

## THEORY &amp; TECHNIQUE

**ADVANCE TACTICS, REALITY AND GAME****The Relationship of Military Tactics to the Play of Simulations,  
Part 3: Special Operations**

by Thomas G. Prutch

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Gaming is on the verge of splitting into two (at least) irreconcilable parts in the view of some industry mavens: the fantasy-and-toy-gun group and the conflict simulation faction. If this is so, Mr. Prutch definitely falls into the latter group of gamers. He has in this series of articles, drawn us closer to the connecting point between what we do in our (relatively) serious games and what doctrine and technology impose upon the flesh and blood of the real world combat force. — *Redmond*

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The discussions presented on the offense and defense are only a beginning. There are many special operations which fall into those categories, and some operations which belong to neither. Breakout operations, link-up, passage of lines, and relief in place are examples of operations that are difficult to translate into a simulation. A link-up or passage of lines involves a carefully coordinated meeting of two different units. The chance of a mistake in identity could readily lead to a serious tragedy. Yet in a wargame, no one has ever accidentally shot down his aircraft with ground fire or killed a friendly ground unit that was moving through the defensive lines.

There are three special operations which should be addressed as being valid for wargames. The three operations are: Reconnaissance, River Crossings and Military Operations in a Built-Up Area.

**RECONNAISSANCE**

This aspect of combat has been generally neglected in wargames. Most of this neglect can be traced to the high level of information that one player can obtain on the opponent's force composition, disposition and condition. The increasing trend to "fog-of-war" rules in simulations makes it worthwhile to look at reconnaissance.

In the past reconnaissance elements were rarely detectable in game Orders of Battle. This was because of the firepower represented by the recon unit was better utilized in helping an attack get to the proper odds for a "sure" elimination of an enemy unit rather than being used to go out and confirm that the armor unit in hex 3715 was an armor unit. Yet it is relatively simple to create a true need for reconnaissance units in

wargaming by keeping all non-unit counters off the map until observation is possible. Minefields, engineer obstacles, blown bridge markers, and so forth simply need not be placed on the map. Their position can easily be recorded on a separate piece of paper until needed to prove locations. Keeping the unit counters face down also creates a need for reconnaissance when used with dummy counters.

Reconnaissance can be treated as three separate types: Route, Zone, and Area. Route recon is conducted along a road or trail which is to be utilized as the route of an attack by friendly forces. The recon unit moves with one element actually on or within visual distance of the road/trail surface. This element is checking for signs of enemy traps. Other elements move to check all terrain that is within line of sight and within 3,000 meters of the road. These elements are checking for possible enemy units which could place direct fires on a force moving along the road.

Zone recon is a check of the entire area that the major unit which owns the recon force will be operating in for combat. In this case the recon element will be used in the smallest possible elements in order to cover all the ground. A high risk of enemy contact will force the recon unit to operate in groups for mutual protection, slowing down the rate with which the ground may be checked.

Area recon occurs when a unit is sent to check a specific area of ground for enemy units. Such an area may be a town.

Generally, combat with the enemy is not a desired result of a recon action. The main idea of reconnaissance is to gather information on the enemy without giving away the owning commander's intentions. The (sometimes) excellent heavy weaponry to be found in a recon element is really intended only to insure that the recon unit can break off from an enemy-initiated combat and survive to report back to headquarters.

Sometimes it does become necessary for the recon element to engage in combat for the purpose of getting the enemy commander to reveal his intentions. Where the need for recon without combat is usually necessary in an attacking situation, the need for combat to gain information usually occurs in a defensive situation. This combat may cause the enemy commander to think that he has hit the main area of the defense, thus leading him to commit his units to the attack early

and give away his plans so the defender has the best opportunity to halt the attack.

**RIVER CROSSING OPERATIONS**

A river crossing operation is probably the most complicated operation that a unit can be required to perform. When at all possible, a commander would rather seize an intact bridge than to attempt a straight river crossing. Only when there are no suitable bridges or fording sites on a river does a commander conduct a crossing. Again the choice is between a *hasty* and a *deliberate* river crossing.

