

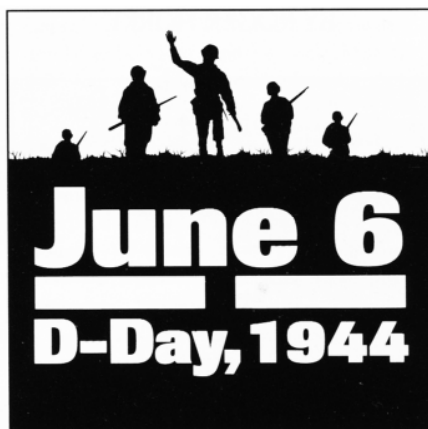
June 6: A Perspective

BY ERIC R. HARVEY

T I traveled to France in 2001, and of course I saw Paris, the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triumph, and many of the other typical tourist attractions there, but not all of them. I also made it a definite point to take the road less traveled, and hop on a train to Normandy (this meant that my schedule would not allow me to see many other famous sites in Paris, but would you expect any less from any wargamer? I simply could not allow myself to miss the Normandy beaches).

Specifically, I went to *Gold Beach*, where the remnants of one of the Mulberry Harbors still sit visibly just off the coast. I saw a D-Day museum (*musee* in French) while there, and I tried to imagine that event which immortalized that place and that day. It wasn't easy. Movies like *The Longest Day* and *Saving Private Ryan* do help a little, but being a wargamer I was better served by my general knowledge of the invasion. In fact, I believe that Normandy had more of an impact on me because I am a wargamer, not in spite of it. "This", I thought to myself, "wasn't a game at all". To me the event was more than just a single page in a High School history book, or a mere *Time* magazine special edition.

Now, I know what you're thinking: "Why didn't you go to 'Omaha Beach'?" Well, I did. I certainly did. And naturally, yes, I was deeply moved. But what moved me most was something I wasn't expecting. Understand that I had been in France for nearly a week already, and I had been doing my best to get around (not easy, since I don't speak French), and I quickly came to realize that I was a proverbial fish out of water. I was a foreigner, and many of the French made sure I knew it (not all the French were as impolite as is rumored, but some were — shall I say — "overly indifferent", to put it in the nicest terms possible). But when I arrived at the American cemetery (the same cemetery that you see featured at the beginning and the end scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*), I was awestruck. Suddenly, as I started to read the engraved names on the rows and rows and rows of crosses and the stars, there were all these *American* names, the types of names that I recognized, names that reminded me of home, the names of my people, here in France. After a week of meeting innumerable French people with innumerable



French names, I was now reading names like "Johnson", "Williams", "Goldberg", "Akers", "Gomez", "Manning" (these were all names I could pronounce correctly!). And so there I was, feeling not so far away from home anymore. It was the one place in France where I didn't feel like a foreigner.

So then, if I've successfully set the tone here, let's talk about GMT Games June 6, a Richard Berg game design, which covers everything from the actual invasion of the Normandy beaches to the eventual consolidation of the Anglo-American beachheads (the campaign game ends before the genesis of *Operation Cobra*, give or take).

June 6 is a marvelously fun game, not without its few quirks, but overall is a well-balanced and intensive simulation of the event known as "D-Day". The entire campaign scenario can be played in a long

day (or spread out over a few of days), and it's portrayed at the perfect operational scale to get the right 'feel' of the overall battle for Normandy. The game can be played as a two-player contest (Germans vs Allies), or better yet, as a three-player contest (a German player, an American player and a British/Canadian player). Having 3-players adds more tension because the American and British/Canadian players will undoubtedly squabble over the employment of relatively limited air and naval assets, as well as operational priorities (i.e., whose divisions will move first during a turn? This can be a tense consideration when each Allied player has a German panzer division staring him in the face). Having played all sides, I can say with certainty that the German player is granted a huge advantage when the Allied side is split amongst two distinct players, instead of a single coordinating opponent. The notable exception is if the two Allied players are particularly cooperative and focused (and if both Allied players are skilled enough to hold their own), but even then there are occasional unavoidable Allied disagreements, something a German player isn't yoked with. If there are two Allied players, the smart strategy is for one of them to adopt a subordinate role, and try to tie down as many German units as possible while his compatriot player pushes and maneuvers to capture objectives. This is usually tasked to the American player, just as it was historically, and for the same basic reasons, too.

