

Facing in Panzer 44 / Mech War 77

By William Tallen

Moves Footnotes, Issue #26

One fault of the Panzer '44/Mech War '77 game system is the lack of emphasis on flanking maneuvers as an effective tactic in engagements on the platoon/company level. With no advantage accruing to the Player who maneuvers to lay flanking fire on his opponent, the game takes on some of the flavor of an aerial engagement, where the primary use of maneuver is to bring units within spotting and firing range of the enemy and the primary device of subtlety is the timing with which this is accomplished.

In the period of the Panzer '44 game, particularly, the importance of maneuver and flanking fire should not be ignored, as this was often the only viable tactic for Allied commanders whose tanks were severely outgunned. For instance, the 75mm gun of the M4 could not penetrate the frontal armor of the Panther at the killing range of the Panther's gun, as the strengths in Panzer '44 readily show. But this same gun was quite capable of penetrating the thin side and rear plates of the Panther-try it in Tank!-even at 1000 meters and you'll see.

A platoon of AFV's deployed in combat will usually have a front orientation as the commanders strive to keep their frontal armor presented to the enemy. When fire is received from several directions, this effort is compromised, and some of the incoming fire is sure to impact on the more vulnerable aspects of the vehicles.

The lack of field-of-fire restrictions on towed artillery is another unrealistic element, which decreases the value of maneuver. There are severe limitations on the effectiveness of towed guns in a fluid situation, but the Panzer '44 rules give such units the same flexibility and offensive value as turreted AFV's, though vulnerability to fire is, if anything, overstated.

It is possible to correct these omissions and restore maneuver to its proper value without adding a lot of dirt to the mechanics of the game. Neither is

it necessary to depart from the spirit of abstraction and playability, which makes this system work. The following rules are, admittedly, rather abstract, if not arbitrary, in their specifics, but the principles are sound and they work without seriously altering the balance of the scenarios.

1. When any Hard target is fired upon by more than one M-Class unit in a given Phase, determine the Line of Fire from each firing unit. If any two LOF's enter the target hex through non-adjacent hexsides, then all attacks are upgraded by adding one (+1) Attack Strength Point before Range Attenuation.

2. The primary facing of a towed artillery unit is indicated by the orientation of the weapons symbol on the counter, which must be directed unambiguously toward a single hexside. The Field of Fire encompasses a 120° arc centered on the orientation of the weapon symbol and projected to the limits of range through the three adjacent hexes so indicated. Fire on any target within the Field of Fire is executed normally. Fire on any targets outside the Field of Fire may be executed, but three (-3) is subtracted from the die roll. This restriction should not apply to mortars, anti-aircraft guns, or any other guns with all-around traverse or which are light enough to be manhandled by a fear-crazed gun crew. Non-turreted AFV's have their Field of Fire limitations factored into their Attack Strength, so they are excluded from this rule.

3. This is unrelated to the "maneuver" issue, but I'll throw it in anyway as it cries for attention. M-Class Attack Strengths are computed on the basis of armor-piercing capability. The resulting range of values for weapons whose high-explosive capabilities were very similar is unfair to Soft Targets. An infantryman would be unlikely to appreciate or experience any difference between the incoming high-explosive shells from the 75mm of an M4 and, say, the 17-lb. gun of the Firefly. Therefore, when M-Class units attack Soft Targets, use Attack Strengths from this table:

Caliber of Firing Weapon	Attack Strength
57mm or less	basic
75mm to 85mm (incl 17-lb.)	7
87mm or greater	9

The mental switch should not be hard to make in the course of play and it will bring the effectiveness of primarily armor-piercing weapons against Soft targets back into line.

The suggested rules modifications have limited applicability to Mech War '77. Flanking fire is of less significance with the common use of HEAT projectiles as opposed to kinetic rounds. The only units subject to Field of Fire restrictions are the Soviet and PLA towed artillery and anti-tank batteries. However, with the greatly increased strength of M-Class units, rule #3 is even more important. A new class, including 105mm and greater calibers, should be added to the table, with an Attack Strength of "10."

-William Tallen