

By Mark Backhouse

A card driven paratrooper skirmish game

GERONIMO!

I have read a lot of accounts of the D-Day landings and particularly enjoyed the descriptions of the American airborne landings. Dropping out of the sky the paratroopers were on their own and had to regroup quickly, often in the face of fierce enemy opposition. Their dramatic stories inspired me to try and recreate elements of this tension and excitement on the tabletop. The part I was particularly keen to try and play out was the initial landing itself and very much from a personal perspective... not worrying about companies or even platoons but instead focussing on the very small scale actions that often took place during the early morning of the 6th June.

I tried playing a few straight set up scenarios, but by and large they did not quite capture the feel of the period that I wanted to recreate. The confusion of the moonlit night, compounded by paratroopers who were nearly always dropped in completely the wrong place was rather difficult to get across. The ideas were therefore shelved for another day and other projects distracted me. Two ideas seemed to come together that recreated this spark of interest. The first was playing some board-games with my friends who are more keen on roleplaying than wargaming. The games 'Zombies!' and Carcassone both use a fun card based board that slowly expands as the players explore each turn. Could this sort of idea work for a wargame? Gary Chalk in 2010 wrote an innovative mini campaign in WI magazine that used a similar system to lay out a series of scenarios randomly before reaching a final objective. Taking inspiration from these I decided it was high time to resurrect the old idea and turn it into a game!

The aim

The idea of the game is one player to recreate just one soldier's experiences during D Day once dropped into Normandy. Some games will be very quick – just like some of the unfortunate paratroopers who were killed, while others might get the opportunity to perform heroic acts and revel in glory. Either way you have one hour maximum per paratrooper (unless your ruleset is super detailed and you really need more!). While it would work fine as a solo game, I envisaged it to be played several times by different players in one evening with each then comparing how successful they were.

THE RULES

We all have our favourites here! I am not going to be too prescriptive, but they will need to handle individual figures through to about 20 figures on the table at one time. You might consider using At Close Quarters by Chris Peers, Rules of Engagement by Great Escape Games, Operation Squad by Warlord



US Paratrooper advances

Games, or the editor's 1938 Legends of the Old West conversion from WS&S numbers 52-53. Crucially, you will also need rules for spotting, and if your rules do not cover this then you will have to make up some basic rules to cover it.

What will I need to play?

Your chosen ruleset and a small selection of figures representing Germans and American Paratroopers. A platoon per side would easily do this. Lastly you need to have a set of terrain cards and some generic Normandy style terrain to represent them. Hedgerows, fields, roads and something as an objective (see later for more information on this). Ideally you also have at least 3 terrain



Lock and load! .30 Cal gunner moves up...

Landing Table – Roll 1d6 and +1 if you are within 2" of a terrain piece, eg. Tree, house, hedgerow.

1,2,3,4	A safe landing. Your paratrooper make it down intact. He must spend the next turn ditching his chute and putting together his weapon.
4	OOps! Dropped too fast or too low his leg bag or griswald bag comes loose and is lost. Your paratrooper loses his primary weapon (eg. M1 Garand, M1 Carbine or Thompson SMG). He now has only a pistol as a firearm. He must spend the next turn ditching his chute and com posing himself.
5	Crunch! Dropped too fast or too low by a panicking pilot the pa ratrooper hits the ground in an awkward way. Rather bruised and stunned he takes two turns to ditch his chute and put together his weapon... I hope there are not any Germans nearby!
6	Argh! The paratrooper lands awkwardly and does himself some pretty serious damage. Hobbled around he will suffer a half movement penalty for the rest of the game. He must spend the next two turns ditching his chute and putting together his weapon.
7	Oh no! The paratrooper snags himself on the terrain item and is stuck if it is a building or a hedge or tree. He will be able to cut himself free with his knife but it will take at least 3 turns. If he has hit a wall then he has broken his leg. He can crawl or hobble at a quarter of his nor mal move. He can attempt to clear the current terrain tile, but once this is done he must stop the game and wait in cover until he gets medical help.

tiles such as those produced by TSS, 2' x 2' work well in 28mm, 1' x 1' would be fine for smaller scales, although simply use what you have available. I removed old tiles as I went, playing the game on a 2' x 4' table.

What happens if I do not have American Paratroopers?

