

AND OUR DEFENCE IS SURE

NOTES ON THE DEFENCE IN WARGAMING

by D.I.A. MACK

Bob Merry, in an article in Phoenix No. 10 dealing with Basic Tactics, devoted a considerable proportion to the attack and especially to the attack on an enemy defensive line, concluding with a short look at the defence. It was interesting to note that when he did so he advocated a defence much sounder than that on which he demonstrated the attack! As a result this article has been compiled with a view to examining defensive tactics at some length: it too has the player of Napoleon at War games in mind but it also takes a look at the 'Modern Battles' series, in view of the special situations that can arise in them due to increased mobility and artillery firepower.

The defence can be adopted in both the short and the long term. In the former it may be necessary to deny the enemy access by a particular route while you yourself move against him elsewhere, in which case you will probably want to ensure that your defensive position is secure but also that it ties up as few as possible of your units. Or it may be that you have seized an objective, perhaps a very important one, and are now consolidating to hold it pending the arrival of reinforcements or the resumption of the offensive. In these instances it is likely that your defensive stance will extend over only two or three game-turns until the mainstream of your operations changes the situation.

On the other hand, you may have to adopt a defensive strategy with all available forces, sometimes for four or five moves or even more, pending the arrival of substantial reinforcements: 'Seelow', 'Wurzburg', 'Cemetery Hill' and 'Mukden' are all examples of games in which one side is in this situation. In yet others one side may be permanently on the defensive, seeking to achieve victory by denying certain objectives to the enemy: 'Bundeswehr' (Scenario 1), 'Fulda Gap' and 'NATO' spring to mind. Whether the defence is short or long term will affect the allocation of forces and their employment: we will return to this later, having examined certain basic concepts first.

The Defensive Line

The *ideal* defensive line has the following characteristics:

- (a) It is absolutely straight.
- (b) Units are spaced one hex apart.
- (c) It runs along the 'grain' of the hex-grid.
- (d) All units are on terrain which enhances their defensive strength.
- (e) Its flanks are secure.

It is stressed that these are the characteristics of the *ideal* line and that it is highly unlikely that in practice you will ever achieve them all: however you should achieve at least three of the five if your line is to hold out and of these three one must be

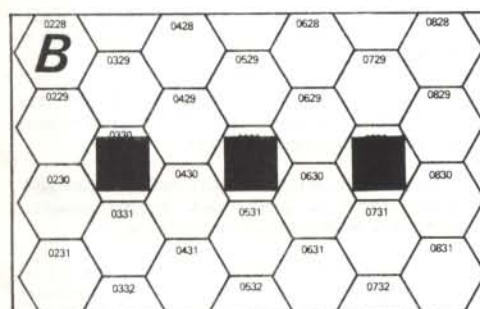
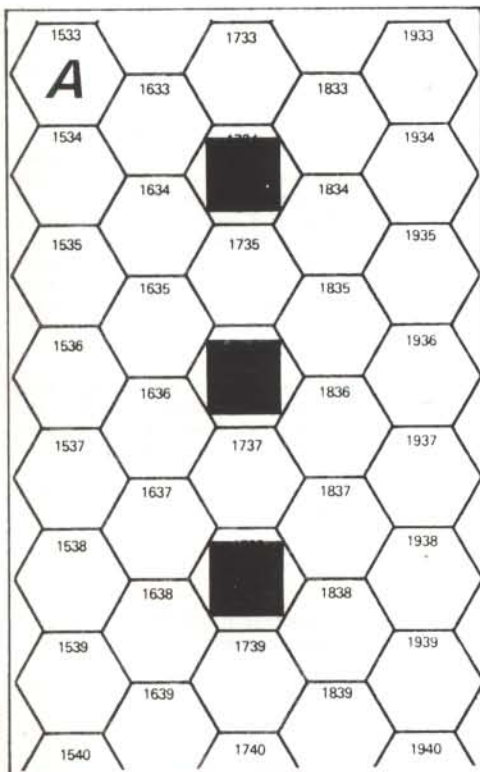