As should be guessed, the campaign game starts on 6 June 1944 with the Allied amphibious landings on the prearranged historical beaches (*Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno* and *Sword*). I'll state now that I would have liked to have seen a scenario exploring possible alternate landing beaches in the Normandy area (and an alternate German defensive deployment), although I realize that this is a bit on the silly side, historically speaking. I do not mention it here as a *bona fide* criticism of the game whatsoever; it's merely the inevitable result of playing the game so many times! Along those lines, the campaign games does offer an optional rule allowing the Allied player(s) to alter the landing locations of the historic

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June 6

D-Day, 1944
Published: 1999
Game Design: Richard Berg
Game Developer: Tony Curtis
Art Director: Rodger B. MacGowan
Map & Counter Art: Mark Simonitch

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Contents: 560 Counters; Two 22x34 inch Maps; Rule Book; Play Book; one die; Player Aid Cards; Bookcase Box
Time Scale: 2 days per turn
Map Scale: 1.4 miles per hex
Unit Scale: Regiment and Brigade
Players: 1-2

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paradrops. This gives the Allied player(s) a huge strategic advantage, namely because the historical paratroop landing sites take into account the wide scattering of the (specifically) U.S. Airborne Regiments (i.e., the pieces land precisely where the Regiments had historically drifted to, which was off by quite a bit in many cases). But the optional rule does not feature any kind of 'drift' mechanic, such that it allows the American player to place his paratrooper Regiments exactly where he needs and wants them to land. In one game, for example, I — as the U.S. player — was able to capture "Carentan" virtually immediately with the 101st Airborne Division (which tremendously helped me quickly link *Utah* and *Omaha* beaches). By the time that the 17th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Division arrived there, it was all-but-impossible to dislodge those *Screaming Eagles*, and of course this did not replicate the actual battle of Carentan at all. If using that optional rule, I would recommend instituting your own mandatory drift mechanic; say, roll one 6-sided die, and land each paratrooper Regiment in whatever adjacent hex corresponds to the six hexes surrounding the intended drop hex, clockwise, with "1" being the topmost northern hex. Even when adding your own 'drift' mechanic, the Allied player(s) still retain a definite advantage because the historical paratroop landing locations are simply awful, as John Wayne would surely attest from *The Longest Day*.

Now, the actual amphibious landings themselves are a perfunctory exercise, except on "Bloody Omaha". Most of the other amphibious landings should go off without a hitch, but the landing at *Omaha* will be very dicey (as it should be), and could potentially become a disaster (although it's unlikely that *Omaha* will have to be abandoned altogether, as General Bradley historically suggested might be necessary). The American player is given some option as to the employment of his Rangers in the vicinity of *Omaha Beach*. He can hedge his bets by assaulting *Point du hoc* directly. He may, however, choose to land them a little farther down the coast to conduct some sort of wide flanking maneuver. The odd thing about the Rangers is that their quality rating (known as *cohesion* in the game) is very, very good, so good, in fact, that the U.S. Ranger pieces tend to be employed in every combat engagement that the Allies can get them

into. We wargamers may be thankful that our cardboard armies can't curse at us (because those Rangers surely would). One of the game's question marks is the superhuman stamina of units engaged in repeated and extended combat, although I would say that most wargames possess this aspect. It is perhaps more forgivable in strategic level wargames, which **June 6** certainly is not. Theoretically, the inevitable attrition of combat will eventually thin out the ranks. But because the owning player always chooses which unit is to be flipped and/or eliminated after fierce fighting, the Rangers are usually not going to be the American player's first choice to suffer a loss. This phenomenon happens on the German side too, to a certain degree.

