GO, BID THE SOLDIERS SHOOT

MECHWAR 2

A PROFILE BY D.I.A. MACK

Mech War 2, SPI's rather uninspired name for their latest tactical armoured/mechanised game, has developed from **Mech War '77** via **October War** and **Panzer Battles**, ideas and systems from both of which are used and improved upon still further. In addition it is two distinct games in one, **Red Star/White Star '79** (why that old title?) on the theme of combat between NATO and Warsaw Pact units in Germany in the 1980s and **Suez to Golan**, a game of the Arab/Israeli War of 1973, covering, as its name implies, operations on the Suez and Golan fronts. Both these games are also available as separate boxed games in their own right: I shall have more to say about this later.
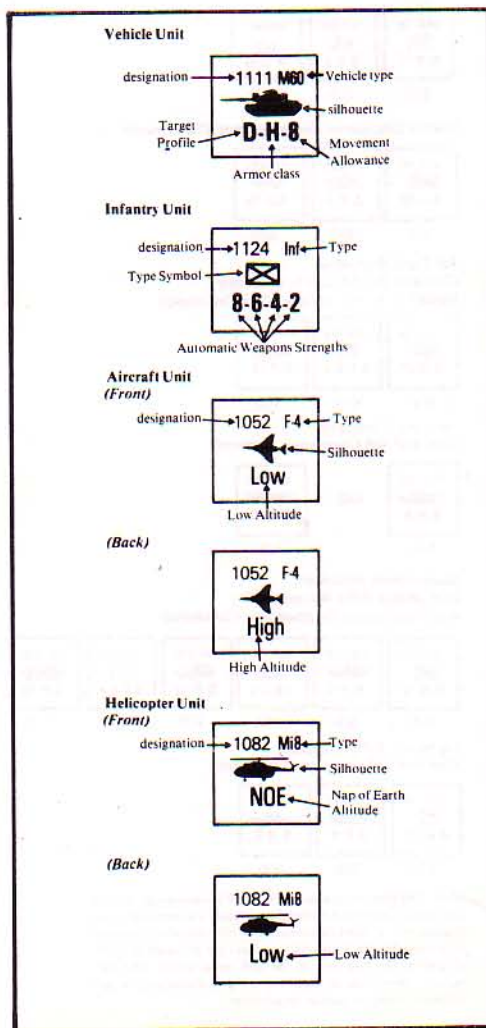
The Game in Outline

To describe the system briefly, it uses platoon or section sized unit counters grouped into battalions with a company level of command in between: each player will usually find himself as a battalion (or equivalent) commander, sometimes as a NATO brigadier or Warsaw Pact regimental commander; there are good opportunities for multi-player organisation, as the rules point out, when each side fields more than one battalion. Scale is 200 metres/hex and each turn represents 5 minutes of 'real' time.

Play is controlled by a simultaneous system and each turn is divided into several different phases with much player interaction; the concept of separate player-turns is quite gone, each game turn representing (rather well) the passage of five minutes with all the activity which takes place therein. Plotting, that bane of "si-move" systems, is much simplified because, first, it is to the company and not the individual platoon that one gives commands and, secondly, there is no differentiation (in plotting terms) between different types of fire, nor do targets (other than artillery targets) have to be specified in advance. Fire combat turns on weapons systems and their likely effects against targets of different types: the unit counters, other than dismounted infantry platoons, bear neither attack nor defence factors, all the necessary data being shown in separate tables.

Losses are by steps, each a vehicle for vehicular units or (roughly) a section for dismounted infantry. Accumulation of losses can result in company or battalion morale cracking, necessitating rallying by the battalion HQ; gone, gone, is the infuriating 'Panic by Hexes' of 'Mech War 77'.

About a dozen scenarios each are provided for 'Red Star/White Star (RSWS) and 'Suez to Golan' (S/G), increasing in complexity as optional rules and extras are 'plugged in'; The scenarios are described as 'specimen recipes' in the Players' Notes and planning one's own scenarios is encouraged — a considerable amount of advice on how to do so is included.

Vehicle Unit

designation → 1111 M60 ← Vehicle type
← silhouette
Target Profile → **D-H-8** → Movement Allowance
Armor class

Infantry Unit

designation → 1124 Inf ← Type
Type Symbol →
8-6-4-2
Automatic Weapons Strengths

Aircraft Unit
(Front)

designation → 1052 F-4 ← Type
← Silhouette
Low
Low Altitude

(Back)

1052 F-4
High
High Altitude

Helicopter Unit
(Front)

designation → 1082 Mi8 ← Type
← Silhouette
NOE → Nap of Earth Altitude

(Back)

1082 Mi8
Low
Low Altitude

Game Components

MW2 comes packed in the now-standard deep box used for larger games, complete with three of those lidless counter-trays which require either that the owner devises ingenious methods of secure lidding or that he carries the game around as though it were a tray of Waterford crystal. The box-lid displays that which does NOT appear in the counter-mix, namely the US XM-1 main battle tank, currently under development.

