

TAC NEWS

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March - April 2008

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RUNNING A HASTY ASSAULT (Micro Armour® The Game - Tactical Notebook #1)

U.S. Army Field Manuals FM-100-5 "Operations" (1941 and 1993), describe in detail how offensive military actions should be planned and executed in accordance with ages-old and universal combat principles. These principles have been presented in many forms and styles over the centuries, and I don't pretend to be breaking new ground here, but I would like to present them below (in my own words) for your consideration.

1. Establish clear objectives.
2. Seize and maintain the initiative.
3. Apply overwhelming force at a decisive place and time.
4. Avoid distractions.
5. Maintain flexibility.
6. Establish a unified chain-of-command.
7. Issue clear and unambiguous orders.
8. Maintain secrecy and security.
9. Know your enemy, his assets, dispositions, capabilities, and intentions.
10. Keep defensive forces dispersed to avoid presenting the enemy with lucrative 'concentrated' targets.
11. To the first ten must be added one more... Keep things simple!

In this article, we will not attempt to cover all aspects of combined arms tactics. Instead we will concentrate on one specific type of operation, running a 'Hasty Attack' on an enemy held position with a mixed force made up primarily of infantry with tank and artillery support. In order to keep things simple (principle 11), we present the following example scenario.

Situation - It is mid-August, 1944. The Allies have broken through the Germans' main line of resistance some three days ago and your command has been advancing mostly unopposed since then. Ahead of you to the north is your next objective, the town of Ordinaire. Ordinaire is located in the midst of a wide expanse of wheat fields and consists of a few dozen wood-frame (light) buildings some three hundred meters wide by one hundred deep. Its significance is due to the fact that it lies at the junction of two improved roads, one running north-south, and the other east-west. The north-south road is important as your most efficient axis of advance and as your main supply-line. The east-west road is valuable as a quick and easy means of shifting units laterally, thereby keeping the enemy guessing as to where your next attack will come from (maintaining both secrecy and flexibility).

Note: This scenario is balanced. The Attacker has a 2:1 advantage in points over the Defender. See the 'Scenario Design' Section of "MicroArmour - The Game - WWII."

Americans - Your force includes an infantry battalion, one medium tank company, and two light artillery batteries consisting of the following stands:

Task Force Headquarters - 1xInfantry (GHQ)/Truck
Infantry Battalion - 1xInfantry (HQ), 8xInfantry,
3xMedium MG, 1x81mm M.1 Mortar(3)
Medium Tank Company - 4xM.4 (Sherman)
Light Artillery Battery - 1x105mm M.2A1
Howitzer(2)/Truck
Light Artillery Battery - 1x105mm M.2A1
Howitzer(2)/Truck

(877 Total Points, Force Cohesion Level - 14)

Germans - Ordinaire is defended by a German infantry Kampfgruppe consisting of the following stands:

Kampfgruppe Headquarters - 1xInfantry (GHQ),
1x37mm Flak.36

Kampfgruppe - 7xInfantry, 2x8cm sGrW.34
Mortar(1), 2xMedium MG, 2x75mm PAK.40
ATG, 1xStug.III

Field Works - 15xLight Improved Positions,
5x'Dispersed' Minefields, 5x'Dummy' Minefields
(439 Total Points, Force Cohesion Level 14)

Game Length - Fifteen (15) turns

General Terrain Type - 'Mixed" with a maximum sighting distance of twenty (20) inches

Victory Conditions - The U.S. must occupy all three sections of 'Ordinaire' by the end of turn 15 to win. Anything else is a German victory.

Deployment (Germans): The map below illustrates how the German forces are deployed in this example. The main 'defensive' principle displayed here is that of 'Dispersion'. The Americans have a distinct advantage in artillery. As a result, the German player is careful not to 'bunch up' his forces by refusing to place units adjacent to one another whenever possible. Note that the only place he does this is in the town itself, where it cannot be avoided. Hopefully, the defensive bonus provided by the buildings and 'improved positions' will offset this disadvantage. Notice that the minefields are also slightly 'dispersed'. This is done to spread them out over as wide an area as possible while still preventing American stands from passing between any two without setting at least one off. (They should be spaced no more than 1/2" apart.) All German units are in Light Improved Positions, except the Stug.III. There simply weren't enough to go round and the Stug.III was considered to be the stand that profited the least from this advantage.

Aside from this, please note that German forces are deployed to take as much advantage of covering terrain, and to deny covering terrain to the Americans whenever possible. For example, the two German Anti-tank Guns have been deployed far enough back to prevent the American tanks from firing at them effectively, while still covering their minefields. Also, the wood-lot on the German left front has been mined

to prevent the Americans from using it as a covered approach route. Of course the German mortars are placed well back to keep them out of the line of fire, but still close enough to interfere with any American advance on the town.

