

# Maneuver Warfare in the TCS:

## Locating the Center of Gravity

Lee Forester, [forester@hope.edu](mailto:forester@hope.edu)

Back in *Operations* #5-7, Dean wrote a 3 part series on the basics of Maneuver Warfare (MW) and its application to wargaming. In this article I want to continue the discussion by applying a fundamental MW concept to the TCS series games: Center of Gravity. Using GD '40 for examples, I will outline some elements which I think can constitute the Center of Gravity in TCS games. Basic familiarity with the overall concepts of MW is assumed. (If you're a bit rusty or unfamiliar with MW, check out the back issues of *Operations* or Robert Leonhard's *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and AirLand Battle*, Presidio Press, Novato CA 1991).

>From the outset it should be clear that TCS games cannot represent MW at its best. MW, when practiced well, will only fight battles when absolutely necessary, and when there is a battle, it will be as lopsided as possible. Such situations are highly desirable when you are fighting a war, but they make lousy tactical games, since they are incredibly unfair. The battles that lend themselves to becoming good games can go either way, so that the outcome is determined by the better tactical commander, not the better operational/strategic commander.

In a sense, then, each TCS game represents a certain degree of 'failure' to practice MW at the operational level. That having been said, there is still a great deal of room for applying MW concepts to TCS games. The basic idea of MW is that you want to make the battle as unfair as possible - in your favor! It is certainly both possible and desirable to do this at the tactical level. Since the TCS games are fairly well balanced, going toe-to-toe attrition-style is an iffy option, as you must count on getting better die rolls or outplaying your opponent at the micro-tactical level. This kind of vintage attrition-style warfare should be odious to the true MW enthusiast!

The most important concept for TCS games (and any wargame for that matter) is Center of Gravity. This can best be understood not as the enemy's main strength (or mass), but rather as the enemy's critical weakness. Dean writes in *Operations* #6:

Identifying the enemy's critical weakness and coming up with an adequate method of destroying it is the chief challenge of maneuver warfare. Once this skill is mastered, the tools of preemption, dislocation and disruption come into their own.

I will outline a few basic considerations for finding a Center of Gravity below, but I want to emphasize again that the chief challenge of playing a TCS game is identifying your enemy's critical weaknesses and making a plan that takes advantage of them. Before you meet your opponent to play, look the game over carefully and outline your plan ahead of time. It should usually NOT be a straight-ahead frontal attack or static defense in place. Such plans are occasionally the best, but with thought players can almost always develop much more

creative, aggressive and ultimately more successful plans. Thinking through the game before playing and locating the various centers of gravity is, I feel, the most important factor in determining who will be the victor.

So what kinds of things can be a Center of Gravity in the TCS? As a first attempt at answering this question, I will offer the following elements: 1) Victory Conditions; 2) Special Rules; 3) Prep Ratings; 4) Your Opponent; 5) Force Ratio + Combined Arms; and 6) Terrain. Let's look briefly at each of these factors and consider their various applications to GD '40.

## **Victory Conditions:**

Any plan you come up with for a TCS game should demonstrate a solid understanding of the game's victory conditions. It is not enough to start with the presupposition: Kill The Enemy And I Win. The goal of MW is not necessarily the destruction of the enemy force, but rather it's **defeat**. Naturally, if you completely destroy the enemy, you have probably defeated him, because he has no units available to impose his will upon you. BUT destroying the enemy here is a means to an end, not the end itself. The end always resides in the victory conditions, which you should know cold. Remember: many of these victory conditions have nothing to do with losses.

Let's take GD '40 as an example. Here are the victory conditions for the 4.4 Battle for Stonne campaign scenario: (see map)

Massive German Victory:

No French units are north of the xx.10 hexrow.

Major German Victory:

Control all village hexes of Stonne, la Besace and all buildings north of xx.15 hexrow.

Minor German Victory:

Control the village of Stonne.

Draw:

Neither side fulfills its victory conditions.

