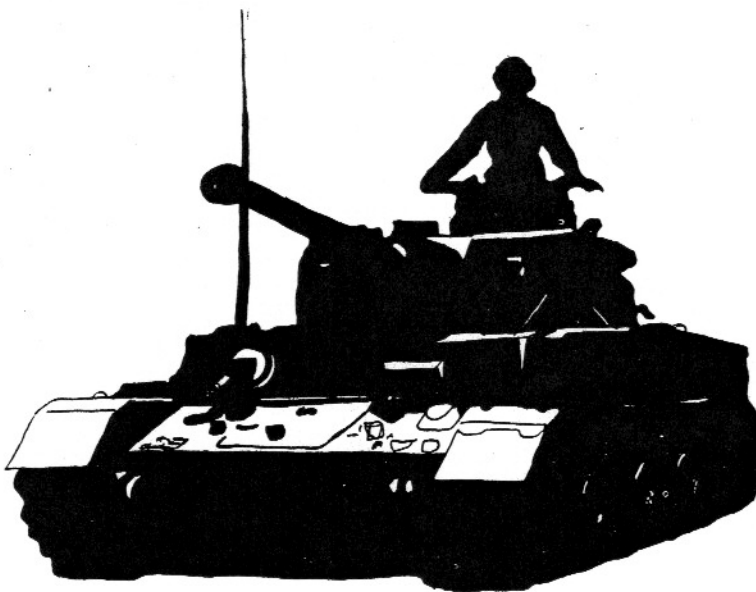# Guide to Panzerblitz

by T.F. McGrath

OBSTACLES AND ELEVATIONS

THIS PORTION of the rules will probably pose the biggest problem to the beginner. Part of the problem lies in the wording used in these rules. Another part of the problem is the unfamiliar use of the representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface.

When you are using the standard line of sight (LOS) rules, the situation is somewhat simpler than when you are using the Real-Space Line of Sight optional rule. So we will cover rules interpretations of this section of the Panzerblitz rules from these two points of view.

Standard LOS Rules

When you are not adjacent to a unit and you want to determine if it is within your line of sight, follow this procedure:

A. Lay a straightedge from the center of the hex the observing unit is occupying to the center of the hex the observed unit occupies.

B. Observe where this straightedge passes through each intervening hex. Make the judgement as to which hexes this line may pass through based on the following statements.

1. If the line passes through the center of each intervening hex, then only those hexes will be considered for the LOS judgement (see Fig. 1).

2. If the line passes through the center of one hex and the line separating the next two hexes, only the hexes through which the line passes and the two hexes that are immediately adjacent to the line need to be considered as possible routes for the LOS (see Fig. 2).

3. If the line passes through hexes so that it is closer to one adjoining hex than to another, only those adjoining hexes that are closer to the line need be considered in adjudicating the LOS (see Fig. 3).

C. If there are any intervening color-coded hexsides on the hexes through which the line of sight must pass as determined in statement B above, the LOS may be blocked, as outlined in the following statements.

D. If both the observing unit and the unit being observed are at the same elevation, then the LOS is blocked by any intervening hexside in any of the paths as determined above. In fig. 1, with the observing unit located in hex Q6 and the target in hex D3, there is a line of sight, since there is no color-coded hexside between any adjacent hexes through which the LOS must be traced. While there is a blocking hexside on hex I3, it does not form a boundary with the next adjacent hex H4 on the LOS. In Fig. 2 the LOS between hexes T7 and FF7 is blocked by the green color-coded hexside between hexes DD7 and CC6.

E. A brown color-coded hexside does not block the LOS between a unit on a hilltop and a unit on a slope.

The remainder of the special notes are reasonably clear for the determination of the LOS, when they are used in conjunction with the Target Elevation Table (TET).

Optional Real-Space LOS Rule

When this rule is used the guidance, of course, is still the basic rules, but the key word in the rules is obstacle, not hexside. Any terrain symbol on the mapboard may serve to block the LOS from one point to another. Actually, the use of this optional rule is much more realistic and it is easier to use. There are far less discussions as to whether an LOS really exists when this rule is used. The routine for the use of the rule is as follows.

