
Development Notes for

Rapid Deployment Force

Known as *Hot Spots* or *RDF* through most of the process under SPI.

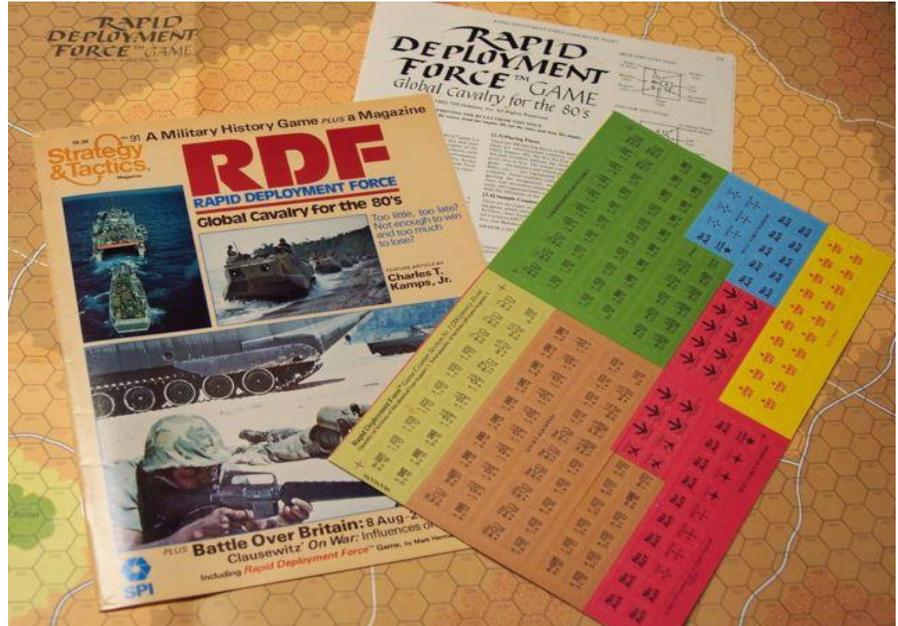
(From *Moves 57 J/J 1981*)

Hot Spots

Hot Spots will be SPI's next release in its series of modern armored tactical games. It covers a broad range of conflicts in the Middle East: some past history and others (thank God) still hypothetical. The historical scenarios include actions from the Iraqi-Iranian war, an ambush of an Ethiopian column by Eritrean rebels, an ambush of a Soviet column by Afghan rebels (the world is a dangerous place), and an Ethiopian counterattack against the Somali forces which invaded Ogaden.

The hypothetical scenarios are similarly exotic. These scenarios include a meeting engagement between Syrian and Israeli columns, a similar engagement between Iraqi and Israeli columns, a Soviet attack on Iranian forces, a meeting engagement between US RDF troops and Soviet troops, and even a scenario involving camel-mounted Omani police against tribal rebels. The variety of units and situations make this a very colorful game.

The game system is a Mark Herman design and a real gem. The range effects chart and the combat results table have been synthesized into a single matrix which makes combat extremely simple at no sacrifice to realism. Fire and movement has been



handled in an equally simple fashion and very little chrome burdens playability. This is a "shoot and scoot" game at a similar level of complexity to *October War*. In short, it is a lot of fun.

The game is not simplistic, however. The heart of the game system is a brief set of command control rules whose implications are enormous. Mark has found a way of simulating the behavior of a whole formation at a tactical level, which works extremely well. Each formation is assigned a road as its center of gravity. The players begin in various modes which determine how far from their roads they may deploy their units. As play develops, players may change command modes in an offensive or defensive direction.

The ability to change modes allows all sorts of advantages but is critically dependent upon command competence and reconnaissance (a commander whose front line units can see a lot of enemy units is likely to reconsider what he is doing).

All in all, this system successfully captures several major elements of modern tactical combat which have never been adequately simulated before, and in doing so still manages to be elegantly simple. A player's role as commander in this game feels closer to the real thing than anything I have ever seen.

--Bruce Maxwell

RDF (From Moves 58 A/S 1981)

Hot Spots

Hot Spots is once again in my hands and I look forward to completing that which I started. The game system is complete, with several months to go before the manuscript is to be turned in to editorial. One thing this game will not lack is playtesting. To date, the Iran '80 scenario has been played 18 times with the score Iraq 10 wins to Iran's 8.

