BRITONS, STRIKE HOME!

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE BRITISH BATTLEGROUP IN 'MECH WAR 2': and a few other observations

DONALD MACK

In my profile of **Mech War 2** published in **Phoenix 25**, I made some comments anent the British Battlegroup as depicted in that game and intimated that I would return to this subject in more detail. Having done some research and asked a few questions, here we go: furthermore I propose to examine vehicle profiles and to comment on some aspects of the Chemical Warfare Rules inasmuch as they affect the various Chemical Protection (CP) status of vehicles. Finally there will be a word on artillery.

The Battlegroup Concept

The two main types of maneouvre units in the British Army are infantry battalion and the armoured regiment; both are lieutenant colonel's commands, both are independent units with a life of their own, both are capable of being moved to any part of the world and of being 'plugged in' to whatever command set-up exists in their new station. However the methods of modern mechanised warfare require a high degree of ability to work in a 'combined arms' role to the extent that neither arm can work independently of the other; the infantry need the tanks' guns to help protect them, especially when on the move in their organic armoured personnel carriers (APCs), the tanks need infantry to flush out enemy infantry positions, to provide close protection in close country and to hold ground which their armour, mobility and firepower have helped to capture.

As a result, although both types of unit are still liable (especially the infantry battalion) to operate as 'pure' units of their respective arms in a mechanised context they are much more likely to find themselves working as battlegroups, that is to say as combined armour/mechanised-infantry forces under a single unit headquarters and using an integrated radio net. This will often be achieved by detaching a company – perhaps a reinforced company – from a mechanised infantry battalion to an armoured regiment while the latter likewise detaches a squadron to the battalion: but that is putting it in a nutshell. There are three types of battlegroup, as follows;

The Armour-Heavy BG: As its name implies this has a high proportion of tanks to infantry and operates under the command of an armoured regimental headquarters; in fact it is basically an armoured regiment with infantry under command. Its role is primarily offensive (within a strategic defensive posture) and it would operate as a local counter-attack force.

The Infantry-Heavy BG: More infantry than tanks, under command of an infantry battalion HQ – in other words the battalion is the 'core' unit. Basically a defensive grouping although it has within itself a local counter-attack ability.

The Balanced BG: That's right, you've got it! It will usually consist of two infantry companies and two armoured squadrons and can be under the command of either type of HQ. As a battalion has four rifle companies and an armoured regiment four sabre squadrons, you will realise that the two units can field between them two balanced BGs – or one armour-heavy and one infantry-heavy BG.

A BAOR armoured division's manoeuvre units are three mechanised infantry battalions and two armoured regiments and it will thus field five BGs, two armour-heavy and three infantry-heavy; or four balanced and one very much infantry-heavy; or two balanced, one armour-heavy and one infantry-heavy. The system is thus very flexible, much more flexible than using units permanently constituted as battlegroups, as some armies prefer, although the divisional commander will try to keep much the same groupings together in operations – and on training – to achieve good person-to-person relationships. Furthermore each BG will integrate further to find, not separate companies and squadrons but combat teams, a CT being to the company or squadron what the BG is to the battalion or regiment. Last but not least, the BG will include an armoured reconnaissance element in the form of a troop from the Close Reconnaissance Squadron of the divisional armoured reconnaissance regiment, and will almost certainly include Swingfire (anti-tank guided weapons) and Blowpipe (surface-to-air missiles) detachments of the Royal Artillery.

The Battlegroup in 'MW 2'

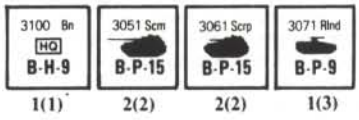
The so-called 'Third Battlegroup' see Fig.1 (in fact BGs are identified by the 'core' unit's title, e.g. 1 R Hampshire BG or 15/19 Hussars BG) is, as you have probably now realised, an infantry-heavy grouping. The battalion has detached one company plus one 81mm mortar section (and Milan, of which more later) and has received an armoured squadron; it has then used the resulting mix to form four combat teams. 1st CT is armour-heavy, with two tank troops and one infantry platoon and will be commanded by squadron HQ; 2nd CT is infantry-heavy, consisting of a 'short' rifle company (one platoon having been sent to 1st CT) and a troop of tanks; 3rd CT is a full rifle company plus a tank troop; and 4th CT is virtually a 'pure' rifle company. Each team also has a section (2 vehicles) from the divisional anti-tank battery, RA, armed with Swingfire ATGW mounted on FV 438 – a modified version of the FV 432 APC. The battalion's integral 81mm mortar platoon, organised in four sections of two mortars, has detached one section with the 'not shown' company and has deployed the remaining three to CTs 1, 2 and 3 (remember that for game purposes on-board artillery/mortar sections are shown as one-step units; this does not affect their fire-CF).