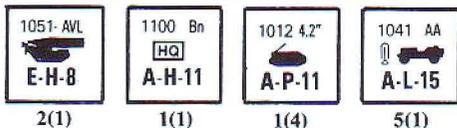
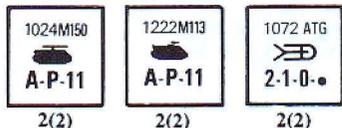
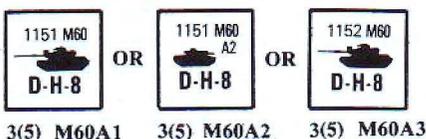
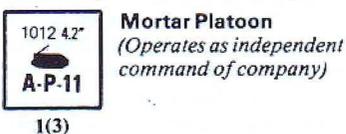
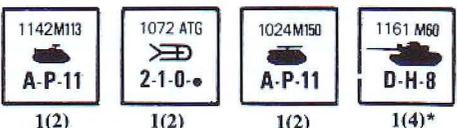
In the hasty river crossing the commander attempts to place a combat force on the far riverbank as rapidly as possible. This task may be accomplished by sending amphibious units across or, when engineer support is available, ferrying the combat elements over. A more recent option in combat is to gain the opposite shore by airborne or airmobile units seizing the far river bank. The crossings occur over the widest possible front on the river. Once the initial forces are across and have secured the area from enemy units, bridging is constructed by engineer units.

In a deliberate river crossing, the differences from a hasty crossing can be difficult to distinguish. Generally the pace of the attack has slowed or stopped while engineers move to the river crossing area. After preparing an area, bridges will be put in and the attack will resume. The opposite shore will have been secured almost exclusively by airborne or airmobile troops instead of amphibious elements. Because of the slow down, tactical air support is not being utilized against enemy defenses for attacking units and can be found striking (interdiction) at any enemy units which threaten the crossing.

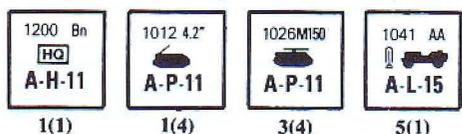
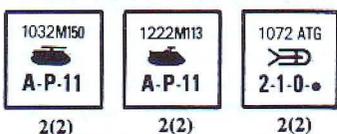
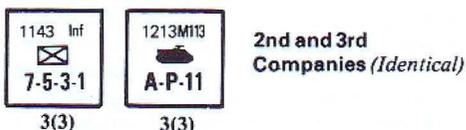
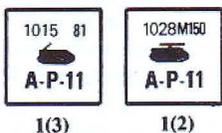
In all river crossings there has been an increasing amount of smoke generator use to screen the bridge and ferry sites from enemy aerial bombing. Snorkel will mainly be used in river crossings where threat of direct enemy confrontation is minimal and bridge/ferry units are not available.

**MILITARY OPERATIONS  
IN A BUILT-UP AREA (MOBA)**

MOBA combat is familiar to all wargamers as being an essential part of combat in a wargame. Rare is the gamer who

**FIGURE 5: US Army Armor Battalion****Battalion Assets (Independent Command)****Scout (Independent Command)****1st Tank Company (Current)****2nd and 3rd Tank Companies (Identical)****FIGURE 6:****US Army Armored Cavalry Troop****1st Platoon****2nd and 3rd Platoons (Identical)**

\*May be M60A1 or M60A3.

**FIGURE 7: US Infantry Battalion (Mech)****Battalion Assets (Independent Command)****Scout (Independent Command)****1st Mech Infantry Company****Company Assets (Independent Command)**

doesn't realize that some infantry and engineer units in a town represent a hard to dislodge combination. Combat in urban terrain has been found in war, as in games, to be a highly costly exercise in terms of men and equipment. The only thing a player can do is put infantry and armor units together and move into the town. As in real life, the first step is to gain a hold on a portion of the town and then fight through the terrain until all enemy units are eliminated. If that seems a big inelegant, so is combat in towns. There are no quick ways to clear a town, barring a nuke.