The Iran '80 scenario pits an Iranian armor battalion with Chieftain tanks, BTR-60 APC's, plus associated air defense and artillery assets against an Iraqi armor battalion with T-55 tanks and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers in a classic meeting engagement. The Iraqi commander is better than the Iranian commander (a B vs. a D effectiveness rating), but the Iranians move first, allowing them the opportunity to gain good positions for their Scorpion reconnaissance unit and thus increase the effective level of their commander's rating, due to superior initial intelligence.

The last playthrough of this scenario followed these lines: The Iranian reconnaissance unit moved down the Bitmyah road and encountered Iraqi PT76 tanks near the village of Tall-Abi-Az-Zaytun and drove them off with light casualties to both sides. Approximately 30 minutes later, the recon platoon commander spotted a column of Iraqi T-55 tanks and associated support in battalion strength approaching the village. The recon commander radioed battalion head-quarters with the information, prompting the Iranian battalion commander to change from a Movement and Contact formation to a Hasty Assault posture. During this formation change one of the Chieftain companies swung off the main axis of advance, while the mechanized infantry company set up blocking positions just east of the village in an area of cultivation that afforded good defensive positions. The other Iranian Chieftain company overwatched the situation from a reserve status.

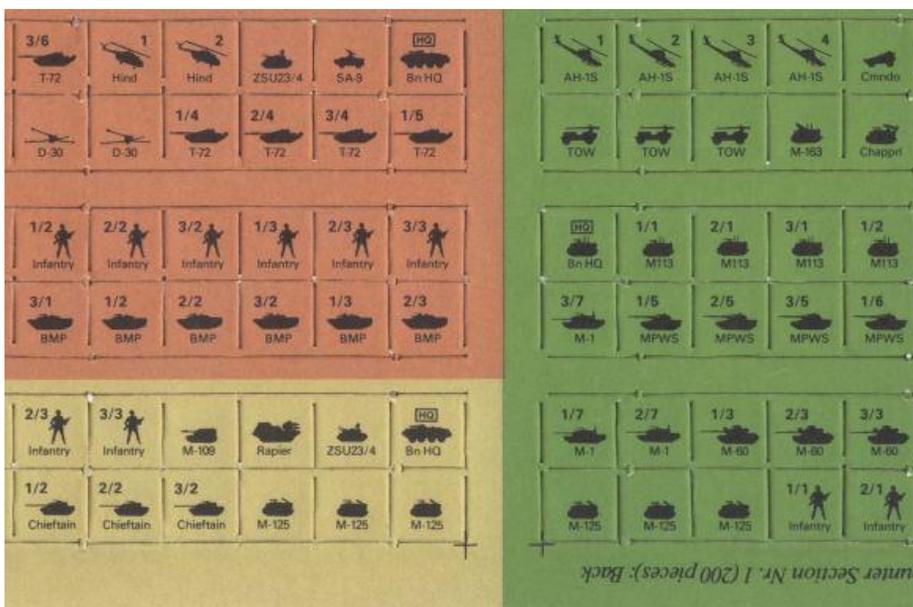
The Iraqi commander, upon receiving the information of the skirmish near the village, decided that it was not a major Iranian formation and ordered that speed was to be maintained. Consequently, no formation change occurred. The Iraqis soon ran into the Iranian blocking positions and the units became embroiled in a massive traffic jam which disrupted the mobility of their formation. Shortly thereafter, the Iranian Chieftain company attacked on the Iraqi left flank; this successful ambush caused the Iraqi units to reach a catastrophic morale status, resulting in a massive retreat with the Iranians in hot pursuit.

Hot Spots allows players to gain tempo and development of their pieces like in chess often the decisive factor in the play of the game. Playtesting of this and the other five scenarios continues ... more next time.

—Mark Herman

RDF (from Moves 59 O/N 1982)

The emphasis of playtesting on *Hot Spots* has shifted from the first scenario (an Iranian and Iraqi meeting engagement in 1980) to the second scenario which is placed in Iran in 1986. This scenario postulates a Rapid Deployment Force that is equipped with high technology coming up against a Soviet T-72 tank battalion. The US force possesses MIP/VIS (Mobile Protected Weapon System) and LAV (Light Armor Vehicle) armored fighting vehicles; both of these systems are now in the testing stage. Though the US force is outgunned, it has



helicopter and air support and is better led than the Soviet force.