A. Lay a straightedge from the center of the hex being observed from to the target hex.

B. If the straight line thus laid out intercepts any obstacle (any colored terrain symbol including color-coded hexsides) then an obstruction to the LOS may exist. Whether the obstruction exists or not can be decided by the use of the Target Elevation Table. Figure 3 illustrates many examples of instances in which the LOS does not exist because of blocking terrain features.

LOS Playing Aid

An excellent playing aid for determining the LOS can be made simply. Cut a hexagon out to match

the hexagons on the board from a piece of stiff cardboard (I have used a bit of manila folder). Locate the center of the hexagon by drawing straight lines from the hex vertices to the opposite vertices and punch a small hole in the center. Locate the hex guide on each hex of the playing surface in turn and punch a pin into the center of the hex. Use a felt-tip pen to color this pin prick and the center of each hex will be marked on the board. The straightedge now will locate the LOS with good accuracy when it is placed between the centers of each hex in question.

Special Notes

When the LOS passes exactly through and is parallel to a gray or green color-coded hexside, the LOS is blocked if one unit is at ground level and immediately adjacent to the end of the color-coded hexside, regardless of the elevation of the other unit.

HILL AND SLOPE DEFENSE EXCEPTIONS

This series of rules basically shows the additional defensive strength of units which are located on slopes or hills. The units thus located are not stronger, but the fire directed at such units by direct-fire weapons is weaker, since they have lost the benefit of grazing fire. Grazing fire (fire which is parallel to the surface of the ground) has the advantage that if you miss one target, you can possibly hit another one behind it. It also contributes greatly to keeping the enemy's head down, so that he can not deliver effective defensive fire. So essentially the fire directed at units which drives into the earth, or fire which rises so that it becomes higher and higher from the ground, is less effective.

This rule, however, seriously weakens the effect of mortar and indirect fire which is inherently plunging since it falls at a high angle; the effect of this fire has already been discounted since it is plunging. This problem will be treated in an optional rule later.

There is no mention of the effect of slope and hilltop terrain on CATs in this section. As was pointed out earlier, a great deal of the strength of the CAT was due to the supporting fire from the MGs assigned to the unit conducting the CAT attacks. In addition, if the assaulting forces have to move up a slope they are much more vulnerable to observation, especially when they cross the military crest and they

are more vulnerable to grenade action. Hence the strength of a CAT attack should be halved as are the various fire attacks. The rule actually calls out attacking units, ao it should be applied to all types of attack.

GULLIES AND STREAMBEDS

Several clarifications need to be made in this section of the rules, espicially with regard to fords and to roads traversing the gullies. A unit may move up a gully to a ford hex, move onto the ford hex without any movement penalty, and leave the gully from this ford hex (a clear terrain hex), thus essentially obviating the movement penalty for leaving the gully.

Similarly, a unit may move up the gully to a road hex crossing the gully and leave the gully on the road hex without paying a movement penalty for leaving the gully.

There are basic differences between these two types of hexes, however. The ford hex is defined as clear terrain, so the defensive value of the gully is lost to a unit occupying the ford hex. The road hex on the gully offers all the defensive values of a gully: Units can not be overrun; a wreck on this hex negates the effect of the road, so units entering this hex now are entering the gully; units occupying this hex have the benefit of only being in the LOS of units occupying high ground.

Around the pond on board 3

there are some problems faced in transitting from one gully hex to another. Movement from any gully hex on the edge of the pond to another gully hex adjacent to it will cost the movement penalty for moving out of the gully in addition to the normal movement cost, if the movement is made directly from one hex to the hex adjacent to it. Backtracking may save MFs in this maneuver. The pond edge itself may not be used for transit.

SPOTTING

This rule has caused many problems in interpretation, especially to those just learning the game. Avalon Hill has explained the rule very well in one of their "Question Box" columns, so I will simply paraphrase the answer which has been given.

