

When I was doing the art/physical system for Firefight, I had the dubious privilege of arguing with an adamant colonel over red and blue counters, top-views vs. silhouettes...Zzzzzzz.

MOPPING UP: FIREFIGHT

by Steven A. List

Firefight is a tactical game covering modern mechanized combat. It is extremely small scale—40 second turns, 50 meter hexes and 2-4 man or one vehicle unit counters. Its scope is limited to US-Soviet conflict currently and in the near future, and it is designed to illustrate some specific factors: lethality of modern weapons, the requirement for effective operation with combined arms, and the use of terrain and suppressive fire to neutralize enemy weaponry.

This game is unusual in that it was essentially commissioned by the Army as a teaching device. As a result, the game reflects "official" viewpoints on doctrine and weapons effectiveness for both sides. Even minor physical details, such as the colors of the unit counters and map terrain conventions, were specified to conform to standard Army usage. Another aspect of this approach shows up in some of the scenarios. These are deliberately biased while on the surface appearing balanced or even biased to the other side. The intent is to sandbag a player-trainee, to flagrantly emphasize what the game is trying to teach so that in a combat situation he will recognize and avoid such pitfalls.

In some respects, *Firefight* resembles *Tank*. The scales are similar, terrain and sighting are handled in much the same way. Combat resolution in *Firefight* is somewhat simpler, and the pre-plotting of turns used in *Tank* is replaced (except for Indirect Fire) by alternative movement or firing of individual units. Major differences appear in two areas, due to design emphasis and the physical package.

Tank provided rudimentary TO&E doctrinal data for a wide range of national armies from the thirties through the present. *Firefight* goes well beyond this, providing a separate 20 page book covering in greater depth the tactical doctrines, hardware, platoon to divisional organization of current US and Soviet ground forces, and appropriate game tactics to reflect battlefield tactics. This allows the game player to get a better grasp of what he is up to and why, and provides for an educational benefit as well. The other area is hard to define, but is the aggregate effect of game mechanics. In *Tank*, the tank was the dominant weapon. In most situations, a pure tank force could whip anything else of similar size. Infantry and anti-tank weapons were very vulnerable; while they were dangerous to tanks, they seldom lived long enough to do serious damage. However, in *Firefight*, a slight shift in design parameters has greatly increased infantry survivability and reduced armored omnipotence. The resulting system requires genuine use of combined arms to be effective.

Tanks are no longer like medieval knights,

doing all the serious fighting, with infantry a tag-along rabble to be ignored or sacrificed. All elements must be used in combination to exploit their unique strengths in the proper situations and to minimize their weaknesses.

Of necessity, rules for wargames and "simulations" have loopholes, ambiguities, and unspoken assumptions built in. The more complex the game, the more of these crop up. The following question/answer section combines errata with comments from the game developer and general observations. Where applicable, they are keyed by the rule paragraph number.

Q. [4.1] If a player declines to fire (or move) a unit when it is his turn to do so, does he forfeit all remaining fire (or movement) for that turn?

A. No. But if a player declines, and his opponent then "passes" as well, the phase is over at that point. It is permissible but risky to stall in this manner.

[5.2] The use of defilade hexside symbols in this game is the reverse of usual SPI practice, with the hexside "lower" than the hex itself. This leads to inconsistent usage, such as in the illustration on page 6, where hexsides 0750-51 or 0949-50 represent ridgelines, as in *Tank*. But as defined in this game, they should represent gullies, which they are not. This is due to the desire of the Army to have hex map symbols match topographical map symbols as closely as possible.

[6.8, 6.9] As the rules stand, fire teams have no ammunition limits; they can fire Dragons or other missiles all day long. In reality, there would be only a few rounds available to each team unless anti-tank action were anticipated, when as many would be carried as could be shoe-horned into the vehicles. The Army apparently plans to expand on this, so that the platoon leader trainee must decide at the start of the game what weapon and ammunition mix he will carry before he knows what he'll be up against.

[8.0] The rules for indirect fire comprise over a third of the basic game rules, and are thus more complex than any other single topic. They aren't as clearly written as they could be, with several readings and considerable playing needed to really grasp them.

Q. [8.51] If a player shifts Indirect Fire from the plotted hex, can the new impact hex be treated as the plotted impact hex on the next turn when in a continuous fire situation? This would allow "walking" fire across the board.

A. This is allowed so long as no other pertinent rules, especially regarding line of sight, are violated.

[8.62] Error—There is no label saying

"results apply to vehicles" on the Indirect Fire Table.

[8.71] This rule is incomplete. Fire cannot be adjusted unless both the plotted impact hex and the hex to which the fire is to shift can be "seen" by the player.

[8.8] This rule is a bit obscure. Units which begin a Movement Phase in an impact hex from the previous turn are not affected unless they move into another impact hex. Moving units are attacked in each impact hex they enter.

[13.22] The use of the word "either" in this rule is ambiguous. Here it means "both," so that line of sight is blocked if an intervening obstacle is higher than the end points.

Q. [16.0] General Rule. Can infantry fire teams fire AT missiles such as Dragon or RPG-7 when mounted?

A. Yes.

[17.0] It is not explicitly stated, but use of Short Halt Attack/Fire on Move is an exception to the rules allowing only Opportunity or Overwatch Fire during the Movement Phase.

Q. [21.1] If a player has a dedicated battery assigned him, does this mean he has two separate fire platoons? If so, can they fire independently?

A. Yes and yes.

Scenario 6. This is on the surface the most balanced scenario, with each player controlling a basic combined arms team, but it is badly flawed. The Russian gains points by delaying the American capture of an objective, the American by destroying Russian units. But even against no opposition, it takes the American at least 6 turns to reach his objective by the fastest route. The Russian could, in the extreme case, set up on the edge of the board and exit on turn one, and still win 6-0. The Victory Conditions clearly need some modification, such as awarding the US player 10 points for capturing his objective. Otherwise, the Soviet player controls the game.