There are four maps. Two are part of the RSWS components and show 'typical' German countryside rather than the 'actual' terrain of the MW77 map: one has more open terrain than the other and both can be joined together in four combinations — two broad and deep, two long and comparatively narrow. The two S/G maps are separate, one showing part of the Suez Canal, desert and then rough country stretching eastward towards Tasa, the other part of the Golan front around Meram Golan. Coloured contouring represents five levels from 0 (lowest) to 4 (highest) and terrain is 'blotched' on: the heavy and light woods look well, Rough-1 Terrain is not over-intrusive but Rough-2 looks like the efforts of a dedicated saboteur with a paint-brush. The RSWS maps have largely escaped his assaults but the S/G sheets have not and look as though they have contracted some vile disease, making them ugly to look at and often unclear as well. The colour contouring depicts higher ground very well and 'blocking terrain' is easily read as a result. Another good touch is that the rivers (RSWS) can be 'small' 'medium' or 'large' according to the scenario and the load-bearing capacity of the bridges also varies from one scenario to another.

Unit counter-sheets come at one each for both component games and there are two sheets of 'neutral' counters showing bridges, mines, current unit strengths, chemical and nuclear strikes (RSWS only), and various status markers such as 'In column'or ' Suppressed'. Unit counters display the appropriate vehicle silhouette for all armoured fighting vehicles from tanks to APCs and recce vehicles, a missile symbol for all dismounted anti-tank guided weapon (ATGW) sections and the

usual infantry symbol for dismounted infantry platoons. As in 'Mech War 77' the mortar sections show the silhouette of the carrying vehicle rather than a mortar symbol; this I always find annoying as the vehicle is only a modified form the standard APC and is thus not easily distinguished at a glance.

The RSWS counter sheet provides US, West German and British forces on one hand, Soviet on the other (but you can turn them into Poles, East Germans or whatever); what is more, the counter-mix is organised to equip the US forces with M60A or M60B tanks (the latter carry the Shillelagh ATGW) and the Soviets with T-62 or T-72. In S/G the Israelis can have either M60A1s or Centurions, the Egyptians and Syrians T-55 or T-62 tanks.

Another step forward on the design side is that the Exclusive Rules book for each game displays the counter-mixes for various types of unit; examples are a US armoured battle-group in both present and projected organisations, a West German panzer battalion — again in present and projected form — a British infantry-heavy battle-group, Israeli tank battalions in 'early' and 'late' Yom Kippur organisations, a Soviet tank regiment and motor rifle regiment, and Egyptian/Syrian tank and infantry brigades and battalions. Strength counters under the unit counters take care of variations in small unit strenghs (e.g. present US tank platoon has 5 tanks, projected has 3) or can reflect losses suffered in a previous action and not yet made good. Each scenario specifies just which units are taking part; thus a particular scenario may require the Soviet player to field the 1st Motor Rifle Regiment with the T-62 equipped 2nd Tank Battalion in support — turn up Page 31 in the RSWS Exclusive Rules and there they are, all laid out in pretty pictures.

The organisations are very accurate, though not 100% so in some instances — including the British battle-group. More of that later. Suffice it to say that one plays scenarios with accurate represent-ations of actual organisations, not the vague mixes of 'Panzerblitz' nor the approximate simulations of MW77; what is more, a clear numbering system (of a type often advocated by Redmond Simonsen) makes it quite clear to which company and batt-alion each sub-unit belongs. Example: a tank platoon with the serial number 1231 is (reading right to left) No 1 Platoon of No 3 Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Tank Regiment — or 1st Brigade, according to whether your shirt is red or blue.

Three rulebooks come with MW2. One is the Standard Rules for RSWS and S/G, covering every-thing common to both games. Rules 1-18 are the basics and cover control, sequence, movement, combat, artillery fire, observation and morale. 19-30 are Advanced Rules dealing with 'build-on' extras such as minefields, helicopters and aircraft (and how to shoot them down!), night operations, river crossings, electronic warfare (whew!), nuclear weapons and some minor but neat little options such as Short Halt, Fire-and-move, Ammo Depletion and Positions of Advantage. Ammo Depletion is a must, it really is, as I shall demonstrate later, and Short Halt and F-and-M are almost equally so.

The Exclusive Rules pamphlets, one for each game, contain special rules affecting that theatre of operations: not very much more for S/G but quite a number for RSWS because of variable weather, chemical warfare and nuclear strikes. Both games have rules on doctrine which affect formations and tactical handling, especially in the case of the rather rigid Soviets and Soviet-trained Egyptians and Syrians: I consider it especially important that the Soviet player in RSWS fully understands the restrictions imposed on him — "Comrade, if I catch you detaching your tank platoons from your rifle companies just once more you'll be on the next train to Gorky" — for what it's all about is a struggle between doctrines and methods as much as between military units and equipments. The bulk of both Exclusive Rules pamphlets is taken up with scenarios and with the large quantity of tables. These last include complete data on sub-unit capabilities; for example a T-72 tank has laser sighting for its main gun, two machine-guns, one of which cannot be used if the tank is 'buttoned up', it can snorkel across certain types of river, it has built-in chemical protection, has an infra-red search-light and can use machine gun and light SAM (Missile 4) against aircraft — provided, again, that it is not 'buttoned up'.

