

'Tactical Combat' Rules

By David Newport

Tactical Combat is a game covering company and battalion level actions using 20th century weapons. The game was designed for World War II action, but it handles recent conflicts as well. The design came about from a desire to have a simple rule set using only one chart that could handle the demands of rapidly teaching the game in a club or convention setting, and then playing the scenario to conclusion in a few hours. The game emphasizes correct use of suppressive fire to keep the opposition's head down while maneuvering in close for decisive action. Conversely, running around in the open and assaulting an enemy who has not been suppressed is a good way to get everyone killed. The emphasis is primarily on infantry, but tank actions can be handled as well with an additional combat table and a few extra rules so that combined arms battles can be played out.

I have put on games ranging from Crete 1941 to D-Day to Barbarossa to the Bulge with only slight modifications to the basic system. The basics of the Action Phase remained the same in all cases, but the command and special rules varied to try to capture the battles better. For example, D-Day had beach assault rules, Crete had airdrop rules, the Bulge had the Germans short on fuel and road-bound, while the 1941 Soviets had command restrictions. *Additionally, some of my more common optional rules are included in italics, and they can be dropped into the game easily.*

Tactical Combat is designed for use with 15mm miniatures. It can be easily played with any scale of figures with players adjusting the movement rates and weapon range break points to match what they feel looks right for their terrain and figures. I have used it with microarmor without adjustment and with 25mm figures by doubling weapon ranges. Game distances are given in inches. A couple of 10-sided dice are required for play. Note that the 00 on the d10 is read as a 10. Low numbers are good, in general. The game requires a number of markers to denote different states for the stands on the table. I use cardboard markers for my games, but obviously you can use whatever looks good on your table, like different figures, casualty caps or rings, smoke markers, fuzz balls, etc. The necessary markers are for 1 Hit, 2 Hits, Suppressed, Paralyzed, and Finished.

Tactical Combat is based around the maneuver of several different formations of troops. Depending on the battle that players wish to simulate, the stands can represent either squads or platoons of soldiers and tanks. With squad-level stands, each player controls one or more companies. With platoon-level stands, each player controls one or more battalions. The difference between the two scales is primarily one of command, as the basic game mechanics remain the same.

Game Sequence

Tactical Combat is played in alternating turns. First one side will complete its turn, and then the other side will do its turn. There are chances for responding to the opposing side's move with opportunity fire, but only one side will be moving at a time. Each turn has the following sequence:

Side A:

1. Remove Finished Markers.
2. Command Phase.
3. Action Phase.
4. Morale Recovery.

Play then passes to Side B for a repeat of these phases. The game continues with alternating turns until the game length is met or someone wins.

Remove Finished Markers

After moving or firing, all stands are marked with a Finished marker. Removing the markers from a side's stands will ready all its stands for action in their turn.

Command Phase

This phase is where players determine how much their men will be able to do during the turn. Three command options are presented for the rules, and of course players should feel free to substitute whatever rules handle their figures and battles the best. Some of my suggestions for customizing them are in italics.

Method 1: No restrictions. All stands can function at full capability every turn. This is recommended only for large games with many new players or for specific scenarios where players feel a lack of command rules is appropriate. *If one side is deemed to be greatly superior in terms of troop quality or command, it may be easiest to show it by allowing them to operate with no restrictions while the other side has to operate under one of the following rules. An example of this would be 1941 Germans against Soviets.*

Method 2: Small-unit scale, with stands representing squad-level formations and players commanding companies. At this level, each formation has a number of small-unit commanders. Platoons have a platoon leader stand, companies have a company leader stand, and if the game goes up to battalion level there will be a battalion commander stand as well. The leader stands are always in command and able to act freely. All other stands which are within 20 of a leader are also able to act freely. Those stands which are outside of the command range of a leader must roll a die prior to doing anything in their own action phase. For green troops, they must roll a 4 or less to act, regular troops need a 6 and elite troops must roll an 8 or less. Stands that attempt to act but fail their roll are marked Finished. Those that do not attempt to act are not marked in any way, and remain eligible to fire opportunity fire in the opponent's turn. *Units with better radios, such as US troops or most Western armor units, might have a longer command range or the ability to put some stands out of range but still in command.*

Method 3: Large-unit scale, with stands representing platoon-sized formations. At this level, players are commanding battalions, and should have a single battalion HQ stand per battalion, ignoring lower level commanders. Each battalion then rolls one die for command points, and the points available are the maximum number of stands that battalion can move and fire this turn. The remaining stands are unable to act and cannot perform any moving or firing during the player's turn, but will be able to opportunity fire

during the opposing move. For each stand that the battalion loses, subtract one from their total available command-point roll. Each side should be assigned a minimum level of activity, regardless of the modified die roll. Green troops should always be given two command points, regular troops get three, while elite troops should always have four command points awarded every turn, representing a baseline level of activity.