The mechanics of this game include something which may seem odd to the veterans of *Mech War 77*. In that game, wire guided missiles such as TOW could not be fired over water, while *Firefight* has no such restriction. The *Mech War* rule was based on combat experience in the Yom Kippur war, but the Army claims the technical problem responsible has now been solved. Presumably the Russians have eliminated this bug as well.

In general, *Firefight* "plays" the way the reference data book says actual combat will, but a substantial departure from this has been made for the sake of playability. Doctrine stresses the advantage of remaining concealed

[continued on page 23]

used to provide variable elevation for the 105mm gun and lower the tank when not moving to aid in providing a small target. An automatic loader reduces the size of the crew compartment and hence the vehicle.

[30.101] Vulnerability

Movement allowance is four movement points.

[30.102] Vulnerability

(same as XM1, 27.3)

[30.103] Fixed Mount Restrictions

See 30.63. Also, the STRV, if under a Mobility Kill result, has a more limited field of fire. It may only fire in a direct line along the hex grain faced by the gun barrel.

[31.0] ADDITIONAL MISSILE SYSTEMS

Additional British, German, and Swedish anti-armor missiles are included on the Supplemental Weapons Chart. The British Swingfire is mounted on the FV-432 APC, which is (for game purposes) the same as an M150. The British Vigilant is used like the Dragon. The German/French MILAN is used like the Dragon. The German/French HOT is used on the M113, and is treated like the M150. The German Cobra is mounted on jeeps (see Scenario 3). The Swedish Carl Gustav is actually a recoilless rifle like the SPG-9. It is also used by the British.

Mopping Up *[continued from page 21]*

in bypassed positions in order to bring flank and rear fire on enemy units. Not only are they supposed to be more vulnerable to such fire, but the surprise effect and limited rearward observation will supposedly give the firing unit a better chance of remaining concealed. The game includes neither of these elements, though they would not be that hard to incorporate as optional rules. The effects of concealment are largely negated, anyway, but the use of inverted counters and dummies. Your opponent can see all your counters, and while he may not know which are real, he can be sure that where there is no counter, there is no unit.

Firefight is one of the best tactical games available, if only for the wealth of current doctrinal, organizational and hardware related information it supplies. While in many respects it has been oversimplified, its structure can easily be expanded on, so that groups with manpower for refereeing and record keeping (gaming clubs, not just the Army), it can be played on a very complex level with true hidden movement to recreate really hairy tactical problems of blind man's bluff.

SUPPLEMENTAL ATTACK EFFECTIVENESS CHART: ANTI-VEHICLE

| Range (in hexes) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 16 | 21 | 31 | 41 | 51 |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Firing Unit | Target Unit | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | to | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 15 20 30 40 50 60 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| JKanone Tank | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| JKanone APC | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Scorpion Tank | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 2 | • | • | • | • | • |
| Scorpion APC | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 1 | • | • | • | • |
| Swngfire Tk/APC | • | • | • | • | 4 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Vigilant Tk/APC | • | • | • | 4 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | • | • | • |
| MILAN Tk/APC | 4 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | • | • |
| Cobra Tk/APC | • | • | • | • | 4 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | • | • | • | • |
| HOT Tk/APC | • | • | • | • | 4 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Gustav Tank | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 3 | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Gustav APC | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

SUPPLEMENTAL ATTACK EFFECTIVENESS CHART: ANTI-PERSONNEL

| Range (in hexes) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 16 | 21 | 31 | 41 | 51 |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | to | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 15 20 30 40 50 60 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| M114/20mm | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 2 | • |
| Marder | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 3 | • |
| Leopard II | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 3 | • |
| JKanone | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | • |
| Chieftain | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | • |
| Scorpion | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| STRV | 1 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | • |
| MBT70 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 5 |

There are a number of vehicles the Anti-Vehicle Attack Effectiveness Ratings of which are virtually identical to some of those already found on the US Attack Effectiveness Chart; thus:

- The M114 and the Marder are equivalent to the MICV.
- The M551 (gun and missile) is equivalent to the M60A2.
- The Leopard II and MBT70* are equivalent to the XM1.
- The STRV is equivalent to the M60A1.
- The Chieftain is equivalent to the M60A3.
- *The MBT70 may also be considered the equivalent of the M60A2.

Designers' Notes *[continued from page 6]*

1. Reinforcements
2. Initial Joint Air Combat Phase
3. Initial Naval Movement Combat Phase
4. Second Joint Air Combat Phase
5. Initial Ground Movement Phase
6. Ground Combat Phase
7. Second Ground Movement Phase
8. Third Joint Air Combat Phase
9. Second Naval Movement Combat Phase
10. Fourth Joint Air Combat Phase.
11. Strategic Naval Movement Phase
12. Strategic Air Movement Phase.

Each of these phases will have one or more segments. —Irad B. Hardy

Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War
 Or, Panzergruppe Guderian forty years later. Untried units for everyone, as well as step reduction for everyone. This is done by using two counters for each regiment/brigade. One side is for untried status, the other three for step down. Untried status is resolved using a two dice table (11 possible outcomes). There are fourteen different levels of "untried potential" a unit may be at. Scenarios will give levels for each nationality, although you may choose your own. Untried outcomes are Doubled (unit's strength is doubled) until it loses its first step. Then its just normal (as shown) strength. Other outcomes are "normal" or start losing one, two or three (a "0" unit) steps. A nice touch. There are artillery units which are effective within their "area of deployment" (some four hexes from where the artillery unit actually is). These artillery units represent non-divisional artillery. There is supply, airpower (including gunships), air-