

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

# CENTRAL FRONT SERIES

## FIFTH CORPS & HOF GAP

by Charles T. Kamps, Jr.



At our booth at the recent Hobby Industries Show, we had a blow up of the map plan of the Central Front Series. It showed the area of Europe encompassed by the ten maps of the putative Central Front System. Filled in in miniature color versions were the two existing maps, *Hof Gap* and *Fifth Corps*. The maps in this system are some of the heaviest the SPI Art Department has ever conquered. Seeing the eight blanks in the system never failed to make my jaw drop in contemplation of doing *all* that work.

— Redmond

### THE RATIONALE

Jim Dunnigan's original concept in designing the Central Front Series was to

produce a sort of super *Modern Battles* scale game which would depict individual corps areas in Germany along major Warsaw Pact avenues of approach. The result would be an examination of current operational level combat which would avoid the mire of tactical level minutiae as well as the enormity of *The Next War*. By borrowing design features from *NATO Division Commander* and *Next War*, and concentrating on ground combat through the abstraction of other features, the essential flavor of division and corps action could be attained.

The scale of 4 km per hex worked out very well on several counts. First, the scale coincided with 1:250,000 military maps,

available from the government. Additionally, 4 km represents the normal frontage for a defending NATO battalion or attacking Soviet regiment, as well as the range through which these units can project a "zone of control" by heavy weapons fire. The multi-phase game turns and FP system go hand in hand, by allowing players the option to compress more action into a given period by intensifying combat at the expense of "burning out" their units.

Composition of the more common units in the series accompanies this article. NATO units are generally battalions, except for the armored cavalry screen which consists of very powerful companies which are assigned

a delaying mission. Warsaw Pact units doctrinally operate at regimental level, but battalions are represented for airborne and special purpose units. The "brigade" size Pact artillery groups are simply collections of battalions which, for game purposes, were segregated according to compatible range and capabilities. Some players may be upset by the apparent weakness of West German units. The organization used for the games was taken from the *Brigade 80* model described in the German Defense Ministry's *White Paper*. No less than five experimental brigade organizations have been tested in the last few years, but none of them may actually be adopted army-wide. In the test organizations, combat power is dispersed among a greater number of smaller units. Players wishing to use the *standard* organization may make their own counters: a panzer brigade being 2×4-5 tank bns and 1×3-9 mech bn; a panzergrenadier brigade being 2×4-9 mech bns and 1×4-4 tank bn (overrun strengths being the first number in each). Brigade and divisional artillery are unchanged.

Warsaw Pact maneuver regiments were each assigned a share of divisional assets to account for small units which would otherwise flood the counter mix. US battalions, based on location, were assumed to be organized (when possible) into mech-heavy or tank-heavy task forces. This results in higher combat strengths for the cross-attached units than the "pure" ones. Under the former German system, cross-attachment was also practiced along fairly regular lines. At present it is not apparent as to how, or if, this is being done. German units are thus depicted as "pure" except for the attachment of brigade assets.

## ATTACK HELICOPTERS

Attack helicopters are particularly strong yet vulnerable units. Since the aviation outfits depicted in the games are all doctrinally assigned "combined arms" roles, it was decided to treat them as a sort of flying artillery in support of ground units. Thus, there is no opportunity for players to use helicopter units as "ground-holding" maneuver elements such as they would be in an Air Cavalry Combat Brigade. The long range of helicopter units makes them flexible and valuable, at the cost of increased vulnerability (mandatory FP gain) and maintenance (1 FP recovery per turn).

## ARTILLERY

The artillery units reflect the doctrines and capabilities of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. NATO artillery is generally better gun-for-gun because of greater flexibility in fire control and use of sophisticated munitions (laser-guided; scatterable mines; ICM's). Without the latter, US 8" and 155mm battalions would be worth 2-2 each. Soviet artillery derives benefits from direct fire as they practice it regularly and find they can achieve quicker response and place more ordnance on target with less ammunition expenditure. One salvo from a battalion of only 18 launch-

er vehicles can throw six times the explosive effect of all the artillery in a US division. The cost, of course, is in ammo supply.

