TANK!

A TANK! RECOVERY VEHICLE

by Mike Costello

TANK! was published with S&T 44 and has already sparked off a number of articles on modification in S&T and Moves. The game lends itself to tinkering of this kind, and this article tries to come up with an optimal set of rules from the various suggestions made so far and quite a few new ones. For those not familiar with the game, it consists of a set of basic game rules, rules for the expanded game, counters representing individual vehicles and infantry squads, a Weapons Characteristics Chart to give weapons values for each scenario, and a 50m-per-hex map. I see TANK! as falling into the category of games that are worth saving despite some glaring faults; it's potentially so good that it is worth spending a little time on revision, and it is also excellent value for money, as the number of possible scenarios that can be built up from the information in the WCC is virtually infinite.

The following systems all have the twin aim of including the main factors which affect combat at this level, and avoiding any significant increase in playing-time.

The first move is a bold one: get rid of the map. It corresponds to no type of terrain within human experience and is impossible to take seriously. The concepts of hull-down deployment and variable elevation have been hopelessly confused, allowing a tank to increase its defensive strength by nestling up against a hill-slope. True hull-down positions are not so easy to come by; terrain elevation is very significant in tactical warfare, but for other reasons entirely. Create two or three maps from blank (numbered) hex sheets; one or another will usually fit a particular situation. "Ridges" can be shown along hexsides, usually representing rock outcrops or earthworks such as railway embankments, and allowing armoured vehicles to take up hull-down positions behind them to increase their defensive strength by 2. As well as the more obvious features, urban hexes can be included as suggested by Mike Markowitz in S&T 47. When a building is destroyed, "scatter" the rubble as for artillery impact markers, providing additional defensive positions for infantry and possibly blocking the street which the attacking forces wish to negotiate (the Allies has this problem in Normandy). Vehicle-impassable hexes (marsh, etc) make defending infantry more survivable and encourage genuine combined arms tactics.

The only major innovation is the use of contour lines, as in Ordnance maps. Some solution to the depiction of elevation has to be found by any boardgame which is competing with miniatures, and I give below a set of rules to establish whether a phasing unit has Line of Sight to a target in a particular situation. Do not be alarmed; in most cases the answer will be clear to both players without recourse to the Elevation Differential Table.

Line of Sight – automatic unless intercepted by blocking hex (friendly unit, woods,urban, twin contour lines). No blocking (hexsides. "Twin contour lines" covers the case of the LOS crossing any contour line twice; the blocking hex is the hex encountered immediately before the LOS hits the line for the second time. As in the original rules, LOS *passes into* the blocking hex but not *through*.

Definitions:
Four contour lines run roughly parallel, labelled 10,20,30 and 40 (meters). If X is between 10 and 20, while Y is between 30 and 40, X is a "level 10" and Y is "two levels higher" than X.

Test each potential blocking hex:
Target and firer at same level: LOS blocked unless the potential blocking hex is at least one level lower than the target and firer.

Target and firer at different levels: use EDT, adding one to ED score for each level that higher unit is higher than potential blocking hex, deducting one for each level that lower unit is lower than potential blocking hex.

ED Score:

-2 Target is not in LOS
-1 Range from higher to lower unit must be at least 5 times range to potential blocking hex.
0 Range from higher to lower unit must be at least 4 times range to potential blocking hex.
1 Range from higher to lower unit must be at least 3 times range to potential blocking hex.
2 Range from higher to lower unit must be at least 2 times range to potential blocking hex.
3 Range from higher to lower unit must be at least 1½ times range to potential blocking hex.
4 Target is in LOS.

Automatic block: lower unit and blocking hex share a common hexside.

The modified Simove system in S&T 57 is certainly worth introducing for TANK! as it cuts playing time, but it needs some adjustment to make it fit this particular game, especially in view of a few other changes I have in mind. We end up with this:

1. Plotting: specify target hexes of DF, Indirect Fire, DT (For moving units write simply "MV").
2. IF: place impact markers (air strikes, artillery, mortar). Execute results. Place artillery & mortar smoke.
3. Morale: test designated units, altering plots.
4. DF: as Standard TANK! Place M markers.
5. MV: as Standard TANK! Place M markers.
6. MT, DT: as Standard TANK!
7. FC: execute plots. Voluntary Facing changes for MV units.
8. Remove smoke & Vehicle smoke markers. Remove impact markers over smoke markers. Place new vehicle smoke markers. Remove artillery impact markers.

