

ADVANCED TACTICS, REALITY AND GAME

The Relationship of Military Tactics to the Play of Simulations, Part 1: The Offense

by Thomas G. Prutch

In real, life, Mr. Prutch runs an armored unit for the benefit of this great land of ours. He has often included the simulation games that he enjoys so much as part of his professional activities. Here we get the rewards of the return flow. Serious gamers, by play and practice, are often good seat-of-the-pants tacticians. The depth of understanding shown by some approaches or surpasses professional levels (much to the chagrin of some pros). Nevertheless, many of us have serious gaps in our knowledge of tactical orthodoxy. To remedy that, stay with this three part series. —RAS

Discussions of tactics in wargames has centered more on the game being played, or peculiarities of board surfaces, than on military tactical criteria. One early discussion even argued the merits of fighting along the grain of the hexfield versus against the grain. As the state of the art in wargame design has improved, so has the ability of a player to use military tactical considerations to influence the play of the game. This increased ability requires a fresh look at military tactics and their use in simulations.

Not all aspects of military tactics are directly transferable to board simulations in an accurate manner. The intent of this article is to present military tactics as they may affect the play of conflict simulations. This discussion will be in these three major areas: the offense, the defense, and special military operations.

The Offense

For military units, attacks may be characterized as one of two types: deliberate or hasty. The designation used is a function of the planning time given to the attack. If one leaves a pre-designated area to attack a specific target area, with prior notice, then the attack is deliberate. When the "attacking" force conducts its attack because of a chance encounter with an opposing unit, then the attack is hasty. Most attacks in a wargame would technically fall into the category of a hasty attack, notwithstanding one's opponent's arguments on the length of time he takes to complete his turns.

Regardless of how or why the attack occurs, there are many considerations to be dealt with before conducting the attack.

Is the purpose of the attack to eliminate enemy units or reach a specific area of ground? In the lust of watching enemy units being removed from the board, it is amazing

how many players will lose sight of a goal to cross a river or seize a hill/town area. A player will tie down a large portion of his forces to eliminate a small (or large) unit, when such a goal is not truly desirable in terms of reaching an objective. Granted, many games define victory in terms of enemy units eliminated. Even in those those games, however, the need to capture territory rather than eliminate enemy units can usually be discerned. The question then becomes: "How does a player recognize the difference?" This can best be answered by using an example.

Let us use what could be called the "standard" scenario and victory conditions. An enemy force (Red-1) must be eliminated by the friendly player (Blue) before reinforcements (Red-2) arrive on the scene. What the typical Blue player will usually try to do is crush Red-1 before Red-2 arrives. Since most simulation game companies do not write reinforcements into scenarios where the initial force may be readily eliminated, the Blue force is normally locked in combat with Red-1 when Red-2 arrives on the scene. This situation allows Red-2 to move and engage in combat at will, while Blue can only react.

A better use of the Blue forces might have been to divide them into two groups — the larger, containing the bulk of the units, to attack Red-1, and the smaller group to hold some area of ground that will prevent or delay the entry of Red-2.

Before any cries arise about the attack ratio being reduced, let it be said that there are many factors, other than the number of units present, that affect an attack's chances of success.

Returning to the discussion, Figure 1 shows how control of an area is often as important, if not more so, than the elimination of an enemy force. Blue still has a significant attack going against Red-1, and by holding the town, Blue has altered the situation for Red-2 considerably. Red-2 will now take a longer time to reach Red-1 because the road cannot be used. Red-2 will (a) take losses as it crosses the open area, (b) take losses as it attacks the Blue force in the town, or (c) delay its link with Red-1 by taking a longer route through terrain that is less favorable to movement. Finally, Red-2 is no longer free to operate at will, but must account for a threat from Blue. Did the Blue force actually conduct an attack to seize that town? Maybe not in game terms, but definitely so in military terminology. If there had been an opposing

force in the town, the attack should have been given the highest priority in support so that the town would be secured before the arrival of Red-2.

