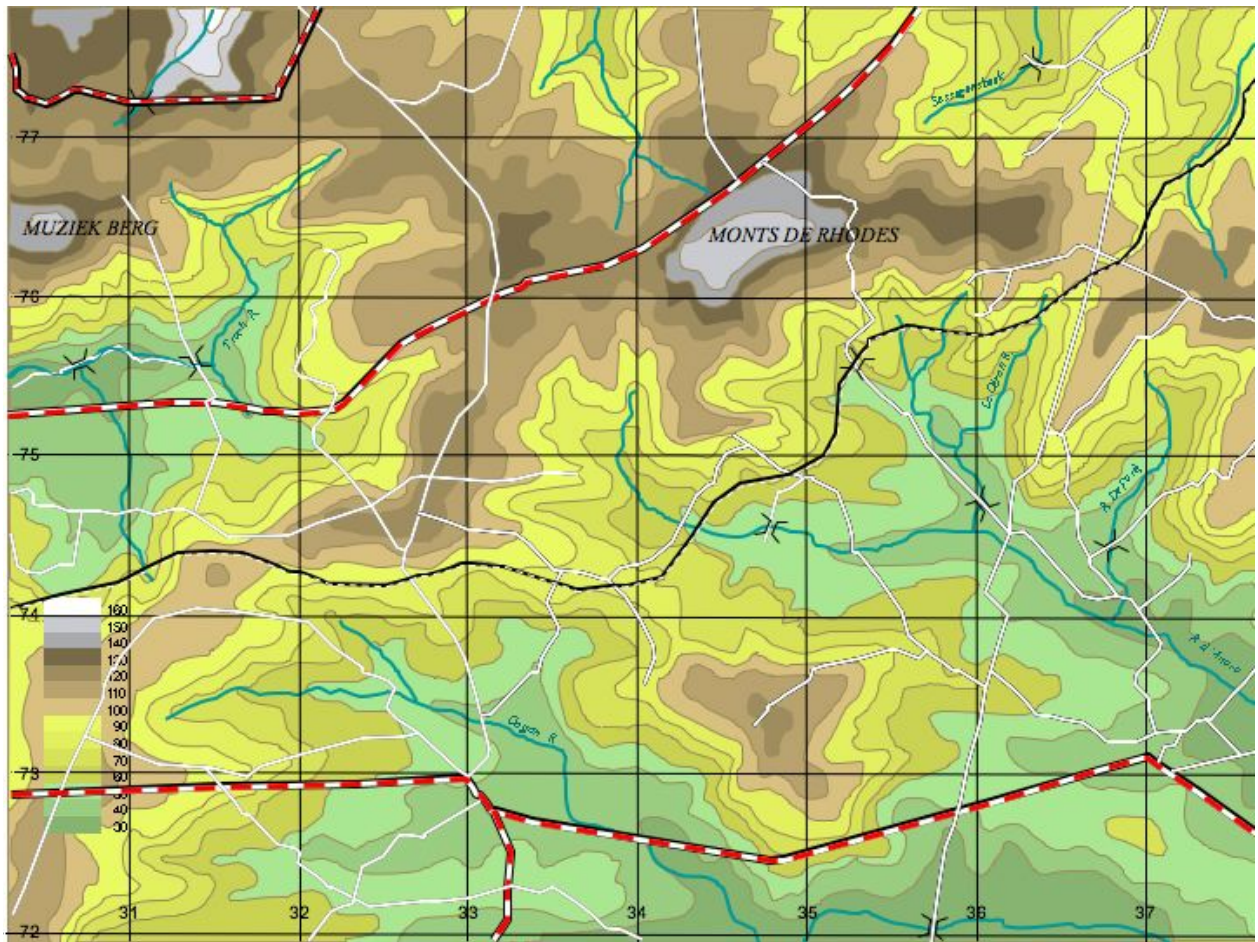


APPENDIX I—TERRAIN ANALYSIS

Let's begin with the map. The key terrain and other details are not as obvious as we might like on this map. While there is a great deal of detailed information shown, there are visual problems. The most obvious is visual clutter – it is literally a challenge to see the forest for the trees. Everything of tactical use is there. But nothing stands out in the welter of design. It would take a magician or a staff officer toilet trained with a flame thrower to make sense of the overall tactical opportunities. So we need to find ways to make the information easier to analyze.



The terrain forms are hard to visualize in this European topographic map, so we'll apply the trick from Map Reading Lesson 5, using a coloring method between the contour lines to provide an easily visualized sense of the ground.