Game System

As I have already said, each game turn is a simu-lation of activities packed into five minutes of real time, rather than simply two player-turns: the sequence of phases seems complicated at first but is soon understood. To simplify, each player brings down artillery fire once and also plots it for the next turn, has two separate phases in which to plot commands for his units (commands being binding until the next Command phase), and two more separate phases in which units can either move if they have a Bound command or fire if they have an Overwatch command — but Short Halt and Fire-and-Move allow moving units to snap-shoot at the sacrifice of half their MP for that phase. The two movement phases have the effect of splitting movement, ensuring that there can be no flick-of-an-eyelid dashes across the open in the style of 'Panzerblitz', and Overwatching units can fire a given weapons system either at moving enemy (Opportunity Fire) or once all enemy movement has ceased (Final Fire), according to which the owning player deems to be more advantageous.

Automatic weapons apart, ground units are armed with Heavy Main Gun (tanks), Medium Main Gun (recce vehicles, some APC, certain shoulder-controlled anti-tank weapons), and, last but not least, ATGW. In all instances the attack factor is determined from tables — printed factors on counters have no place in MW2, other than for infantry automatic weapons — and this, cross-referenced with the number of vehicles in the firing unit, or steps in dismounted ATGW teams, gives a hit probability on a two-die CRT. Heavy Main Guns have their attack factor determined by a combination of range, the type of sighting mech-anism available, and the profile of the target — 'A' is the most difficult to hit, 'E' the easiest — an intriguing and informative system. Medium Main Guns use a simpler table, using only range, class of gun and target profile.

ATGW have very constant factors up to the maxi-mum range but are less effective or even unusable at close ranges. A realistic rule governing their use is that if an ATGW unit fires it can itself be fired on and the effect of this return fire determined immediately if from a gun; that is, the ATGW unit is liable to be hit before its missiles reach their target.

Once we have got the 'hit probability' come the modifiers, some enhancing the chances of a hit, others diminishing them, all cumulative. A single die-roll is modified, the higher the figure, the worse for the target; enhancing factors include good-quality troops in the firing unit, target in column formation, or crossing a river, or silhouetted; diminishing factors include moving targets, units in defilade, firing unit suppressed or using Short Halt or Fire-and-Move fire, and even firing unit protected against chemical warfare (well, try doing a fiddly job while wearing a gas-mask and gloves). The terr-ain in which the target is also contributes its modifier. One clever dodge which deserves com-ment is a modifier which prevents Medium Main Guns from knocking out tanks too easily while underlining their role as anti-APC weapons.

The Vehicle Loss Modification Table may then yield a No Change result (original hit probability confirmed) or may reduce or increase the number of hits; its various columns allow for hard, protected and light targets and also for tanks equipped with Chobham armour. It all sounds like the old 'saving throws' of early miniatures' rules but, believe me, it's all very sensible and leads to more realistic results than other games of this genre.

Artillery fire is done simply and quite well, with-out the complications of the MW77 system. Most artillery is off-board, its fire plotted once per game-turn, one turn in advance; fire will impact with various degrees of initial accuracy, depending on the distance from spotter to target, but, dependant

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SOVIET UNION

1st TANK REGIMENT
Regimental Assets *(Independent Command)*

1000 Rg HQ A-H-11	1031 ZSU B-L-7	1033 SA 9 A-L-15
1(1)	2(2)	1(4)

Recon Company *(Independent Command)*

1011 MC A-•-30	1013 BMP A-P-9	1021 BR1 A-L-15
1(3)	1(3)	2(2)

1st Tank Battalion
(2nd and 3rd Battalions identical)
Battalion Assets *(Independent Command)*

1100 Bn HQ A-H-11	1051 Eng 6-1-0-•	10518 T60 B-P-13
1(1)	1(3)	1(3)

1st Tank Company
(2nd and 3rd Companies identical)

1111 T62 B-H-8	OR	1111 T72 B-H-11
3(3)		3(3)

Sometimes attached ...
2nd Motor Rifle Battalion
Battalion Assets *(Independent Command)*

1200 Bn HQ A-H-11	1061 120 B-P-7	1041 ATG 1-0-•-•	10418 T60 B-P-13	1051 Eng 6-1-0-•	10518 T60 B-P-13
1(1)	2(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(3)	1(3)

1st Motor Rifle Company
(2nd and 3rd Companies identical)

1211 Inf 6-4-2-1	1211 BMP A-P-9	1214 T62 B-H-8
3(3)	3(3)	1(4)

Note: T62 Platoon is attached to BMP Company for morale purposes. Only two 120mm mortar units are included in the countermix. If more than one motor rifle battalion is present in a scenario, the "missing" mortars are assumed to be in-cluded in the HQ unit of the additional motor rifle bat-talions. When one of these HQ units is eliminated, it per-manently loses its mortar capabilities.