## ZONES OF CONTROL

Zones of Control are handled differently for company size units (and non-mech infantry) as it is easier to disengage from outfits which lack the ability to do much about it. Stacking restrictions represent the usual problems of road space and deployment, allowing for doctrine and terrain. Combat comes in two varieties — normal and overrun. Normal combat represents the stereotypical set-piece engagement consisting of long range duels between tanks and ATGM's, followed by an orderly advance of units in geometric formations. The overrun depicts short, sharp actions, usually accompanied by a whirlwind barrage and smoke, in which the attacker attempts a penetration on a narrow front with the aim of disrupting the defender in order to get behind him and cut him off from command control and routes of retreat. These are more likely to be undertaken during some type of reduced visibility; therefore, close range weapons assume a greater importance. In non-overrun situations, the defender can minimize losses by trading space in a delaying action — substituting retreat for FP's — or take it on the chin and remain in place, gaining more FP's. "Soft" units are devoid of armor protection and are relatively less mobile, meaning that they will absorb more losses before they can successfully break off and retreat (the mandatory 2 FP gain).

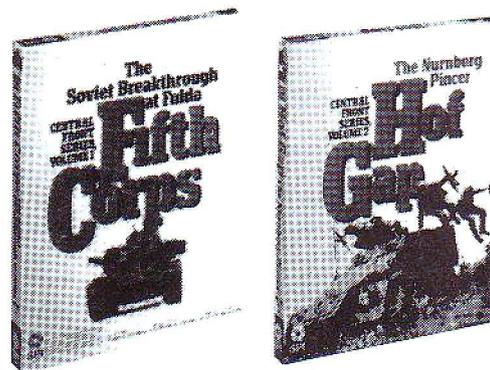
## SOVIET DOCTRINE

The Soviet Doctrine rule in *Hof Gap*, which should supercede that in the *Fifth Corps* rules, is fairly accurate in that the Soviets will go that extra mile on the regimental level without regarding their flanks. The original doctrine rule in *Fifth Corps* is a little too stereotyped to be entirely credible. The NATO Surprise Attack Bonus enhances NATO combat power when they can bring off a successful combination against an exposed unit. Soviet "inflexibility," as it were, comes into play here. Warsaw Pact/Soviet March Order is another doctrinal point which is addressed, but tends to lose importance rather quickly. The Soviet pre-emptive strike is one feature that used to give me nightmares in Germany. The thought of all those tanks lined up track to track in motor pools — the possibility of an entire armored battalion rendered useless with one napalm run.... In the *Seventh Army* scenario, the Pact Player should be able to eliminate about nine US battalions and cripple many more by going after the large concentrations posed by brigade garrisons. The pre-emptive strikes represent a portion of Soviet air power. The rest are assumed to be pasting NATO airfields — hence the inclusion of the Initial Air Supremacy rule.

## SPECIAL UNITS

Several special unit types deserve passing mention. The West German Territorial

Army fulfills a number of functions, chief among them being the repository of replacements for the active army. The Territorial HSK brigades consist of light infantry battalions (included in the games), which in theory could be expanded after a comprehensive mobilization. The VBK organization is represented by the static infantry available to the NATO Player. Although these units are only the tip of the iceberg of the VBK structure, most of its troops would be broken down into small units charged with traffic control, guarding telephone exchanges and power stations, blowing bridges, etc. In fact, VBK demolition teams are simulated by the ease with which the NATO Player can destroy bridges.



## AIRBORNE

All divisions of both sides have organic combat engineers who assist with mine clearance and river crossing operations. Thus, these capabilities are abstracted within normal movement rules. The only engineer formations depicted in the games are special amphibious engineer battalions, which serve as foci for any extraordinary engineer operations. Electronic warfare units are abstracted into tables based on relative capabilities. For game purposes, electronic warfare was structured to favor the attacker. It was felt that offensive EW would be better prepared and generally more effective. Additionally, the Warsaw Pact plans to minimize radio traffic during offensive operations, leaving NATO EW assets few targets of opportunity.