Let's look at some general topographic principles.

First, note the river lines I have added for illustration. Obviously there is a correlation between where the rivers run and how high the land is. The rivers are literally “draining” the surrounding terrain; the flow of water, eagerly seeking its own level, is obviously from higher elevations to lower. Note how the water has followed (and expanded by erosion) the draws and valleys.

There are also several topographic features of note. A prominent ridge line with large prominent hills runs along the top of the map, with a narrower subsidiary ridge joining it from the lower left corner. A hill separates the parallel valleys of the rivers running south to north (Riviere d'Anore from the right edge of the map and the Gogon from bottom center).

If you had been using the famous colored pencils the underlying map features would still be visible under the colors. I've tried to reproduce this on my Mac, but the result is not very readable at this scale, so I've simply added some key details:

Two kinds of roads are shown: hard surface (white with black borders) and hard surface heavy duty (with red dashes). The black and white dashed line running left to right across the

center is a rail line. I've also inserted critical bridges. These are all man made, but they are also "terrain" in the tactical sense. The towns and villages (on the original map) are also possible strong points, and are frequently located at road junctions and around bridges.

Terrain compartments

What do these features tell us? For one thing, they suggest important elements of analysis called *corridors* and *compartments* (see **FM 101-5**, pp. 131-136 and **Map Reading, Lesson 5**). Let's look at the map again.

Since this is 1944, let's presume we are driving north into Belgium from the bottom of the map. Two corridors suggest themselves immediately, defined by the valleys of the d'Anore and the Gogan, both of which are flat and richly supplied with roads. These are corridors (or compartments) because the high ground to either side block observation and direct fire while they are controlled by us. These compartments allow a fairly protected drive north and west without having to traverse rough terrain.

Of course, the corridors lead to the large ridge line running in the map area from the Musiek Berg on the west through the Monts de Rhodes to the east (note the change from French to Flemish names in a mere 5 km – welcome to Belgium). These and the valley of the Troch beginning in grid square 3072 present the dreaded cross-compartment, which means we are advancing onto ground from which the enemy enjoys observation and fields of fire. The Light Brigade faced similar terrain at Balaclava.

Terrain, obstacles, and communication

Let's also look at *communications*. If both corridors are used for attack, there is the question of coordination between advancing elements on either side of the intervening high ground. Mutual support would be difficult until both axes reached the road from grid 330730 to 350748.

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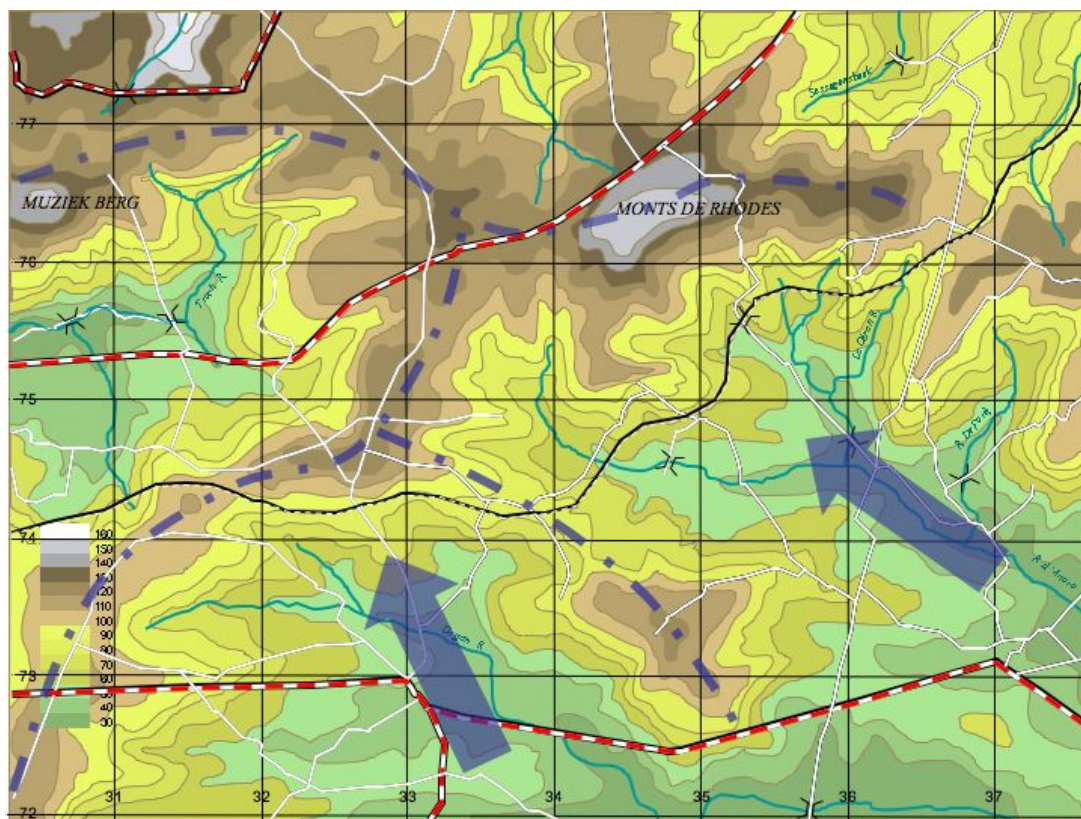
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tual support would be difficult until both axes reached the road from grid 330730 to 350748. (See map above.)