**NATIONAL DOCTRINE AND FORCE STRUCTURE**

One of the greatest difficulties in discussing military tactics for wargamers is portraying the emotional and mental confusion of combat. Many of the details in tactical planning lack relevancy in a game. There is no need to plan a phase line in an attack (in a game) along a dominant or obvious terrain feature. In actual combat, the phase line is used to coordinate the movement of all combat elements of a unit. This helps to prevent any one unit from going too far in front, or falling too far back, and provides the overall commander with a means of monitoring the progress of the movement. Yet all of this information is available to the wargamer at a glance.

Another aspect of combat that is not reproduced is the difficulty of switching combat elements among command groups. In an actual situation, the switching of combat elements requires a specific spot to be agreed to for the meeting of the new element with its new command group representative information on the frequencies used by the new command for radios, plus the radio call signs, and possibly some service support equipment (fuel and ammunition vehicles, maintenance, etc.) to be sent if the new command group is not equipped to support the attached element. Again, the player does not have to concern himself with such details; he simply pushes the counter into its new position and all direct fires are perfectly coordinated between the unit and its neighbors.

It is the above mentioned factors, plus some others, which have led different armies to develop different solutions for avoiding confusion during combat. The solution is found in the tactical approach the army takes to combat. The Soviet Army takes the approach that standardized tactics throughout the combat elements will keep a unit doing exactly what is required regardless of outside factors. Thus one can find their attacks being directed to move through or around enemy resistance to seize the desired objective in order to avoid having a unit go off and attack an unanticipated enemy unit. By avoiding a change in the mission, the Soviet intent is to keep control of the movement. The enemy force would then be handled by (a) a later element which was given the specific mission of attacking or by (b) stopping the current operation and planning a new attack.

The US Army takes a more flexible approach towards combat. Two factors contribute to this difference. The first is a greater radio command network than the Soviets utilize. Second is a greater reliance on the use of initiative with the small unit leader (company and below). Which approach would be more successful will hopefully continue to go unsettled.

For those readers interested in a good discussion of national doctrine affecting game play read "FireFight Alone" by Robert A. Kung in *MOVES* 48.

Before closing the article, there is one remaining item.

Throughout the article illustrations have been given using *Mech War 2* as the base for examples. Comparison of the examples to the Orders of Battle utilized in the game, plus some comments made in the article, have undoubtedly caused some questions. First look at Figures 5, 6 and 7. These figures show the base organization of the U.S. Army Infantry (Mechanized) Battalion, Armor Battalion, and Cavalry Troop. The major differences between the *Mech War 2* order and the US Army can be found in the battalion asset for both the Mech Infantry and the Armor, and in the Cavalry Troop. These changes are:

**Scouts.** The scout platoon is found in both battalions. It is utilized as a single unit for missions as given in the previous discussion on reconnaissance. The irresistible urge to utilize the TOW units some other way must be recognized as not being a correct idea in terms of military organization.

**Mortars.** The original game has these units as one-step units. Considering the vulnerability of a mortar carrier with the top open for firing and various rounds of ammunition exposed, treating the unit as a one-step counter is probably valid. The number of vehicles present (steps) is presented just for information.

**AA Jeeps.** The counter is designated as a one-unit, five-step element. This creates an air defense unit with a vulnerability totally out of proportion to the real situation. In an actual unit, the five AA Jeeps are used at widely separated locations. This multiple positioning provides: (a) an ability to engage an aircraft, regardless of the approach path used, by at least one missile; (b) allows the missile units to provide mutual coverage for protecting the missile elements from air attack; (c) cover the maximum area possible; (d) provide continuous coverage for the main combat force while moving by having two or three elements in position while the remainder move to a new location.

**AVLB.** This element was inexplicably left off the *Mech War 2* orders of battle.

**Armored Cavalry Troop.** This format of organization will undoubtedly cause the most comments. There are many players who organize the counters for an infantry group, an armor group, and an anti-tank group. Cavalry units do not cross-attach elements of platoons or companies.