Airborne rules are fairly conventional, but the capabilities of the mechanized Soviet airborne forces far exceed those of any other airborne troops in history. Most NATO airborne forces in the theater would be used in an airmobile role, but in future games there is no reason to exclude them from roughly the same "jump" ability that the Soviets have. Airmobile units will be found useful to the Soviet Player in their doctrinal role of seizing tactical features such as bridgeheads in the NATO rear, and cutting off NATO retreat routes. NATO airmobile units can plug gaps or aid in limited counterattacks.

The US Major Training Areas rule provides for a number of units which may be routinely training at Grafenwohr (on the *Hof Gap* map) or Hohenfels (off the south map edge). These two MTA's are more or less in continuous use, and it is not unusual to find

as many as six armored battalions at "Graf" during divisional tank gunnery qualification. Other NATO countries use these areas as well, but a compromise of one US brigade seemed appropriate for game purposes. The US Paralysis rule (which will extend to other non-German NATO allies in future games) is an abstraction of the problem caused by lack of heavy weapon ammunition in congested garrison areas. A long time will elapse before US units can get trucks out to ammo supply dumps to bring crated rounds out to the troops at the front for breakdown and distribution. Under conditions of surprise, this scenario looks too much like a rerun of Isandhlwana for comfort. Rather than allow defenseless US battalions to move out of their alert areas, a logical solution for game purposes seemed to be to restrict US movement while the units unloaded their ammo. Battalions at training ranges were naturally exempted from such restrictions.

Since the Soviet Union retains a virtual monopoly in the field of offensive chemical warfare and maintains a commanding lead in CW defense, the game system depicts the currently prevailing "one way street." A new optional Nuclear Warfare rule would duplicate the doctrinal clutter which attends each side's employment of such weapons, and forces the player to plan and account for each warhead — as in real life. An attempt was made to reduce some of the dirt by limiting the weapons mix to those types with a major tactical effect confined to one hex for a period of one Game-Turn.

## THE BIG PICTURE

As far as the larger picture is concerned, *Fifth Corps* and *Hof Gap* (maps 6 and 8) complete the forward area of US Army Europe. Currently in design is *BAOR* (i.e. *British Army of the Rhine*) which covers map 4 (Hannover), the corridor to The Ruhr.

Featured in *BAOR* will be I British Corps and I Belgian Corps as well as a division each from West German I and III Corps. The opposition will consist of 20 Warsaw Pact and Soviet divisions. Projected for the future is *North German Plain* (map 6, Hamburg/Bremen), and perhaps *Donau Front* (map 10 — perhaps reconfigured — the Munich Plain). These games all depict frontier battles extending about 200 km into West Germany. If the Soviets make their advertised rate of advance, they should be nearly off the west edge of any of these maps in about 10 Game-Turns. As each individual game can get pretty lengthy, the second tier of maps (1, 3, 5, 7 and 9), covering the deep objectives, may be made available as just that — maps. Also, since I suggest that changes be made to about 10% of the current counter mix, replacement counters *might* be offered in a later game or separately.

To address another topic, one of the real judgment calls in this series is the lineup of opposing forces. The "in place" units on either side are pretty well known. Where they will go is another question. On the NATO side, some attempt has been made to rationalize the counter mixes along lines of national corps and division integrity, except when a formation's proximity to the border will *de facto* involve it at the outset where it is. Across the *Iron Curtain* one can only speculate on probable thrust lines based on unit locations and major avenues of approach through NATO territory.

## REINFORCEMENTS

Reinforcements are another problem. Some NATO units from Belgium, the Netherlands, and Britain will undoubtedly reach the combat zone within the first five days. On the other hand, significant *Reforger* reinforcements from the US will probably not get into action within the same time frame. In fact, the "off map" US units

(3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division; 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division; and 17th Artillery Group) will probably have to drop back into a CENTAG Reserve role while guarding *Reforger* equipment depots until the first few brigades deploy from the States. In *Hof Gap* and *BAOR*, considerable Soviet reinforcements arrive from "Category II" formations in Russia. The arrival of these units was based on a compromise between the possible and the probable, but falls far short of the estimates of the Warsaw Pact's "best effort" (sending out 80-odd divisions in the first week).