The German Plan: The German commander must play for time, which means he must delay the U.S. advance as long as possible. He must also concentrate his fire on the American mortars whose primary function is to deliver smokescreens to provide cover for that advance. Secondly, he must prevent the town from being outflanked and surrounded, preventing the U.S. player from launching his final assault from two or more directions. Finally he must engage the American armor and reduce its numbers, so that if they take the town, he can organize a counterattack to regain at least a foothold in it before the end of the game, thereby preventing a U.S. victory.

Deployment (Americans): The U.S. Task Force is divided into four groups, each with separate, but associated, missions. The leftmost group, is made up of a reinforced infantry company, backed by six 81mm Mortars (3 sections), under the direct control of the Task Force commander. The center group consists of the Medium tank company and a rump infantry company under the direct control of the infantry battalion commander. The rightmost group consists of the battalion's third infantry company, and a fourth (off map) group made up of two 105mm artillery batteries rounds out the force.

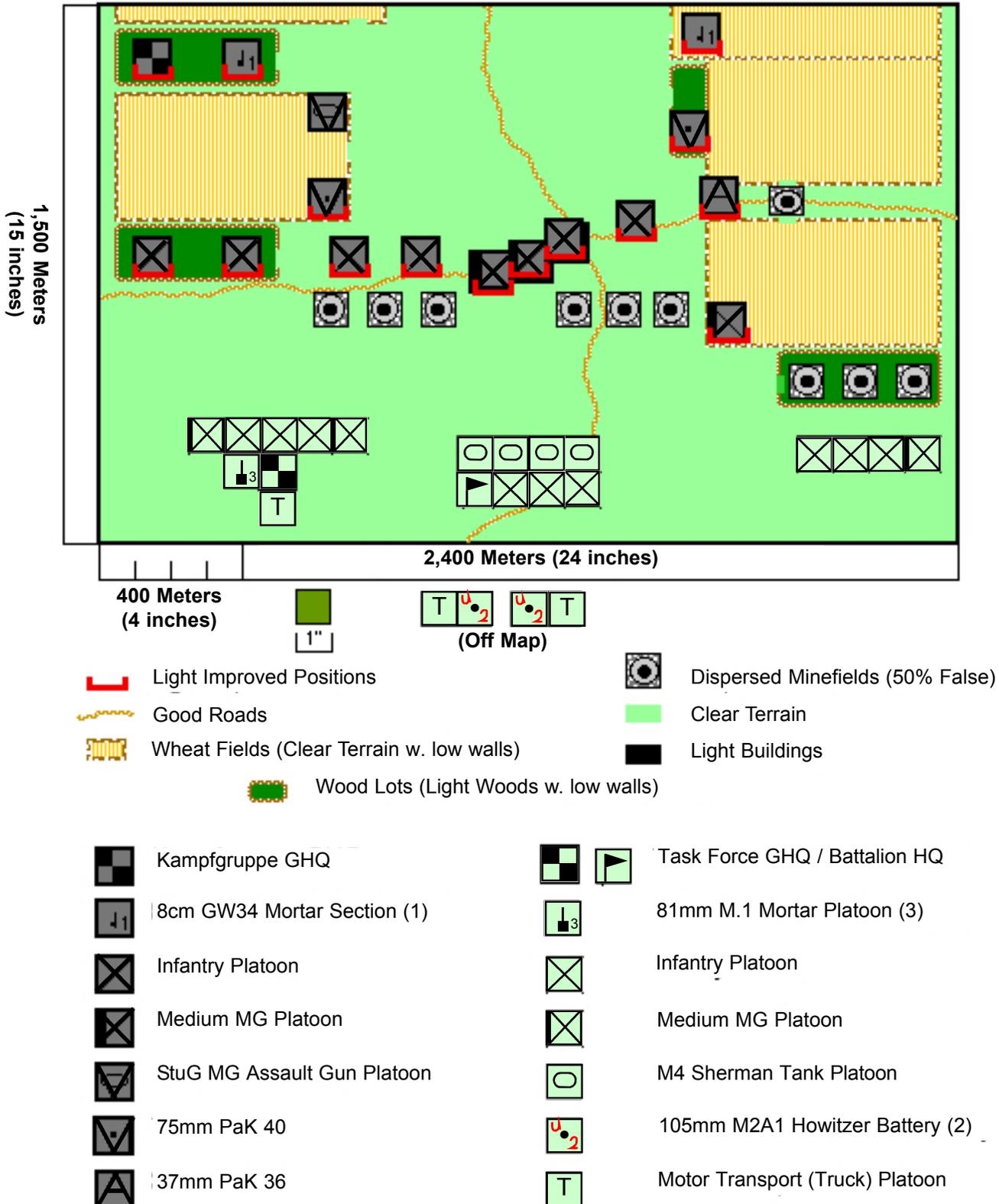
For the purposes of this scenario, the indirect artillery-fire rules first introduced in the WWII Micro-Armour 'Campaign Supplement: Appendix A' (Rule 7.12) are in effect to reflect prevalent conditions. Both sides have been actively engaged in infantry 'recon' patrols over the last several days; prisoners have been taken and interrogated by both side,, and the Americans have made extensive use of aerial reconnaissance. In short, for indirect-fire purposes, "forward observers" have been dispensed with. Instead, The American player may use his normal Cohesion of fourteen (14) for indirect-fire, whereas the German player must add +2 to his indirect fire Cohesion die-rolls (for an effective Cohesion of 16). This reflects advanced U.S. fire-direction control practices by the Summer of 1944, as well as their extensive use of aerial artillery spotters.