There are three things to keep in mind when using the spotting rule. First, since firing must precede movement, the spotting unit may not move into place to spot on the same turn in which the firing is executed. It must be in a spotting position at the beginning of the turn in which firing is executed against the unit(s) being spotted. Secondly, even after the unit that is to be the target is spotted, the firing unit(s) must have a clear field of fire to the target unit. If there is an obstruction to the LOS of the unit which is to fire, the fire can not be executed since LOS also implies line of fire (LOF). If the optional Indirect Fire rule is being used, the CP which is directing the fire must
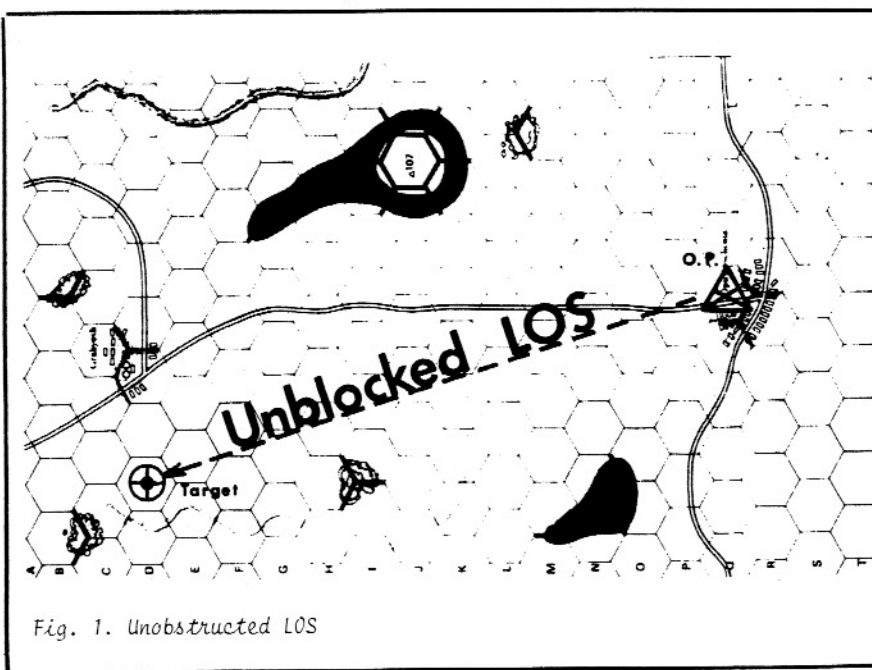

Fig. 1. Unobstructed LOS

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--have a clear LOS to the unit being spotted (the target unit). If the LOS of the CP is obstructed indirect fire may not be directed at the target unit. Thirdly, the spotting unit may move away on the movement portion of the turn in which fire has been placed on the unit being spotted. If the spotting unit moves away, the target is no longer spotted for subsequent turns, however, even though the target unit remains in the same hex. Of course, the spotting unit may fire at the unit it is spotting, or any other unit within its LOS.

WRECKAGE

The phrase "wrecks negate a road" means simply that the placement of a wreck on a road hex makes that hex become whatever other terrain is displayed in the hex. As the passing rule is interpreted (see Outposts No. 8), a wreck on a hex in which the road passes through a green hexside may be blocked so that vehicular traffic may not pass. If the wreck is on a hex in which the road traverses green hexsides on both sides, such as hex 2Q4, it blocks vehicular traffic in either direction. If the wreck is placed on a hex with just one green hexside crossing the road, it inhibits traffic from moving through the wreck, then through the hexside. For example, if there is a wreck placed on hex 205, vehicles can move from hex 2P5 to 205, but not from hex 205 to 2P5 directly. Hexes containing wrecks can still be occupied up to the stacking limits allowed to each side, whether on or off roads.