Minor French Victory:

Control the village of Stonne

Major French Victory:

Control Stonne and clear a continuous path of primary road hexes from the south map edge through hex 28.21.

Massive French Victory:

Control Stonne and clear a continuous path of primary road hexes from the south map edge to the north map edge.

The victory conditions suggest a few things:

- Control of Stonne is critical. Without it you cannot win. As a corollary, if you deny your opponent control of Stonne, he cannot win. It follows that each player should keep in his plans the possibility of preserving a raiding force to prevent his opponent from

winning. Simply taking one hex of Stonne at the end of the game will render the game a draw, even if the situation is otherwise hopeless. Naturally you want to achieve victory for yourself if possible, but if the battle goes poorly, this step can save you from defeat, even if victory is impossible.

- The Germans must control most of the map if they want anything other than a marginal victory. Corollary: The French can spoil a German Major or Massive victory with just one unit in a village or building hex north of xx.15. The French player should not ignore this.
- The French must control the North-South highway through Stonne to achieve anything other than a Minor Victory. This is an easier victory condition than the Germans have, so the French have an advantage here. The high mobility along the road makes it easier to defend once taken, especially considering the number of French tanks.
- The victory conditions say nothing about relative losses.
- Victory is determined at the end of the game. It doesn't matter who controls the terrain during the game; it's only the last turn that is important. It follows then that there may not be any need to take Stonne until near the end of the game. This seems counter-intuitive, but it does open up numerous possibilities.

## Special Rules

Depending on the game, special rules can have a significant impact, so read them carefully. For GD '40, there are really only three special rules. The first is the limited AT capability of the infantry units involved, and this has a huge influence on the game. You can use tanks here successfully in close terrain against enemy infantry, especially with friendly infantry support. Because the battle area is heavily wooded, this rule significantly helps the French, since they have the larger armored force. This is quite different from other TCS games, so you may have to 'unlearn' some habits and tactics. The second rule covers the enhanced non-combat movement rate of French motorcycle troops, giving the French player a good reason to keep such troops in reserve or to use them in wide flanking maneuvers where no enemy troops are present. The third optional special rule for truck and half-track movement allows the German player much greater rear-area mobility with his infantry units, which increases his relative speed over the French even more. I recommend this rule only if the German player is relatively inexperienced.

## Prep Ratings

As has often been said, the heart of the TCS series is the command rules. Yet I find that most players do not exploit these rules to the fullest. The rules are designed to reduce the ability to react to enemy moves, which means that surprise maneuvers, flank and rear attacks, sudden withdrawals etc. should be standard in any game. If you have a much better prep rating than your opponent, you should **never**, I repeat **never** be satisfied simply to plow into him or stand your ground. If you chose to do so, you are yielding what could be your best advantage to no real purpose.

Prep Ratings are critical in GD '40. The Germans, with a Prep Rating of 4, are not extremely flexible, but the French, with a rating of 7, are abysmal. The French cannot use reserves, while the German can. If French units commit themselves to an operation, it will be several game hours before they can change. Like a toreador in the ring, the Germans are easily more dexterous than the French and are fools not to take advantage of this. When the French charge, the Germans can simply sidestep them and stab them in the flank. There is no reason the Germans should engage the French in a force-on-force confrontation. Through maneuver, they should always be able to concentrate their forces on a French weakness. Good French play may partially spoil this, but if the Germans find themselves simply charging into/over/through the French to take Stonne and then trying to defend it statically, they are throwing away their greatest strength (and making the French player's day). The French player, in turn, should be concerned with limiting or if possible eliminating the German maneuver advantage by bringing on a slugfest, or attaining local superiority during the first part of the game through superior planning and initiative (since all their opsheets start implemented). The German advantage can be felt most strongly near the end of the game, as it takes a bit of time for their advantage in action/reaction to be felt, a fact the French player must not neglect.