Along with Battlegroup (battalion) HQ appears the attached troop of the Close Recce Squadron, in four sections of two vehicles each. Oh yes, and the Roland. Heaven and **SPI** know what the Roland is doing there: quite apart from the fact that the British Army doesn't use it – our own Rapier is just as good, in fact probably better – air defence regiments RA are under Corps command and would be most unlikely to be parcelled out to BGs. They have other roles. Air defence at BG level is provided by Blowpipe detachments of the divisional AD battery, RA; there is no fixed scale but a likely attachment would be one section of

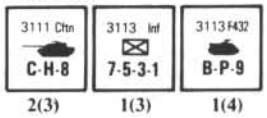
BRITISH

THIRD BATTLEGROUP

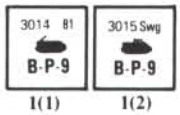
Battlegroup Assets *(Independent Command)*



First Team

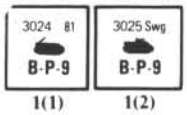


Team Assets *(Independent Command)*



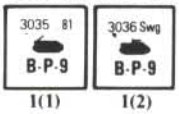
Second Team

Team Assets *(Independent Command)*



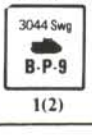
Third Team

Team Assets *(Independent Command)*



Fourth Team

Team Assets *(Independent Command)*



five launchers. This is not shown as such but is satisfactorily represented by the Missile-2 AD capability of the HQ unit.

The general organisation thus depicted is accurate (Roland apart) and reflects the make-up of the British infantry battalion, the armoured squadron, and the divisional sub-units likely to be made available to an infantry-heavy BG. My sole comment at this level is that the Swingfire detachments would be unlikely to be allocated to CTs; their use and deployment would be decided by the BG commander through the medium of the battalion anti-tank platoon commander (who cooks up the anti-tank defence plan for the entire BG) and it is much more on the cards that the Swingfire detachments would simply be 'in location' and not 'under command' as far as CT commanders would be concerned. As they are Independent Command units in the game and can thus range freely, the actual likely situation has not been misrepresented.

Detailed Organisation of 'Third Battlegroup'

Close Recce Troop: That mix of Scorpion and Scimitar is incorrect, I fear. The Close Recce Squadron consists of five troops each of eight Scimitar tracked recce vehicles (to call them light tanks is liable to arouse quiet laughter in military circles): the Scorpions are to be found in the Medium Recce Squadrons of the armoured recce regiment and will be firmly under divisional control. So read each counter as Scimitar, two steps to the counter; this sells you short on armament but I will be coming to this later.

Armoured Squadron: We are also being sold short here. Each troop is depicted as having three steps (i.e.three tanks). Actually a British armoured squadron consists of four troops, two of four tanks and two of three. Furthermore each armoured regiment holds enough extra tanks in preservation to increase the number of operational tanks to four per troop on mobilization, the extra crews coming from recalled Regular Army Reservists. Taking these factors into account, (1) increase any two troops to four tanks each – these would probably but not necessarily, be in CT 1, the armour-heavy CT; (2) if mobilization is deemed to have taken place prior to the outbreak of hostilities, increase *all* troops to four tanks.

Armament

Chieftain Turret MG: The Chieftain tank includes an externally – mounted 7.62mm machine gun on the commander's cupola. The Vehicle Unit Data (UK) table on Page 34 of the **Red Star/White Star** Exclusive Rules pamphlet should include the following; Weapons Systems – Tur MG*; Air Defence – Gun 3*

Stabilised Main Armament: (This section is applicable to certain tanks other than Chieftain). British tanks have had stabilised main armament since about 1950, enabling the main gun (and the co-ax MG) to be held trained on a target while the tank is moving; this enables accurate fire to be delivered by a moving tank and would convey a particular advantage when using Short Halt fire. I can vouch for this: I have seen Centurion tanks demonstrating fire on the move and regularly hitting their target and remember vividly seeing as long ago as 1953 a Centurion doing its 'party piece' at the School of Infantry by turning round and round on its axis, one track locked, while turret and gun stood still, held on an unchanging line of sight.