That issue aside, the idea of individual unit quality (i.e., cohesion) is unquestionably the best design feature of **June 6**. Players will really learn to appreciate the difference between various units like the German 716th and the German 12th SS, not merely because of their differing type, size and weaponry, but also because of their willingness to fight. During a skirmish, a unit's cohesion matters intently ("it's not the dog in the fight, it's the fight in the dog", as someone once said). Cohesion will very often decide the outcome of a firefight, all other things being equal (this is primarily why my aforementioned opponent's German 17th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Division could not easily eject my U.S. 101st Airborne Division from *Carentan*). Because of that fact, the British player will, for example, invariably have a very hard time fighting his way into *Caen*, where he may face no less than a dozen German divisions, many of them high-quality *panzer* divisions (what was Monty thinking?) The German *panzer* and *fallschirmjager* units possess some of the best cohesion ratings in the entire game. Some of the more famous American and British units also possess very good cohesion ratings. Overall, the best tactical doctrine is to use your high-quality units to stomp on enemy low-quality units, although geography and your opponent don't always cooperate with such tactics. The German player is especially handicapped in that regard due to Allied air supremacy, which interdicts the movement of German units, as well as helps the Allied player(s) gain an advantage during individual skirmishes and/or firefights. In turn, however, the Allied player is most

often handicapped by those dreaded hedgerows: the *Bocage*!

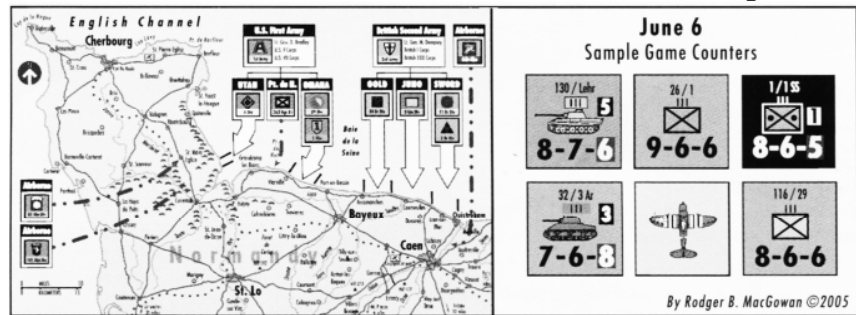
What can I say about the *Bocage*? I will say this: if there were no *Bocage*, the Allied player(s) would sew up the entire campaign in a few turns (could Monty have taken *Caen* more quickly in that case?). Having seen *Bocage* personally, I can attest to the fact that it is extremely difficult to drive over, go through, and get around, let alone when there are Germans with *Panzerfausts* and MG 42s lurking throughout it all. This particular aspect **June 6** replicates very well. For the Allied player(s), the *Bocage* is a genuine pain in the neck, figuratively speaking. Not only is it difficult fighting terrain, but you can also be sure that your supply troops won't follow your combat troops very far into it. So, the entire campaign hinges largely on the roads, as Patton once stated. To make matters worse for the Allied player(s), the game rules feature an additional *Bocage Ambush* mechanic, and I will let the name itself tell you all that you need to know (the first time I ever saw this rule, I thought: "That can't be good.", and it's not...not for an attacking Allied player). But the *Bocage* is a double-edged sword; occasionally the German player will be very tempted to orchestrate a counterattack (guilty as charged), and the *Bocage* helps defending Allied units just as much as it helps defending German units. Add to that fact the possibility of Allied bombers and/or fighter-bombers showing up (German players will quickly become annoyed with all those Allied airplanes!), and hence the German player is not often granted the opportunity to reach, much less roll up, any of the Allies' landing beaches. In fact, **June 6** has often made me wonder if Rommel's historical plan to counterattack the beaches immediately after the Allied landings could have been successful. I can just imagine how many German tanks that would have been minced by swarming Allied fighters and bombers if they dared to move against the beaches in broad daylight. The major exception to that hypothesis, however, is the weather.

The weather in **June 6** is a crucial element of the game. Weather conditions can vary from clear and sunny to a howling storm, and it matters a lot. As suggested above, the Allies want continual clear and sunny weather (this allows Allied air assets to operate at full capacity). Allied aircraft can

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be employed to do everything from interdiction of German reinforcements, to bombarding German positions and/or units directly. Indeed, the Allied player can easily acquire a tendency to depend on his air superiority (during good weather, that is), and that's often precisely when the weather may change the course of a game. It is quite possible to witness advance elements of an Allied formation - merrily pushing ahead under the aegis of air cover - suddenly and surprisingly become embroiled in an engagement with a markedly superior German force during unexpected inclement weather. Verily I say unto thee, in such a case you can kiss their butts goodbye. If they're lucky, the weather may clear up just as quickly as it soured, but the opposite is also true; I remember one game in particular wherein the weather remained stormy for nearly a week straight (sometimes the dice just roll that way), and Germans were operating with impunity. My favorite axiom is, "When the sun is away, the Germans will play", and it is especially true when playing **June 6**.