The need to include infantry support weapons, as pointed out in Steve List's article (S&T 53), can be met fairly easily as it is not necessary to go into too much detail: after all, it is a game about tanks. Some infantry weapons are subsumed in the generalised "HE attack strength", others can be coined and each stacked with an infantry squad, sharing its fate throughout the game. No effect on movement unless you want to make some fireteams spend one turn in certain types of terrain hex before exiting.

Medium mortar: attack strength 0/3, range 5-35, capable of IF, SF, OF. Called down after 2 turns delay on any hex by any observer of that hex; no MV missions for mortar team during delay.
Heavy mortar: as above, periods 6-12 only, attack strength 0/5.
HMG: attack strength 1/6, range 20 capable of DF, OF.
Support squads may not also be equipped with anti-tank weapons.

You may also want to use flame if the defending forces are in bunkers, and specialised sapper units for demolition, mine-clearing, etc. The attack strengths given for mortars are within effective range (20 hexes); cut the strength by half (rounding up) for greater ranges. I use a separate CRT for all IF fire (which is cumulative) as this allows more logical differentiation of the

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effects of fire on different types of terrain and target. I also allow infantry to entrench, as this is almost the only kind of defense construction that the time-scale of the game permits. All these little touches can generally be tacked onto the game without causing problems elsewhere, and quantifying attack strengths is generally a matter of playtesting each innovation to make sure it assumes a proportionate role within the games. In the same vein, airlanding units will really liven up some scenarios. Using specialised forces of this kind raises problems of game balance, and one of the problems with TANK! is that players have to do their own balancing; there is no friendly neighbourhood SPI game developer to guarantee a fair fight in each scenario. This is a point I'll come on to later.

The final modification concerns the semi-random Panic system, and the undiscriminating Preservation rule. Again two concepts seem to have been confused: "Panic" is not concerned with Morale but with communications deficiencies, whereas "Preservation" (in the Expanded Game) means an inhibiting of Fire together with a somewhat increased likelihood of Panicking towards the enemy! This set of rules (see 12.0 and 25.2 especially) is the sort of thing most likely to convince newcomers that they should stick to miniatures, which is a pity. The rules do not even have the merit of saving playing-time, and can be replaced with procedures for determining the reactions of individual units which are interesting in themselves rather than an exercise in die-rolling.

During each turn, place Morale markers on units in the following categories:

Isolated
First time under lethal fire
Other unit in platoon destroyed in that turn
Currently retreating (test whole platoon separately)

Other categories can be added if desired. An isolated unit is not in Conformity as defined in the Expanded rules (25.0 & 25.1) except that Conformity in movement is checked only at the end of the movement segment, and the wording should be tightened to specify that a unit can be up to two intervening hexes from another unit which in turn is the correct distance from another, all units in the platoon forming a single chain which includes the leader.

In the following turn, test each designated unit; I use a decimal die, subtracting one per turn 10% Panic level, then adjust die roll as follows:

Subtract

1 Unit under fire from unspotted unit in previous turn.
Visible friendly unit Retreated or Fled in previous turn.
Unit under IF (per 3HE attack points).
2 Each destroyed unit in platoon.
3 Isolated. Already retreating.

Add

1 Visible enemy unit Retreated or Fled in previous turn.
Each visible destroyed unit (in previous turn).
2 Unit in Improved Position.

