

– KAMPFGRUPPE NORMANDY –

A RULES PRIMER FOR NEW PLAYERS

This short article is intended to introduce new players to the basic game rules for Warhammer Historical's new 20mm (1/72 scale) wargame, set in the Normandy theatre, post D-Day.

First off, this game does not attempt to cover the entire war. It is limited to a single theatre, dealing with it in two separate sections. The British Sector, which includes background, scenarios and army lists, and the American Sector, which again provides background, scenarios and army lists.

The Turn

The game is played in turns, with each player taking it in turn to have their go (nothing new there!). At the beginning of their turn each player rolls for Command and Control. This dice roll (modified by the number of command units in a battle group), dictates how many units he can activate in a turn.

Once a unit (each unit being an infantry squad or weapons team or an individual vehicle or gun) is activated, it can then take two actions. So, whilst you might not get to use everything in your force on every turn, when a unit does get a go, it can actually do quite a lot.

Once activated there is complete freedom to use actions as a player wishes. So, a unit could move then fire, fire then move, fire twice, move twice, etc. This decision is entirely up to the commanding player, giving them tactical flexibility. Some special actions do require both actions to use, such as calling in artillery fire or going onto covering fire (allowing a unit to fire in their opponent's turn).

Movement

For each movement action taken by a unit, it can move a number of inches. Whilst on a road a unit can double its move. If a unit takes two movement actions it gets to do it twice (and nothing else). This allows a unit to cover quite a lot of the tabletop if it sacrifices doing anything else. On a road units can really motor about but then roads are also likely to be covered by enemy fire too.

Those vehicles designated as 'road' vehicles (such as trucks and jeeps) can quadruple their road movement distance, making them very fast on a road, but conversely rather slow when moving cross county.

Shooting

The real detail in the rules is in the Shooting section. There are different types of shooting, which have different effects on different targets. This may sound complex, but this is all dealt with quickly by different shooting actions.

Firstly, shooting is broadly divided into two modes. The first and simplest is Suppressing Fire. The second, more deadly but harder to use, is Direct Fire.

Suppressing Fire

The Suppressing fire action can be used by small arms or high-explosive shells (fired from tank guns, mortars, artillery pieces, etc). Suppressing Fire isn't aimed at killing the enemy (although a direct hit may still cause casualties), it aims to suppress them. A suppressed unit cannot be activated until it has its suppression marker removed (because they're keeping their heads down and hugging cover), which effectively takes them out of the game. You'll find it easier to suppress infantry and soft-skinned vehicles than open-topped armoured vehicles and enclosed armoured vehicles.

Suppression is an important element of the game. The enemy's ability to fight can be seriously impaired by good (and sustained) use of Suppressing fire. It is also the area in the rules where artillery really comes into its own. Artillery, especially when fired as batteries, is good at suppressing enemy units. Heavy artillery is especially good at it.

Direct Fire

There are three Direct fire actions: Direct fire with small arms, Direct fire with high-explosives and Direct fire with anti-tank rounds. Each is a separate action, so a player can choose which to use based upon the target.

Direct fire has the potential to do serious damage, destroying enemy units rather than just suppressing them. This might seem like the best option every time, but the down side of Direct fire is that it is harder to use than Suppressing fire, and it is easier to miss with. The first step in all Direct fire actions is spotting and identify the target. If this dice roll is failed the action ends and is lost. Spotting an enemy unit varies from very easy (ie,

an enemy vehicle in the open firing) to very hard (a small infantry team in cover, not firing).

Other Shooting

There are two other forms of shooting actions covered: Anti-Aircraft fire and Indirect fire (from mortars and artillery). Both are special forms of Suppressing fire.

Morale

Morale is split into two sections. Unit Morale deals with each individual unit, and there is also overall Battle Group Morale.

Unit Morale

This deals with the reaction of individual units to incoming fire, from becoming suppressed to withdrawing or abandoning a vehicle or gun. It is a simple D6 dice roll which is very quick to resolve at the end of a firing action.

