

TAC NEWS

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HORSE-MOUNTED TROOPS AND MICRO ARMOUR®: THE GAME - WWII

Micro Armour®: The Game - includes several rules specifically dealing with equestrian forces, the most common of these being mounted cavalry. While the role of mounted cavalry (and other mounted forces) in WWII is often barely touched upon in wargaming rules sets, these were nonetheless an important part of many of the armies taking part in that war. The four primary Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Romania, and Japan) fielded large numbers of mounted troops and maintained numerous horse-drawn transport vehicles, primarily artillery prime-movers and supply wagons.

Among the Allies, France and the Soviet Union fielded large equestrian contingents. The Soviet Union in particular made good use of horse-cavalry, taking advantage of its mobility under the difficult terrain, limited transportation network, and harsh climate so common across the 'Eastern Front'. Soviet mixed cavalry/tank formations were instrumental both in establishing and maintaining the infamous 'Stalingrad' pocket. Thousands of Axis troops were first surrounded, then assaulted, and finally starved into submission under some of the worst weather conditions and fiercest fighting ever witnessed in that most vicious and merciless four-year campaign.

Cavalry in WWII was not, as has often been portrayed, an anachronistic throwback to earlier times. The very idea of



launching a head-down 'charge for death or glory' in the face of dug-in machine guns and rapid fire artillery would have been laughable to the crafty, battle-wise, horsemen of WWII. Just look at the record! French and Belgian cavalry bore the brunt of the German offensive in the Ardennes during the first days of the 1940 Blitzkrieg. Polish cavalry roughly handled the Germans on more than one occasion during 'Case White' in September, 1939 (despite the common misconception of futile mounted charges), again by fighting skillful delaying actions. Romanian cavalry (the elite of their expeditionary force) was instrumental in the capture of Rostov and Odessa on the Eastern Front. Even Italian cavalry had their moment of glory there when the battle cry, "Avanti, Savoia!" heralded the last successful Axis 'sabre' charge of the war on a dusty battlefield in the Ukraine some eighty miles northwest of Stalingrad along the banks of the Volga. Italian horsemen captured hundreds of Soviet prisoners in this attack.

Examples of the effective use of horse-cavalry in WWII are numerous and informative. How were mounted troops organized? In what ways were they most effective? How can gamers use cavalry for a very interesting alternative to armour gaming in GHQ's *Micro Armour®: The Game*?

WWII CAVALRY ORGANIZATION (INCLUDING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR)

1. Troops - In *Micro Armour®: The Game*, horse-cavalry is represented by platoon-sized "stands" (called Troops) representing anywhere from 30 - 50 men on horseback. The combat value of these is calculated in the same way as



for infantry. A single squad of eight to twelve moderately-trained men armed with bolt-action rifles is rated at one (1) firepower point. The addition of a reliable light machine gun or automatic-rifle to the standard squad raises this to 1.2 points. Overall, then, a standard cavalry 'troop' possesses a (small arms) firepower value of between three (3) and five (5), depending on how well it is armed and how



many squads it includes. Maximum range is five inches (or 500 meters). Its standard anti-tank value is zero (0) since it possesses no organic anti-tank weapons other than improvised ones or grenades.

Its defense value of five (5) is different from the standard six (6) for infantry due to the fact that, while dismounted, one fourth of its personnel must be detached as horse-holders. It was decided that the remainder would never be fully comfortable separated from their primary means of transport (and escape in case of disaster) and would therefore be more 'brittle' under fire than other troops. In addition, the rules state that the defense value of all 'Personnel' stands (which includes cavalry) is halved (rounded DOWN) while in the Movement Posture. This means that mounted cavalry on the move defends at a value of two (2), which reflects the greater vulnerability of exposed horses, as opposed to foot soldiers.

Finally, its movement value is eight (8), representing a maximum speed of eight miles-per-hour (8 mph), which is the standard movement rate for horsed cavalry (in action) in the U.S. Army Field Manual (FM 2-15 Horse Cavalry Vols 1, 2 & 3, 1938). This corresponds to international standards and practices, and horse cavalry is never allowed to make use of motor transport, except under extraordinary conditions, like transfer between duty stations, etc.

2. Squadrons – A standard cavalry 'squadron' consists of three to four (3 – 4) troops and a small headquarters element and should be considered the smallest independently operating mounted formation.