Hexes which have been stacked to the stacking limit do not generally impede movement (other than on road hexes with green color-coded hexsides). You may pass freely through such hexes, although you may not stop on them. After all, thirty wrecks in almost 11 acres would pose no obstruction to movement, though they would offer nice cover for infantry.

If a single wreck is placed on a road hex traversing a swamp hex, the road is completely blocked to vehicular traffic. Vehicles are forbidden to enter the swamps, so a passing maneuver is not allowed. Since the wreck negates the road you are not allowed to move up on the wreck, then off the road on the next turn. The road hexes crossing gullies and slopes are also negated by a wreck. The full movement penalty must be paid for traversing such hexes when a wreck is present. A wreck in a ford hex does not negate the ford. The ford area is presumed to be wide enough so that it is not blocked by wrecks.

MINES

Mines are an integral part of modern vehicular warfare and are placed primarily to inhibit movement. The casualty producing effect is only secondary. If they are not covered by fire they are easily removed and therefore represent only a transitory barrier to the movement of vehicles. In this game, they are stronger than in reality; an optional rule is suggested later to more closely represent the probability of minefield removal. When units move up on minefields they are attacked by the mines at odds of 2:1 (83% chance of at least dispersal). If the mines are located in towns or woods, the units attacked do not get the benefit of the "plus" factor allowed them by other attacks.

Units on minefields may not be attacked by a CAT. Implicit in the concept of a CAT is the entry by the attacking infantry into the occupied hex (by at least a portion of the attacking infantry). Any normal infantryman treads very hesitantly in an area that he knows is mined. He would prefer to not tread at all; so the dash of the typical CAT would be lost (and most of its effectiveness).

Units which survive a minefield attack (no effect) may remain on the minefield without facing further attacks from the minefield. Otherwise, if the unit is not eliminated but dispersed, it will be attacked on subsequent turns by the minefield.

BLOCKAGE

Blocks not only negate the road in a green color-coded hexside, but also prevent vehicular traffic from moving in either direction when placed in this position (unlike wrecks). Otherwise they have the same effects as wrecks on a road hex.

Blocks are probably more difficult to remove than the typical minefields of the period; as such, the statement in the rules that the blocks may not be removed at all only implies that the time period allowed for the game would not allow sufficient time for any unit to clear the blocks. This is certainly true for blocks on road hexes through wooded areas, or the other implication of a destroyed bridge over a gully or a stream.

The construction of a block placed in clear terrain would imply much more extensive construction than would have normally been done during the period over which the game ranges. The construction of an effective tank trap 250 meters long would have required much more manpower than was generally available; at least in the case of the Germans. When civilian labor was available, it was certainly exploited, but such labor was not available in the fast-moving situations generally portrayed. Perhaps these blocks do represent such engi-
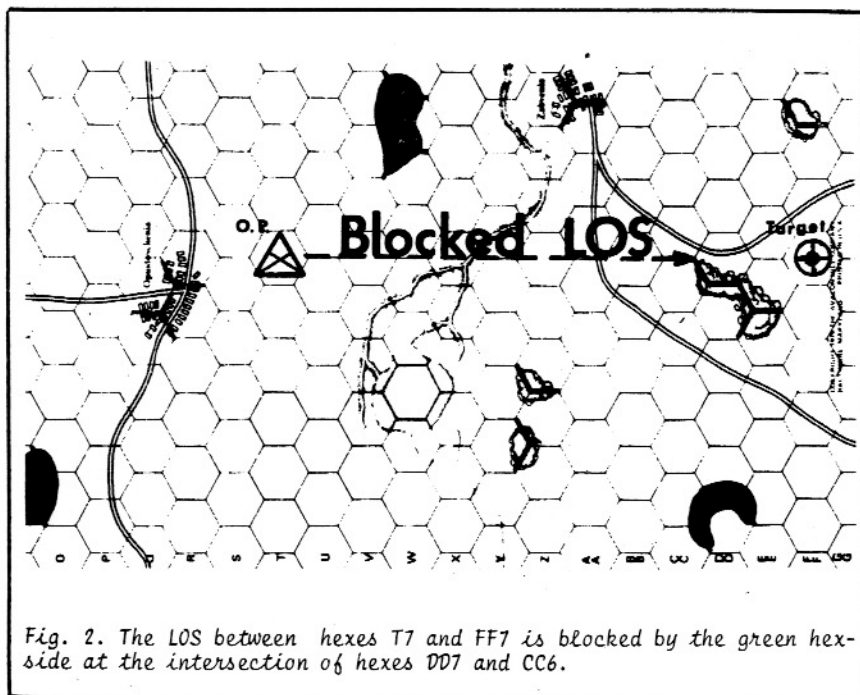