How does terrain influence the conduct of the attack? One of the areas in which the effect of terrain is first felt is time. How long will it take to move from point A to point B depends on the type of terrain between the two locations. If a game situation requires 15 game turns as the maximum time for a conclusion to be reached, then a route that would take 20 game turns to traverse is not suitable. Assume that two suitable routes have been found, in addition to one that is unsuitable. If both suitable routes allow the attacking force to move from the start point to the objective point, with sufficient time to attack/eliminate intervening enemy forces, how else will terrain affect the choice?

The cover and concealment afforded by the terrain along a route is a significant consideration. Units crossing open spaces are prime targets for enemy fire. Given an enemy unit in a specific location, a friendly player may move through a wooded area or move so that a ridge/hill blocks the enemy unit. The wooded route offers true concealment, with some cover; the hill provides cover primarily, with limited concealment as a secondary benefit. The problems and advantages of cover and concealment do not readily appear to a gamer, because most games provide the player with perfect information on enemy locations, information that is seldom available to the real life commander.

The wooded route so readily chosen by many gamers may be shunned by an actual commander who recognizes the danger of enemy infantry with short-ranged anti-tank weaponry. The possibilities for observation also distinguish the commander's attitude toward woods from that of the gamer. Where the player moving through woods or behind the hill knows the location of enemy units, the commander would be obliged to consider a route that affords the best opportunities for long-range observation from concealed positions to check for possible enemy positions. This need for observation of enemy positions in actual combat requires the occupation of key terrain.

Key terrain may be characterized by any or all of the following:

1. It may be a terrain feature that permits control of a large area, because fields of view or of fire from that point can prevent or

restrict enemy movement over a large area. A hill is typical of this type of feature.

2. It may control access to an area by its physical location with respect to an avenue of movement. A town astride a major road or bridge across a river are common examples of terrain meeting this criterion.

3. It may permit fire to be brought to bear on the major objective of an operation. Such terrain is a more sharply defined version of that defined in (1). Since the commander in combat cannot divine the locations of enemy units, he is forced to treat his movement in expectation of meeting an enemy force at any moment. He must, therefore, occupy or check terrain that would afford him, *or the enemy*, control of any key terrain.

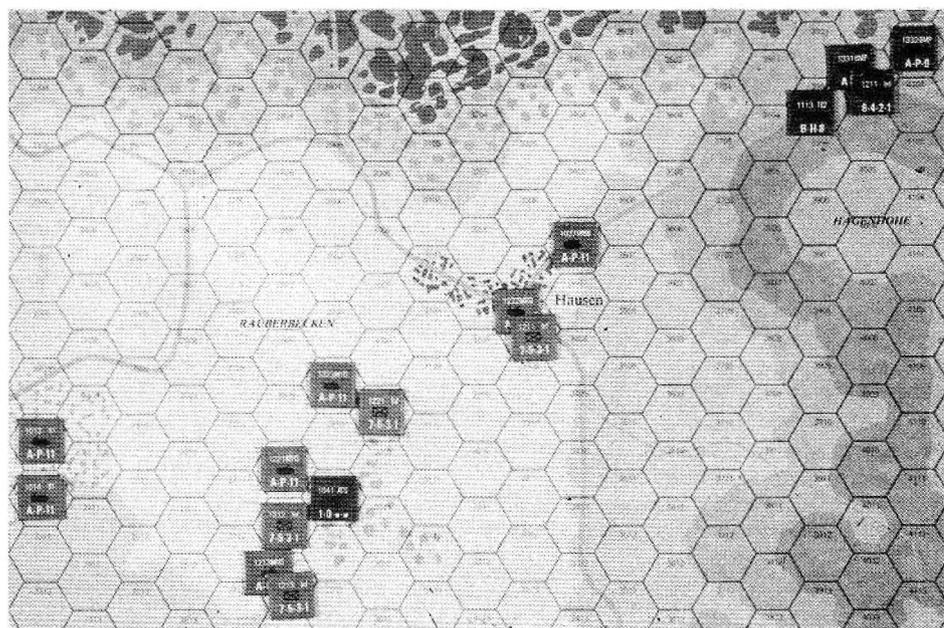
How do the combat units physically move during an attack to maximize protection for themselves while causing heavy losses to the enemy? Not all attacks are heavy charges into the teeth of enemy guns. Units participating in such lethal activity may accumulate a good deal of glory, but alternate means — if available — certainly deserve consideration. The techniques of movement that have been developed can be broken into two major areas: movement prior to assault on the objective, and the assault proper.