## FIRST MOVE

Many western analysts believe that the Pact can only achieve surprise with a jump from garrison, and any lengthy buildup would send NATO units up to the border in full strength. Unless you are into fantasy, don't believe it. As of the time of this writing (January 1981) the Soviets have been mobilizing the Western Military Districts since last August, and NATO is just as unwilling to make *any* move as it was in 1968 when Czechoslovakia was invaded.

Players are encouraged to experiment with Pact invading forces. For example, *Fifth Corps* and *Hof Gap* were done on the assumption that the US 8th Mech Division might deploy elsewhere, and that the Pact might find the Meiningen Gap (center north edge of the *Hof Gap* map) more attractive than Fulda. Recent US shifts, however, seem to lock the 8th into the Fulda area. Therefore, players wishing to try a *revised Fifth Corps* game (including the 8th Division) could accurately charge through Fulda with the 8th Guards Army and 1st Guards Tank Army at a rate of two reinforcing divisions per turn, *and* add the 3rd East German Army as well (bringing in two divisions on Game-Turn One and another division on Game-Turn Two). ■ ■

## CENTRAL FRONT UNIT COMPOSITIONS



### Soviet Motorized Rifle Regiment (BMP)

2,114 men; 112 × BMP; 40 × T-62 MBT; 10 × T-55 MBT; 10 × BRDM AC; 18 × 120mm Mor; 4 × SA-9 SP SAM; 4 × ZSU-23-4 SPAA; 36 × SA-7 SAM; 87 × RPG-7 ATGL; 9 × BRDM/ATGM. Plus, from division: 3 × BRDM/ATGM and 6 × 125mm SPAT. (Regimental artillery is represented in other units.)



### Soviet Tank Regiment

1,066 men; 95 × T-72 MBT; 30 × T-55 MBT; 34 × BMP; 4 × BRDM AC; 4 × SA-9 SP SAM; 4 × ZSU-23-4 SPAA; 36 × SA-7 SAM; 29 × RPG-7 ATGL; 6 × 120mm Mor; 7 × vehicle-launched bridges.



### Soviet Self-Propelled Artillery Group

1 × Bn of 18 × 152mm SP How; 2 × Bns of 18 × 122mm SP How each. (Group in a tank division has only 1 × 122mm SP How Bn.)



### Soviet Regimental Artillery Group

3 × Bns of 18 × 122mm How each. (Group in a tank division has only 2 × Bns.) **Note:** See Addenda.



### Soviet Division Artillery Group

1 × Bn of 4 × FROG SSM launchers; 1 × Bn of 122mm Multiple Rocket Launchers. **Note:** See Addenda.



### Soviet Independent Tank Battalion

51 × T-62 MBT; 10 × T-55 MBT.



### Soviet Airborne Assault Battalion

400+ men; 31 × BMD; 6 × 120mm Mor; 27 × SA-7 SAM; 3 × ASU-57 SPAT (may be deleted); 3 × jeeps/ATGM; 2 × 23mm AA; 30 × RPG-7 ATGL. (The "3-4" Reinforced Battalion Group additionally has 12 × ASU-85 SPAT; 6 × BRDM AC; 4 × BRDM/ATGM; and 6 × S-60 AA from division.)



### Soviet Airborne Division Artillery Group

36 × 122mm How; 18 × 140mm Multiple Rocket Launchers.



### Soviet Attack Helicopter Regiment

36 × Mi-24 *Hind* Attack Helicopters. (Various types for Warsaw Pact allies.)



### US Armored Battalion

559 men; 37 × M-60A3 MBT; 17 × M-60A2 MBT; 23 × APC; 4 × SP 4.2" Mor; 4 × SP TOW ATGM; 4 × *Dragon* ATGM; 5 × *Redeye* SAM; 2 × vehicle-launched bridges. (The "4-6" Armored Bn Task Force gives up 17 × M-60A3 MBT and gains 1 × mech infantry company.)

