

BRIGDE LAYING VEHICLES IN TANK!

Mark Mazkn

(from Footnotes, Moves issue 26)

The anti-tank ditch markers in Tank! are an absolutely impassable obstacle. But in reality, every defensive measure ultimately produces an offensive gimmick to counteract it. The remedy for the anti-tank ditch is the bridge-laying tank.

As early as the First World War, armored units went into action carrying "fascines," huge round bundles of brushwood that could be dropped into trenches ahead of the advancing tank to facilitate crossing. By the Second World War, several types of assault bridging vehicles had been developed for the purpose of crossing streams, canals, trenches, ditches and other minor obstacles. Such vehicles would normally be concentrated in brigade or division engineer units, but for a planned attack on a prepared position, they could be attached to individual tank companies. The simplest type was represented by the British "ARK" or a Soviet modification of the T-34. This was simply a tank chassis, minus turret, with a platform atop the hull and drawbridge extensions at bow and stern. It would be driven bodily into the ditch, the drawbridges would be lowered onto either bank of the obstacle and the following tanks would cross directly over it. More sophisticated bridging vehicles carried a rigid steel girder bridge up to 40 feet long that could be launched out over an obstacle on rollers mounted on the front of the

tank hull. The final development was the "scissors bridge" (as mounted on the British Valentine, and on modified Main Battle Tank chassis in most armies since WWII). This type of bridge is raised, unfolded and extended over a gap by hydraulic rams, then dropped and uncoupled without the crew dismounting.

A few simple, somewhat abstracted rules for Tank! can readily reproduce this capability:

[37.0] Bridge-Laying Vehicles

At the discretion of the Players, and within the limits of the various historical periods and national weapons inventories, the Alpha Force may include up to one section (four vehicles) of assault bridging vehicles in scenarios involving anti-tank ditch defenses.

[37.1] Ark-type Bridging Vehicles: This is an unarmed tank chassis, with Defense Strength characteristics corresponding to the battle tank employed by Alpha Force (or an "obsolete" vehicle of the same army). They may be attached to each separate platoon, or moved together as an "engineer" platoon. To use its bridging capability, the unit must be moved adjacent to the ditch, where it must stop and move no further in that Turn. On the following Turn, it may be driven into the ditch, and other vehicles may cross "over" it. The "bridge" vehicle is

considered to be abandoned. It may not leave the ditch or move at all for the remainder of the scenario. The bridge itself may be destroyed by HE Fire, defending with a strength of "15."

[37.2] Steel Girder and Scissors Bridge Laying Vehicles: These are unarmed tank chassis which carry a "bridge" unit as a "passenger" ("bridge" counters may be made up from blanks or borrowed from games that use bridge units). The "bridge" is emplaced by moving the vehicle adjacent to the ditch. On the following Turn, the bridge may be unloaded, and vehicles may cross. The bridge may be taken up again by reversing the process. The bridge itself defends against HE attacks with a strength of "12."

Players should research the special characteristics of the various types of gap-crossing vehicles they wish to simulate. Some vehicles, for example, retained main or secondary armament. Others could lay a bridge, could not take it up again. In practice special purpose vehicles tend to attract disproportionate volume of enemy fire. this takes some of the heat off the MBT's. let's hear it for the engineers!

-Mike Mazkn