3. Regiments – A cavalry 'regiment' commonly consisted of anywhere from an average of three (3) to maximum of five (5) squadrons, usually a full-strength 'headquarters' troop, and generally some sort of 'support' squadron. The composition of these support squadrons varied widely from army to army and from one period of the war to another. They might contain anywhere from 1 – 4 machine guns, light anti-tank guns, light to medium mortars, or even light anti-aircraft guns. Tactically, the regiment was the most commonly deployed cavalry formation of the war, being trained and equipped as an integrated, all-arms force capable of independent action, whether for reconnaissance, security, pursuit, defense, or assault, as the need arose. It was also common practice to assign a cavalry regiment to

each infantry 'corps' (formations of 2–4 divisions) or 'army' (two or more corps), primarily for reconnaissance and liaison purposes.

4. Brigades and Divisions – Operationally, cavalry regiments were often organized into brigades (when there were enough of them to warrant this for prolonged or fully independent operations). In this case, the brigade would be assigned an operational general headquarters (GHQ), to handle all the necessary command, supply, administrative, maintenance, and communications functions. Brigades could even be gathered together into cavalry divisions, as was the case in Germany, Romania, France, and the Soviet Union, among others. Such divisions (and often brigades as well) were where you would find artillery, engineering, anti-tank, and other formations attached as adjuncts toward fulfilling the formations primary mission in current operations. From time to time these might include attached motorized infantry, tank, and even aeronautical support.

MOUNTED COMBAT SUPPORT

In order to keep up with mounted troops, the various combat support elements of a WWII cavalry unit needed to be mounted as well. To do this, the units' organic machine guns and mortars needed effective transport, the most common being pack-animals. These would be led along by the weapons' crews (ideally, either mounted themselves or on foot). The advantage of pack-animals over wagons is obvious after a little consideration. Horse cavalry's greatest mobility advantage lay in the fact that it was not road-bound. Mounting its support weapons on horses (or mules) means that these can maintain the same movement rate as the troops supported, making them readily available when needed. Of course, this requires that the weapons' crews be provided with horses as well.

That said, pack-animals have their limits. Although several nations developed lightweight 'mountain' artillery capable of being dismantled and 'mule-packed', most artillery is simply too heavy for 'direct' animal transport (loaded on the poor beasts' backs). Therefore, light limbers or carts were commonly employed for transporting most of any mounted unit's artillery or anti-tank guns.

MIXING TRANSPORT

During the 1920's and 30's, several countries (notably Poland, Italy, and France) experimented with 'mixed' horsed and motorized transport as a means of modernizing their mounted forces. Mixed transport met with mixed success. Certainly, in the road-rich environment of Western

Europe motor transport greatly enhanced the speed with which a cavalry regiment's support elements could be brought into action. However, the troopers themselves became the



limiting factor in their own mobility. Since any unit's operational speed is never greater than that of its slowest element, motorization of support elements was of limited overall utility. Also, the use of motor transport actually reduced the mobility of horse-mounted units in areas where good roads were few. Artillery limbers, horse-drawn carts, and wagons are generally narrower than trucks and tractors, and of lighter overall weight, making them less susceptible to adverse road or weather conditions. Operating in heavily forested areas, roadless steppe, or snow-covered prairies, horse-mobile units would prove effective far beyond their heyday before the invention of modern rapid-fire weapons.

CAVALRY TACTICS IN MICRO ARMOUR®

Movement: In *Micro Armour®: The Game* the standard maneuver element for mounted troops is the regiment, consisting of nine – twelve cavalry stands (troops) and a headquarters element, often with the addition of a support squadron of some sort. Maneuvering by company (squadron) should be avoided unless your Force Cohesion Level is at least sixteen (16). Regiments should generally move in a 'double-line' formation (two ranks deep) whenever possible.

When the time comes to move, all stands in the second rank should be moved before any front-rank stands move. This practice helps prevent the worst 'fragmentation' effects of enemy opportunity fire, since gaps in the formation caused by second-rank stands immobilized or destroyed by opportunity-fire can readily be filled by front-rank stands coming up from behind. The importance of this cannot be stressed too strongly. The greatest threat to a regiment's mobility comes from it being broken up into small groups which must move separately. You have a limited number of 'orders' to spend in any turn. If you can move a regiment as a whole (a single Movement Group), this requires only one such order. However, if a single stand in the middle of a formation is lost or 'straggles' as a result of opportunity-fire, the regiment suddenly becomes two movement groups, requiring two orders for those units to roll for Cohesion at full value. Once such 'fragmentation' begins, it can only get worse. The only remedy is for the parent unit to stand fast while its fragmented parts struggle up to rejoin the colors (a dangerous and time-consuming exercise, especially in open terrain).