(e) – the secure flanks. To examine each characteristic in more detail:-

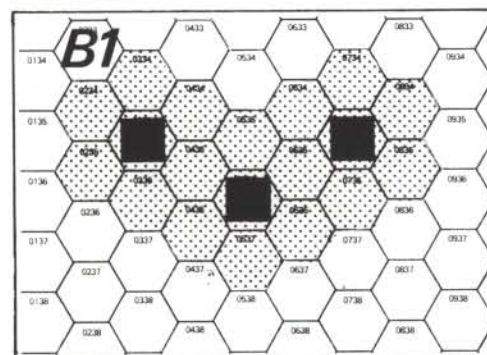
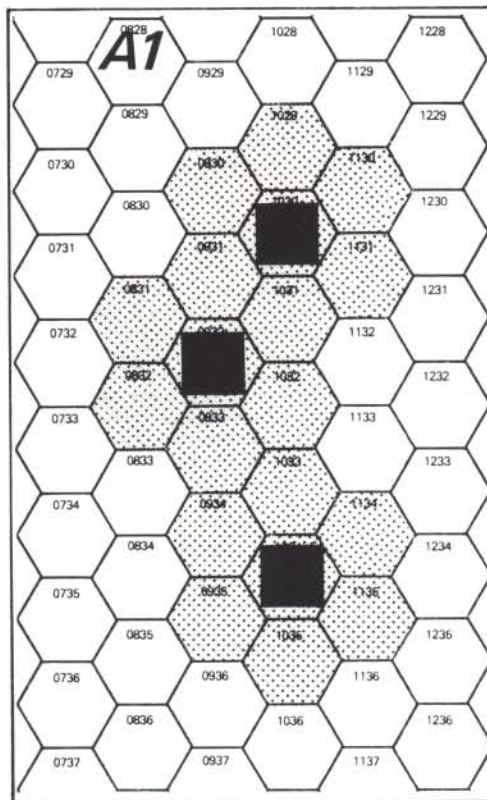
Straightness: To have an absolutely straight line means that the enemy has least chance of concentrating overwhelming strength against one or two units whose hex-sides present too many faces to his unhindered approach: kinks and salients give him just such an opportunity. The combination of a straight line with the 'grain' of the hex is particularly strong (see below).

Spacing: As Bob Merry well demonstrated, to have a row of adjacent units affords the enemy the opportunity of concentrating his strength against alternate ones and using advance after combat to pin and surround the remainder. When one hex is left between units the retreat of one will still leave only that one liable to be left adjacent to the advancing enemy at the end of combat. In addition – and this applies whether one's line is along or across the 'grain' – a retreat of one or two hexes will still leave you with a continuous line of ZOC: it will take a retreat of three or more to snap the tripwire. A one-hex space only, please note: two hexes still mean continuous ZOC but each unit can now be flanked.

The Grain: One picture is worth a thousand words. Fig 'A' shows a line running *with* the 'grain', 'B' one running *across* it.



You will see straightaway that any one defending unit in Fig 'A' can be attacked from only two hexes to its front (plus such artillery as the game rules and the situation allow, of course) thus reducing the attacker's ability to concentrate against particular hexes: the line across the 'grain' on the other hand allows attack from three hexes provided that holding attacks are mounted against the adjacent defending units. Now let us look at a diagram showing both types of line with one unit retreated one hex: note how the ZOC line is still intact.



Terrain: Obviously to have as many units as possible on good defensive terrain will strengthen the line considerably while conserving units. Ground must be considered when choosing defensive positions.

Secure Flanks: The more quickly a defensive line can be outflanked the less effectual it is. The strongest line will be one both flanks of which rest on virtually impassable terrain – the ultimate being the map-edge in most games, an unrealistic but nonetheless useful situation. Thereafter come impassable hexes or hex-sides and then terrain so rough that large-scale movement through it is impractical. However, we shall be dealing with flanks in more detail later.