## Your Opponent

I find that gamers often ignore this factor completely, even though it is crucial. The goal is to defeat your opponent. To do so, you need to know who your opponent is. This seems obvious, but since gamers are often accustomed to playing solitaire, they often forget to take this into account. Is your opponent aggressive? Cautious? Sneaky? Easily intimidated? Does he have favorite troops, without which he usually gives up? Use these 'fuzzy' factors in your planning. If your opponent concedes, you win. And often players will concede if they feel they're losing, even if in reality they have a good chance. If your opponent **feels** he has been defeated, he **has** been defeated. You may want to consider bold plans that will intimidate your opponent into conceding, even if his situation really isn't that bad. Remember: He doesn't know what your opsheets are, and his opsheets may be even worse than you think. This lack of intelligence can be used against a cautious or fearful player. Psychological factors are key in MW theory, and though hard to represent in games, this is one area where they are directly applicable. Often your opponent may not recognize weaknesses in your forces or dispositions that you do, so bold action may be the best way to protect yourself (depending on your opponent, of course!).

## Force Ratio & Combined Arms

Know the forces involved in each battle, as this will strongly shape your battle plan. If you have an edge in artillery and air support, your plan should capitalize on this. If your opponent has a big edge in armor, you will need to plan to neutralize this superiority. Combined arms is an important aspect of MW which deserves separate treatment that I cannot offer here, but look for the obvious advantages and disadvantages in the units involved (such as when they

enter play, morale rating, number of AT guns, mortars, IGs, availability of transport, etc.) in order to come up with an optimal battle plan.

In GD '40, the Germans have plenty of infantry, good support weapons (IGs, mortars and AT guns). Artillery support is also good, but most of the ammo is not available until later in the day. Air support is good. The main German weakness is in armor. The French, on the other hand, do not have much infantry, and what they do have is only of fair to poor quality. Artillery support is plentiful, but the guns are only 75mm, which is fine vs. armor but poor vs. dug-in infantry. Support weapons such as mortars, IGs and AT guns are terrible. Air support is only fair. The main French advantage is in armor, but the terrain is heavily wooded, so this advantage is not as great as it would be in open terrain.

As a consequence, much of this battle will revolve around the French trying to bring their armor advantage to bear, while the Germans will be scrambling to negate it. The longer the battle goes, the better for the Germans, since the Luftwaffe will be a constant drain on the French tanks. The French tanks are maneuverable along the roads, but because of their terrible prep rating, the French player may not be able to use them for all they are worth. German air power also plays a role here, as it is most effective against tanks in the open, i.e. their favorite terrain. The French player will need to plan the battle very carefully to realize his armor advantage to the fullest.

## **Terrain:**

This is linked closely to #5 above. The map will dictate much of the maneuver possibilities, as well as which sorts of arms can be used most effectively. The road net is critical, since mechanized movement along it is so much faster. When you make your plan, be sure you know the map well and have considered how to utilize the ENTIRE map, both for attack and defense. Along open roads, an armored force can move extremely rapidly, if you have the will to do so. Do not let defensive terrain dictate all your plans, as an advantage in position (i.e. surrounding the enemy) and numbers are much more important factors in the TCS than the defensive modifiers that terrain can afford. Remember that units can often traverse a large portion of the map in a few turns, and because of opsheets, your opponent may not be able to react to a large shift in forces at all. Don't let yourself get stuck in a linear mode. The TCS games can be very fluid, so take advantage of that fact. Make infiltration your friend, since this drives 'linear' players mad (yielding yet another good psychological advantage for you.)

For GD '40, the map offers plenty of room for maneuver. French tanks need to use the roads to exploit their mobility, so the German player will want to think of ways to keep the roads blocked. There is a lot of covering terrain, enabling units to maneuver in close proximity to the enemy while still out of LOS. The French player should consider lines of advance that seem 'off the beaten trail' in order to avoid German roadblocks and unnerve the German player. Having 20-30 enemy tanks roving behind your lines can be very unsettling in a tactical game, especially if you don't know where they are going...