Players can save unused command points with their battalion HQ for use in later turns. This represents the staff planning that is going on to ready the battalion for future activity and will tend to enforce lulls while points build up. Players will find that it helps to have a stash of command points built up before the action starts, as once they take casualties and get into serious combat, they may find themselves living hand to mouth on command points or worse, reduced to the guaranteed minimum move. Battalions that have lost their battalion HQ cannot save command points, and must spend all their points every turn or see them go to waste. *If one side is better in the area of command and especially staff work, you may want to have them roll an extra die for command points, for example 1940 Germans against French. If a side had some limitations, you may want them to have no minimum number of command points so they may well be hamstrung on a random basis, for example a German Panzer unit low on fuel in 1944.*

Action Phase

This is where the bulk of the game is played out. Stands may move and fire during this phase, perhaps stopped by the opposition with opportunity fire. This part of the turn is totally free form. Stands may move and fire in any order desired, subject only to the limits of the command rules. One stand can fire, followed by an artillery strike, then a few stands can move, another stand fires, and finally another stand moves. Stands are allowed to take only one action per turn. At the conclusion of movement or fire, mark a stand with a Finished marker as a reminder that it is done for the turn and cannot fire in the opposing player's turn. Stands that take no actions in their own Action Phase and as a result are not marked with a Finished marker may fire opportunity fire in the opposing turn.

Movement

Infantry units can move up to 8" during the action phase.

1. Stands move one at a time.
2. Movement may be interrupted by enemy opportunity fire, but only one interrupt is allowed per move.
3. Moving through terrain such as woods or uphill costs double movement.
4. *As an alternative, any time a stand enters a terrain feature that would impede its movement, it rolls a d6 and subtracts that number of inches from its move. If it would be left with no remaining move, it must halt in place (optional).*
5. Units may enter close combat by moving into contact with an enemy stand, in this case resolve the close combat immediately.
6. Mark the stand Finished at the completion of the move, no matter how far it actually moves.

Combat

Stands may fire on the enemy during the action phase. Combat rules:

1. Each stand fires individually. Do not combine fire.
2. Infantry has a 360-degree arc of fire.
3. Stands may fire out to 8ö normally, or out to 16ö with reduced effect.
4. *Heavy machine guns may roll two dice and pick the best result (optional).*
5. *Heavy machine guns do not suffer a penalty for firing at long range (optional).*
6. A clear line of fire is required for direct fire weapons. You can not fire through blocking terrain features or friendly stands.
7. There is one table below that handles all infantry fire combat. Roll a single d10 on this table when firing.
8. Combat units can take 3 hits. Combat results may cause a stand to take a hit. There are no effects from the first and second hit. On the third hit, remove the stand.
9. *Some stands, such as weapons stands, have only two figures. These stands can take two hits (optional).*
10. Leader stands, like platoon commanders, can take one hit. If these stands are in contact with another stand, they are assumed to be within those stands and cannot be individually targeted. The larger stand must be wiped out before the leader takes its hit.
11. If a platoon or company leader stand is killed, replace it two turns later as someone steps up or HQ sends out a replacement. Do not replace lost battalion HQ stands in larger games.
12. Fire has two possible morale results in addition to hits: Suppressed and Paralyzed.
13. Suppressed stands may not move except as noted below. They may not fire opportunity fire. They may fire with a modifier in their own action phase.
14. A second suppressed result against a stand will cause it to become Paralyzed.
15. Paralyzed stands are extremely limited. They can fire once defensively in close combat and at no other time, and cannot move, except as noted below.
16. Paralyzed and Suppressed stands are not normally allowed to move. The only move they are allowed to take is a Panic Move during their Action Phase. In this case, the stand moves a full 8ö directly away from the closest enemy stand. Ignore terrain movement penalties. At the end of this move, the stand remains or becomes Paralyzed and must take one hit.