UNITED STATES

1st ARMOR HEAVY TASK FORCE *(Current)*
Battalion Assets *(Independent Command)*

1100 Bn HQ A-H-11	1012 42" A-P-11	1013 81 A-P-11	1071 ATG 2-1-0-•	1071M113 A-P-11	1041 AA A-L-15
1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	2(2)	2(2)	1(5)

4th Mechanized Infantry Company *(Current)*

1141 Inf 7-5-3-1	1141 M113 A-P-11
3(3)	3(3)

Company Assets *(Independent Command)*

1013 81 A-P-11	1021 M150 A-P-11
1(1)	1(2)

5th Tank Company *(Current)*
(6th Company identical)

1151 M60 D-H-8	OR	1151 M60 A2 D-H-8	OR	1151 M60 D-H-8
3(5)		3(5)		3(5)

SYRIAN UNITS

1st ARMORED BRIGADE
Brigade Assets *(Independent Command)*

1000 Bde HQ A-H-11	1011 PT76 A-P-7	1013 BR1 A-L-15	1021 ZSU B-L-7
1(1)	2(4)	1(4)	5(2)

1st TANK BATTALION
(2nd and 3rd Battalions identical)
Battalion Assets *(Independent Command)*

1100 Bn HQ A-H-11
1(1)

1st Tank Company
(2nd and 3rd Companies identical)

1111 T55 B-H-8	OR	1111 T62 B-H-8
3(3)		3(3)

on the spotter staying put and spotting, correction of impact is simulated by a shift to the 'Fire for Effect' column of the spotting table in subsequent turns. This gives a 100% chance of a hit in the target hex and a high probability of being On Target, i.e. no 'scatter' in the fire-pattern: thus, as in real life, if shells start to drop near you it's time to clear out or to put on a brave smile, as "They" will be finding the range quite soon. A quibble by me is that 'best' spotting range extends up to 20 hexes — 4000 metres or 2½ miles; extremely far for a young gentleman equipped with the 'other arms' spotter's tools, namely a map, a pair of binoculars and a prismatic compass — a much shorter 'best' distance would be more realistic.

Size of 'beaten zone' is determined by the size of the artillery/mortar unit: section, one hex; battery, three; battalion, seven. I believe these last two to be over-generous. A long-standing yardstick for infantry officers is that one battery beats a zone about the size of a football field and 'American and Soviet Artillery Organisation' (FYEO, S&T 70) gives a beaten zone of 100 x 250 metres for a six-gun battery of 155mm howitzers — and that, I infer from the context, at long range, thus increasing the size of the beaten zone. Football field or 100 x 250m, it amounts to *one* hex, not a triangle of three. Nor can I accept a battalion of 18 guns beating a circle some 600 metres in diameter and I doubt if any gunner would consider that a satisfactory battalion/regimental concentration: the Royal Regiment of Artillery is well-used to base mockery but gets *very* annoyed if referred to as the 'Royal Drop-Shorts'. While MW2 stresses (and rightly) the importance of artillery, I consider that it exaggerates that importance by reason of its generous spotting ranges and its over-sized beaten zones.

What's that you said? Yes, I am well aware that a battery of BM21s scatters its missiles over a wide area but MW2 makes no distinction between gun

and multiple rocket-launcher; perhaps it should have done instead of lumping the BM-21s under the 'light howitzer' designation.

Above the map thunder the aircraft, Migs, Tornadoes and the lovely, lovely, ugly tank-busting A-10, flying High (braving the SAMs) to spot targets and then diving to Low Altitude to strafe and also to let the AA guns have a go at them. Plotted like artillery, but three turns in advance and without having to be committed to strafe any particular hex, they can strike, turn away and strike again until either the opposition gets them at last or they expend their armament, which they do pretty quickly. Their cousins, the helicopters, zoom to and fro, nipping from behind ridges or woods to fire their ATGM, and going lickety-split across the map to the point of crisis. Very exciting!