The following tanks should be deemed to have stabilised main armament: UK, Chieftain; US, M60A3; W German, Leopard; Israeli (Suez/ Golan), Centurion. These are able to fire while on the move and have an advantageous modifier when using Short Halt (see box)

Rarden Cannon: The Scimitar tracked recce vehicle is armed with a Rarden cannon which is, in my opinion, much under-rated in MW2: its inclusion under the general classification of Medium Main Gun 3 does not reflect its capabilities. The Rarden was specially designed to be employed against APCs and other lightly-armoured vehicles. It is a 30mm gun with a high muzzle velocity (and therefore flat trajectory), the ammunition for which includes armour-piercing (AP) shot, AP explosive and AP incendiary tracer. It is effective up to 1500 metres (7 hexes) but the tracer burns out at 1100m (5 hexes). The Rarden is normally fired as a semi-automatic cannon – it is clip-fed – but automatic fire of up to six rounds at a time can be used if required.

The combination of flat trajectory, semi-automatic fire, and a proportion of tracer available for inclusion in each clip makes the Rarden a very accurate weapon and the types of ammunition used guarantee highly satisfactory results against enemy APCs. Yet as a Medium Main gun 3 firing at a BMP halted in the open at 0-1 hexes (from very close range up to 300m) it has an attack strength of just 3: assuming that two vehicles are firing together this gives exactly 50% chance of a hit (not a first-fire hit, just *a* hit) against a BMP standing in the open 100m away! At 2 hexes (400m) this chance goes down to 25% and over 3 hexes (600m) fire is prohibited!!

A letter to **SPI** about various aspects of **MW2** remained long unanswered but I have since been in contact with Stephen Donaldson, then with OSG, who was one of the developers; he told me that he has never even heard of the Rarden and says, "I suggest that you do the evaluation". That is a problem as I am no designer. As a Main Gun 3 the weapon is being sold short but simply to upgrade it to Main Gun 1 or 2 would exaggerate its effectiveness against Hard targets. My simple solution: Rarden counts as Main Gun 2 with the following provisos (1) Fire against 'A' class targets is resolved on the 'B' column of Table (10.52) (2) When firing at a Hard target the -3 Loss Modifier of a Medium Main Gun 3 still applies (see Table 12.3).

This still tends to fall short of Rarden's capabilities but not nearly so much; nor can I be accused of *exaggerating* those capabilities.

Infantry Anti-Tank Capabilities: The infantry Data Table indicates that a UK mechanised infantry platoon may be armed with *either* the Milan ATGW *or* the Carl Gustav shoulder-controlled 84mm anti-tank gun. The notes stress that these are what is *available* and that the scenario notes will specify which is carried.

This is an incorrect rendering of the armament actually available. The Milan is operated by the battalion anti-tank platoon, which can deploy four sections each of two detachments, each detachment having two firing posts (i.e. launchers); but the counter-mix fails to provide these detachments, each of which should be shown as an infantry ATGW detachment complete with APC. Furthermore the mechanised infantry platoon is equipped with *three* Carl Gustavs, *plus* LAW.

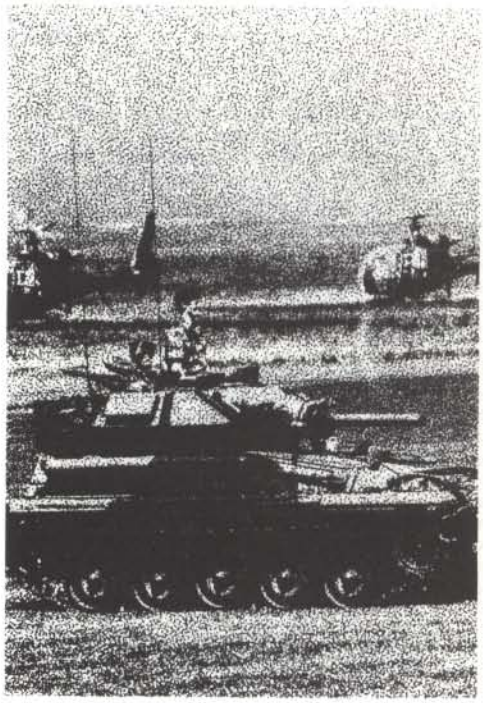
The best way round this misrepresentation is as follows;

(1) Milan will frequently be deployed on the scale of one section per infantry-heavy combat team. Therefore in 'Third BG' teams 2, 3 and 4 have a Milan section with them.

