

TAC NEWS

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DEFENDING AGAINST AN INFANTRY ATTACK

Micro Armour®: The Game - Tactical Notebook #2

RECAP

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.

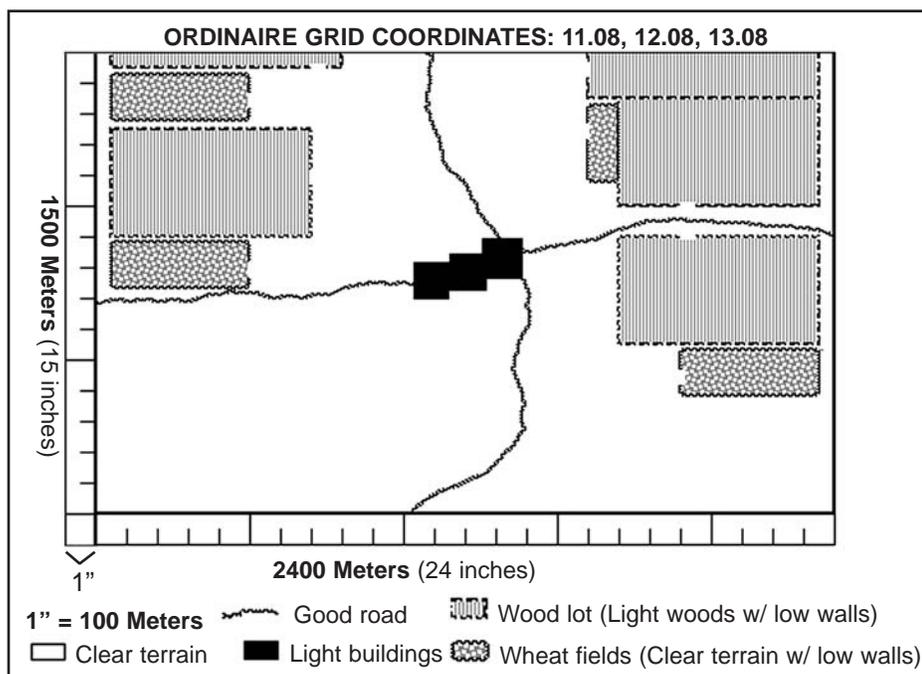
11. To the first ten must be added one more...
Keep things simple!

In the last Tac News "Running a Hasty Attack", I covered the techniques used in taking a territorial objective from the enemy by use of an infantry force supported by armor. In this article, I will attempt to describe useful techniques for holding on to the same territorial objective without the kind of artillery support most gamers would believe necessary to do so. In order to keep things simple (principle 11), I respectfully present the following example scenario. (It's the same one presented in the previous article.)

SITUATION - It is mid-August, 1944. The Allies have broken through the Germans' main line of resistance some three days ago and the Americans have been advancing mostly unopposed since then. Ahead of them to the north is their 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 the Americans most efficient axis of advance and as their main supply-line. The east-west road is valuable as a quick and easy means of shifting units (German or American) laterally, thereby keeping the enemy guessing as to where the next action will take place (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 "Micro Armour: The Game - WWII."



FORCES

Germans - Your task, as the German commander is to defend Ordinaire using an infantry Kampfgruppe consisting of the following stands:

- Kampfgruppe HQ - 1x Infantry (GHQ), 1x 37mm Flak.36
 - Kampfgruppe - 7x Infantry, 2x 8cm sGrW.34 Mortar(1), 2x Medium MG, 2x 75mm PAK.40 ATG, 1x Stug.IIIG
 - Field Works - 15x Lt. Improved Positions, 5x 'Dispersed' Minefields, 5x 'Dummy' Minefields
- (439 Total Points, Force Cohesion Level 14)

Americans - The attacking force contains one infantry battalion, one medium tank company, and two artillery batteries with the following stands:

- Task Force HQ - 1x Infantry (GHQ)/Truck
 - Infantry Battalion - 1x Infantry (HQ), 8x Infantry, 3x Medium MG, 1x 81mm M.1 Mortar(3)
 - Medium Tank Co. - 4x M.4 (Sherman)
 - 2x Lt. Artillery Btry - 1x1 05mm M.2A1 Howitzer(2)/Truck
- (877 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.