Last but not least, the infantry with their automatic weapons and various anti-tank launchers can be very hard to flush out of a well-chosen position, and armoured vehicles will do well to give them a wide berth. The only way to deal quickly with dismounted infantry is to mount a Close Assault with one's own infantry, but one's artillery had better keep the defenders suppressed during the approach if the attacker is not to get a splendid bloody nose.
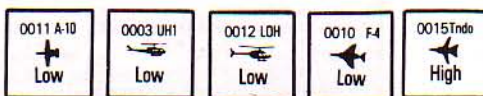
Some Good Points

There are some especially good points and clever dodges in **MW2**, all of which increase realism and which deserve special mention. The first concerns defiladed positions, meaning positions in which vehicles are hull-down and infantry are using the familiar duo, Cover from Fire and Cover from View. Briefly, a unit can go into defilade in *any* hex, a special marker going on top of it: writing of **'Firefight'** in **'Wargamer'** I complained that that game divided terrain into billiard-table and hogs-back, disregarding the fact that even open fields offer all sorts of little dips and rises in which one can hide, especially if some way off from the enemy. Well, **MW2** recognises this, to be in defilade means a favourable modifier on the die-roll when fired on, in addition to any modifier conveyed by the terrain. But if the firing unit is two or more height levels above *vehicle* targets then the latter lose all benefit of defilade; the doctrine of 'vital ground' is thus emphasised.

A clever wheeze which seems to have gone wrong is the simulation of the fact, proven in the Yom Kippur War, that Soviet-built tanks have such a small angle of depression of their main guns that they are at a disadvantage in many defilade positions and have to take up a more exposed stance in order to let the gun bear. The wheeze is that vehicles with a B profile (all Soviet tanks) receive a lesser modifier when in defilade; so far, so good. The gone-wrong bit is that the B classification is not confined to Soviet tanks, as one would expect; it includes *all* British vehicles other than tanks and many of the West German ones, despite the fact that these have no such problems with their armament. This seems to have been noted during playtesting and corrected to some extent — not *one* US vehicle is B-class, not even the M113 APC, which is about 14-18 inches higher than the British FV-432! So puzzled am I by this B-class business that I have written to SPI about it; in the interim my advice is that the disadvantage is applied to Soviet tanks *only* and not to B-profile vehicles in general.

Next comes ammo expenditure, an advanced (i.e. optional) rule but one which I beg you to use from the word 'Go'. All major weapons systems (guns, ATGW, aircraft) have an ammunition level ranging from 3 (full scale) to 0 (out of ammo) and start most scenarios at 3. *In addition* each weapons-system has an Ammunition Depletion number, given on the data sheet for that particular system and reflecting the likely rate at which its scale of ammunition is likely to be used up in combat. Every time the system is fired *one* die is rolled and if the resultant number is equal to or less than the AD number then the ammo level goes down 1. A main battle tank has an AD figure of 1 or 2 and is thus likely to fire a good many times before it runs out of ammunition. On the other hand the

Sagger ATGW system on a BMP has an AD factor of 5 and is therefore likely to expend all its missiles in three firings; which is consistent with the BMP's scale of not more than five missiles carried on the vehicle. Thus the BMP's role as anti-tank vehicle becomes much more realistic than in **'Firefight'** (in which it can fire ATGW for ever and ever) or even in **MW77** (in which it runs out of missiles on a roll of 1 or 2). All ATGW systems are under fairly severe restrictions as regards ammo expenditure compared with other weapons; this makes both sides none too ready to squib them away regardless.

The step-loss system, referred to earlier, first appeared in **'October War'** and was a great improvement on MW77's 'slaughter or Stun' CRT with it's results of either temporary disruption or total extinction of the target. It means that an attacking force is likely to keep moving forward on first suffering casualties, a more realistic likelihood. However a thus-depleted platoon will be at a disadvantage when it comes to returning fire; remember that the number of vehicles steps in the firing unit affects hit-probability.

Mounting losses will also affect morale at company level. Both sides normally start with a Morale Level of 0 (best). ML 1 has no effect, merely being an indication that morale has become brittle, ML 2 prevents the affected company from continuing the advance although it may continue to fire, and ML 3 makes retreat mandatory. Whenever a company suffers a loss it is rolled for on the Morale Table, the chances of a change for the worse increasing as casualties mount, and liable to be enhanced if more than one vehicle or step is lost at one blow.

Morale is restored by Rallying, a process in which battalion HQs play a vital role: likelihood of improving morale level by 1 on each attempt depends on the 'value' of the HQ in question: values stem from scenario rules tempered by die-roll and give NATO a slight edge on Warsaw Pact, Israel considerable edge on *her* enemies. All this involves more die-rolling but I think that you will agree that it is a long sight better and more realistic than the completely arbitrary Panic rules in **MW77** which decreed that even Marshal Ney would panic if he happened to be in Hex 1234 and you rolled a 4!