Movement prior to assault encompasses what are called tactical movement and administrative movement. Since administrative movement amounts to lining everyone up and moving by the fastest route to a new area, and because any gamer worth his salt can tell when it is possible to move all his units down a road with impunity, there is no reason to delve into this type of movement. The tactical movement requires discussion at greater length.

FIGURE 1: US Attack on Soviet Forces

Map: Map A of *Red Star/White Star* from *Mech War 2*.

Comments: For the sake of clarity, only a few counters are used. Infantry in the same hex as carrier are dismounted, except the Soviet infantry in hexes 4103 and 4003.



One type of tactical movement is appropriate when a force is deployed for combat and enemy contact is unlikely. In this type of movement, a company size force (given a game where the counters represent platoons or squads) would have its elements scattered over the terrain, moving without halts except as required by terrain or obstacles. Prior to 1970, such movement was generally called by the shape the formation assumed: wedge, vee, line, or column. After 1970, commanders have been taught to perform such movement with one or two elements leading and two elements, or one, following. This style of tactical movement is called travelling.

When enemy contact is highly likely, units move by bounds, splitting into a minimum of two elements. If the movement of the two elements involves element A moving into the lead and halting, then element B moving into the lead and halting, and so on, such movement is called alternate bounds. If element B merely moves up even with element A, and element A moves again into the lead, then the movement is called successive bounds. Around 1970, this movement was further modified by constricting the distance of the bound from the distance of observation between the two elements, to the distance at which one element could provide direct fire support for the forward element. The new name given to this style of was bounding overwatch.

In bounding overwatch, the tactical intent is to find the enemy force with a minimum of combat power lost or pinned by enemy fire, allowing the bulk of the bounding force to maneuver to eliminate enemy units. In wargames, the result of bounding overwatch is the same as in actual combat, but the mental process differs. In actual com-

bat, the enemy commander may not realize that the lead element is protected, or may realize the situation but choose nonetheless to try to eliminate the lead element before it finds its positions. In the game situation, the higher level of intelligence on enemy force locations turns this tactic into a ruse, similar to baiting a trap. If the opposing player chooses to attack the lead element, he may be engaged so completely that the rear elements of the bounding force can move at will. By the same token, the bounding player may lose his lead element completely if he has underestimated his opponent's strength.

A recent innovation in the techniques of movement is called travelling overwatch, which falls between the two techniques thus far presented. Time scale and game rules currently used in wargames do not permit the simulation of this technique. In travelling overwatch, the lead element continues to move while the trailing element pauses on various terrain features to provide overwatch.

The second facet of movement to be discussed is the assault. At some point, it becomes necessary for the attacking force to bring all possible firepower to bear on the objective. Another necessary aspect of the assault is to create panic and confusion among the defenders.

The attacker may split into two groups, one of which would comprise the units that have long-range direct fire capability. These units could take a position separated from the defender and place direct fire on the defender's positions. The second group of attackers, usually consisting of infantry type units, assaults the objective by moving into the defender's positions. In game terms and in military tactics, this movement is called close assault. It is important to note that the ranged fire provided by the first group must stop when the second group performs its close assault.

Another technique calls for several elements of the attacking force to alternate attacks against the defender by having one unit perform close assault, then a second unit, and so forth.

One last — and least desirable — method is to have all attacking units attack as one combined force. This method is frowned upon, because it commits all forces to a specific use, thus denying a commander the means of meeting unexpected enemy moves. This disadvantage is sometimes absent from games where the CRT shows the combat ratio or differential to be so overwhelming as to guarantee success.

What about all those great little counters that do not represent infantry or armor? What of the unseen support from arty, air, or other sources? In military parlance, anything that assists combat is called a multiplier, and that term covers a host of units and items used in combat.

A cardinal rule in developing an attack is to create a weak point in the enemy defense. To do this, one must look at the overall enemy arrangement.