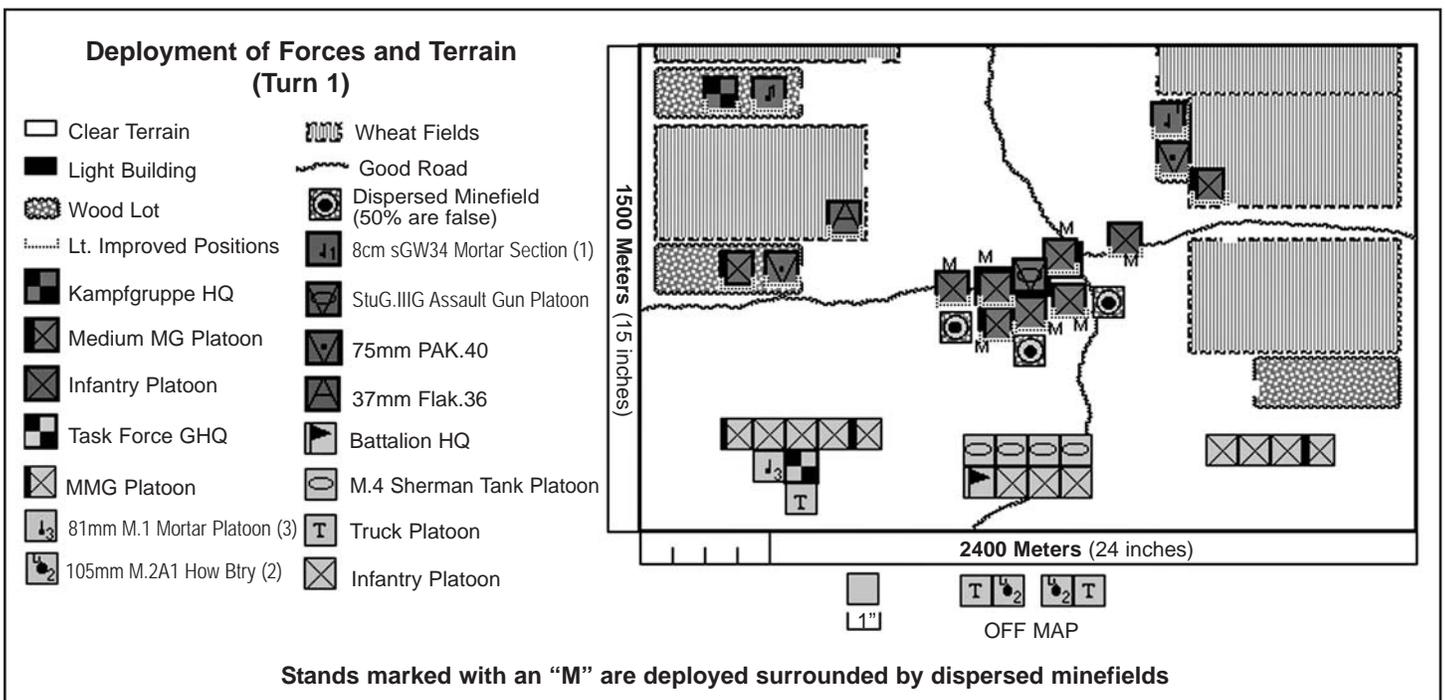
GERMAN DEPLOYMENT - The map above illustrates how the German forces are deployed in this example. The main 'defensive' principles displayed here are these:

The establishment of and concentration on clear objectives, and the application of overwhelming force at the decisive place and time.

The Americans have a distinct advantage in artillery. Therefore, you (as the German player) must be careful not to 'bunch up' your forces by refusing to place units adjacent to one another whenever possible. Note that the only place this rule is ignored is within the town itself, where it cannot be avoided. Hopefully, the defensive bonus provided by buildings and 'improved positions' will offset this disadvantage*. Notice that the unoccupied 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.IIIG. There simply weren't enough to go round and the Stug.IIIG was considered to be the stand that profited the least from this advantage. Also, many German stands are deployed within minefields.

* Note: The stands deployed 'surrounding' Ordinaire should be placed so that there is at least a quarter-inch gap between them and the stands occupying the town itself.

Placing a minefield 'under' a stand confers several advantages. No enemy armored vehicle may even attempt to overrun the stand, since any stand landing on an enemy minefield must stop and move no further this movement phase. Since the 'overrun' procedure requires you to pass completely over the target stand, the two rules cancel each other out. Overruns of units deployed within minefields are effectively impossible! Therefore, the stand in question must either be destroyed by fire or Close-Assaulted.