No problem. This would work well with British Paratroopers instead. If you do not have Normandy terrain you will need to change the card tiles to

something you do have. With a bit of tweaking this system could be used for the Sicily drops or even playing German Paratroopers dropping on Crete or the Low countries – you will just need to muck about a bit with the tables and make your own terrain cards to fit it. Forget WW2 if you like and put it in a completely different context to suit you. There is no reason why this system could not be quickly converted to a more modern setting such as a downed Huey pilot in Vietnam.

THE GAME

The player representing the Paratrooper needs to have a model to represent him. He is probably an officer or an NCO and will command any other paratroopers under his control that he encounters. He will be armed with an appropriate small arm of choice, a pistol, a large knife, bayonet or knuckleduster, a few grenades and possibly a hawkins mine.

He selects 5 cards at random from the card deck and an objective card. He turns over the first card – this will be his drop zone.... maybe not his intended drop zone, but the one he is going to land in anyway! Set up a terrain tile to match the scenery on the card. The paratrooper player must then work out where he has landed. Divide up your terrain tile into multiples of 10 and roll a 2d10 to work out how far along the X and Y axis he lands. He should then consult the landing table.

For each map card drawn out you need to also consult the events table to see what interesting things are going on.

Events table – roll 1d6 and consult the appropriate table. Figures and events should be located on each map tile using the X and Y axis generator used for landing. This might potentially mean that several things are located very close together.

1,2	US paratroopers
3,4	Germans
5	Odd things
6	Empty



A cautious advance through the hedgerows.

Paratroops – any paratroopers encountered should be equipped at a ratio of 1 SMG for every 3-4 rifles, and roughly 1 LMG (either .30 or BAR for every 10 men). If this encounter is in the drop zone square then the paratroopers encountered will also be landing. If they are in a later card square then they will be assumed to have landed and to have got full basic equipment. You gain automatic control of the paratrooper in play.

1,2,3	A lone paratrooper.
4,5	A small section of 1 + 1d3 paratroopers.
6	A support team of two paratroopers (either a bazooka team or a .30 team)

Germans – The Germans might represent one of several units around the drop zone. These might be poorly motivated Ostruppen, Regulars or veteran Fallschirmjäger. I recommend that you go with whichever you have figures for and use the same for each paratrooper player in the same evening session. If you are braving Fallshimjaegar then best of luck to you! You will need it! The Germans can be played by another player or played out by the solo player if required.

1,2,3	A lone German on patrol.
4,5	A small section of 1NCO with an SMG + 1d3 Germans with rifles.
6	A support team of two Germans with an LMG.

Odd things

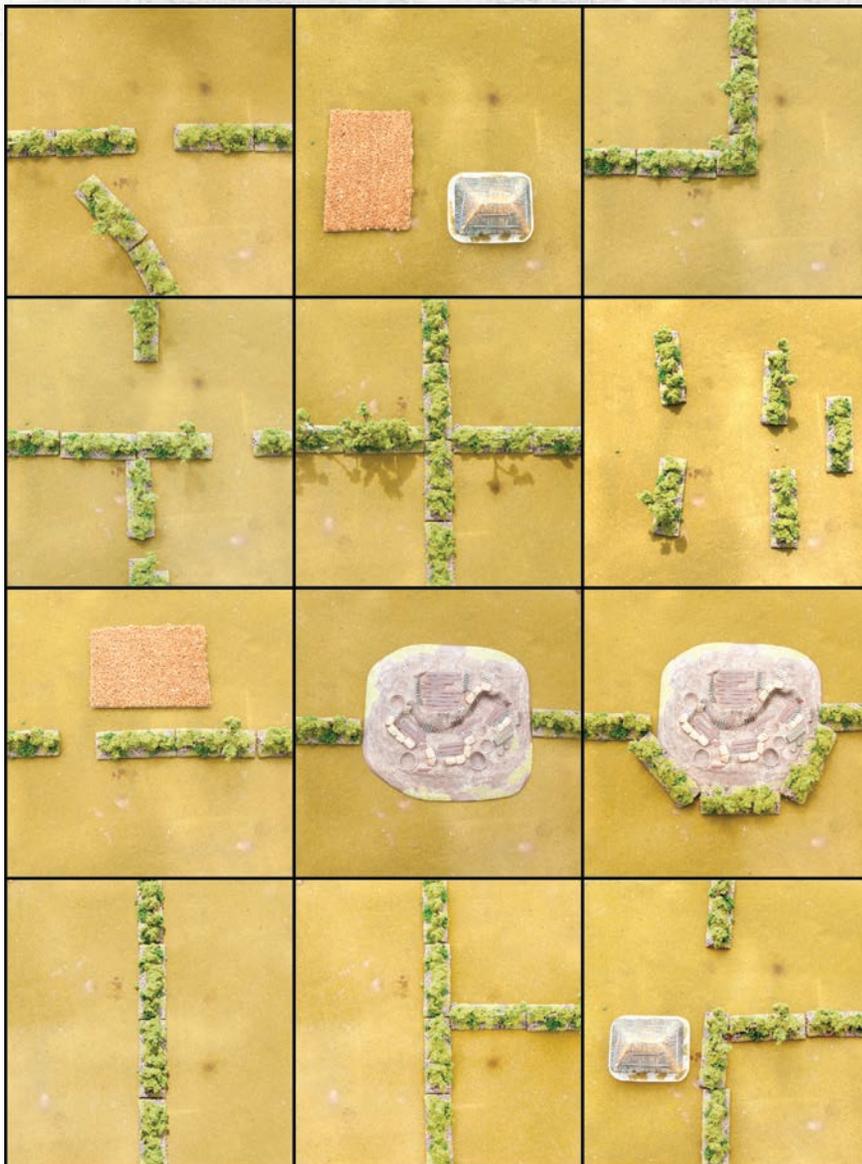
Moving around. If your paratroopers get within 6" of one of the tile edges and are facing towards it you may place down the next map tile. This should be turned over and the card should be turned so as it creates the best fit by the paratrooper player. If there are hedges or roads then obviously these should try

