
COLD WAR COMMANDER

Fast-Play Tabletop Wargame Rules For Combined-Arms Operations, 1946-06

The Battle For Hanover West Germany, 1976

Introduction

It is 0445 hours, Sunday 6th June 1976. The WarPac launch a massive conventional attack against NATO forces in a three-pronged offensive into West Germany. Tasked with breaking through the NATO defences in the central sector is the Soviet 3rd Shock Army. The main thrust is along the Berlin-Hanover axis, the A2 autobahn connecting Berlin to West Germany. Spetsnaz Special Forces infiltrated NATO lines the day before in order to secure key road junctions once the attack is underway. The WarPac divisions will use the roads during the initial stages of the advance to maintain the momentum and gain valuable ground before NATO can respond. Intermingling with NATO units is key to the success of the attack, as this minimises the chances of tactical nuclear retaliation by NATO.

Tasked with the initial breakthrough is the 207th Guards Motorised Rifle Division, who successfully breach the NATO defences using overwhelming force against a single point in the line. Through the breach the 10th and 12th Guards Tank Divisions stream, with the 47th Guards Tank Division being held in reserve. The two divisions attempt to bypass the city of Hanover, the 10th GTD to the north, the 12th GTD to the south. However, to the north of the city is Bergen - the home of 7th Armoured Brigade, 'The Desert Rats', of the British 1st Armoured Division, British Army of the Rhine (BAOR).

The commander of 7th Armoured Brigade is alerted of the attack at 0520 hours and springs immediately into action. The crews of 2nd RTR mount their Chieftain Main Battle Tanks within minutes of being alerted and are deployed to the south of Bergen, either side of the B214 Weitze-Celle road, by first light at 0550 hours. The mechanised infantry of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers accompany them. The troops lie in wait for the expected Soviet advance.

NATO

Formed in 1949, NATO included Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France (until 1966), the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Iceland, Greece, Turkey and West Germany (from 1955). Its primary role was to defend Western Europe against Soviet aggression.

Until the late 1960s, massive retaliation by nuclear weapons was the defence doctrine of NATO. This changed to a more conventional doctrine when the Soviets began to expand their own nuclear capability. From the late 1960s, NATO adopted the doctrine of *flexible response*. This shifted the focus of conventional forces from being used as a tripwire, designed to give NATO the excuse for nuclear retaliation, to actually halting a conventional WarPac attack without resorting to nuclear weapons.

West Germany was the frontline between East and West, with the infamous Iron Curtain running from the Baltic coastline in the north down to the border with Austria in the south. Austria was neutral, but would most likely have become involved on the side of NATO had hostilities broken out. The defence of West Germany was split into two army groups: NORTHAG (Northern Army Group) and CENTAG (Central Army Group). Denmark and Norway were under the command of AFNORTH (Allied Forces, Northern Europe).

NORTHAG contained four Corps as follows, from north to south: I Netherland (NE) Corps; I German (GE) Corps; I British (BR) Corps and I Belgian (BE) Corps. CENTAG also contained four Corps as follows (again from north to south): III German (GE) Corps; V US Corps, VII US Corps and II German (GE) Corps. These two army groups were spread out along the length of the West German border with East Germany and Czechoslovakia - the Iron Curtain.

NATO's primary role against a Warsaw Pact offensive into Western Europe was defensive in nature. Due to the lethal nature of the weapons involved, it was expected that a European World War Three scenario would be over within 6-8 weeks at the most. The war could end in one of several ways: WarPac forces stopped dead in their tracks through

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superior weapons and training in the West (best-case scenario); NATO losing a war of attrition should they fail to halt the WarPac in Germany; or mutual annihilation through escalation to nuclear war (worse-case scenario).

Nuclear weapons were factored into the strategy of both sides, from low-level tactical nuclear weapons used on the battlefield to global-level strategic nuclear weapons used against military and civilian targets. The WarPac were more prepared than NATO to fight under NBC conditions on the battlefield, so this indicates they were ready to use such weapons as part of their offensive strategy. However, France was more than willing to go nuclear if it meant WarPac forces would be halted outside her borders, ie: in Germany itself.