The scenario begins with the reconnaissance elements of both sides entering the map on Game-Turn 1, with the rest of the forces entering on Game-Turns 2 and 3. Game-Turn 4 would probably go something like this: The Soviet battalion commander has been receiving reports for the last hour of contact with the enemy forces. He decides to initiate a formation change from a movement to contact into a hasty assault (the Soviet, are on an offensive mission); chances for success are 45 percent. Due to the various friction of war factors (mostly lack of good intelligence), this attempt fails.

The US commander having identified the Soviet axis of advance, has already changed his formation into a hasty defense. His indirect support (mortars and artillery) open fire on the identified Soviet positions, causing widespread suppression. Meanwhile, the US maneuver elements move and trigger enemy opportunity fire when sighted. The US commander reassesses his position at this time and decides to "dig in," modifying his formation into a deliberate defense; he has an 83 percent chance of passing the check and succeeds.

The Soviets then conduct similar types of action (indirect fire followed by movement and direct fire). At the conclusion of the Soviet player's actions, the fourth Game Turn ends.

The preceding comments relate the key events that are undertaken during a player turn.

The crucial action centers on the ability of a player to modify his force structure to allow for maximum utilization of all the available forces. This particular scenario ended in a US victory. The Soviet attack stalled due to the "dug in" nature of the US positions; a successful counterattack was later launched from these positions which broke the morale of the Soviet force and eventually resulted in their withdrawal off the map. Playtesting continues, more next time ...

—Mark Herman

RDF (from *Moves 60 D/J 1982*)

I recently had the pleasure of demolishing an Iraqi armored battalion with an Iranian force of Chieftains (2 companies) and associated infantry. The Iraqis had the larger tank force, but not only was their equipment inferior (T55's against Chieftains is suicide), so were their tactics. The Iraqi commander found out why it doesn't pay to attack with tanks in a piecemeal fashion; against superior firepower, you get defeated in detail.

RDF is now entering the final stages of development. The addition of high-technology equipment like thermal-imaging sights (to allow sighting into and out of smoke) did not require lengthy new rules, but it did require a change in tactics. The side that had such equipment had a real advantage, even when outnumbered and with relatively poor command ratings. It became possible to balance the scenarios with ease; one side had it, the other

didn't. The MPWS (Mobile Protected Weapons System) finally could stand up to even a T72, although still not on quite even terms. Before, it didn't stand a chance.

The scenarios have now been balanced to the point where playtester skill has become paramount, which is exactly where they should be. I detest games where one side always wins; you feel as if you're not playing against your opponent, as much as against the game. None of that in **RDF**, oh no.

Scenarios are being prepared now to deal with helicopter-to-helicopter combat, reconnaissance units contacting each other, ambushes by guerrilla units (Afghanistan guerrillas vs. the Soviets), and the like. The system seems to handle almost any battle situation thrown at it with a modicum of tweaking, so coming up with new scenarios shouldn't be a real problem.

Scenarios tend to be unmercifully bloody, sharp engagements, with units breaking well before the end. It is something to watch when a Soviet tank battalion breaks after its headquarters has been destroyed by an artillery barrage (he let a platoon of APC's get close enough to spot the HQ for the 155mm howitzers) while F4's chew up soft vehicles in the battalion. It is not easy to achieve such a debacle (for the opposing player), but the results are well worth the effort. Nothing like a scenario with a serious catastrophe for your opponent! This game has the potential for many such happenings; of course, such things can happen to you, too. I got clobbered by

the Soviets in a meeting engagement when my RDF battalion refused to change formation before running head-on into 3 companies of T72's . RDF casualties ran up to 75% before it was all over, and the Russian was only down a tank company. Oh, well, the war continues...

--Tony Merridy

RDF (from S&T 90 J/F 1982)

RDF (Rapid Deployment Force) nears its production turn-in date and the final optional rules are being added. The game now includes smoke (not used in large quantities by Middle East countries), interceptors, and minefields. Testing continues on the five scenarios in the game, which include: Iran vs. Iraq {a meeting engagement); a US Air Cav unit vs. a Soviet tank battalion (blocking force); the US Rapid Deployment Force vs. the Soviets (a blocking force attempts to stop an armored

thrust); the US Rapid Deployment Force vs. the Soviets (in a positional defense); and the US Rapid Deployment Force vs. Iran (a meeting engagement).

In addition, the last three scenarios featuring the RDF come in two flavors - current and future high technology - yielding a total of eight different situations to play. RDF should provide quite a challenge to both sides, and offer an occasional chance for an unexpected and overwhelming victory (or loss).

--Mark Herman