Close-Assaulting them is unaffected, except that the stand that accomplished the assault would have to risk damage by the minefield in order to move beyond the objective. Also, any stand fired upon while occupying an enemy minefield receives a -2 die-roll penalty on the CRT because of the difficulties inherent in "taking cover" while simultaneously trying to avoid the surrounding mines.* **

**Note: Stands deployed 'within' minefields do not suffer this penalty since the last sentence of Rule 11.1.4 states, "Stands may pass unscathed through 'friendly' minefields..."*

***Note: This is a good time to introduce one of the rules from 'Micro Armour®: The Game - Modern' (Rule 07.09.12), which states: Artillery may 'neutralize' minefields. Any minefield is considered to have an "unarmored" defense value of eight (8). Minefield markers are reduced in 'concentration' each time they are 'Eliminated' by artillery fire. (i.e. A 'Concentrated' minefield becomes a 'Standard' minefield. A 'Standard' minefield becomes a 'Dispersed' minefield. A 'Dispersed' minefield is destroyed.)*

Aside from this, please note that German forces are deployed to take as much advantage of covering terrain as possible, and deny covering terrain to the Americans whenever possible. For example, the two German Anti-tank Guns have been deployed so that they can direct flanking fire on any American tank approaching Ordinaire. Also, the Stug.IIIG has been positioned so that the Americans cannot win the game unless they take it out. Since this stand is heavily armored, deployed in a built up area, and surrounded by supporting infantry and minefields, doing this before the end of turn 15 will be difficult at best. Of course the German mortars are placed well back in wooded terrain 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: First, the German commander must play for time, which means he must delay a direct U.S. attack on Ordinaire as long as possible. Second, he must concentrate his fire on the American mortars whose primary function is to deliver smokescreens, providing cover for that attack. Finally, he must force the Americans to fight for every inch of ground around Ordinaire.

AMERICAN DEPLOYMENT - The U.S. Task Force is divided into four groups, each with separate, but associated, missions. The left-most 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.

Note: In this scenario, the indirect artillery-fire rules are modified 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 sides, 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 American 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.

Phase II (Turns 6 - 10) - Advance to Contact: By the end of turn 5, one German mortar has been eliminated, along with one anti-tank gun. (The fact that the Germans deployed their mortars and AT guns in wooded areas made them harder to spot and eliminate.) The other gun has been suppressed by fire from the American 105's. The U.S. mortars have shifted fire from them to the Stug.IIIG and the rest of the Ordinaire garrison. The three U.S. maneuver groups now begin to close with the enemy. The Left Group advances into the gap between the German minefields to their front and the German right. The Right Group moves obliquely to its left to separate the German left flank from the rest of their forces, basing their firing position on the farm wall due east of the town. The Center Group advances with tanks in front and infantry following toward the objective. No further advances occur until Phase III begins.

Phase III (Turns 11 - 15) - Final Assault: Up to this point, the Americans have lost two infantry platoons, two tanks, and one MMG. The Germans have lost both anti-tank guns and both mortar sections to American artillery fire, along with one infantry stand in Ordinaire itself. However, the Americans are about to suffer a serious defeat. The final assault on Ordinaire begins with the central U.S. infantry force advancing past their tanks to Assault the units in front of the town, while the U.S. artillery pummels the German defenders. Everything is touch and go with heavy losses on both sides, but the final result is never in doubt. The American armor simply cannot lead the charge into Ordinaire due to the skillful placement of German mines. The game ends with Germans in possession of two of the three squares of Ordinaire, a substantive victory.

LESSONS LEARNED

If you read the previous installment of the GHQ Gamers' Notebook, it will be patently obvious to you that everything that went right for the Americans then collapsed in a shambles this time. The forces engaged were identical in both instances. It was the way the Germans deployed and the way the Americans reacted to it that made all the difference. Let's examine this.

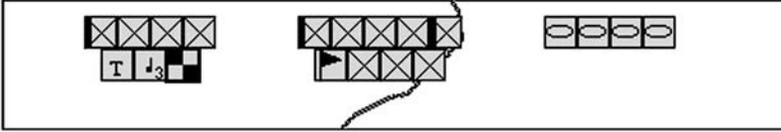
1. The majority of German strength and firepower were concentrated in a tight (but not too tight) circle around the objective. In fact, even the units *not* deployed directly in defense of Ordinaire were placed so that their fire *interlocked* with that of the defenders in a way that made the whole German force a single (multi-faceted) strong point.

wrapped up with 'experience' above. Learning from your mistakes and profiting from the experience is the universal formula for eventual success.