(2) Designate two platoons in each team as having a Milan detachment with them; each such platoon can fire Milan as a two-step weapon. Loss of one step from the platoon does not affect Milan capability but on the loss of a second step Milan goes down to one step; when the platoon loses its third step the Milan detachment is eliminated too.

(3) Milan is *always* fired separately from the platoon's own weapon systems and in addition to them.

(4) All mech platoons always have Carl Gustav and LAW and fire these in the normal way.



Vehicle Profiles

'B' Class Vehicles A fairly important point on which I remarked in my profile of this game is the fact that Soviet tanks in defilade receive a -1 modifier on the Loss Modification Table, as opposed to -2 for all other tanks. This reflects the fact, proven in combat, that because of the very small angle of depression of their main guns – above 3 degrees – (the penalty for having such low turrets) Soviet tanks cannot make as effective use of defilade positions as can tanks which can depress their guns farther; this puts them at a disadvantage in tank-to-tank fighting.

Unfortunately the modifier which penalises Soviet tanks, all of which have a 'B' profile, applies equally to *all* other 'B' vehicles, a category which includes all British APCs and TRVs and most West German ones, even though these most certainly do not suffer from the Soviet problem; this can produce some difficult situations for the NATO player in scenarios which do not include US units. The simple, sensible and justifiable solution is simply this: loss modifier of -1 in defilade applies only to Soviet tanks and all other vehicles receive the standard -2 modifier.

Add new Case (31.0) to **Mech War 2 Standard Rules** booklet as follows;

(31.0) Stabilised Main Armament
General Rule:
The following tanks have stabilised main armament and are able to fire while on the move as well as having an advantage when using Short Halt fire; UK Chieftain, US M60A3, W German Leopard, Israeli Centurion.

Procedure:
Tank units of the above types with a Bound command may fire while on the move at the owning player's option. Fire combat is resolved at any time during movement.

(31.1) Units firing on the move may fire their main gun and/or coaxially mounted MG at any time during movement. Each system may be fired once only.

(31.2) Fire on the move is at the owning player's option and need not be plotted in advance. To perform fire on the move the owning player simply stops movement of the unit counter, resolves fire in the normal way, and continues movement, to the limit of the unit's MF if desired.

(31.3) Units defending against fire on the move receive a Loss Modification of -2 on their Loss Modification die rolls.

(31.4) Units which fire on the move may not fire the same system again during the movement phase in which fire on the move was performed.

(31.5) Units with stabilised main armament also fire at an advantage when using Short Halt fire (Case 21.0). Enemy units defending against them receive a Short Halt modifier of only -1 of their Loss Modification die roll.

"You take the high ones and I'll take the low ones ..." Curiouser and curiouser, study of the counters made it plain that US vehicles had no such troubles over defilade as all the APCs, which are variants of the M113, are classed 'A'. Thus, it would appear, they have a lower profile than the British FV432; which is odd, very odd, because the height of the FV432 is 6'2" whereas that of the M113 is given (The US War Machine) as 8' 2". Even allowing for the fact that this figure includes the pintle-mounted machine gun the hull of the vehicle is obviously higher than that of its British counterpart, as comparisons of photographs of the two vehicles testify.

To cut a long story short I have done a fair amount of comparison of vehicle heights with their given profiles, with the aid of the data given in 'The Armed Forces of the United Kingdom' (David and Charles), 'The US War Machine' (Salamander), and 'Modern Soviet Armour' (Arms and Armour Press). I had intended to compile a table wherewith to decorate this article and to impress you with my diligence and erudition, but have decided to spare you this opus. Suffice it to say that the following rough yardstick seems to apply.