The first thing to remember is that the enemy was not able to design the terrain that to match his defensive needs, so somewhere in

that defense a unit is sitting on a piece of terrain that is not as easily defended as other areas. How did the enemy player augment

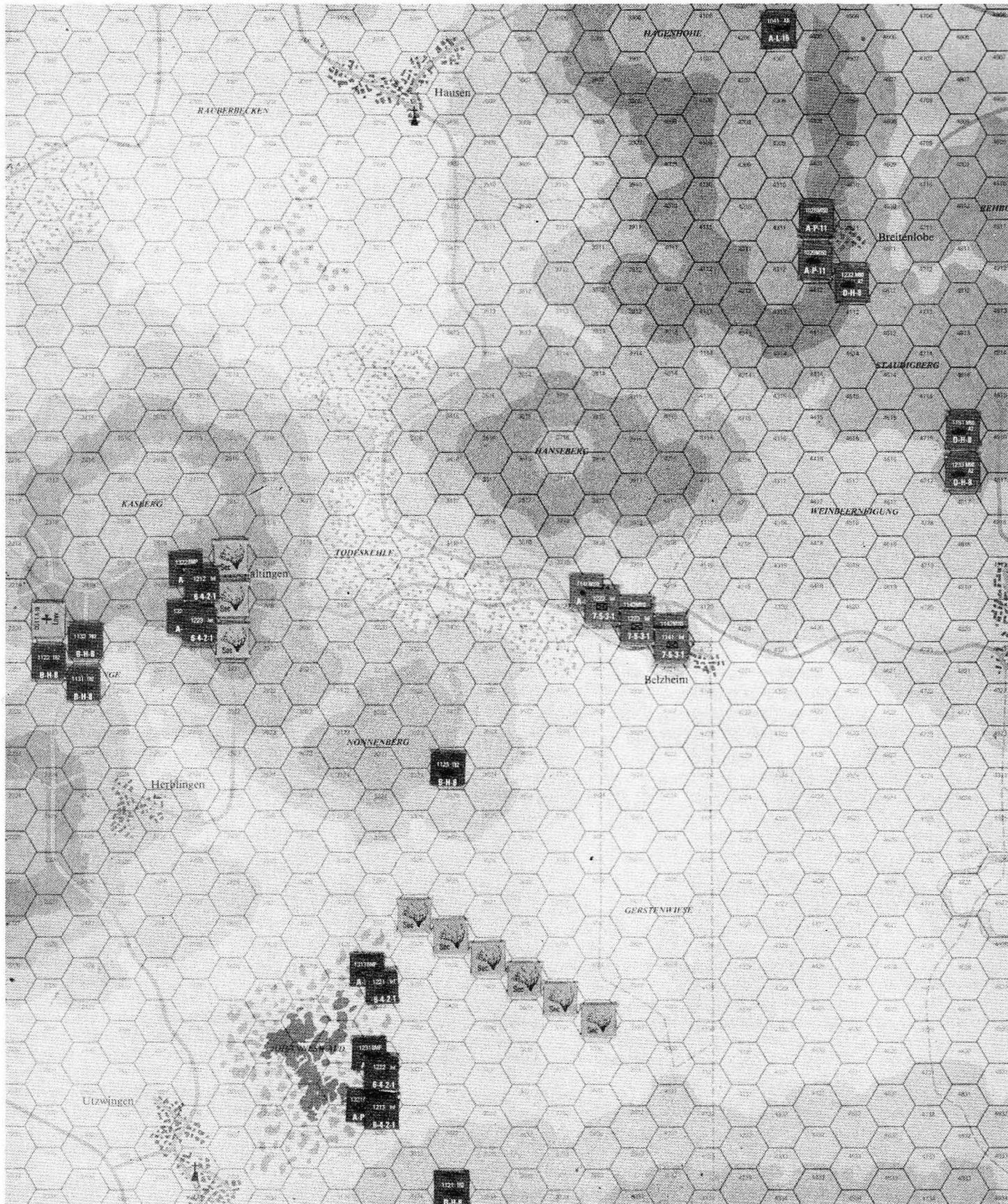
that weakness? Did he dedicate extra artillery support to the ground unit? If so, then friendly counter-battery fire will weaken the

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FIGURE 2: US Task Force(-) Attacks Soviet Reinforced Battalion

Map: Map A of Red Star/White Star from Mech War 2.