**US Mechanized Infantry Battalion**

901 men; 69×APC; 22×SP TOW ATGM; 4×SP 4.2" Mor; 9×SP 81mm Mor; 40×Dragon ATGM; 5×Redeye SAM. (The "3-7" Mech Bn Task Force gives up 1×rifle company and gains 17×M-60A3 MBT.)

**US Armored Cavalry Troop (Regimental)**

12×M-60A3 MBT; 6×SP TOW ATGM; 11×APC; 3×SP 4.2" Mor; 6×Dragon ATGM; 1×Redeye SAM; 1×vehicle-launched bridge; 10×motorcycles. (The "1-1" Tank Troop holds 17×M-60A2 MBT only.)

**US Combat Aviation Battalion**

42×AH-1S Cobra attack helicopters; plus 1×assault helicopter company with UH-1's and a general support aviation company for liaison and command. (The Cavalry Regiment's Air Troop "3-3" has 21×AH-1's.)

**US Divisional Direct Support Artillery Battalion**

18×155mm SP How. (The West German brigade artillery Bn "3-3" is similarly equipped. The US Cavalry How Bty "1-1" holds 6×155mm SP How.)

**US Divisional/Corps General Support Artillery Battalion**

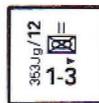
12×SP 8" How. (The "2-2" Bn carries 12×SP 175mm guns.)

**US Divisional Armored Cavalry Regiment**

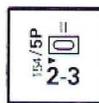
893 men; 36×M-60A3 MBT; 18×SP TOW ATGM; 9×SP 4.2" Mor; 22×Dragon ATGM; 43×APC; 9×AH-1 attack Helicopters; 18×utility and observation Helicopters; 30×motorcycles.

**West German Panzergrenadier Battalion**

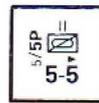
43×Marder fighting vehicles; 6×SP 120mm Mor; 33×Milan ATGM.

**West German Jager Battalion**

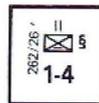
43×M-113 APC; 6×120mm Mor; 9×Milan ATGM; 37×ATGL.

**West German Panzer Battalion**

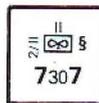
33×Leopard MBT plus 4×JPR/HOT ATGM from brigade. (In Panzergrenadier Bdes, the Bn is reinforced by 8×JPK SPAT and 4×JPR/HOT ATGM.)

**West German Divisional Recce Battalion**

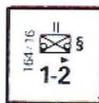
28×Leopard MBT; 32×Luuchs AC; 18×Hotchkiss APC; 6×120mm Mor.

**West German Fallschirmjager Battalion**

6×81mm Mor; 9×Milan ATGM; 37×ATGL; plus 4 to 8×120mm Mor and 10 to 15×jeep/ATGM from brigade.

**West German Corps Anti-Tank Aviation Regiment**

56×PAH-1 attack helicopters with HOT ATGM's.

**West German Territorial Jager Battalion**

36×ATGL; 36×LMG; 8×120mm Mor; 6×106mm RR; 6×20mm AA. Plus, 4×JPK SPAT or M-48 MBT and up to 9×120mm Mor from brigade.

**ABBREVIATIONS:**

**AC:** Armored car. **ATGL:** Anti-tank grenade launcher. **ATGM:** Anti-tank guided missile. **APC:** Armored personnel carrier. **BMP:** Mechanized infantry fighting vehicle. **BRDM:** Wheeled armored vehicle in armored car and anti-tank variants. **BMD:** Airborne mechanized infantry fighting vehicle. **FROG:** Free rocket over ground. **How:** Howitzer. **JPR:** Jagdpanzer raketee. **JPK:** Jagdpanzer kanone. **MBT:** Main battle tank. **Mor:** Mortar. **SP:** Self-propelled. **SAM:** Surface-to-air missile. **SPAA:** Self-propelled anti-aircraft gun. **SPAT:** Self-propelled anti-tank gun. **SSM:** Surface-to-surface missile.