Fig. 2. The LOS between hexes T7 and FF7 is blocked by the green hexside at the intersection of hexes DD7 and CC6.

neer-designed, civilian-labor-prepared works, but an additional optional rule is given later to cover the situation for players who would like to try something different.

FORTIFICATIONS

According to the descriptions furnished by the protagonists in the battles generally occurring during the period covered, the fortifications of Panzerblitz were not elaborate prepared fortifications, but field types. The infantry would dig small one-, two-, or three-man foxholes, using a mess tin or a scrap of board for digging. The weapons would be emplaced in a position allowing a good field of fire and protection would be provided for the ammunition supply. The armor would be dug-in (hull-down position) and heavy artillery would be placed in gun pits. There was seldom overhead cover, due to either lack of time or lack of materials. There was no concrete available nor time to prepare it. The Germans never prepared tank traps. The headquarters bunkers may have had roofs, usually consisting of a scrap of canvas, according to eyewitnesses. Concertina wire was seldom available. A few antipersonnel mines may have been used; perhaps some anti-vehicular mines were employed on the logical vehicular approach routes. The Germans did not have the necessary supply; the Russians did not have the logistical ability.

So, in many respects, fortifications represented in Panzerblitz are stronger than they were in actuality.

Avalon Hill has given one specific interpretation on the fortification rules: Three units (German) may be stacked under cover of fortifications and an additional three units (German) may be stacked on the same hex outside the fortifications. Two units may be stacked in each location for the Russians. There certainly is enough room in the area represented by a hex.

They have also made an interpretation contravening rule B under "Fortifications." This rule states that fortifications do not affect movement or stacking. Avalon Hill has stated that units may move onto an occupied fortification in one move, but may not move off the fortification until the next move.

If rule B is to stand, then two statements must be made: 1) A fortification-occupied hex can only be stacked to its limit (three u-
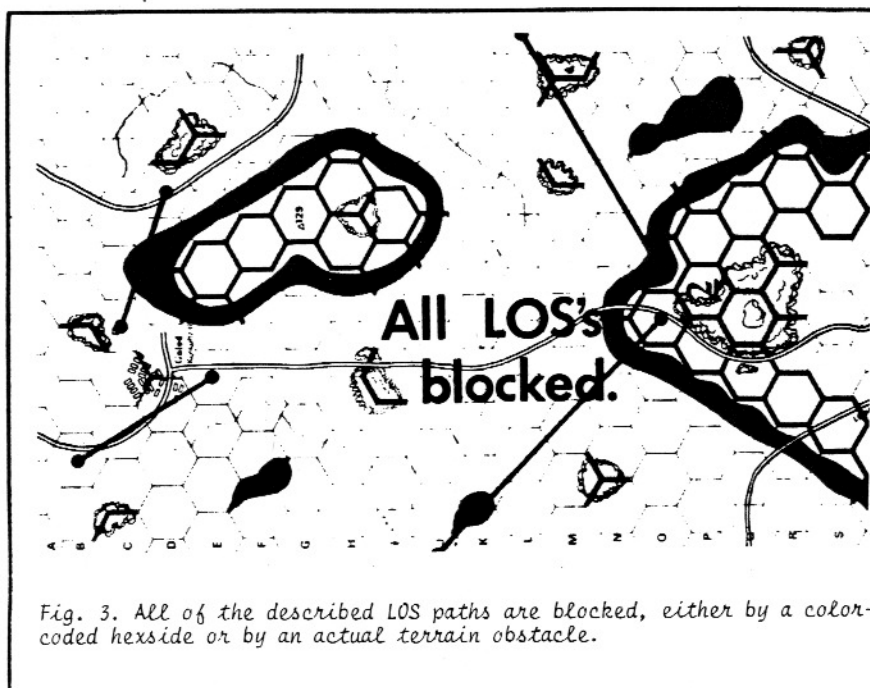