There are any number of *obstacles* to movement and communication other than ridges and hills. The slopes are sometimes too tough for stable vehicle crossing, and soft beds will quickly turn to mire.

On the original map we can see large patches of forest, particularly in the Monts de Rhodes area. A glance at the map shows a major difference between European map styles and those in the US (still the case): this map has circles of various sizes inside the green forest areas. This code tells us that the trees are predominantly hardwood, not evergreen. Hardwood (e.g., oak, maple) trees are generally spaced a bit farther apart than pine or cedar, and are easier for troops to negotiate. In addition, European forests are “cleaner” than those we are used to in our own country – forests are considered resources, and local towns and political districts invest in maintaining them, which means clearing out undergrowth and creating a more park-like woods.

There is another factor that should be considered. If you examine the roads on the original map (see for example 329738 area) you will find many cuts and embankments (fills). These are measures used in road construction to keep the roadway as level as possible when it necessarily traverses rough ground. These places can have two effects on combat. First, they canalize (narrow down) movement off road, particularly for vehicles. Imagine some idiotic plan involving armor and airborne units to seize a single embanked roadway through Holland – nobody would consider such a plan because tanks and other vehicles would be restricted in most places to a file along the roadway, vulnerable to raking fire from the front and unable to deploy in such a way as to return it effectively.

Second, they make it difficult to cross a road, again for vehicles in particular. This is complicated by the fact that either a cut or a fill can serve as cover for a defender.

Observation and fields of fire

With respect to observation and fields of fire, there are some considerations to bear in mind. Simple elevation does not guarantee the ability to see an enemy clearly or to bring direct fire down on him with accuracy. A glance at the colored elevation map suggests that the Monts de Rhodes is substantially covered with woods. Firing (or seeing) through woods for any distance is quite difficult; unlike Reenactors, soldiers tend to fire at longer ranges, particularly in the defense. In the wars of the 19th century, armies cut down trees to clear fields of fire. This is now impractical – the changes in the terrain would be noticed, and accurate indirect fire would be brought down on the positions.

Responsibilities

Terrain analysis is important to the commander as well as to the S-2, S-4, and S-4. Each will need to examine the terrain in forming an estimate. The S-2 will receive information about the terrain from aerial photos, reconnaissance, reports of partisans, and other available sources, with particular attention to the degree to which terrain favors or hinders the enemy’s employment of forces. The S-3 looks for maneuver opportunities and obstacles. The S-4 must somehow keep those maneuvers supplied despite the terrain. And the commander must use all that information – both his own informed intuition and the details supplied by his principal staff – to make his own

estimate and develop a concept of the proposed operation for his staff and subordinate commanders to execute.



LESSON SUMMARY

1. A combat order is informed by estimates: the commander's estimate, supplemented by staff estimates. This approach, central to the military decision making process, helps reduce the likelihood of making an uninformed decision.
2. The commander's estimate is ongoing with the staff estimates, which saves valuable time in the process. In forming his estimate, the commander examines the *mission*, the tactical *situation* and *possible lines of action*; an *analysis of the lines of action* and *comparison of their effectiveness*, and a *decision* that will form the basis for the combat order.
3. The commander is assisted by the S-2's intelligence estimate. The intelligence estimate consists of a summary of the enemy's *situation* (enemy activities and identifications, the enemy's rear area, and terrain and weather), and an estimate of the enemy's capabilities, limitations, and possible lines of action.

Now take the self-assessment quiz for Lesson 3.

LESSON 4 will take you through the process of preparing and briefing a Field Order.