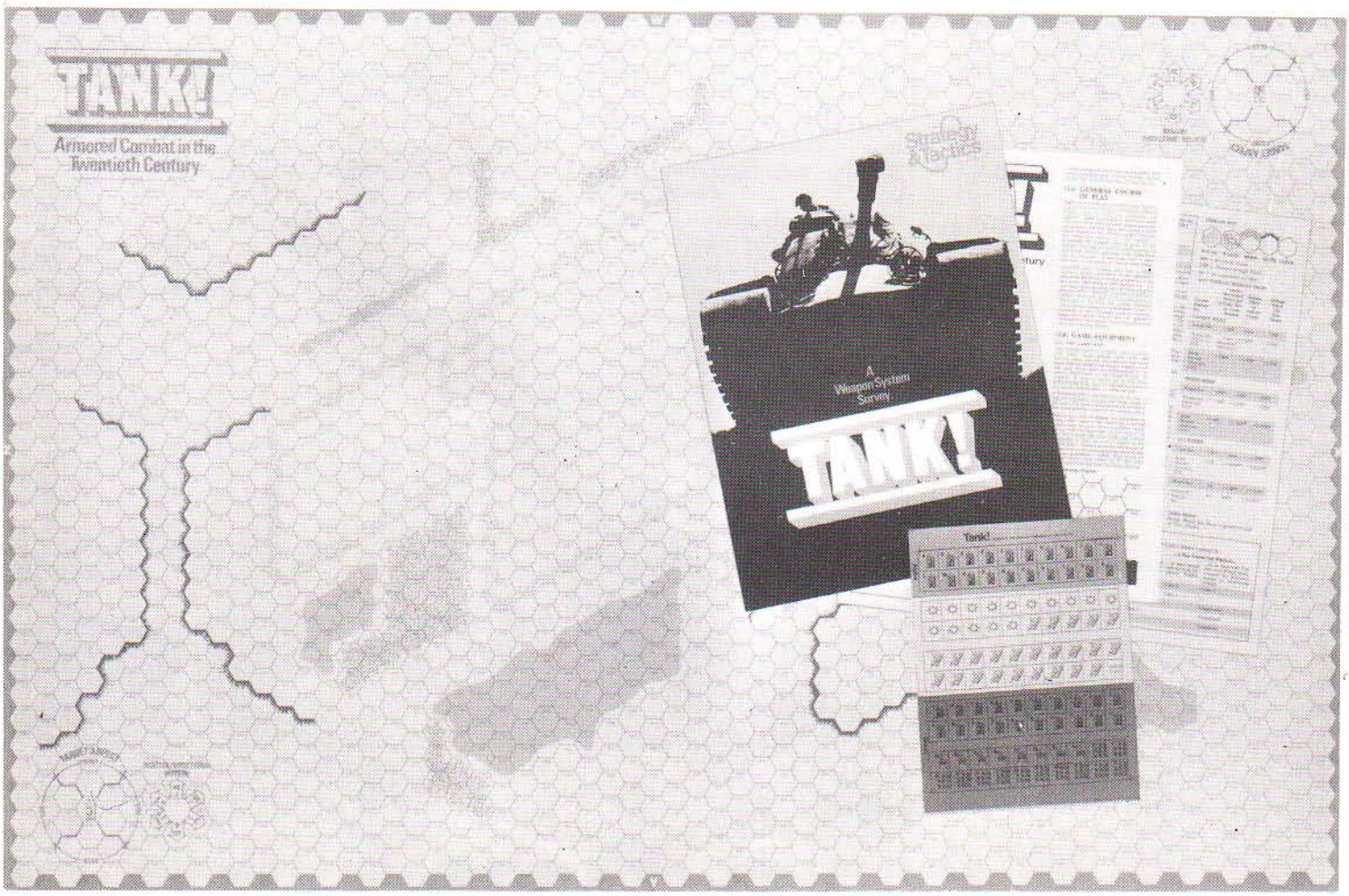
Having worked out the score for the unit, alter its plot as required:

4 No effect.
3,2,1, Cancel MV/OV.
0,-1,-2 Cancel all missions; may give unit FC or MVR mission.
-3,-4,-5 ***Retire:*** all mobile units MV/MVR to increased range from enemy.
-6,-7,-8 ***Retreat:*** static units eliminated, others full Movement Allowance towards entry map edge.
-9 ***Flee:*** as above and may not re-test. May not re-enter map, but not considered destroyed for Victory Conditions.

Under this system a unit is free to move out of Conformity, but in practice a player will seldom choose this option because units become too unreliable. Panic and Preservation rules as such are no longer used; players will already have sufficient incentive not to expose their units to excessive hazards.