Fig. 3. All of the described LOS paths are blocked, either by a color-coded hexside or by an actual terrain obstacle.

nits for the Germans, two for the Russians), whether the units are inside or outside the fortification. 2) Units may move freely over fortifications which are occupied or over empty fortifications.

To bring the use of fortifications back into perspective an additional rule is given later.

Fortifications are classified as armored targets. This is a rather unreal representation. Actually, armor-piercing shells were somewhat ineffective against earthen bunkers.

INDIRECT FIRE OPTIONAL RULE

In order to use the CP as a fire director in the game it must be dismounted.

Strangely, the rules do not allow howitzer-type artillery to fire indirectly, although it was principally designed to do just that! German howitzers were manned by trained crews and were equipped to engage in this type of firing. This condition is ammended by the addition of an optional rule, given later.

MISCELLANEOUS

The following rules interpretations were found in the "Question Box" of The General, or in other private communications from the various people who serve as the "answer man" in response to a query containing a self-addressed, stamped envelope. They generally deal with concepts regarding the play of a particular situation or with off-board operations.

A. When units are entering the board in any given situation, unless the situation card states otherwise, they may be started on any available half-hex.

B. When victory conditions require that a certain number of units be located on a particular board, those units must be fully on the board. They can not be placed on the half-hexes which are at the junction of one board with another. They may be located on half-hexes on the edge on the board which does not connect to another board, however.

C. Units entering the board from any off-board position may interpret the terrain off the board to their advantage. They can assume there are road hexes off the board on which they can move to contact a road hex on the board. They may not stack beyond their limit however.

D. Unless the rules so state, units may not leave the playing area of the board in any situation.

E. Units off the board in any situation may not fire at units on the board, unless specifically permitted to do so by the rules of the particular situation.

F. Unless the situation rules specifically forbid it, units due to enter the board on a given turn
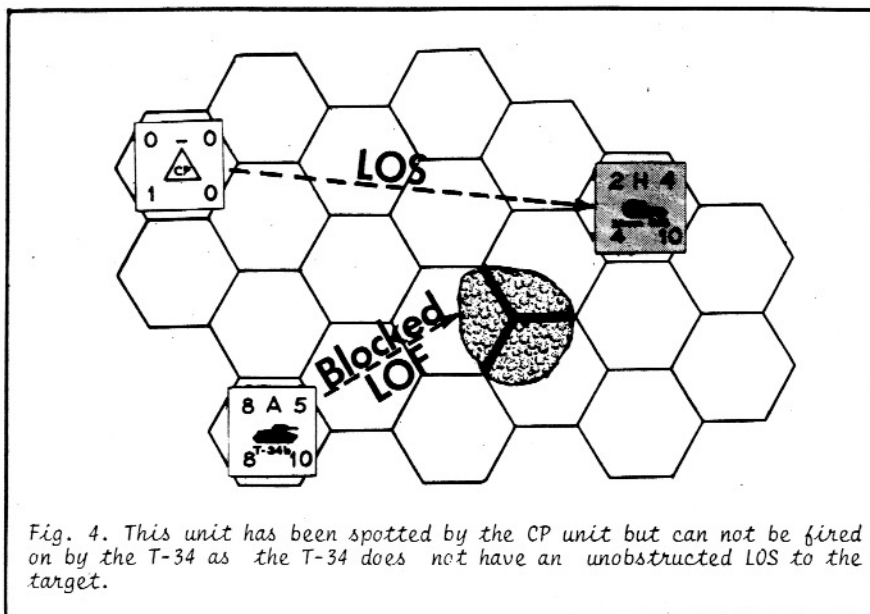
Fig. 4. This unit has been spotted by the CP unit but can not be fired on by the T-34 as the T-34 does not have an unobstructed LOS to the target.

may be held off-board for entry at a later turn.