## CONVENTIONS Up and Coming

The following is a list of conventions scheduled to be held in the upcoming months, including place, name of convention, and whom to contact for further information. Much of the material in this feature is derived from the **Midwest Gaming Association Boardletter**.

**March 13-15**

COASTCON 81, Biloxi, Mississippi. *Contact:* CoastCon, POB 6025, Biloxi, MS 39532.

**March 20-21**

SIMCON III, Rochester, New York. *Contact:* SimCon, POB 5142, Rochester, NY 14627.

**March 27-29**

GAMEFAIR 6, Peoria, Illinois. *Contact:* Fred Soady, Heart of Illinois Game Club, Illinois Central College, E. Peoria, IL 61635.

**April 3-5**

CWA SPRING GAMESFEST, Glen Ellyn, Illinois. *Contact:* Chicago Wargamers Assn., 1 East Schiller #18B, Chicago, IL 60610.

**April 4-5**

KUBLAI CON, Columbus, Ohio. *Contact:* Allan Carson, 1467 N. Forest, Columbus, OH 43201.

**April 4-5**

UNH SPRING GAMESFEST, Durham, New Hampshire. *Contact:* R. Brad Chase, UNH Simulations Club, Memorial Building, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

**May 15-18**

CANGAMES 81, Ottawa, Canada. *Contact:*

Bruce Knight, 2011 B St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, Ontario, K1G 1A3.

**May 22-25**

GRIMMCON III, Oakland, California. *Contact:* GrimmCon, POB 4153, Berkeley, CA 94704.

**May 31**

MIGS '81, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada. *Contact:* Les Scanlan, 473 Upper Wentworth, Hamilton, Ontario L8M 2M1.

**June 5-7**

GHENGIS CON, Denver, Colorado. *Contact:* Denver Wargamers Association, 2527 Gaylord Street, Denver, CO 80205.

**June 5-7**

DALLCON 81, Dallas, Texas. *Contact:* Richland Wargames, Richland College, 12800 Abrams Road, Dallas, TX 75243.

**June 12-14**

MICHICON 10 GAMESFEST, Rochester, Michigan. *Contact:* Metro Detroit Gamers, POB 787, Troy, MI 48099.

**July 3-5**

PACIFIC ORIGINS, San Mateo, California. *Contact:* Pacific Origins, POB 5548, San Jose, CA 95150.

**July 12-13**

MINNESOTA CAMPAIGN, Rochester, Minnesota. *Contact:* Fred Funk, 343 N. 19th Street, Minneapolis, MN.

**July 17-19**

CWACON 81, Northlake Hotel, Chicago, Il-

linois. *Contact:* Chicago Wargamers Assn., 1 East Schiller #18B, Chicago, IL 60610.

**July 23-26**

GENCON EAST, Cherry Hill, New Jersey. *Contact:* GENCON East, POB 139, Middletown, NJ 07748.

**July 24-26**

ATLANTICON, Baltimore, Maryland. *Contact:* Atlanticon, POB 15405, Baltimore, MD 21220.

**July 30-August 2**

NANCON, Houston, Texas. *Contact:* Nan's Toys & Games, 1385 Galleria Mall, 5015 Westheimer, Houston, TX 77056.

**August 7-9**

AUGUST CON #3, Windsor, Ontario, Canada. *Contact:* Mike Girard, RR#1, South Woodslee, Ontario, Canada N0R 1V0.

**August 14-16**

Napoleonic Symposium, with David Chandler, Columbus, Ohio. *Contact:* Jim Getz, 546 Colonial Avenue, Worthington, OH 43085.

**August 20-23**

GENCON, Kenosha, Wisconsin. *Contact:* GENCON, POB 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

**September 11-13**

DRAGONFLIGHT, Seattle, Washington. *Contact:* Brass Dragon Society, POB 33872, Seattle, WA 98133.

**November 13-15**

WINTERCON 10 GAMESFEST, Detroit, Michigan. *Contact:* Metro Detroit Gamers, POB 787, Troy, MI 48099 ■■