The British Army of the Rhine

The British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) was part of the NATO defence of West Germany from the end of the Second World War until the succeeded by British Forces Germany in 1994. During the 1970s, the BAOR comprised three divisions, including the 1st and 3rd Armoured Divisions and the 2nd Infantry Division. These were part of I (BR) Corps, which was part of NORTHAG.

If war broke out the BAOR would deploy two armoured divisions forward, with the 2nd Infantry Division defending vital military targets in the rear. The 24th Airmobile Brigade was part of the 2nd Infantry Division and was capable of being transported by helicopter. Its main role was anti-tank defence, the three battalions of the Brigade being equipped with Milan Anti-Tank Guided Weapons. Each armoured division could call on the support of Gazelle and Lynx helicopters from the Army Air Corps Regiment.

The Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact was formed in 1955 as a response to NATO. The WarPac included the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania and Albania (until 1968). The eight nations of the Pact can be split into two with regard to their capabilities and their role in any conflict. The more capable nations included the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and, until the late 1960s, Poland as well. The other nations had a much more defensive role.

Should the WarPac have attacked NATO, the Soviet Union, East Germany and Czechoslovakia would have played the central role. One proposed plan was a three-pronged pincer attack into West Germany: across the North German Plain in the north, through the industrial heartland in the centre and into the flank of the NATO defence in the south. The goal of attacking in three places simultaneously was to overwhelm NATO forces, draw in their reserves, and force NATO into a war of attrition by continuously attacking. To supply such an attack, reinforcements would be “pushed” to the units at the front according to anticipated losses, rather than the usual “pull” system, whereby commanders request reinforcements as they need them. This would allow the commanders at the front to concentrate on fighting, rather than getting caught up in logistical matters.

Group of Soviet Forces, Germany

The Group of Soviet Forces, Germany (GSFG) was the strongest concentration of Soviet forces outside of the Soviet Union. Based in East Germany, the GSFG comprised of 10 tank and 10 motorised rifle divisions, supported by an artillery division. The majority of the divisions had Guards status and were trained and equipped accordingly, fielding around 6,000 tanks, or 15% of the Soviet tank inventory. The GSFG was supported by the 16th Tactical Air Army, which fielded around 1,300 aircraft and provided tactical air support and air defence for the ground forces.

The Scenario

The fictional Battle for Hanover was written for Cold War Commander to illustrate one type of battle you can play using the rule system. The scenario is based on a Breakthrough Attack scenario, but the British forces are not in prepared defensive positions as they have only just arrived at the B214. The troops don't even have time to dig foxholes. This is more like an Encounter battle, one that the Soviets trained extensively to fight throughout the Cold War era.

The battlefield should have a tarmac road down the centre of the table, representing the B214. One end of the road will be at the British table baseline, the other end of the road will be at the Soviet table baseline. The road should have open fields to either side, with gentle hills and sparse woodland dotted about as the players see fit. A small built-up area may be placed anywhere along the road by the British player, representing one of the villages along the B214.

The British player should deploy up to the centre of the table. The Soviet player should use mobile deployment and may use the flank deployment rule. The objective for the British player is to break the opposing battlegroup to achieve a major victory and inflict 25% casualties to achieve a minor victory. The objective for the Soviet player is to exit 25% of his units off the British table baseline to achieve a major victory and have at least 25% of his units in the farthest third of the table to achieve a minor victory. The game is limited to 12 turns, with the Soviet player taking the first turn.

British 7th Armoured Brigade

The following order of battle contains elements of the British 7th Armoured Brigade to be used in the scenario. The unit stats can be found on pages 106-108 of the Cold War Commander book.