G. The specific rules given for a particular situation govern play of the game for that situation. Any rules that conflict with these specifics are not in force for that situation.

ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL RULES

The following suggested optional rules serve several purposes: They add a touch of additional realism to the situations; they serve to equalize to a degree unbalanced situations; and they serve to change the tenor of a much-played situation. Both players should affirm which rules will be used, before starting a game.

Smoke

Any mortar-type unit (80 and 90 code group) can fire smoke instead of its normal HE shell. The following rules and restrictions apply to this operation.

A. They may only fire at hexes within their range and LOS.

B. They may not fire into hexes occupied by friendly units; they may fire into hexes occupied by enemy units if they are spotted or in the firing unit's LOS. Smoke has no casualty producing capability.

C. Smoke in a hex serves to block the LOS through that hex, regardless of the altitude of units attempting to observe through the smoke. Units adjacent to the smoke-filled hex can observe into that

hex. Units in a smoke-filled hex may observe out of the hex.

D. The smoke fired by 80-type units lasts for one full turn only

E. The smoke fired by 90-type units lasts for two full turns only.

F. Mortar units may only fire smoke on three turns during any situation.

This rule serves to curb the LOS, creating new avenues of approach through which to attack, or shielding defending or spotting units from view. It may help the Russians significantly in Situation 4, or the Germans in Situations 10 and 7. It is certainly realistic, though it was useful only when the weather conditions were right.

Observation for Indirect Fire

A CP may be used to direct indirect fire when mounted on a halftrack. The halftrack may not move in the turn in which the CP does direct fire.

This is a very useful rule in a highly mobile situation. It is based on actual practices, for it was done often in mobile situations.

Variation on Indirect Fire

Howitzers may also be used for indirect fire but only at greater than half-range. This is an addition to the present Indirect Fire optional rule of the basic rules. It benefits the side that has such weapons and it is realistic.

Combat Decision

The die is not rolled to determine the results of combat until all fire has been allocated and all movement executed. The only combat results that will be known prior to movement will be automatic victories. These are defined as those attacks in which the odds are 4:1 against the defender and there are no "plus" factors assigned to the die roll.

This optional rule equates FTF and PBM. It is realistic, since certainly many times the results of specific attacks would not be known in the time interval allocated to a turn. The rule generally benefits the defender.

PLUNGING-FIRE WEAPONS

All plunging fire is not halved when fired at units on slopes, hilltops, and in fortifications. Plunging fire is defined as that fire delivered by mortars at any range and howitzer-type weapons at greater than half-range. Of course, if the fire is directed at armored targets at greater than half-range the attack factor is halved, but not additionally due to the effect on combat of defender-occupied terrain.

This variation is reasonably realistic; it gives these usually slighted weapons a greater role in the game situation. Again, it augments the capabilities of the side possessing the greater amount of these types of weapons.

Additional Engineer Capability

Engineer units may remove minefields and blockages. This is done in the following manner:

A. The assigned engineer unit moves up to and dismounts next to the block or minefield.

B. On the next turn the engineer unit moves into the hex containing the obstacle. If it is a minefield the engineer unit is not subject to minefield attacks. No other unit may enter the hex containing the obstacle while the engineer unit is "working" in it.

C. On the next turn the die is rolled. If the result is 1, 2, or 3 the obstacle is removed. Otherwise it remains in place.