Height	'Game' Profile
Up to 6'6"	A
6'6" – 8'6"	B
8'6" – 9'6"	C
9'6" and up	D
Big 'funnies'	E

On this rating, I suggest that UK APCs are redesignated 'A' vehicles, except for the Swingfire units, and US APCs as 'B's. I really do suspect that there was a bit of fudging over US vehicle profiles (O, Patriotism, what crimes are committed in thy name!) although the tanks are fairly rendered as 'D' vehicles (the M-60 is 10'8" high), especially as the bigger US M113 was depicted as having a lesser profile than the FV432!

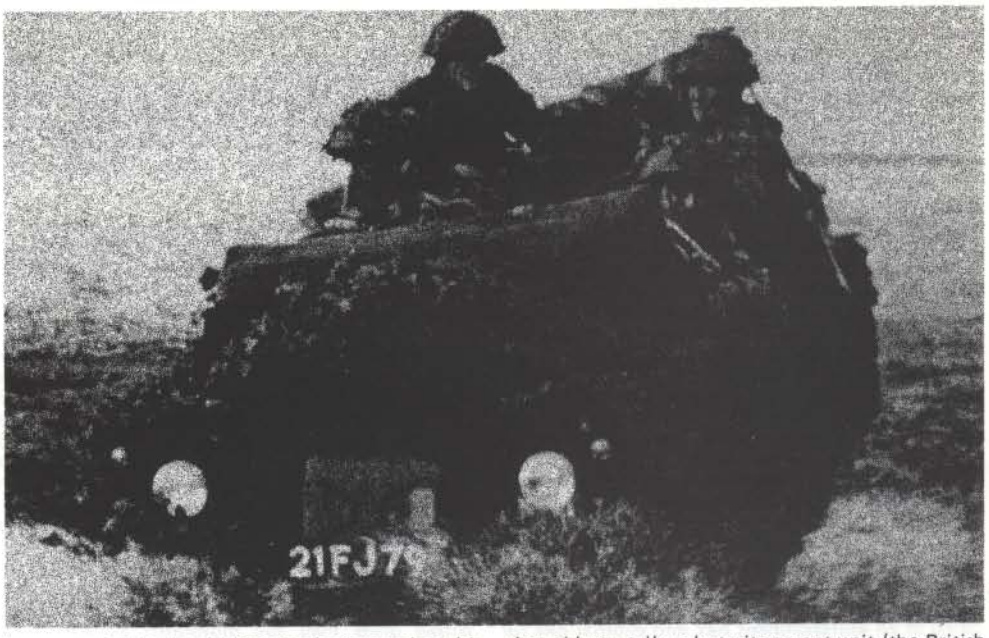
Chemical Warfare

I said in my profile that I found some aspects of the chemical warfare rules puzzling. In particular I could not understand why APCs in Chemical Protection State 3 (fully protected) could not dismount their infantry; and interrogation of friends in my regiment, now in BAOR, showed that there is no obstacle to, or doctrine forbidding, so dismounting – you just open the doors and get out. "Of course if you do it in a gas-cloud you'll have to decontaminate the inside of the vehicle afterwards, but that's your rough luck" was the general verdict.

Since then Stephen Donaldson has produced information which helps clarify the CP rules and which also indicates a misconception made when these rules were formulated. For personnel, CP1 is totally unprotected, CP2 is 'suited-up' but not masked, and CP3 is 'suited-up', masked, the lot. For vehicles, CP1 means open ports and hatches whereas CP3 (no CP2 for APCs, remember) is closed-down and over-pressure system operating (i.e. air pressure inside the vehicle is higher than ouside).

All well so far and a fair simulation of real conditions and practices. However it also appears that when the rules were written it was not conceived that men in a fully-protected APC would go to the extra inconvenience of wearing CP suits. "APCs are extremely crowded", wrote Stephen, "and I find it hard to picture everyone getting into suits when riding buttoned-down". He is right on both counts but the fact is that if there is a chemical threat you already have your Noddy suit on and you stay in it – your section's APC is not a mobile changing room! This is why exercises in BAOR regularly include CW phases when everyone is 'suited-up' for periods of up to 48 hours or even longer; it is also the reason why means of making full CP gear less arduous to wear are constantly being sought – a new and better design of CP suit is already being issued to British troops and some other NATO countries are buying it from us.