Into Battle

A part of my adult life has been spent in the study of the clash of mechanised forces and especially in speculation on what would actually happen on the ground should the balloon ever go up; to this day I am still not sure of the right technique for mounting the actual assault (the whites-of-their-eyes bit) on an enemy defended position, and to judge from a recent correspondence in the 'British Army Journal' I'm not alone. **'Mech War 2'** certainly brings out the tactical principles currently in use. Tanks are powerful but cannot operate alone in the face of the ATGW, both short and long range, available today. Guided weapons are powerful too and have the advantage over tank guns at ranges in excess of 2000 metres, but on the other hand they are liable to suppression by enemy fire — or more effective still — to blinding by smoke. Infantry in APCs need the protection of tanks when on the move — especially British and US infantry whose FV-432 and M113 APCs mount machine-guns only — yet they must remain mounted for as long as possible if they are to keep up with a mobile battle. Dismounted and in terrain which affords good cover they can be decidedly deadly to tanks, especially the Milan-equipped West German and British infantry; and it is only infantry which can winkle out enemy infantry — but with the help of other arms.

The need to move with 'one foot on the ground', i.e. with part of one's force halted and ready to cover the moving part, the folly of choosing fire positions which have a marvellous field of fire but which can themselves be seen for miles, the deployment of ATGW to cover approaches with interlocking flanking fire, fluid defence in depth rather than rigid dispositions, all these principles and practices apply in the game as much as they do on the ground. Moreover the interwoven phasing of each game-turn goes a long way to simulate the fluidity of mobile tactical warfare and gives the advantage to the tactical defensive — the opportunity to fire four times in each turn, provided that firing units have Overwatch commands. In both **RSWS**
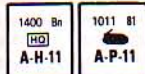
[10.3] MAIN GUN ANTI-VEHICLE COMBAT RESULTS TABLE

Nr. of Vehicles or Steps in Firing Unit — Attack Strength

One	0	*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	-	8	9		
Two	-	0	-	1	-	2	3	4	5	6	-	7	8	9
Three	-	0	-	1	-	2	3	-	4	-	5	6	7 8 9	
Four	-	0	-	1	-	2	-	3	-	4	-	5	6 7	- 8 9
Five	-	0	-	1	-	2	-	3	-	4	5	6	- 7	8 9

DICE	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
2	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	2	3	5			
3	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	1					
4	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				
5	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					
6	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	5			
7	-	-	-	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	3	4	3				
8	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	2	2	2	2	4	4	4						
9	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	2	2	2	4	3	4							
10	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	2	2	4	4	4							
11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	3	3	3	2	4						
12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	3	3	2	4								

\# = Number of vehicles lost, unmodified. Determine modifiers and proceed to Table 12.11.
– = No vehicles lost, unmodified.

[12.11] VEHICLE LOSS MODIFICATION TABLE

nr.	Armor Class			
	Chobham	Hard	Protected	Light
-3	-3	-3	-2	-1
-2 -1	-3	-2	-2	-1
0	-3	-1	-	-
1	-2	-1	-	-
2	-2	-	-	-
3-5	-1	-	-	-
6-8	-	-	-	-
9	+1	+1	+1	+1
10	+1	+1	+1	+2
11	+1	+2	+2	+2
12 or more	+2	+2	+3	+3

See Case 12.12 for explanation of results.

[10.51] HEAVY MAIN GUN ATTACK STRENGTH TABLE

Range in Hexes	A O S L	B O S L	C O S L	D O S L	E O S L	Target Class / Sighting System
0	8 8 9	8 8 9	8 8 9	9 9 9	9 9 9	
1	7 7 8	8 8 9	8 8 9	9 9 9	9 9 9	
2	7 7 8	8 8 9	8 8 9	8 8 9	8 8 9	
3-5	6 6 7	7 7 8	7 7 8	7 8 9	8 8 9	
6-7	3 4 5	4 5 6	4 5 6	5 6 8	6 7 8	
8-10	2 2 5	3 3 6	3 3 6	4 4 7	5 5 7	
11-15	0 1 4	2 2 5	3 3 5	3 3 6	3 4 7	
16-20	0 0 3	0 0 4	0 1 4	1 2 5	1 3 6	
21-25	P P O	P P 1	P P 2	P P 3	P P 4	
26 or more	P P P	P P P	P P P	P P P	P P P	

\# = Attack Strength; O = Optical sighting; S = Coincident Sighting; L = Laser Rangefinder; P = No attack permitted.

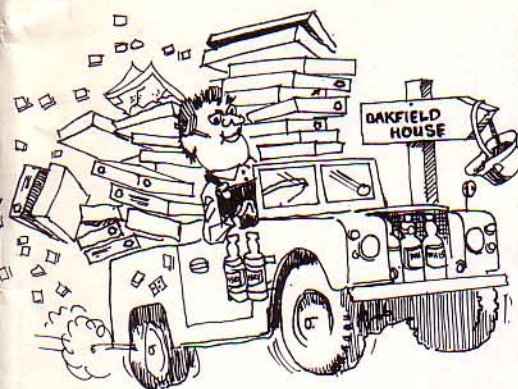## [11.41] PERSONAL ANTI-TANK ATTACK STRENGTH TABLE

Range in Hexes	Attack Rating R	B	A
0	5	3	2
1	3	1	1
2	1	P	P
3 or more	P	P	P

\# = Attack Strength; P = No attack permitted; R = PPG-7; B = 3.5" rocket launcher (bazooka), armburst, PZ4FF; A = LAW (Light Assault Weapon).