**Cross-attachments of Units.** The US Army takes the Infantry (Mech) Battalion and the Armor Battalion and cross-attaches

*(continued on page 40)*

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### Advanced Tactics [continued from page 11]

companies as needed to meet the mission requirements. Typically one Mech Infantry Company is switched for one Armor Company. The only battalion asset which is usually switched is from the Mech Infantry Battalion Anti-tank Platoon — one counter of TOW in game terminology. Once the cross-attachments are made, the Armor Battalion is called an "Armor Heavy Task Force" and the Mech Infantry is an "Infantry Heavy Task Force."

Within the task forces, the attached company is generally re-organized with the two organic companies to form three equal composition teams.

On special missions, the balanced task force (two companies each of infantry and armor) may be formed. All task organizations depend on the mission and enemy force structure.

The Soviet Army organization reflects a reinforcement approach to tactical doctrine. Instead of removing any elements, the Soviets add to the base organization any needed units. The Soviets do not use a pure infantry or pure armor force unless there is an overwhelming reason.

### CONCLUSION

Major military movements such as Pursuit, Exploitation, Withdrawal, and so on have been deliberately left out of this discussion. These operations are only applicable to large military forces. Within the major unit (division corps) the elements (battalion and company) are still operating on the same idea of either attacking or defending. If one adopts those ideas presented herein that are compatible with the rules' structure of the game played, then a greater understanding of past or future history military conflicts will be gained. ■■

## CONVENTIONS Up and Coming

The following is a list of conventions scheduled to be held in the upcoming months, including place, name of convention, and whom to contact for further information. Much of the material in this feature is derived from the *Midwest Gaming Association Boardletter*.

#### May 15-18

CANGAMES 81, Ottawa, Canada. *Contact:* Bruce Knight, 2011 B St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, Ontario, K1G 1A3.

#### May 22-25

GRIMMCON III, Oakland, California. *Contact:* GrimmCon, POB 4153, Berkeley, CA 94704.

#### May 31

MIGS '81, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada. *Contact:* Les Scanlan, 473 Upper Wentworth, Hamilton, Ontario L8M 2M1.

#### June 5-7

GHENGIS CON, Denver, Colorado. *Contact:* Denver Wargamers Association, 2527 Gaylord Street, Denver, CO 80205.

#### June 5-7

DALLCON '81, Dallas, Texas. *Contact:* Richland Wargames, Richland College, 12800 Abrams Road, Dallas, TX 75243.

#### June 12-14

MICHICON 10 GAMESFEST, Rochester, Michigan. *Contact:* Metro Detroit Gamers, POB 787, Troy, MI 48099

#### July 3-5

PACIFIC ORIGINS, San Mateo, California. *Contact:* Pacific Origins, POB 5548, San Jose, CA 95150.

#### July 12-13

MINNESOTA CAMPAIGN, Rochester, Minnesota. *Contact:* Fred Funk, 343 N. 19th Street, Minneapolis, MN.

### Professionalism [continued from page 13]

the game. I say "stopping work" rather than "completing" because in a very real sense this is not a completed game. It seems to me that to the end Rich must have felt intimidated by his data rather than comfortable with it. To the end he seems unable to finally say "Eureka! Now I really understand what's going on here!" Without that final flash of understanding, without that feeling of comfort with and mastery of a subject, it is impossible for the designer confidently and forcefully to set an agenda.

CNA is a game without an agenda. *Early Pacific Battles* struck me that way too, although in that case I never made the commitment necessary to find out for sure. Numerous unpublished efforts I've seen, and I'm sure many of you have seen, are also illustrations of this phenomena. How many club project games have you gotten involved in that were incredibly complex, loaded with variables, options, data, and "chrome," and yet couldn't keep your interest beyond one playing? They are games without souls; they are orders of battle in search of a game.

What does professionalism in design amount to? Two things, both of them indispensable to plying your trade with confidence and skill. First, it requires a constant recognition of the fact that the game system is an illustration of your own subjective view of reality. Second, it requires that you accept the responsibility to acquire more than a passing or superficial knowledge of your subject, the responsibility to bring to bear as much objectivity as you can muster in what is admittedly a subjective process, and the responsibility to exercise restraint in your final presentation. It seems to me that to do otherwise amounts to little more than self-indulgence, and self-indulgence is the ultimate hallmark of the true amateur. ■■