Battle Group Morale

As well as a traditional points total, each battle group will also have a total Morale value. In the army lists each unit is worth Morale points, and these are all added together to get a total (just like points). During the game each player has to randomly take Morale counters from a pot, with counters numbered from 1 to 4. The destruction or withdrawal of units, the removal of suppression markers and the capturing of objectives by the enemy are the main reasons you will be forced to take Morale counters. These counters are kept secret, but once the counter's running total reaches a battle group's total morale value then your higher command orders you to withdraw, and the game is over.

The game is designed so that the morale value, points value and command and control rules work in balance. An army that selects only the cheapest units in points might have a lot of units on the table and a proportionally larger morale value, but it will find that its command and control are poor, and therefore it might have a lot of units, but it won't be able to use them well. Conversely, a battle group that selects only the toughest, elite, high points value units will find its command and control good but its morale value proportionally lower because of its small number of units. Hence a tension is created when players are selecting their battle groups from the army lists. Not just points must be considered, but morale value and command and control as well. Too strong in one will weaken another.

Special Rules

The Special Rules section deals with ammunition for armoured fighting vehicles, units with special abilities (such as medics or signals units), and engineering tasks such as minefield clearance, bridging operations and demolitions. There are also rules for engaging and destroying buildings, night fighting and covering fire.

Army Lists

The thinking behind the army lists is that each player takes command of a combined arms 'battle group' (including tanks, infantry, artillery and supporting units such as engineers, signals, medics, etc). This battle group will have been created from a larger parent unit - its division. The type of parent division will dictate what forces are available.

The rulebook contains eight army lists in all. Two for the British (Armoured and Infantry Divisions). Two for the Americans (Armoured and Infantry Divisions). Four for the Germans (SS Panzer, Wehrmacht Panzer, Infantry and Fallschirmjäger Divisions).

Regardless of its division type, all army lists have access to five Assets. Assets are broad headings. Each battle group will be made up from the following Assets: Headquarters, Armour, Infantry, Artillery and Defences (these are only available when defending in a scenario). Note that aircraft are not included as an Asset. Aircraft cannot be pre-selected, their deployment being well above the level of command represented upon the tabletop. The arrival of air support is always a random event, so you never know if/when an aircraft might become available. It is more likely that an aircraft will arrive to aid the Allies' battle groups than for the Germans, and more likely again if your battle group contains a forward air controller – but even then it remains unpredictable. This is designed to limit the power of air support in what is a tactical game. Aircraft are potent, but never a guaranteed choice.

Asset category is also split into two - main force units and supporting units. An army cannot have more supporting units than main force. So whilst an infantry platoon is main force, units such as mortars, heavy machineguns, anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft guns are support, and thus restricted.

Each army list has its own unique selling points and an Infantry division is not weaker per-se than an Armoured or Panzer division. Remember

this is combined arms warfare, so each list still gets access to tanks or assault guns, infantry and artillery in one form or another.

Hopefully, as players gain experience, they will begin to see where each type of division has its advantages. As a brief example, uniquely an SS Panzer division has access to veteran armoured panzer grenadiers who are well equipped with half tracks. They are very expensive in points, but also proportionally high in morale too. A battle group based around them will be small in numbers but tough to break.

Scenarios

The game takes two approaches to scenarios. The first is the familiar 'pick-up and play' generic scenarios, divided into two types: Meeting Engagements and Set-piece Attacks. They are designed to be played using battle groups selected from the army lists using equal points values, in a familiar, quick and easily understood style. In a Set-Piece Attack one player will be the attacker, the other the defender (and therefore gets access to the defenses in his army list).

The Scenarios section also presents a series of Historical Refights, both for the British sector and American sector. These are re-fights of actual engagements, and include background, maps, special rules and complete force lists. Players simply set up the terrain as shown on the map, use the exact forces listed, deploy as described and set to – all the work is done.

Added to this are two mini-campaigns, both a series of 6 or 7 historical re-fights. For the British sector the campaign is 'Forward the Guards', dealing with the Guards Armoured Division's battles around Cagny during Operation Goodwood. For the American sector there is 'The Hard Road to St Lo', a series of battles in the Vire river valley as the Americans drive towards the Normandy town of St Lo.

And finally...

Hopefully, that has provided you with a broad general overview of the game and you've found it both useful and enticing. For more detail on the design of the rules, you'll find the Designer's Notes in the appendix of the rulebook, well worth a look.

Thanks for reading.

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