Comments: Forces in hexes 4512, 4410, and 4411 are Reserve Group. All infantry is unmounted except in hexes 3819, 3920, and 4020.



Tactical Results [continued from page 30]

13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	2.5
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = .293388
Casualties This Time = 21.0445

EXAMPLE OF OUTPUT

4 US Tanks in Hull Defilade Ambush 10 Soviets in the Open

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	4
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	10
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	1.0
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	60

Average Casualties = 3.83503

Casualties This Time = 2.86883

And the Soviets Return Fire.

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	7
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	10
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	0.3
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = 1.51393

Casualties This Time = 1.39675

Oops! Too Many Targets! Once Again.

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	7
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	4
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	0.3
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = 1.34645

Casualties This Time = .572402

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	4
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	7
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	1.0
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = 2.61929

Casualties This Time = 1.61458

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	5
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	4
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	0.3
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = 1.01633

Casualties This Time = 2.79719

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	1
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	5
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	1.0
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = .756481

Casualties This Time = .0608634

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	5
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50

8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	1
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	0.3
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = .690427

Casualties This Time = -.327333

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	1
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	5
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	1.0
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = .756481

Casualties This Time = 2.28517

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	3
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	1
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	0.3
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = .506168

Casualties This Time = -1.02428

1. NUMBER OF WEAPONS FIRING	1
2. MAXIMUM RATE OF FIRE	6
3. MAXIMUM SPEED OF FIRER	30
4. ACTUAL SPEED OF FIRER	0
5. MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE RANGE OF FIRER	4000
6. ACTUAL RANGE TO TARGET	1000
7. FIRERS ARMOR PENETRATION RATING	50
8. ACTUAL DEPTH OF TARGET ARMOR	15
9. ALTITUDE OF FIRER	0
10. ALTITUDE OF TARGET	0
11. NUMBER OF TARGETS	3
12. TARGET EXPOSURE AS DECIMAL FRACTION	1
13. MAXIMUM SPEED OF TARGET	60
14. ACTUAL SPEED OF TARGET	0

Average Casualties = .717654

Casualties This Time = .909908

Note: Due to the difficulty in duplicating computer output with conventional typesetting, SPI cannot attest to the absolute accuracy of the data as presented in this article.

Advanced Tactics

[continued from page 28]

defense of that ground. Did the defender plan on moving his reserve to meet any attack that is too strong for his unit on that terrain to handle? If so, then tactical aircraft used to strike at his rear area reserves may stall or eliminate such support long enough for an attack to succeed.

Sometimes, if the defender has a good defensive position throughout the area where the attack will occur, it is necessary to create a weak point, and the key to success in such an undertaking is isolation. When enemy defensive units can provide mutual support by direct fire, the use of smoke to restrict

observation in the area of the specific unit to be attacked creates the necessary isolation. The use of electronic warfare to prohibit the defender from calling in artillery or tactical air support is another means of isolating the unit in question. Air defense units in the area of the attack isolate the defender by denying his aircraft access to the area. Finally, isolation can be established by directing the attacking forces in a suitable fashion. The encirclement of the defender is the ultimate method of isolation.

What last advice should be given to the attacker? Always, always, always have a reserve force. No battle develops exactly along the lines the attacker plans. When the

unforeseen occurs — a bad die roll, a reinforcing unit making it into the defense, or any number of other possibilities — it is necessary to have a combat capability that is not critically committed to combat and is thus free to move and fight where needed. Even if that reserve is but a small fraction of the overall attacking force, its freedom can have an effect out of proportion to its size.

Figure 2 shows an attack utilizing some of the techniques discussed in this presentation of tactical considerations for the offense. For further reading in tactics for wargames, the articles by Fredrick Georgian in *MOVES* 22, 23, 24, and 28 are recommended. ■ ■