

The Battles at Yang Dang Khum and Phum Preav

The French Counterattack in Cambodia, January 16 1941

The Situation

By the first week of January 1941, the conflict between Thailand and Vichy French Indochina had developed from a series of border skirmishes along the Mekong Frontier to a full-scale Thai invasion of Laos and Cambodia.

The Thai Burapha Army undertook the main advance on Route Coloniale 1, crossing the border into Battambang on January 5. The invaders were vigorously opposed, particularly at Poipet, but the French soon had the salient evacuated. Fierce attacks on the defensive line at the village of Khum Kaup and the quarries of Krabei forced the defenders to withdraw to the westernmost outskirts of Sisophon, allowing the Thais to occupy the villages in between.

In an attempt to gain the upper hand the French decided to launch a major counteroffensive that would smash the Thai army's left flank. The task of achieving the main objective fell to Colonel Jacomy, whose "Groupement J" would have to recapture the villages of Yang Dang Khum and Phum Preav.

Historical Events

The counteroffensive was bound to fail from the start. The French deployment on the night of January 15 was nothing short of chaotic as units were forced to carry out a series of overcomplicated manoeuvres, zigzagging their way across difficult terrain. This resulted in the troops reaching their starting positions dazed and exhausted.

Worse was to follow though. The understrength IV/19 RMIC – one company had been left behind to guard the artillery while another was lost in a nearby forest – arrived north of Yang Dang Khum to find the Thais alert. Fighting ensued at approximately 0400 hours, but lack of support compelled the colonial battalion to retreat.

Having beaten off the attack, the Thai 1st Guards Infantry Battalion then swung its attention to the south, where an assault was being put in by II/16 RMIC and II/11 RIC. French artillery fire soon ended late in the morning, as the two artillery battalions quickly accompanied IV/19 RMIC back to Khum Kandal. The air support promised failed to materialise and the troops were intermittently attacked by Thai planes. Demoralised, the two remaining infantry battalions likewise abandoned their attack.

The fighting that occurred at Phum Preav proved much fiercer. Contrary to French intelligence reports, the Thai 3rd Infantry Battalion was not billeted in the village but had entrenched itself along a dried creek in the forest to the east. The Thais sprang a devastating ambush on the French column, with the battalion's Bofors infantry gun platoon knocking out several of the DMC's vehicles. However the legionnaires of Major Belloc's III/5 REI recovered quickly from their initial shock, and proceeded to prove themselves tenacious in their subsequent attempts to dislodge the defenders. It was only the appearance of medium tanks late in the morning that induced the attackers to conduct a fighting retreat back to Khum Kandal.

The Scenario

To win, the French must capture the villages. For a decisive victory, the Thai forces must be routed off the table. The Thai objective of course is to prevent the enemy from achieving theirs.

Vehicles are restricted to the roads and open grounds.

The game commences at a little before dawn – treat the first three turns as night.



French Briefing

The subgroup (“Groupement C”) under Colonel Cadoudal starts the game at the eastern edge of the table on the road to Khum Kandal. Groupement C’s objective is to take Yang Dang Khum. Once this has been achieved, a maximum of two infantry battalions (provided that one is left to guard the village) may be dispatched to attack Phum Preav from the north should fighting still occur there.

Groupement J begins the game at the easternmost end of the road to Khum Soeng. It’s objective is to capture Phum Preav.

To reflect the poor quality of local guides, individual companies moving through woods will have to throw a D6 at the beginning of each turn. If the result is an odd number, the unit has lost its way and must stay immobile for the rest of the turn. This test need not be taken once firing has commenced, as it is assumed that any lost unit shall immediately head for the fighting.

French Forces

GROUPEMENT “C”

HQ Regular

- Colonel Cadoudal + 2 fig
- I/5 RAC OP Team

II/11 RIC Regular for firing, Poor for morale

- HQ (Col. Faulot + 5 fig, 60mm mortar)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Support Coy (12 fig. + 81mm mortar, MMG)

II/16 RMIC Regular for firing, Poor for morale

- HQ (Col. Rémy + 5 fig, 60mm mortar)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Support Coy (12 fig. + 81mm mortar, MMG)

GROUPEMENT “J”

HQ Elite

- Colonel Jacomy + 2 fig
- II/5 RAC OP Team

III/5 REI Regular for firing, Elite for morale

- HQ (Maj. Belloc + 5 fig, 60mm mortar)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Support Coy (12 fig. + 25mm AT gun, 81mm mortar, 2 MMGs)

DMC (Capt. Aguesse) Regular

- Motorcycle
- FT17
- Laffly-White AM50 armoured car

Engineer Coy Regular

- 6 fig. + truck

IV/19 RMIC Poor

- HQ (Col. Quelenec + 5 fig, 60mm mortar)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Inf. Coy (9 fig.)
- Support Coy (12 fig. + 81mm mortar, MMG)

11 RIC AA Detachment Regular

- 2 Truck-mounted 20mm Oerlikons

Artillery Support (off table)

I/5 RAC (Maj. Belletrude)

- 2 75mm Mle 1897 Guns

II/5RAC (Maj. Michel)

- 2 75mm Guns Mle 1928 Guns
- 2 105mm Guns Mle 1928 Guns

Thai Briefing

The Thais start the game dug in, concealed, and on reserved fire. The 1st Guards are deployed in and around Yang Dang Khum, while Major Nim's Battalion is entrenched in prepared positions around the dried creek in the forest in front of Phum Preav.

The medium tank squadron from Poipet arrives on the road to the east of Phum Preav. Air support, in the form of Hawk III fighter-bombers, may be called in from turn 6 onwards.

The player may request that the 9th Infantry Battalion, held in reserve by the Bangkok Division, reinforce one of the villages. It will arrive on a D6 roll of 4, 5, and 6 from turn 10 onwards.

Thai

1st Guards Infantry Battalion Regular

- HQ (Maj. Wutthi Wirabut + 5 fig)
- 1st Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- 2nd Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- 3rd Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- Support Coy (8 fig + 47mm/81mm Infantry Gun, 81mm mortar, 2 MMG)

3rd Infantry Battalion Regular

- HQ (Maj. Nim Chayodom + 5 fig)
- 1st Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- 2nd Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- 3rd Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- Support Coy (8 fig + 47mm/81mm Infantry Gun, 81mm mortar, 2 MMG)

TURN 6

Medium Tank Squadron (Capt. Sanit) Regular

- 2 Vickers E Mk B Tanks

TURN 10+ (optional)

9th Infantry Battalion Regular

- HQ (Maj. Khun Saritratchayothin + 5 fig)
- 1st Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- 2nd Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- 3rd Inf. Coy (8 fig.)
- Support Coy (8 fig + 50mm Krupp Mountain Gun, 81mm mortar, 2 MMG)

Sources

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The Royal Thai Armed Forces' Official History of the Conflict with French Indochina (Thai)

Nowfel Leulliot's [France 194...something](#) website.

Danny O'Hara's [Weird Wars](#) website.

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