

Maneuver Warfare in the TCS:

Learning the Tools of the Trade

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This is the second article in a series on Maneuver Warfare and the Tactical Combat Series. Previously, we looked at overall theoretical considerations in making a plan for a TCS game, which involves studying the situation to ascertain the critical weaknesses, or Center of Gravity, both of your own force and of your opponent's. Now let's say you have found these weaknesses and have a general plan. Does Maneuver Warfare offer any practical tools in executing a battle plan? The answer of course is **yes!**. The pillars upon which MW rests are three: preemption, dislocation and disruption. While these concepts are certainly not new, MW draws them together in a powerful theory of war which has a great number of direct applications to TCS games. Note that these three 'pillars' are not completely separate: it is better to see them as nodes on a continuum, and effective tactics will often combine various aspects of the three. Since disruption is simply the principle of attacking your opponent's center of gravity, I will not treat it any further here and simply refer the reader to the [Center of Gravity](#) article.

To get started, let me quote from Robert Leonhard's important book *The Art of Maneuver* (1991) where he gives an overall definition of these three key terms: (p.19)

Maneuver theory...attempts to defeat the enemy through means other than simple destruction of his mass. Indeed, the highest and purest application of maneuver theory is to preempt the enemy, that is, to disarm or neutralize him before the fight. If such is not possible, the maneuver warrior seeks to dislocate the enemy forces, i.e. removing the enemy from the decisive point, or vice versa, thus rendering them useless and irrelevant to the fight. If the enemy cannot be preempted or dislocated, then the maneuver-warfare practitioner will attempt to disrupt the enemy, i.e. destroy or neutralize his center of gravity, preferably by attacking with friendly strengths through enemy weaknesses.

I have quoted here at length because I could not have said it any better. The best application of MW is preemption. Leonhard continues by remarking that virtually all cases of successful preemption in warfare were unpopular, because they were 'unsporting.' The war or battle was over before it began. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), this most pristine form of MW is difficult to achieve in TCS games, as they cover actual battles, which by definition are failures at preemption. One way you **can** use preemption in the TCS is to occupy a position that your opponent was sending forces to on either on a move opsheet or preliminary instructions. His forces will need to break contact without a fight, and without an implemented Opsheet they will be vulnerable. This is great when you can pull it off, but it is difficult to orchestrate. Attacking a force without an implemented opsheet can also be considered a type of preemption, though it also shares features with functional dislocation (discussed below).

Again, this is a great tactic and should be striven for, but often good planning on your opponent's part will make it difficult to achieve.

Positional Dislocation

In my opinion, there is much greater potential in the TCS games for dislocation, making your opponent's strength irrelevant. Leonhard distinguishes between two basic types of dislocation: positional dislocation, where your opponent's strength is removed from the critical point, and functional dislocation, where your opponent's strength is present, but rendered irrelevant. Because of the system of Opsheets, you will probably have an easier time practicing positional dislocation in this game system than in any other. Your goal should be to always fight with local superiority. This means catching your opponent flat-footed, bringing your strength against his weakness while his strength is off somewhere else being irrelevant. And the various unit and weapon types available in TCS games give ample opportunity for functional dislocation through the practice of combined arms and what I call tactical dislocation.

Without further philosophizing, here are a few ideas on how to achieve positional dislocation:

1. **Speed.** One straightforward way to concentrate your forces rapidly is to use a group of tanks and mechanized infantry. Movement rates for such units are high, and they can usually traverse a typical TCS map in a few turns. If you are facing an infantry force (such as the Germans in GD '40), or a force with very limited ability to react (such as the Russians in Black Wednesday), you should be able to hit your opponent hard with local superiority for a few turns, and then withdraw when he reinforces, ready to head to another area on the map. The idea is to never allow his reinforcements to arrive while you are still there, thus assuring you continued superiority. It may mean being disciplined and not going for a knock-out blow right away (use frequent jabs before you deliver your haymaker). When using this method, don't allow yourself to get drawn into a slugfest. Be disciplined about inflicting casualties on your opponent while you have an advantage, and pulling out when your advantage has diminished or is gone. And remember that these troops are highly mobile, so it is usually very possible to hit your opponent somewhere away from his focus. Don't be afraid to infiltrate and or cause the situation to become 'non-linear'.
2. **Misdirection.** There are many opportunities for feints in the TCS. If your opponent is playing smart and has reserves, try to draw them out by using a feint. Plan to attack a given enemy force for a few turns and then withdraw the units and send them to the real point of attack after your opponent has committed his reserves. Perhaps you can have your reserves spearpoint the actual attack, and your feinting units can then come to their support or act as the new reserve. Reinforcements are often great for feints, since they can arrive with implemented opsheets (if you have devised your plan at the beginning of the game), or alternately they have plenty of time to write up new opsheets while waiting to arrive. The TCS is one of the very few systems that allows for this sort of misdirection, and I encourage all TCS players to add this tactic to their

repetoire. Naturally, it is only useful against a force that has a reaction capability (so there is no use trying to misdirect the Russians in Black Wednesday, since they couldn't react to a feint even if they wanted to).