## Bringing it all together

>From the above, I see a number of Centers of Gravity. For the Germans, it is their lack of armor and more difficult victory conditions. For the French, it is their poor Prep Rating, poor supporting arms and lack of infantry. As I mentioned above, I heartily recommend that players outline for themselves factors that determine the opponents Center(s) of Gravity. What you actually do with this information, in terms of making an operational plan is up to you. Overall, the more creative, unexpected and unified your plan is, the better its chances for success. Here are a few of my own thoughts on what can be done with this information to get the creative juices flowing:

Common wisdom has it that it is best for the French to sacrifice their initial units attriting the Germans and making them 'fight' for Stonne. But I'm not sure this is such a good idea. Why stand and fight against a greatly superior force? The 1&2 205 RI are no more than a speed bump. If the Germans assault Stonne in a deliberate fashion, they will proceed with smoke screens and covering fire in order to limit the effects of French artillery. Cross-fires and local fire superiority will clear out the French quite handily, particularly in view of their poor morale ratings. Throwing the 3-205 into the fray will not improve matters. The Germans can come from three different directions with good supporting arms. To make matters worse, when the dust clears and the French eliminated, the Germans are sitting right on top of their goal! If only due to superior numbers, the Germans will take Stonne if they want it. Why get in the way?

What possibilities of utilizing MW concepts exist? The French have a really bad Prep Rating, so basically they will only get about 2, maybe 3 implemented opsheets in the first day. BUT at the beginning of the day, all units can begin with implemented opsheets. One good possibility is to set up the 3-205 where it seems to be defending, and then send it, along with the rest of the 205 and the tank support, on a flank attack, perhaps against the III-GD. (If you try this, make sure the Germans cannot engage them if they get the initiative on turn 1). If the Germans have simply committed all their units to attacking Stonne, you will be able to side-step their attack and hit an isolated part of their force. This will get you at the very least a better exchange ratio (assuming you want to sacrifice these troops that is), and you will reap good psychological benefits too. This stage of the battle is supposed to be a German walk-over, and if you outplay your opponent here, he may become overly cautious. If the German has designated the III-GD as reserves, so much the better, because he may try to commit them to defense, and if you keep moving, you may be out of the way before his reserves can begin their operation (depending on the DRs for committing them). At any rate, even with an force on force battle, you have dislocated a German Bn from the attack on (and later defense of) Stonne and achieved better odds than you would have sitting around in Stonne.

Another possibility is go around the German forces and seal off the entry areas, threatening to block his afternoon reinforcements, which include an infantry battalion and a bunch of AT guns. Fighting AT guns with infantry is great, as it pits your strength against his weakness and keeps him from using his strength (AT fire) against your weakness (armor in this case). If the

Germans want to eliminate this roadblock, they must remove units from the attack on or defense of Stonne, giving the 10 AM French attack a much better chance of success (assuming they attack Stonne at all). Even better, if you have written orders to go through Stonne directly north, you may catch his force attacking your roadblock and hit him from both directions, which with the SYR retreating rules and cross-fire affects, can be devastating.

Yet another idea is to lead the Germans on a wild-goose-chase. Feint either right or left, move to block the entry area, stop for a turn or two, then keep moving elsewhere, perhaps to the central woods to support a 10:00 AM attack on Stonne! If you're lucky, the German will commit his reserves to deal with the threat, and you will neutralize much of his force for the morning at no cost to yourself. This course has its risks, though, because you have to plot out the entire maneuver beforehand, and may have nowhere to retreat if your advance is blocked. Still, that is better than dying in Stonne for nothing, and has great potential for displacing much of the German force.