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and S/G, Soviet or Soviet-type mass assault and plentiful artillery cover is massed against greater NATO or Israeli flexibility; this is why I have said that the Soviet or Soviet-type player must fully understand the doctrine rules which affect him, and keep to them.

Although plotting is simplified the game can still be rather slowmoving, the more so when some of the main 'extras' are used. The multiplicity of charts and tables is one factor which tends to slow up procedure; when one tank platoon fires at another this involves the consultation of four tables and two die-rolls — three if the Ammo Depletion rule is being used — although one soon becomes familiar with the regularly-used tables. All tables are contained in the centre of each Exclusive Rules book and players might find it helpful to photocopy certain pages, cut them up and mount the tables in a logical order on a piece of cardboard as a ready-reference playing-aid.

In addition each player will need to make up a unit plot sheet, an artillery fire plot sheet and a unit status sheet before each game — rather a chore. However SPI do provide a full-page blank specimen status sheet in the RSWS Exclusive Rules, intended to be photocopied (once more I ask myself if they have copiers on every street-corner in the US of A).

But while sequence of play can be long-drawn-out it is emphatically NOT dull: the interwoven sequence keeps both players well-occupied and combat requires plenty of player inter-action and, moreover, things happen fast. In one game, involving a meeting engagement between two US task forces and two Soviet battalions, five turns saw the Soviet motor rifle battalion hurled into utter disarray while the tank battalion (the two companies still functioning, that is) gazed in helpless dismay from the hill whither they had withdrawn to avoid the hail of Shillelagh missiles from the US M60A2 tanks. One US tank company had taken a drubbing from the BMPs' Sagger missiles, but at the cost of near-total expenditure of the Saggers: as US fire had been concentrated on knocking out the motor rifle companies' tank platoons (deprive infantry of their tank protection — another principle) the BMPs were left virtually helpless.

Wot, no XM-1?

Failings there are in 'Mech War 2', despite unusually complete and comprehensive rules. In particular, tanks firing HE against infantry have the cards stacked against them: to begin with, they are restricted to a maximum range of 1000 metres (5 hexes) whereas the Chieftain's range, firing HE, is 8000 metres and one must presume that other tank main guns have a performance similar or not greatly inferior. Moreover the chance of even suppression of an infantry platoon is not as great as one would expect. In real life it is common practice for a troop of tanks to provide covering fire for an assault at ranges of up to 2000 metres: this means three or four 105mm or 120mm guns firing high explosive shells at a rate of up to 20 shells per gun per minute, something that would persuade the enemy to keep their heads down. I feel that the effect of close-support tank fire against an infantry position is played down.

However US tanks can fire the especially-effective Beehive round against infantry — or could fire it if there was a rule to cover its use. Exclusive Rule 102.3 refers us to the Beehive line on the anti-infantry table — and the Beehive line says 'See Case 102.5'. As Case 102.5 concerns the simulation of 5-vehicle platoons, this isn't much help; perhaps there has been a misprint and one should read 'Case 102.3' — which brings us to where we started. It's one of the few holes in the many rules but it's a frustrating one.

Rules for artillery spotting fail to specify whether or not the spotting unit must have an Overwatch command to do so. As it is impossible, using the available techniques, to spot for artillery fire in real life unless one is sitting still (a constant grid bearing from observer to target is crucial for plotting at the gun position) this ought to be the case and it is a 'house rule' which I have adopted in my playing. The generous ranges at which observers may spot have already been commented on.

I have referred to the provision of present and projected battalion organisations in the Tables of Organisation and to the fact that a picture of the US XM-1 main battle tank — the projected main battle tank for the 1980s — dominates the box-lid (it also features in advertisements published in S&T). But alas, there are no XM-1 counters in the game, nor data wherewith to fudge them. Perhaps the counter-mix prevented this but, if so, then perhaps the visuals should have featured the familiar M-60. On the subject of things to come I missed also the Precision Guided Munitions (which enable normal artillery to knock out armoured vehicles with great accuracy at long range), which Sir John Hackett deems to be generally available in 'The Third World War'.

S&T 72 has a FYEO article on the proposed reorganisation of the US Army in which the change from platoons of 5 tanks to those of 3 is discussed and from which discussion it would appear that the smaller platoon is likely to be more effective as a fighting unit. This is not reflected in RSWS; in any scenario offering the choice of present and future organisations to the US player he should go for the former every time; once the combat factor has been determined for a platoon the hit probability increases with the number of vehicles in it, making the 5-tank platoon one of the hardest-hitting units on the map! Game-system seems to have beaten combat simulation here.