D. During the next turn, assuming the obstacle to still be present, it is automatically eliminated at the end of the turn. In the four consecutive turns, the

engineer unit can definitely remove the obstacle. If the obstacle is not covered by fire, the engineers can easily complete their mission. This forces the defender to cover all of these obstacles with fire if their integrity is to be maintained. The engineer unit is not attacked by the minefield since it is assumed that it is working on the fringes of the obstruction. The engineer unit may not participate in any attacks nor leave the hex containing the obstacle until demolition or removal has been completed. This is a reasonably realistic rule, though the 24 minutes used to open a path through a minefield may be short for well-patterned fields.

It will benefit the side with engineers which is attacking a semi-prepared position. The Russians will benefit in Situation 12, for example. It gives the engineer units an additional role and may change the "flavor" of some situations.

Passenger Dispersal

When passengers carried by assault guns, self-propelled artillery, tank destroyers, and tanks are dispersed by fire, they must be dismounted from the carrier unit and dispersed on that hex in which they were attacked. Stacking beyond normal limits is allowed in this case.

If an armored unit of the previously mentioned categories is carrying passengers and is dispersed, the passenger must be dismounted and dispersed also in the hex where the attack occurred. Units may exceed the stacking limitations in this case for that turn only.

If the stacking limit has been exceeded, during the next turn sufficient units must leave the hex to bring the number of units occupying the hex down to the stacking limit. If for some reason, including additional dispersal, units are unable to leave the overstacked hex then sufficient units, selected at the option of the owning player, must be removed to bring the number of units occupying the hex down to the stacking limit.

This is a very realistic rule. Certainly, if the armor were dispersed the passengers would head for separate cover. Small-arms fire could also cause the passengers to seek cover. This rule benefits the defender in any given situation for it forces the attacking forces to spread out in open ground, especially armored forces carrying passengers.

PBM: MECH WAR '77

by Wes Polender

MECH WAR '77 is one of SPI's better games. FTF play is very exciting, and PBM can be just as good. The following method is the easiest way to play Mech War '77 by mail; however, it is complicated.

PLAY SEQUENCE

1. The players record items a-d (listed below), each on a separate piece of paper. Each piece of paper is sealed in a small envelope (be sure to retain a copy of these orders for your own reference).

a) List units that will execute direct fire and the target hexes for this fire; the stocks to be used for resolving these attacks should also be listed.

b) Units that will move.

c) Units that will execute opportunity fire and the target hexes for this fire; include the stocks to be used for resolving these attacks.

d) Units that will execute indirect fire, OFBDA, and CAS and the target hexes for these attacks; include the stocks to be used for resolving these attacks.

Label each envelope carefully and specify a closing transaction date for combat resolution for this turn.

2. The players place all of these small envelopes into one large envelope and mail it to their opponent on the same day that he mails his move. This mailing date is decided on before play begins for the first turn; on later turns the second player specifies the mailing date after he has completed step No. 5. The specified closing transaction date should be two days after the mailing date.

3. When you receive your opponent's move, obtain a listing of the closing transactions for the date specified in your opponent's letter. These are first used to determine panic. Your opponent will have, of course, included the names of some stocks to be used for this depending on your panic level (if it is 20%, he will specify two stocks). The last number of the

sales-in-hundreds is the result. After panic is resolved open your opponent's direct fire envelope and resolve his attacks. There is no need to exchange letters again, since if you followed instructions you will both be using the same closing transaction date, so you will know what has resulted from your attacks.

4. The first player plots movement for all his units that were designated to move, hex by hex, and mails it to his opponent. Mail two copies and keep one. After mailing, open the second player's opportunity fire envelope and resolve any combat using the same listings that were used to resolve panic and direct fire.

5. The second player completes step No. 4 after he receives his opponent's move.

6. Remove all pin and disruption counters. The stocks used for determining disruption removal are the top three or four stocks on the page depending on the amount of attempts there are. Disruption removal attempts are resolved in the following order: The unit with the highest identification number uses the first stock listing, the unit with the next highest ID number uses the next stock, and so on. It is alright to use these stock listings if they have been used elsewhere.

7. The players open each other's indirect fire envelopes and resolve combat. This completes turn No. 1.

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