As the French, it may be worth foregoing an initial assault on Stonne, assuming the Germans have taken it. If the Germans get a dug-in force in Stonne, they aren't going to want to move it and lose the dug-in status. This effectively immobilizes that force. Use the opportunity to destroy supporting German units with your superior armor. If you can shatter the other German defenders, you can surround Stonne later in the afternoon and take it with superior firepower and crossfires, which will mostly negate the dug-in status. This smacks somewhat of attrition, but once the Germans get set up in Stonne, they will probably not leave voluntarily! You will have to fight, so work to make it any fighting as lopsided in your favor as possible. Because of their mobility, tanks can concentrate their force well. Try destroying the Germans one battalion at a time with your armor and artillery! I've seen a good part of the GD overrun this way. The trick is to have Stonne at the end of the day. Until then, kill Germans! An unimaginative German player will deploy his troops to both sides of and behind Stonne, so it may be easy to predict where they will be (unless he's read this article that is).

I feel that the French should operate mainly to the north of Stonne, since that helps them in their long-range goal of clearing the road which they will need to hold for a good victory. It also splits the German forces and neutralizes (i.e. renders inconsequential) the defenders in Stonne, who are effectively left out of the action. Even though the Germans have a better preparing, units defending in Stonne tend to get 'locked' there simply because players are unwilling to move them out. Such psychological factors can have a great influence on the game and are always used in MW.

Having read the above, the German player may want to send only one Bn to assault Stonne and leave everyone else on reserve to await the results of the first few turns. If the French set up the 3-205 RI where the Germans can get it, the Germans should try to mug it to keep it from pulling off any of the stunts mentioned above. The Germans can write up initial opsheets after the French set-up, which is an advantage. Don't expect the French to stay where they start, however! The Germans may want to consider leaving Stonne unoccupied, and try to destroy the French force in a mobile meeting engagement. This allows the Germans to bring

their superior forces to bear and put their much better prep rating to good use. Pin French forces by blocking their advance, then flank them with reserves. (This is Sun Tzu's 'ordinary force' and 'extraordinary force', key concepts in MW). Naturally, MW dictates defeating the enemy, which in this game means occupying Stonne at the end of the game, but perhaps the chances of achieving this goal are better through an indirect rather than direct approach. The longer the Germans wait, the more artillery and forces they will have, the more relative speed (since opsheets that were implemented at game start have probably expired for the French, forcing them to roll vs. their 7 prep rating), and they should be able to concentrate on Stonne and take it before the French can adequately respond.

A major German goal should be to destroy all French infantry, which I identify as a French Center of Gravity. This makes their armor much more vulnerable. The French are real light on infantry, and if they lose the 205 and 1-67, they will be in big trouble since it is extremely difficult to hold Stonne with tanks only.

The Germans may want to consider preempting French movements by screening the entry areas. Use good taste here, as it seems a bit too 'gamey' to occupy entry hexes. Discuss with your opponent the various acceptable options (i.e. how close can you get to the edge of the board, etc.) The whole idea is to interrupt French movements before they can fully develop, which will keep them off-balance and allow the Germans to pin them and commit their own troops (if necessary), who will probably arrive before any French forces can react. Pinning the French forces is almost always a good idea (as long as you don't get squashed in the process) because he will have great difficulty implementing new orders. Remember: you may not need to be directly in the way. Perhaps being slightly off to the side with good lines of fire is even better, threatening effective overwatch fire but also being outside his planned attack axis.

I consider the above merely a point of departure on brainstorming ideas for making initial battle plans for GD '40. When devising your plan, keep the victory conditions constantly in mind, use your superior prep rating if you are playing the Germans (and try to offset it if you are the French), tailor your plan to your opponent's weaknesses, use the combat advantages your force has while trying to limit your opponents advantages, and use the whole map. Overall, there are a great number of possibilities for maneuver in GD '40 and TCS games in general, and I encourage players to experiment with them more. At the very least, players should not let themselves get trapped unconsciously playing according to the actual history of the battle or the suggestions in the player's notes (or in this article for that matter). Come up with your own unique solutions to the problems at hand. Be aggressive, innovative, and have a plan. I think you will find that victory can be very satisfying when it comes from overall superior play and not just 'dicing it out.'