After the initial amphibious landings and airborne drops, **June 6** primarily becomes an Allied effort to establish the beachheads, and then link the beaches together. This allows much more lateral movement, and some choice regarding maneuver and direction. The Allies should be able to accomplish this sooner or later. Most of the German coastal divisions are too weak to do anything but irritate the incoming Allied forces, although a skilled German player knows how to employ his coastal divisions to create maximum delay (never underestimate the usefulness of those crummy divisions). Before too long, the Allied player(s) will have a solid beachhead established (this is why *Carentanis* so important; it is the lynchpin that connects the *Utah* and *Omaha* beaches), and the Allied player(s) must decide how they will achieve their goals (in other words, which direction they will thrust). Sometimes the Allied player(s) will be forced to adopt a completely different plan than they had originally intended to employ ("no plan survives contact with the enemy", as the saying goes), but the German player's deployment, the current weather, the outcome of certain *release* die rolls (see the next paragraph), *et cetera* will help the Allied player(s) determine their strategy. More often than not, the Americans become the 'maneuver element', and the



British/Canadians become the 'hinge'. Alternate strategies are possible and do-able, but there's simply not much maneuver room on the British/Canadian side of the map, and they would be lucky to even reach *Caen*, much less actually capture it. *Caen* is worth a lot of victory points, but is not at all necessary for the Allies to win the game.

To really put the whole game into perspective, the victory conditions are based upon certain key objectives (e.g., *Carentan*, *Bayeux*, *Cherbourg*, *St Lo*, etc.) that the Allies must capture before the end of several weeks of campaigning, so it is essentially a race against time. The German player must do everything he can to stop, or at least delay, the Allies' progress from the beachheads. All in all, it is not that hard to do; the difficult terrain (to wit, *Bocage*) and the numerous powerful German *panzer* and *panzer-grenadier* units (and with any luck, a few turns of bad weather to ground the Allied air assets) are quite enough to hold off the American and British/Canadian units for some time. However, the fly in the ointment for the German player is *Herr Hitler*. Yes, Hitler's infamous direct control of the *panzer* divisions is simulated in **June 6** as a *release roll* where a die roll is required of the German player to actuate specific German units (usually the heavy *panzers*). If not for this *release roll* the German units could probably hold firm indefinitely. This is particularly true because the Allied victory conditions are not easy to achieve. The British/Canadian units will almost certainly never capture *Caen* (I asked Richard Berg about this, and he confirmed that *Caen* is virtually impenetrable against any German player that is even half-way determined to hold it). It is even possible for the Allied player(s) to make better progress than was achieved historically, and yet still lose the game according to the printed victory conditions (this actually happened to me once). But as a game, this is not a bad thing (though I would have preferred to consider

that aforementioned lost game a draw). Nevertheless, I can say that all of the **June 6** campaign games that I've played were all very close, sometimes going right down to the wire. This is not an easy facet of wargame design, especially when the game includes much randomness. None of the players can influence or modify things like the weather, nor the *panzer release rolls*, or even the turns in which they become relevant. Yet somehow each side is given the opportunity to adjust his strategy accordingly. I've never been able to know the outcome of any **June 6** campaign that I've played before the final turn or two.

To summarize, the **June 6** system is relatively simple, well balanced, appropriately detailed and aptly historical. It is graphically appealing (e.g., each division is printed with its actual historic division patch symbol), it is reasonably researched, and is an interesting and challenging simulation of the Normandy campaign that can easily be played during a solid weekend. It has some minor *faux pas* (some of the chits were misprinted, although errata chits were subsequently made available), and the extremely astute wargamer may notice some slight historic variances here and there.

Perhaps the best thing that I can say about the game is that I truly wish that Richard Berg would design a whole series of World War Two games based upon this same basic system — that's high praise indeed to be said of any wargame. For now, **June 6** will be the game that I return to after watching movies such as *The Longest Day*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, or even - dare I say - *Ike!*

(Editor's Note: June 6 is out-of-print, but it is currently a part of our P500 Program. The game will be reissued when enough pre-orders are received.)