As an addendum to misdirection, it is usually a good idea to move towards your objective in such a way that your opponent is not sure what you are up to. If you can threaten a number of areas with one force, that's great because it can freeze up your opponent. It is also possible to misdirect an inattentive opponent even with a slow infantry force in slow terrain, such as in Matanikau or Hunters from the Sky. If you can inobtrusively get close to your objective (perhaps by seeming to be up to something else), then even when your opponent figures out what's up, the terrain may slow him down so much that you will still get there first (in Hunters, even without the use of opsheets). The general rule is to keep your opponent in as much doubt as possible as to your actual plans.

3. Mobility. Make sure that important road nets are in your possession, while limiting your opponent in the use of his road net. Establish positions that will give you good overwatch along roads, so that, even if you opponent has reserves, he will not be able to get them to the battle in time. Preparing road blocks beforehand may also be to your advantage. If you have good artillery support, consider setting up good fire missions to interdict roads once his reserves move out.

I find it is often best to interdict indirectly. Place your forces at an angle to the routes you expect your opponent to take. It may be that your defensive positions are not considered in your opponent's opsheet, so he may not be able to attack you directly. If he stops to engage you, you have achieved your purpose. I also recommend that you plan for blocking forces to change positions often. If your opponent commits reserves to handle your blocking forces, he must specify the operation on the implemented opsheet they are a part of. If you change positions, his operation may become invalid, and you have successfully neutralized the reserve force for a while, simply through superior play.

Functional Dislocation

Now it is time to turn from ways to avoid fighting to actual fighting. Functional dislocation means making your opponents strength irrelevant. One important way to do this is through combined arms tactics (see Dean's article in *Operations #7* on combined arms for a longer discussion). Combined arms begins with the thesis that in a force with mixed capabilities, some units can protect the weaknesses of others. Tanks are great in open country, especially with rolling hills, because it allows them full mobility and field of fire for their high velocity weapons. It is terrible country for dismounted infantry though, because they are slow and typically do not have long range high-velocity weapons. On the other hand, tanks are weak in closed terrain, which is where infantry are best. So a mixed force has the capability of protecting itself in both types of terrain. This Leonhard terms the complementary principle.

The antithesis to this principle is the dilemma principle, and is what you want to do to your opponent. You want to arrange a combat such that, in order for your opponent to defend himself against one arm, he becomes vulnerable to another. An example: a minefield covered by weapons. In order to safely traverse a minefield, you need to breach it. Yet moving through a breach makes you vulnerable to any covering weapons. It's a dilemma. Likewise an armored force defending a wooded hilly area can easily be defeated by a combined armor/infantry force. If the tanks go hull-down (combat mode) in the woods, they can defend well against attacking armor, but they are vulnerable to the infantry. If the tanks move out into the open to get an advantage against the infantry, they become vulnerable to the attacking armor. The synthesis of these two principles Leonhard calls the Alcyoneus principle, named after the giant, Alcyoneus, that Hercules fought. As long as Alcyoneus was standing on the soil of his home country, he could not be defeated. So Hercules picked him up, carried him out of the country, and killed him. For combined arms, this means that you want to strive to force the enemy to move into or through terrain that is disadvantageous for him, and defeat him there.

A correlary to this synthesis is that it is usually wrong to attack an enemy system with a like system, since you will not have any terrain advantage. It has been said that the best tank-killer is another tank, but Leonhard disagrees. For him, the best tank-killer is infantry in close terrain, because the tank is easy prey and can't defend itself, while in a tank-on-tank confrontation in the open, both units are in terrain that makes them strong, and the fight is a 'fair fight' of strength on strength. Knowing this, commanders will strive to maintain a mixed complementary force. And knowing this, your mission is to deprive your opponent of one of his arms so that the remaining forces become vulnerable to your arms. This is why in my last article I saw the lack of French infantry in GD '40 as a center of gravity. If the German player can eliminate all the French infantry, the French tanks become vulnerable to German infantry (though not nearly so much so if the Germans had reasonable short-ranged AT weapons!)