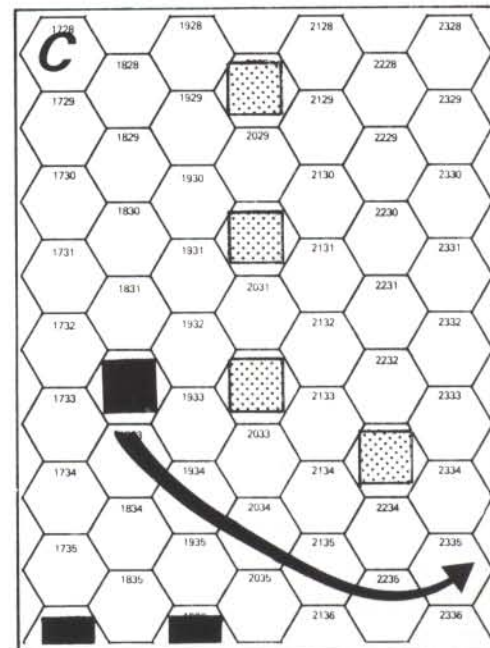
That, as has been said, is a list of ideal characteristics, the only game I have seen in which one can come near to achieving them all being 'Bundeswehr', which is probably why Scenario 1 usually becomes 'Verdun 1980'. Sometimes it will be worth having a kinked line in order to gain benefit of terrain: sometimes you will have to have two units adjacent to cover a particularly vulnerable approach: sometimes a straight line will be more important than getting the best from the terrain, especially if you can afford to give ground a little, although you will still need to have strong points along it like the pylons supporting a power-line. In short, you will have to be flexible in your approach to the problem: however you should still have fulfilled at least three of the requirements in order to establish a line that will hold for more than two turns. And that brings us to:

The Problem of the Flanks

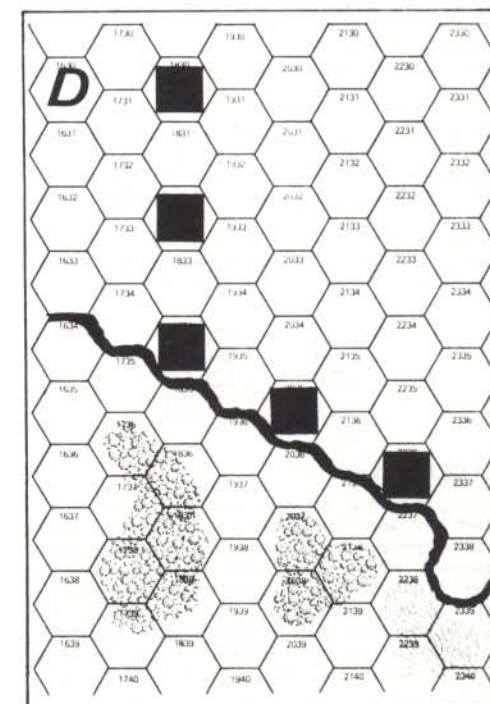
Players there be whose ideal is to string a tenuous line clean across the map from edge to edge: I knew one who, in 'Wurzburg', did this regularly. (Are you reading this, my Jeddart lad?). It *can* be

done in some games but it usually has hideous weaknesses which will become apparent further on. Generally, and especially if one is conducting a defensive in one part of the board or has few units available, one will have to consider the problem of the flanks. If one can rest one or both flanks on impassable or near-impassable terrain, well and good, but that will not always be feasible: one will have to settle for something less, always bearing in mind that the longer it will take to outflank one's position the stronger it is.

The suggested answer is the Refused Flank, that is to say a flank angled back thus:



The unit constituting the flank prevents the enemy from outflanking the line at one blow: his flanking units would take at least two moves to get round the ZOC in NAW and 'Blue and Gray' games, even using cavalry, giving the defender time to react. However, in games with highly mobile units, such as the 'Modern Battles' series or 'West Wall' this tactic is less effectual as a unit with a movement factor of 10 or 12 will be able to reach round the refused flank unless either the flank is extended so much as to constitute a leg of the line or the terrain inhibits rapid movement. The best likely solution is a combination of these two factors, a refused flank two units long, fronting on to difficult terrain and/or resting on a river-line. This will tax the reach of even a 12 MF unit.



You will note that the unit at the 'corner' where front and flank join is in a salient and thus vulnerable to enemy assault from up to three hexes. This must be accepted and be compensated for by selecting a stronger unit than usual for the post, or choosing good defensive terrain for the position or allocating a large share of artillery FPF to it (in games which include this asset) or by adopting a combination of these.

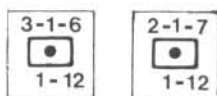
Weaknesses and an Antidote

So now we have our strongly-posted defensive line, properly spaced, one flank resting on impassable terrain and the other refused, with woods and rivers inhibiting the development of a threat from that direction. Now for the bad news: it will hold out only for a limited period as it is now constituted. Sooner or later the enemy will breach it or outflank it and it will crumble. Nor will you be able to respond without stripping units from elsewhere in the line, which is probably what the enemy is hoping you will do. The defence line we have achieved will delay an enemy but will not hold him up for any length of time because it is a crust defence, so called because once the crust is broken there is nothing to resist penetration. This was the pit into which my 'Wurzberg' opponent fell: once Soviet attacks on the Active CRT had breached his line the whole defensive disposition was void because it was still only Turn 3 and, apart from a few artillery units, he had no reserves.