Conduct of the Battle

Phase I (Turns 1 - 5) - Artillery Preparation: The artillery group concentrates its fire first on one, then on the other German mortar section. This is vital because the German mortars are the weapons most capable of interfering with an orderly U.S. advance. They must be silenced as quickly as possible. The U.S.

81mm Mortars, for their part, will begin to deliver a smokescreen, first on one, then the other of the German anti-tank guns, to prevent their interference with the advance of the U.S. armor. Their aim is to Suppress and Disorganize rather than destroy these units, a task for which they are perfectly suited.

DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES AND TERRAIN (TURN 1)



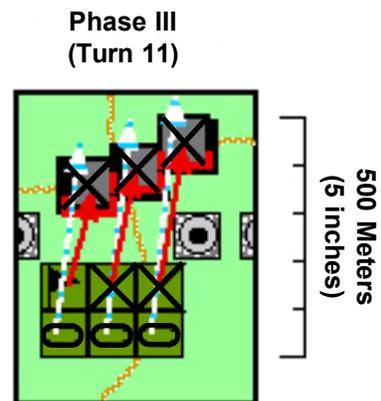
Phase II (Turns 6 - 10) - Advance to Contact: By the end of turn 5, both German mortars have been eliminated, along with one of their anti-tank guns. The other gun has been both Suppressed and Disorganized, all by fire from the American 105's. The U.S. mortars have shifted fire from from them, first to the Stug.IIIG and then to the Ordinaire garrison. The three U.S. maneuver groups now begin to close with the enemy. The Left Group circles to the left of the German minefields to their front to engage the German right. The Right Group moves obliquely to its left (taking a chance with one of the minefields, which turns out to be a 'Dummy' marker, to engage the German infantry positioned along the farm wall to their front, advancing beyond it to take the German Flak platoon under fire. The Center Group advances with tanks in front and infantry following to the gap between the two central German minefields. No further advances occur until Phase III begins.

Phase III (Turns 11 - 15) - Final Assault: Both sides have thus far lost some 25% of their forces, so things appear fairly well balanced. However, the operation is about to end in a U.S. victory. The U.S. commander's final assault on Ordinaire is about to begin. His moves at this point are a bit complicated and their timing is vital so I will now go into them in detail.

Phase III begins with the U.S. mortars shifting targets once again. They have been engaged in laying smoke over the Ordinaire garrison for the last several turns, effectively blinding them, and now begin to lay a new smokescreen between Ordinaire and the German right wing (which includes the Stug.III). The U.S. 105s now shift from working on eliminating the German AT Guns and lay their four impact markers on Ordinaire in an overlapping pattern with one impact marker on each end of the town and two on the center sector. Meanwhile the U.S. tank company advances to within three (3") inches of Ordinaire laying fire on the town once it is in position. The remaining infantry of the center group now advance behind the tanks and pass through them, placing themselves two inches (2") from the town. Once these are in place, the U.S. artillery shifts once more to land two inches beyond Ordinaire to prevent German reinforcements from interfering with events during the game's final turns. On the same turn that the artillery shifts off the town, the tanks move to overrun the German forces occupying it. At the same time, the U.S. infantry advances two inches, arriving at the edge of Ordinaire and 'Close Assaults' the town in turn.

Note: Overruns and Close Assaults both take place after all movement is complete, but according to the Sequence of Play, although both actions take place in the same turn, Overruns are executed first, and Close Assaults after.

The key here is that the final assault on Ordinaire should not take place too soon. The U.S. player must be careful not to allow the Germans sufficient time to organize a counterattack before the end of the game and retake even one sector of Ordinaire (thus negating his victory).



Closing Notes: The key principles in executing a successful Hasty Attack on an enemy position are the same as in most other tactical operations. Concentrate on the objective, apply overwhelming force against that objective at the most advantageous moment, and make use of every asset according to its individual characteristics as part of a combined-arms effort. The U.S. Player lost approximately eight stands (42%) of his directly engaged forces (the artillery doesn't count as it was deployed off-map). The German player lost the same number of stands (50%) from his force. Yet, the U.S. won a clear and substantive victory, by keeping to the objective, concentrating his forces at the decisive place and time, and sticking with a clear and simple battle plan. Keeping the principles above in mind whenever you play Micro-Armour will not guarantee that you will win every time, but it will have a positive impact on the way you play and enhance your enjoyment at the same time.

Give it a try!

by John Fernandes