With the theory of combined arms before us, I would like now to examine the various strengths and weaknesses of units in the TCS games according to their strengths and weaknesses, followed with some thoughts on how to fight both with and against these units.

Infantry:

Strengths: Fairly durable (5 steps), often with reasonable firepower. Can conduct assaults and AT rolls. Protect friendly units from AT rolls. Protect AT and Inf. guns from easy elimination when stacked (by taking a step instead of the gun). Can spot for artillery and mortars. Defend well in close terrain. Can dig in and both lay and breach minefields.

Weaknesses: Slow (unless motorized). No ranged AT strength. Easily overrun by armor in open. Vulnerable to morale effects. Suffer defensively when stacked.

MG sections:

Strengths: Good range (usually 8). Can augment platoon fires well. Minor protection for AT and Inf. guns. Can spot. Defend well in closed terrain. Can dig in.

Weaknesses: Morale usually poor. Cannot lay or breach mines. Somewhat fragile (2 steps). Cannot kill P-targets.

Mortars

Strengths: Can support friendly SFAs at long range with no ill effects. Can fire smoke and illumination rounds (if 80mm or larger). Often very good firepower.

Weaknesses: Slow. Fragile (2 steps). Cannot affect P-targets. Easily killed in assault combat. Can only fire once per phase (so not good at overwatch).

AT Guns:

Strengths: P-type weapon. Can dig in well.

Weaknesses: Slow. Fragile (1 step). B-target class, so vulnerable to point weapons and AT rolls. Lost in SYR.

Infantry Guns:

Strengths: Good firepower. Good range. Can dig in well. Guns 100mm and larger can fire smoke. Guns 150mm and larger can kill P-targets (note: combined with a long range, this can make for devastating overwatch vs. vehicles).

Weaknesses: As AT Gun, & cannot kill armored units (unless 150mm).

Tanks:

Strengths: Good mobility. Cannot be killed by area fires. Good fire power. Usually have point-fire weapon. Virtually immune to morale effects. Can carry friendly infantry. Can spot for artillery. Not very vulnerable to artillery. Improve defense of friendly infantry when stacked. Cannot traverse steep hills.

Weaknesses: Vulnerable to point weapons and AT rolls. Can be buttoned-up by area fires. Vulnerable to air sorties with AT rolls, especially in open. Easily spotted. Very vulnerable when moving on roads.

Aircraft:

Strengths: Great firepower. Often has AT capability. Unlimited range.

Weaknesses: Never enough. Not reliable because of sortie success roll. Weaker against targets in protective terrain. Must be used at start of turn.

And now for some conclusions based on the information above:

1. Remember the synergy of armor and infantry operating together. When stacked, P-targets are protected from AT rolls, and A-targets receive a defensive bonus (if the P-target has a strength >1). Units also receive a favorable morale shift. BUT remember not to move these stacks together under fire, as the tanks can draw area fire overwatch at any range, and even if the tanks aren't affected, accompanying A-targets are. It is usually best to advance them separately (tanks first to provide overwatch, then infantry perhaps, depending on the situation). Also, keep in mind that if a stack suffers a surrender result, any tanks in the hex also surrender. This is the one time tanks suffer morale results, so it is sometimes not a good idea to stack armor with units that suffer poor morale.
2. Against infantry alone in the open, attack with a tank-only force. This can be even more effective with artillery support. If you can suppress infantry in open or billiard terrain, they are 'dead meat' for attacking tanks. If you bring infantry, it will simply become vulnerable. Don't forget to overrun whenever possible.

3. In mixed terrain, strive to keep infantry and tanks together. In this context, memorize an often over-looked rule: 25.1e Vehicles as Carriers. Tanks and armored cars can carry two steps or one towed unit. Always use this capacity, as it protects both the tanks and the infantry through synergy, and enhances the movement of the otherwise slow infantry force. Study 24.0 Consolidated Assault, and remember that Infantry units don't have to be mounted in order to participate in a CA. CAs are GREAT against suppressed targets.
4. Strive to stack AT-guns and Infantry Guns with infantry platoons to protect them from AT-rolls and to absorb area fire damage. This is particularly true of Infantry Guns, which usually have no anti-armor capability, and are thus very vulnerable to overruns, even in close terrain.
5. Mortars are wonder-weapons. Protect them and use them. One great tactic is to suppress a unit, move a spotter adjacent to it, then plaster it with mortars (which get the column shift for the adjacent spotting unit). This can happen in one phase, since units spotting for mortars are not required to be in fire mode. You may want to stack them with unneeded MG-sections to make them more durable.
6. Use your air against mortars and other supporting weapons, as their unlimited range, good spotting, good firepower and morale effects make them ideal for this job. If your planes are effective tank busters, consider using them against armor. I usually prefer to target all my planes against ONE type of opposing unit, so as to eliminate that arm and reap the benefits of combined arms.
7. Don't forget that B-Targets are vulnerable to AT rolls. This includes AT Guns and Infantry Guns.
8. Because AT Guns and Infantry Guns are vulnerable to loss from SYAs, don't stack too many of them in one hex, or you are asking for trouble. It is a good idea to keep these units in partly protected or protected terrain, dug-in if possible, and with a supporting tank.