A crust defence will suffice for only two moves or so; if your defence is short-term only, well and good, but for anything more enduring you will need a sword in addition to your shield, in other words a mobile reserve. Moreover if your general strategy is a defensive one, whether for the time being or for the entire game, a strong mobile reserve is essential; indeed it will be the main defensive force, the line mainly a screen which forces the enemy to show his hand and which, through a mixture of strongly and less-strongly posted units should lure him to direct his main thrust where you want him to — in the open terrain where going is good and the ground does not favour the defence. These factors will apply equally when your counter attack comes in. Should a flanking move be attempted your reserve, or part of it, can be deployed ready to meet it: this is why it is important that defensive positions be so chosen that a flanking move takes at least two turns to develop.

This reserve or counter-attack force should comprise units which are both strong and mobile; the first for hitting power, the second for speed of reaction. Note too that the strongest units should be allocated to the reserve rather than the defensive line unless their mobility is poor or unless the importance of a particular sector requires maximum strength; the sword must be long, strong and sharp. Artillery will play an important part in this force, whether the game be 19th or 20th century: its hitting power plus its bombardment range adds considerable weight to the counter-punch, more than could be achieved by the use of other arms alone. More of artillery in a moment.

Finally your reserve should particularly in a defensive-strategy situation, be large enough to provide two or more task-forces lest the enemy attacks in two places, using the well-tried gambit of overloading the defence in order to gain success at at least one point. Once again it is important not to commit so many units to the defensive line that you are left with an insufficient reserve.



Use of Artillery.

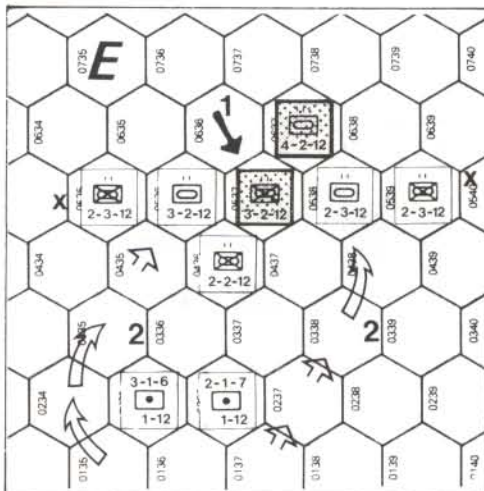
Artillery's ability to reach over the heads of the crowd and add its CF to an assault is invaluable in strengthening a counter attack, especially when maximum effort is required or when space in which to manoeuvre is limited. In 19th century games its comparatively short range will usually require it to move to do this but what range it does possess is tantamount to a bonus on its movement factor, making it an arm that is both hard-hitting and as mobile as cavalry; this is particularly true of

the Napoleon at War series. In 20th century games the range of artillery will often mean that it can participate in a counter-attack without having to move so much as one hex; but in these games ('Modern Battles' and 'West Wall') artillery's trump card is its fire protection factor (FPF), the ability to lend *defensive* strength to units under attack. Properly used, this can make some attacks non-starters.

My advice is that FPF should be concentrated on the support of those two or three units in your defensive line whose positions the enemy must NOT take if your defence is to remain effectual — the pylons in the power-line: it is likely that, apart from their tactical importance, they will be on terrain which would require a strong effort to retake. You must be prepared to accept retreats in certain sectors where your counter attack force can restore the situation and indeed where you can turn things to your advantage. Give maximum artillery support to the vital ground and ride the punches elsewhere: do not lend a little support everywhere and not enough anywhere.

The Jaws that Bite, the Claws that Catch

Given that enemy success in some areas will have to be accepted, it can be exploited to your advantage if he follows up after combat without weighing up all the possible outcomes. Time for another diagram; units represent those in 'Modern Battles II', mostly because they're more easy to draw than horses:



Note: Units marked 'x' are those of the original defensive line.