I consider, therefore, that that part of Rule 106.11 which forbids the mounting and dismounting of infantry into and from vehicles in CP3 is best ignored as it is based on a misconception and does not square with actual practice. In addition that part of Rule 103.33 which says that infantry may change from CP2 to CP3 only when in the same



hex as a vehicle should likewise be ignored as this action represents the donning of respirators and special gloves (if the latter are not already being worn), both items carried on the man as part of his personal equipment.

Whether or not TOW would still be fired by US units during a chemical attack is outwith my knowledge but it is as well to point out that the BMP's Sagger system cannot be reloaded while the vehicle is closed down, to place a fresh missile on the launch rail requires the gunner to open up and to expose the upper half of his body. Indeed a suppressed BMP would be unable to reload for the same reason. Neither of these disadvantages of the BMP-mounted Sagger system are mentioned in the Soviet Vehicle Data; perhaps you may wish to incorporate them.

Artillery Spotting and Fire Control

At the risk of boring you with technical details, here is how one actually spots for artillery. (1) Identify the location of the target on your map as accurately as possible and note the grid-reference (2) Take a compass bearing on the target and convert it from a magnetic to a grid bearing. This bearing becomes the Observer/Target (OT) Line. (3) Note the height of the target above sea-level. (4) Pass this information direct to the gun position. (5) The battery now ranges on the target with a single gun while you, the spotter STAY PUT and correct the fall of shot in relation to the OT line; this last is essential as, although it is immaterial to the gunners to know where the spotter is, it is vital that the OT line remains constant. For example if the OT line is at 90 degrees to the line of fire, "Up 200" from you would be "Left 200" to the Gun Position Officer. (6) Once the ranging gun is spot on give the gun position "On Target"; the target is now registered and can either be engaged there and then or noted as an "on call" target – the gunners have the data they need and until the battery changes its location can engage that target, at will, with full accuracy.

However this procedure requires the spotter to be able to talk direct to the gun position on the artillery radio net; as a result spotting is normally done by the battery commander of the battery in direct support of the battlegroup or by one of the three battery observation posts (OPs) – the commander and the OPs are 'up front' with the battlegroup, usually deployed to combat team HQs. 'Other arms' officers receive practical training in artillery spotting but this is envisaged as an emergency procedure if the OP personnel have been incapacitated, and still requires one to have access to the OP radio; I stress that there is no direct link between the battlegroup's own radio net and that of the gunners, nor would this be practicable as too many stations on one net results in Babel.

That is the system generally used by NATO armies and it means that artillery spotting cannot be done just like that by anyone who has a radio and who can see the enemy. The Soviet system is less flexible still, each battery having only *one* OP and that able to talk only to its parent unit (the British OP can 'flick' to the artillery regimental net if necessary) – see the article 'Soviet Artillery' in **S&T 78.** As a result Soviet artillery plotting is much more rigid than that of NATO, a known weakness: if a battalion concentration comes down in the wrong place it cannot be switched as easily as a NATO concentration.

Yet in **MW2** not only can any unit spot for off-board artillery (OBA) but the Soviet artillery is just as flexible as that of NATO in addition to being available in Soviet quantity! May I suggest the following amendments;

(1) Spotting for OBA can be done only by any HQ unit or by a unit of a company or company-equivalent; this cuts out the use of motorcyclists, spare recce vehicles or even unemployed engineer or airdefence units as instant OPs. (I understand that a ruling on these lines has been included in **Cityfight).**

(2) Spotting units must have an overwatch command in order to be able to spot; remember the OT Line!

(3) Soviet OBA fire, once it impacts on a target, cannot be switched (although it may be corrected in the usual way) until the next gameturn but one. In other words an OBA concentration plotted on, say, Turn 3 will impact on Turn 4 *and must continue to impact on Turn 5;* even if replotted on Turn 4 it cannot be switched before Turn 6.

These additions would be a better reflection of the deployment of available artillery OPs with companies/combat teams and would also do something to reflect the greater rigidity of Soviet fire control. They are contrived rulings, of course, but at least they do something to counter the present instant-thunderbolt use of artillery as permitted by the rules and also tend to diminish the present disconcerting effects of giving the Soviet player Soviet gun-density linked to NATO control systems.

Epilogue

This article was conceived solely as a dissertation on the organisation of the British battlegroup in 'MW2' and on some ways of making the representation more accurate as regards organisation and firepower, especially anti-tank firepower. In the writing it acquired a few appendages of more general application, but I hope that these prove to be a bonus rather than a distraction.