Tactical Dislocation

Another form of functional dislocation is what I call tactical dislocation. This means neutralizing an opposing force through tactics and position, not just weapon and target mix. The first method is suppression, either by direct fires or supporting arms such as artillery or air power. When assaulting a position, it is almost always best to suppress (and supporting positions) first, in order to reduce or eliminate overwatch fires and allow you to advance with reduced casualties. I generally will attempt with air first, then artillery if that fails. Artillery is best used against supporting positions, since you cannot advance to the target if it is protected by a good fire mission. When suppressing a hex by direct fires, I usually prefer to use a large number of smaller fires, which usually has a greater chance of getting a suppression result (this may not be the case against a hex with a large number of defensive shifts). Remember that not all direct fires need to be kills. It may be better to use direct fires to suppress, so that you can maneuver to kill more effectively.

A second important tool in tactical dislocation is smoke. Use artillery smoke to isolate part of a defending line, so that you can gain local fire superiority over another part. This is often easier than suppression by fire. Mortar smoke can also be quite useful, so do not automatically fire all your mortars as area fires. A combination of suppression by fire and judiciously placed smoke missions can allow you to advance with impunity. Smoke is also a combat multiplier against armor in close terrain (if you are assaulting with infantry) because it eliminates overwatch except at a range of 1, and reduces the effectiveness area fires while enhancing AT rolls. Proper use of smoke is a KEY tactic in fighting, so study the possibilities. Note that it can work very well on defense too, and can be used to mask enemy units spotting for artillery, making that arm temporarily useless.

A third tool is surrounding your opponent (at least his non-armor elements). This results in cross-fire modifiers, greatly increasing the effectiveness of your SFAs (mainly through the morale effects). Study rules 16.5d and 16.5e, which stipulate that a unit must end up further away from enemy units when it SYAs than when it starts, otherwise it is destroyed. If you surround an enemy force at a range of 3 hexes, you may be able to destroy them in this fashion. Also a units undergoing an SYA cannot retreat adjacent to an enemy unit (16.5l). A good tactic is to suppress a unit, move surrounding units adjacent to it, then 'light up' on it, looking for an SYA result which would destroy the entire force. Note that supporting armor can also be destroyed in this way. Surrounding a force is thus a very effective tactic, and multiplies the effect of your fires. Don't forget the usefulness of tanks, artillery and air strikes in this context.

Fourthly, make terrain work for you. Players generally like to place their defending units in close terrain, so take this into consideration in your planning. While helpful in terms of defensive shifts vs. area fires and a good morale shift, these bonuses can be negated through cross-fires. Do not allow terrain to DICTATE what you do. Sometimes it is better to be in the open in an unexpected position than in defensive terrain that is an obvious place to be. Remember to use cover to screen your movements. Consider the effects that close terrain has on air power.

An especially important example in the use of terrain is in Matanikau. Since Japanese units are vulnerable to air strikes only in the open, the tendency is to keep them in the jungle. So the Marine player should strive to use this by attacking jungle patches at the narrow ends (since the jungle areas tend to be long and narrow). This way they can achieve both local fire superiority (since the jungle is often only 1-hex wide at the ends), possible cross-fire modifiers, defending units are blocked from supporting because of intervening jungle hexes, and if the Japanese deploy horizontally against the flanking force, they have to move out into the open and become vulnerable to air strikes. This is a classic example of the Dilemma Principle of combined arms.

The conclusions drawn above through the framework of Maneuver Warfare, while certainly useful at any stage of a TCS game, point to one overriding principle: in the TCS, it is better to attack than to defend. Defending in one position allows the attacker to gain positional

advantage, concentrate firepower and achieve local superiority, not to mention neutralizing the defending force by avoiding it entirely. A mobile defense is generally better than a static one (assuming there is any room to maneuver, of course). Aggressiveness is a valued quality in a small unit commander, and this holds for the TCS as well. Use the principle of preemption, dislocation and disruption to your advantage, fight aggressively, and do unto your opponent before he can do unto you. That is the Golden Rule of the TCS.