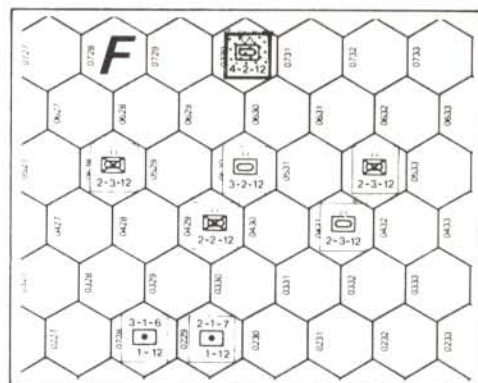
In the Soviet player-turn the West German 2-2-12 mechanised infantry battalion was attacked by a Soviet 3-2-12 motor rifle battalion and a 4-2-12 tank regiment supported by artillery (not shown), suffering D1 on the CRT; the 3-2-12 then advanced (1) into the vacated hex, pinning the German battalion. The line of ZOC still holds but unless the situation is rectified the Soviet player will be able to turn the dent into a wide gap.

The West German player ripostes by making the following moves (2) :

1. A 3-2-12 panzer battalion moves to a position flanking the Soviet 3-2-12 and a 2-3-12 panzer battalion moves in on the Soviet battalion's other flank.
2. A 3-1-6/1-12 and a 2-1-7/1-12 artillery unit are assigned to give support. Although, for diagrammatic purposes they appear very close to the front line they could be anywhere within range.

3. Attacks are mounted in this order:
(a) The German 3-2-12 and 2-2-12, supported by the artillery, attack the Soviet 3-2-12 at a differential of +8: allowing for the paucity of Soviet artillery's FPF it is unlikely that this will be reduced below +6 (therefore still on the same CRT column) giving a 5/6 chance of DR.

(b) The German 2-3-12 attacks the Soviet tank regiment at 0, giving a 1/3 chance of AR and a 1/3 chance of Both Retreat; it is to the attacker's advantage that this attack results in a retreat for his unit, as will be shown. As you will have realised, this battalion's real purpose is to cut off the Soviet 3-2-12's retreat, ensuring its elimination.



Here we have the situation after combat. The Soviet 3-2-12 has been eliminated and the German 3-2-12 has advanced to occupy the vacated hex, thus restoring the defence. The 2-3-12's attack of the tank regiment resulted in a BR, disengaging the attacker and positioning it just behind the front line.

The reason why the panzer battalion moved into the vacant hex rather than the infantry 2-2-12, the original occupant, was to avoid finishing with three units in adjacent hexes and so giving the Soviet player the opportunity to force retreats of flanking units in order to cut off the centre one; it was for this reason too that the attacker's retreat in attack No.2 was desirable. In the next turn the 2-2-12 should return to its defensive-line hex, freeing the panzer battalion to resume its place in the mobile reserve.

Note that this attack restored the situation with the commitment of only two units of the reserve, plus artillery support. Note also that there was room for a third unit to have been added had this been necessary, as it might have had artillery been lacking or more attack factors needed. The situation was simple but nonetheless one which occurs quite often in games; in 19th-century simulations the only real difference is that artillery units will have to be moved close up behind the attacking units.

Of course a sensible attacker will assault on a broader front to establish a salient wider than the one-hex one just depicted. Even so, the response should follow the same principles, namely:

1. Bring up enough counter-attack units to isolate and destroy the foremost enemy units in a correctly-phased series of attacks.
2. Restore the line.
3. Disengage the counter-attack force so that it can be ready for redeployment.

Result: the attacker is left with his attack to make all over again and fewer units to do it with.

Summing Up

1. A good defensive line is straight, or as nearly so as feasible, strongly sited and has flanks sufficiently secure to foil attempts to out-flank it at a blow.
2. Such a line will suffice to delay enemy advances for two or three moves; if a short-term defensive is sought, this may be enough.
3. A longer-term defensive must include a counter-attack force to push back enemy assaults, preferably with loss to the attackers.
4. A strategic defensive is based on a defensive line pinned by strong-points and backed by a powerful mobile reserve able to provide at least two task forces. Artillery will be an important part of this reserve.
5. Enemy advances in some sectors will have to be accepted and indeed encouraged in order that the attacking force may be surrounded and eliminated. On the other hand, vital ground must be denied to the enemy by strong units, well supported 'by artillery in those games which include FPF.