3. Luck - I can't remember who said it, but the words, "I'd rather be lucky than good" have always been true. However, luck can never be counted on. It is the judicious application of experience and knowledge to the problem at hand that makes successful people *appear* to have more good luck than they do.

In addition to the principles above, there are three others that you should always keep in mind, specifically when playing MATG:

Suggested modifications to American deployment



2. Faced with the situation above, the American player should have deployed differently as well (Remember, the defender must deploy *first* in a Hasty Assault!). He should have concentrated most of his infantry in his center with his armor on the right flank. The terrain on the right (east) side of the map is less constricted with fewer German units to interfere with maneuver. The U.S. armor could have swept up and over the German left, taking out the German AT gun and mortar section there themselves, permitting the U.S. artillery to concentrate on the town. In addition, the western German AT gun would have had no U.S. armor to shoot at, its line of sight blocked by the town and the farm walls to its left-rear. A quick thrust by the U.S. armor could then have taken out the second German mortar, leaving the town with no artillery support.

4. Know your weapons - Technology, to a large extent, dictates tactics. You should have a clear understanding of the advantages and disadvantages inherent both in *your* weapons and those of your opponent. He who owns the best tanks doesn't *always* win the battle. Neither, for that matter, does the owner of the best artillery or infantry. If weapons statistics alone decided battles, then the Germans in France would have won in 1944 and lost in 1940. Don't try to do the impossible. Shermans will not defeat Panthers in a stand-up fight (they were never intended to). The western Allies' artillery arm was far more effective than their German counterparts, and Allied air supremacy over Northwest Europe is legendary. They also had the greatest proportion of mobile infantry, as well as large numbers of armored personnel carriers. Allied tactics should stress these advantages, not expose their weaknesses. Once again, it all comes down to knowledge and experience.

3. The U.S. should *not* have waited before advancing but moved to outflank and isolate the town beginning on turn one, and should have concentrated *all* his artillery on the German center with the aim of neutralizing their minefields and possibly eliminating some of their infantry before the final assault.

5. Maintain Balance - Always try to assemble a balanced force, taking into account troop quality and the nature of the objective. Attempting to fight with the wrong force for the situation at hand is frustrating at best. Fielding a balanced force of infantry, artillery, and tanks in intelligent proportion allows you to take advantage of opportunity and avoid total disaster. Of course, picking just *exactly* the right mix of forces generally brings decisive victory, but how often can you expect to guess *exactly* right?

SUMMING UP

By now you should realize that there is no such thing as a "perfect" all-purpose plan. There are, however, three basic principles to successful play that should be kept in mind:

1. Experience - Learn the rules! Play the game! Play the game a lot! Before you can start experimenting with theoretical tactics you have to get to the point where the mechanics of the game become second nature. Moving, firing, opportunity-firing, over-running, assaulting, plotting artillery fire, negotiating minefields, etc. are not difficult to handle, once you've actually done them a few times. My experience running games at conventions bears this out. After two or three turns almost nobody has any difficulty moving and firing. Using artillery effectively sometimes takes a little longer and the less common activities like assaults and over-runs have to be run through a few times, but by the end of the game, pretty much everybody understands what's happening, even if they have *never* seen the rules before.

6. Know the Terrain - Understanding how the 'lay of the land' will affect the course of a battle and how various terrains can be utilized to your advantage is an often undervalued talent. No less a figure than Napoleon Bonaparte is quoted as saying, "A keen eye for terrain, and the ability to turn it to his advantage, is what separates the common soldier from the truly gifted".

2. Knowledge - Success in any wargame (or nearly any other endeavor, for that matter) is generally a matter of recognizing the current situation as similar to a previous one, and remembering what worked (or didn't) last time. This is all

EPILOGUE

The situation above would have been radically different if, say, the attackers had been Soviets. Soviet tactics had to take in factors such as reduced artillery flexibility and generally lower Force Cohesion levels, but the principles remain the same. Knowledge, experience, technical expertise, balance, an eye for terrain, and luck all have their roles to play. Coordinating all these factors successfully goes a long way toward explaining why wargaming such an engrossing pastime. There's always a new 'wrinkle'.

By John Fernandes