If you find the rules covering hidden and unspotted units unsatisfactory, you may consider using dummies. Having to remember where your hidden anti-tank guns are supposed to be on the map is one of the less entertaining aspects of the game, and partial solutions, such as the proposal by John & David Tate (Moves 26) that occasional units can be moved while off-map, will break down as soon as players discover that opposing units have just "moved" through each other without realising it.

Each dummy would represent a certain type of unit (vehicle, infantry, etc) and would be allowed only MV missions, being eliminated whenever spotted in the usual way. Indirect fire attacks then have to be resolved by your



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opponent if the targets are unspotted, since this fire would not itself reveal whether units are dummies or not. There are a few other little complications in practice, but the system is still workable if you do not mind cluttering up the map with extra counters. All units are in an unspotted state to begin with and each can be spotted only by a specific enemy unit, immediately before its Fire mission. This is the only time that units are revealed, whether spotting is "automatic' or not; if it is automatic, though, there is no need for any enemy unit in its LOS to have a Fire mission against it. All spotted units can be targets for all units. Finally, a much-needed improvement to the existing rules is to add (say) 2 to the die roll when resolving an attack against a unit which has had to be spotted in that turn; the attacker is penalised for constantly shifting targets.

To ensure balanced games, give each unit a points value, including all types of defensive installation, and "charge" also for dummies. Values of tanks will be derived from the AP attack strength, the armour defense strengths, and perhaps the movement allowance as well. Each player can equip himself with any weapons within the constraints of the WCC and Historical Period Chart, up to a total points value which will be the same for both players. This will still give the Alpha player a greater number of combat units than the Bravo player when attacking a prepared defensive position, since the defender will have to allocate considerable points quotas to defenses and dummy positions.

This innovation actually does the game a lot of good, as there must be few players who voluntarily equip themselves with inferior weapons in the manner ingeniously described in section 31.0.A German player in period 5 will probably never choose any other tank but the Panzer V; this means that half the equipment in the WCC will remain unused. In any case it was rare enough for a Company Commander to have available to him the very best weapons of every type. Players will have to think more carefully about their requirements when faced with the choice of, say, eight Pz III's *or* five PzIV's.

These innovations have worked well in playtesting so far, although there is still room for improvement. Period 12 scenarios are less successful, as indeed they are in the original game, because of changing battlefield conditions, but rather than continuing to tinker with the mechanics it would probably be simpler to go out and buy *Firefight.*

To sum up, the following rules sections are deleted and replaced with new rules: 3.1, 4.1, 6.0, 8.71, 8.8, 8.81, 8.82, 8.83, 9.0 through 9.13, 9.35, 9.36, 9.37, 10.13, 10.21 through 10.26, 10.5, 10.6, 12.0 through 12.24, 13.4, 14.2, 14.5, 15.0 through 15.2, 21.1, 14.5, 25.21, 25.22, 25.4 27.3, 28.32 through 28.34, 31.0, 32.6 through 32.7. Minor changes need to be made to the following sections to accommodate the new rules; 2.0, 4.0, 5.0, 9.2, 10.0, 13.21, through 13.23, 14.0, 14.41, 14.9, 22.0, 28.61, 34.0 through 34.4. This includes the changes in the Standard rules dictated by the Expanded rules.

The Battle of BORODINO

Borodino Dismembered Part 3, by Rob Gibson

I doubt if any boardgame could simulate effectively the daily routine of the Emperor Napoleon: to sleep for four hours and work as leader, administrator and commander-in-chief for a large part of Western Europe for the other twenty would have drained many a lesser man of inspiration. By 1812, Napoleon had been at war for the best part of twenty years, and had been losing his touch of late: the narrow margin of victory had become narrower. Now he began to play safe: sheer weight of numbers replaced the calculated manoeuvrings of earlier years.

So when Marshal Davout came to the Emperor on the 5th of September, 1812 to propose an outflanking movement by his 1st Corps and Poniatowski's Vth Corps to roll up the Russian line before Borodino, he was curtly refused permission and sent away with the proverbial flea in his ear.