Combat: The *Micro Armour®* rules assume that horse-cavalry will always fire dismounted (See 'Close Assaults' below). However, whenever a cavalry stand moves, it is considered mounted, suffering the increased vulnerability that entails. Therefore, cavalry should avoid engaging the

enemy on open terrain, it should use its relatively high mobility to reach and occupy 'covering' terrain whenever possible, utilizing towns, villages, woods, ridge-lines, etc. From here they can pour defilade fire onto the enemy while they wait for friendly machine guns and artillery to soften them up for a sudden rush and Close Assault.

Operations: Mounted forces of any type in WWII were most effective when used in accordance within the parameters established by the German 'masters' (Manstein, Guderian, Rommel, et al), in that you should, whenever possible, move offensively and fight defensively. The idea is to take advantage of your greater mobility by taking decisive action, grabbing some vital piece of terrain your opponent (for one reason or another) simply cannot allow you to occupy. It may be some crossroad, bridge, or railroad line sitting astride his lines of communication and supply, some high ground that dominates an otherwise secure position, or a blocking position that prevents him from executing an orderly withdrawal (such as in the great Eastern Front encirclement battles of 1941-42). You must seize this objective, occupy it in strength, and dig in, making sure to bring along sufficient anti-tank and artillery assets to make any effort to retake it a costly one. After that, you hang on tenaciously to this vital ground while enemy forces batter themselves to fragments trying to pry you out of it.

This principal is as old as warfare itself, but is often lost in the confusion and complexity of modern combat operations. Therefore, if handled effectively, mounted forces should rarely be used in the assault, but deployed as flank guards or 'exploitation' troops, where the principal above can be utilized to maximum effect.

As an example, try out the "Cavalry Screening Action" scenario below. The nationality and exact composition of forces involved is up to you. The lesson illustrated here is that the more mobile force should take advantage of its greater tactical 'speed' to occupy the objective and hold on while the slower force must drive them out. After playing it a few times, you should gain a clearer understanding of the real merits of battlefield mobility.

SUGGESTED RULES OPTIONS

Micro Armour®: The Game provides all the rules necessary to employ horse-cavalry in a historically accurate manner. However, in the interests of simplicity and speed of play, several optional cavalry rules were left out of the standard rules. These are enclosed below for your consideration. You may use them or ignore them as you like, but they will add considerable realism to your games.

1. Extended Operations "Afoot": At any time during a game, you may 'dismount' any cavalry stand for an extended term. This simulates the unit sending its mounts out of harm's way a considerable distance away from the firing line. To do this, simply replace the cavalry stand with



an appropriate infantry stand (taking note of the ID numbers of both). This infantry stand retains the original stand's firepower and range values, but now has the standard infantry defense (6**) and movement (3F) values. 'Remounting' this stand requires it to assume the Movement Posture and make a Cohesion die-roll. If this roll is successful, the stand is replaced by the original mounted stand, which may move and fire normally next turn.

2. Pack Animals: You may mount one or more 'pack-horses' provided in GHQ Cavalry packs (or other beasts of burden) on quarter-sized stands (.5"x.5"). These may be added to machine gun, mortar, or other light support weapons (those considered a 'personnel' stands in the rules), providing them with increased movement capabilities. Pack animals possess an unarmored defense value of three (3), may never have any firepower value of their own. Stands being transported by pack animals may never fire while mounted. Their movement value is three (3F), and the point cost for pack animals is two (2).



When used to support mounted cavalry units, the weapons' crews are often mounted as well, allowing them the same relative mobility as the troops they are supporting. In this case, their movement value is eight (8) and their cost is increased to three (3).

Notes: Machine guns and mortars normally have a movement value of two (2F) due to their weight and bulk. Providing them with pack-animal transport allows them to move at the same rate as infantry. The same is true for several 'light' anti-tank guns (German 37s, French 25s, Soviet 45s, etc). These normally have a movement value of one (1), hitching them to one or two horses or mules allows them to move at the infantry rate as well.

3. Mounted Infantry: Mounted Infantry behave similarly to horse-cavalry with the following exceptions:

- They may never Close Assault while mounted.
- Once dismounted, they must remain dismounted for the remainder of the game.

4. Light Carts: These have a defense value of (two) 2, a Movement Value of six (6F), a transport capacity of four (4), and a point cost of 2 each.

- John Fernandes
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Micro Squad®: The 1:1 Scale Game - WWII

Written by George Chrestensen and based on the original "Micro Armour®: The Game" platoon scale game. The game rules include weapons data for France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, the Soviet Union, UK, and US. Also included are game markers, combat table card, scenario generator, and 10 ready-to-play scenarios!

Game Scale: 1 model = 1 vehicle/weapon, 1 inch = 25 yds/meters, 1 game turn = 1 battlefield minute

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