1	Artillery barrage hitting a random point.
2	1d3 cattle wandering around and generally trying to avoid gunfire.
3	1d3 French refugees trying to hide in a ditch. Incoherent for your basic French skills!
4	French resistance – 1d3 irregular fighters joining in. Armed with rifles and SMG's.
5	An ammunition or weapons container can be used to re-arm any lost weapons that might have been lost in the jump or upgrade one pair of paratroopers to a heavy weapons team eg. Bazooka, .30 cal or even 60mm mortar.
6	Roll twice on the main events table.



Currahee! The Paratrooper charge their objective.

Rendezvous Point	Clear it of enemy and wait for the rest of the company to arrive before moving off (1d6 turns)
Gun or radar post	Capture or destroy the gun position/ radar. Held by 2 rolls on the German table.
Causeway or bridge	Capture key position and hold from an enemy counter attack made up of 3 rolls on the German table.
Barracks	Several farm buildings billeted with Germans. Kill or capture all enemy. Manned by 3 rolls on the German table.



Depending on your terrain resources here are a couple of suggestions, although there is no reason why you cannot make up your own:

How do you win?

The paratrooper player scores 5 points for being alive at the end of the game. (After 1 hour = daybreak)

For each German killed or captured = 5 points.

For each friendly paratrooper in play = 3 points.

For the objective to have been met = 30 points.

Additional points might be scored for anything else deemed noteworthy from sheer bravery and guts to humanity and selflessness!

I want more!

The basic system has plenty of further scope. Add in extra events into the tables, or extra map cards to represent the terrain you have got. Have additional wandering German patrols to keep the Americans on the back foot. Allow several players to play as the American paratroopers, all landing on the first square... or maybe play it the other way around as Germans encountering the paratroopers and trying to prevent them from reaching their objective? We envisaged six tiles for a quick game, ten for a tougher challenge and a whopping sixteen for the full Band of Brothers experience!

to continue. If the card *does not fit* then a suitable alternative may be drawn from the main deck until you can have it working. The terrain tile is then placed down and terrain set up accordingly. As soon as you enter the tile then you activate the events table. Once tiles have been completely moved through and cleared you can remove the old tiles and re-use the terrain and figures as required.

What happens if my paratrooper is killed?

If you have other paratroopers still alive then you may take over with them if there is time, until the final objective is taken.

The objective tile

The objective tile represents one of the

unit's objective on D Day night. This could be a simple rendezvous point or a strongpoint that needs to be neutralised.

Further research

Several excellent accounts of the Normandy drops are available focusing on the American perspective.

Band of Brothers by Stephen Ambrose.

Easy Company Soldier by Don Malarky.

Currahee! A Screaming Eagle in Normandy by Donald Burgett.

D-Day with the Screaming Eagles by George Koskimaki.

The 101st Airborne at Normandy by Mark A. Bando

If you get a chance to visit Normandy the Airborne Museum in St Mare Eglise is well worth the visit!

Miniatures are Bolt Action and Artisan Design painted by Paul Birkin and Mark Backhouse. Terrain boards are 2 foot square from TSS.