Would it have worked? Since the object of our boardgame is to simulate past events without necessarily repeating the same moves, it seemed to me to be worth a try. The first thing to do was to identify the units involved on the turn/reinforcement chart, using the 'Borodino' historical order of battle (cross checked against Duffy). As the game is presented it does not quite bring on units in their historical entry positions, this caused a certain amount of confusion at first but this was resolved by resort to the H.O.B. and Duffy once more. Once the point of entry was established on the game map, everything was set for a very diverting alternative game, presented below.

The Davout Plan

A. Changes in the order of Battle

The following units do not appear on the turn/reinforcement chart for September 5th.

Game Turn 2	One 4-4 at B
Game Turn 4	One 7-4, one 7-3, one 5-4 all at B.
Game Turn 5	One 2-5 at B.
Game Turn 8	One 4-3, two 4-4, one 2-5, all at C.

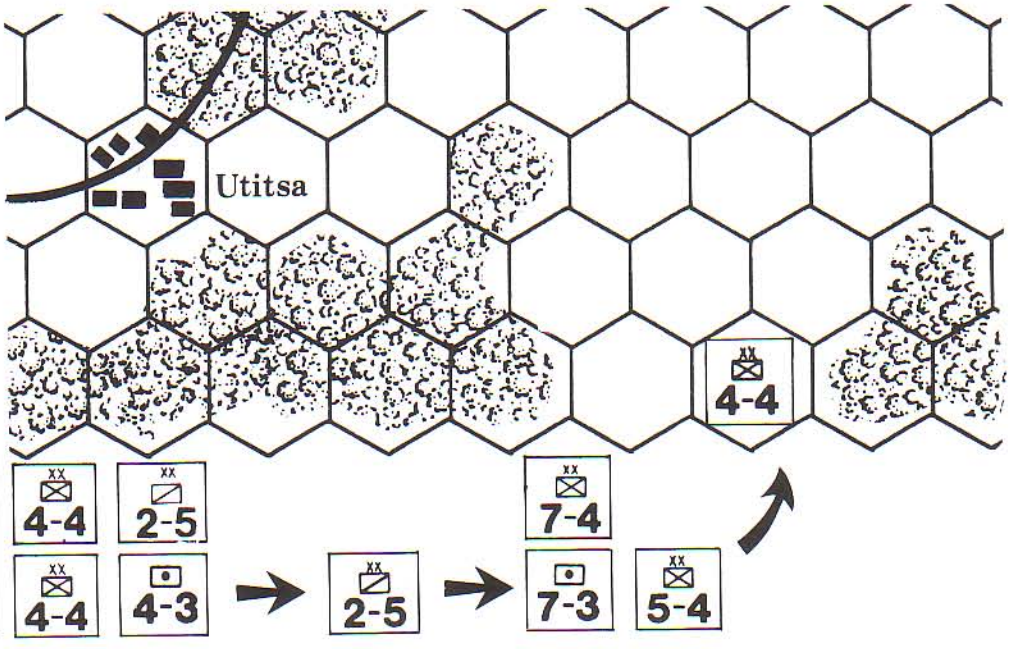
These units are set aside as they become available behind the French Player's start line.

B. Point of Entry

The units detailed in 'A' now enter on the southern edge of the map behind Utitsa. i.e. in the gap along that edge between the Utitsa woods and the next wooded area to the east.

C. Time of Entry

The earliest possible time of entry would be game turn 15 (September 6th) and the most probable time of entry would be game turn 17 (September 6th). At the start of game turn 15, the French player throws a dice. If the result is 1,2,or 3 he places a 4-4 unit on the entry point, and then continues as normal. On the following turn (16) the units originally allocated for game turn 4 appear; on game turn 17, the units allocated for game turn 5, and so on. If the dice throw is 4,5, or 6, the process is repeated at the start of game turn 16. A successful throw (1,2 or 3) allows the 4-4 unit to enter; an unsuccessful throw (4,5 or 6) defers entry until game turn 17 by the remaining units in their original allocation sequence.

D. Prohibition

No Russian unit may move deliberately within 3 hexes of the southern map edge in the point of entry until a French unit actually appears on the map at this point (This excludes retreat after combat *if no other hex is available*).