Brigade HQ

- 1 x CO (CV10)
- 1 x Attack Helicopter Unit (Lynx AH.1)
- 1 x Ambush

2nd Royal Tank Regiment

- 1 x HQ (CV9)
- 2 x Armoured Squadrons, each with:
 - 1 x Recce Unit (Scorpion)
 - 1 x ATGW Unit (Swingfire, FV.438)
 - 4 x Tank Units (Chieftain Mk.5)

Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

- 1 x HQ (CV9)
- 1 x Recce Unit (Scouts)
- 9 x Infantry Units + Carl Gustav upgrade + FV.432
- 1 x Support Unit (ATGW, Milan 1) + FV.432
- 1 x Support Unit (Mortar, 81mm, FV.432)
- 1 x Support Unit (RR, 120mm Wombat, FV.432)
- 1 x Air Defence Unit (SAM, Blowpipe)

Royal Artillery Regiment

- 1 x FAO + Gazelle Helicopter
- 3 x Artillery Batteries (105mm, Abbot)

This comes to 4,000 points with a breakpoint of 13. The British gain +1 when rolling for air superiority at the start of the game.

Soviet 10th Guards Tank Division

The following order of battle contains elements of the Soviet 10th Guards Tank Division to be used in the scenario. The unit stats can be found on pages 116-121 of the Cold War Commander rule book.

Division HQ

- 1 x CO (CV9)
- 2 x Attack Helicopter Units (Mi-24 Hind D)

61st Guards Tank Regiment

- 1 x HQ (CV8)
- 1 x Recce Unit (BRDM)
- 1 x ATGW Unit (AT-5 Spandrel, BRDM)
- 1 x Air Defence Unit (AA, ZSU-23-4)
- 2 x Tank Battalions, each:
 - 6 x Tank Units (T-64, Improved)
 - 3 x Tank Units (T-64, ATGW)

62nd Guards Tank Regiment

- 1 x HQ (CV7)
- 1 x Recce Unit (BRDM)

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- 1 x ATGW Unit (AT-5 Spandrel, BRDM)
- 1 x Air Defence Unit (AA, ZSU-23-4)
- 2 x Tank Battalions, each:
 - 6 x Tank Units (T-64, Improved)
 - 3 x Tank Units (T-64, ATGW)

63rd Guards Tank Regiment

Held in reserve and unavailable during the battle

248th Guards Motorised Rifle Regiment

- 1 x HQ (CV8)
- 1 x Recce Unit (BRDM)
- 2 x Rifle Battalions, each:
 - 3 x Infantry Units (Conscripts) + RPG-16 upgrade + BMP-1 IFV & Sagger
 - 6 x Infantry Units (Conscripts) + RPG-16 upgrade + BMP-1 IFV
 - 1 x Air Defence Unit (SAM, SA-7) + BTR-50PK

1st Independent Heavy Tank Regiment (Attached)

- 3 x Heavy Tank Units (T-10M)

744th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment

- 3 x Artillery Batteries (122mm, 2S1 M1974) allocated to 61st GTD
- 3 x Artillery Batteries (122mm, 2S1 M1974) allocated to 62nd GTD
- 3 x Artillery Batteries (122mm, 2S1 M1974) allocated to 248th GMRR

Air Support

- 2 x FAC
- 2 x Aircraft Units (SU-17 Fitter), each with two ground-attack assets

This comes to 8,000 points with a breakpoint of 28. The Soviets suffer -1 when rolling for air superiority at the start of the game.

The Outcome

The result of such a battle will always remain open to speculation as, fortunately for us, the Cold War didn't lead to World War Three. This is one of the reasons why playing such battles is enjoyable as it involves the unknown. For those who may think this is simply fantasy wargaming, think again! When carrying out the research for this scenario, and for the rule book itself, I was amazed at how much information there is on the weapons and doctrine of the nations involved. The fact that some of the books were written at the time, and contain as much speculation as fact, only adds to the interest for me.

Sources

- The Warsaw Pact: Arms, Doctrine and Strategy by William J. Lewis
- Fighting Armies: NATO and the Warsaw Pact by Richard A. Gabriel
- The British Army web site
- Various other web sites