The rules for chemical warfare are interesting and deal with chemicals, persistent and non-persistent, delivered by artillery and missiles and 'attacking' units which are engulfed, on a special CRT, the results of which can be reduced or even nullified by the degree of Chemical Protection (CP) previously adopted by the target units. It is the rather complicated rulings about CP which I found tricky and even incomprehensible; they seem to be based on two assumptions, first that training in CP is not as good as it could be in the US Army (probably true) and, second, that none of the other NATO countries are any better (not true). Both the British and West German armies take the threat very seriously and frequently have chemical protection suits worn for lengthy periods on exercises; modern British CP suits (the Noddy Suits) are very good indeed and an even better kind is now being taken into use, reducing the level of discomfort. The Russian ones are far inferior and much more productive of fatigue and discomfort, yet this is not reflected in the game. I have taken up the question of relative degrees of CP as simulated in the game direct with SPI and will not comment further at this stage. I would seriously advise players using scenarios in which only the Soviet side can use chemicals to consider ruling that Soviet units must enter a certain degree of CP; if this is not done a clever Soviet player can twist the game-system to gain advantages for himself by using chemicals as a game-device rather than as a weapon — more I will not say for fear of giving systems-operators ideas.

A British battle-group is included in the counter-mix. It represents an infantry-heavy BG and does so accurately as far as general outline goes although I have criticisms of the detail, in particular the strength of tank-troops and the representation of the scale of anti-tank weapons in a British infantry battalion. There should be four tanks in two of the Squadron's four troops (four in all troops if mobilisation has preceded hostilities) and an infantry platoon has three Carl Gustav anti-tank weapons as part of its normal scale of weapons, while the Milan missile is a separate system operated by the battalion anti-tank platoon; SPI's ruling that the platoon has Carl Gustav or Milan, dependant on the scenario is incorrect and Milan would normally be deployed at a scale of one section (4 launchers) per infantry-heavy combat team. Again I am pursuing this outwith these pages and hope to write a separate article on the British Battle-Group in MW2.

No record tracks are provided either on the maps or on a separate sheet although they are referred to and markers are provided; they are essential and should be constructed on a filing-card or something similar, one track for turns and another for phases. A small point but an unusual omission from a company noted for its excellent playing aids.

Summing-Up

Mech War 2 is a fairly complex game, rather slow in play but certainly not slow-seeming to the players. A good (though not necessarily thorough) comprehension is a must before first playing and a bit of practice of fire and movement is advised before a scenario is tried. Also, due to the need to prepare plot sheets and status sheets, it is not a game to set up on the spur of the moment. Once into it, the seeming complexities explain themselves and test mini-playings greatly assist one to achieve a good grasp of the sequence and main systems. The general game-system is the result of development over three earlier games and the rules are remarkably clear and complete, although — as I have pointed out — not without some anomalies and vague areas. It is not a game for the beginner nor is it a 'beer-and-pretzels' game (what's a pretzel, someone?); on the other hand it is not a vast mind-

FEEDBACK

SIMPUBS IS ON THE MOVE AGAIN...

Yes, its true, for the fourth time in eight years we are moving to new, bigger premises due to our continued expansion.

Not surprisingly I am heavily involved in the move and cannot devote sufficient time to producing 'Simpubs Briefing' for this issue. To the many whose hearts will be made heavy by this revelation I apologise most sincerely, to those others I can but threaten you with the return of Briefing in issue 26. Our new address and phone number from July 1st will be: SIMPUBS LTD, FREEPOST, OAKFIELD HOUSE, 60 OAKFIELD ROAD, ALTRINCHAM, CHES., WA15 0BR. Tel: 061-941 4371 (2 lines). I will take this opportunity to apologise in advance for any inconvenience caused during our move. **Malcolm Watson**

Contact!

MECH WAR 2 Continued

bender for, like 'Stonewall' and 'Ney vs Wellington', it packs its complexities into a fairly small space and a comparatively low counter-density in any one scenario. What it *is* is a remarkably good and up-to-date simulation of tactical mechanised warfare inasmuch as such a fluid and fast-moving form of combat can be simulated with map, counters and dice. Armour enthusiasts will love it and so should all 'modern' enthusiasts who wish to be worthy of the name. Its arrival on the scene relegates 'Mech War 77' and 'Firefight' to the shelf and 'Panzerblitz' to the toy-box. Honest!

At £19.95, boxed, it is an expensive game and many interested gamers may wish to consider buying one of its two component games at £11.45. If so, my advice is to go for 'Red Star/White Star' because for the same outlay one gets a more flexible set of maps, a greater mixture of nationalities, organisations and unit-types and a wider range of advanced rules.

A Disclaimer

My name appears in the Design Credits of this game as one of those who provided technical assistance; I supplied some information on UK armoured recce units, on the probable composition of a UK battle-group and on the adoption of the BMP as a recce vehicle in place of the PT-76 light tank. That apart, I have no axe to grind in writing this review.