Infantry Combat Table

Die Roll	Results	Modifiers to the die roll
1	Hit and Paralyzed	+2 target in building or other hard cover
2-3	Hit and Suppressed	+2 firing unit Paralyzed (close combat only)
4-5	Suppressed	+1 target in cover
6	Green Stands Suppressed, Others No effect	+1 firing stand Suppressed
7-10	No effect	+1 target is at long range, 8-16ö

Opportunity Fire

During the enemy turn, friendly units which are not marked with a finished marker may fire opportunity fire on enemy stands that move or fire.

1. Only friendly stands that are not marked Finished, Suppressed, or Paralyzed may fire opportunity fire.
2. Opportunity fire is resolved using the normal combat rules.
3. If an enemy stand fires and a friendly stand can see the firing stand, the friendly stand may overwatch fire on the enemy stand immediately after the enemy stand resolves its own fire.
4. If an enemy stand moves and a friendly stand can see the move, the friendly stand may fire opportunity fire on the enemy stand as soon as it has moved 1ö or more in the sight of the friendly stand.
5. Only one unit may fire opportunity fire on any one enemy stand when it moves or fires. There is no ganging up on the enemy with multiple fires. Opportunity fire represents taking advantage of a fleeting opportunity, not a coordinated attack.
6. If the opportunity fire result is No Effect, mark the stand which opportunity fired with a Finished marker. It may no longer fire opportunity fire this turn.
7. If the opportunity fire has a result, i.e. a Suppression or better, DO NOT mark the stand Finished. It remains able to fire opportunity fire in the enemy turn until such time as it fails a roll and gains a Finished marker. *If playing with the optional rule where MGs get to roll two dice and pick the best, this makes an MG able to dominate its field of fire during opportunity fire. Suppress those enemy MGs before you move!*

Close Combat

As soon as a friendly stand contacts an enemy stand during the Action Phase, resolve the close combat.

1. Close combat is resolved with alternate fires until one side is Paralyzed. Obviously if one side is wiped out by fire, the combat is over at that time.
2. The attacker is always in open terrain and will never gain a +1 or +2 cover modifier from any defending cover during close combat.
3. The defender fires first. If the attacker is Paralyzed after the resolution of the defender's combat, he must retreat 4ö and take a hit, remaining Paralyzed. This hit is in addition to any hits that may have been inflicted by the defender's fire.
4. The attacker fires second. If the defender is Paralyzed after the resolution of the attacker's combat, he must retreat 4ö and take a hit, remaining Paralyzed. This hit is in addition to any hits that may have been inflicted by the attacker's fire.
5. If neither side is eliminated or Paralyzed and forced to retreat, the sequence is repeated until one side is dead or forced to retreat. There can be only one winner and it must be determined before the game moves on.
6. If the defender starts the close combat Paralyzed (i.e. the attacker is doing his job correctly), he gets to fire one shot at a +2 modifier, the attacker will get his regular shot at the defender to try to inflict some extra hits, and then the defender will have to retreat and take a hit since he is Paralyzed.
7. Once an attacking stand has engaged in close combat, it is marked Finished and can move no farther that phase.

Morale Recovery

In the final phase of the turn, morale states improve. First, Suppressed markers are removed from the active player's stands, and then Paralyzed markers are replaced with Suppressed markers. The inactive player does not adjust his morale states.

As an option, you may wish to require some sort of morale check in order to improve morale states. This adds a minor level of complexity and randomness to the game. I recommend a 6+ for green troops, 5+ for regulars, and 4+ for elites, but this is easy to adjust.

An additional optional rule covers platoon and company leaders in smaller-level games, giving these guys more roles beyond the focus of the command rules. As an option, allow each leader to move to a single Suppressed or Paralyzed stand during the leader's movement and improve the morale state of that stand by one level immediately, representing the motivational effects of the leaders applying encouragement or boots-to-the-backside for their troops. This is a perfect role for Soviet kommissars.

End of Turn

Once a player has finished all his Moving and Firing during his action phase, the turn passes to the other side. Players are not required to move every unit, whether they have the command ability to do so or not. In fact, it is often advantageous to have units not marked with a Finished marker and thus ready to fire during the enemy Action phase.

Air Support/Artillery/Mortars

Players may call for air support or artillery fire during their action phases, if allowed by the scenario. Air support can come down at any point on the map, unless you feel that a spotter is required for the strike. Airpower makes a standard attack on a single stand. More effective air support, like say a Stuka in the early-war period, should be allowed to roll 2 or even 3 dice and pick the best result, thus justifying their feared status.

Artillery and mortar fire targets must be spotted before they can fire. For company-level games, a leader must spot, and the act of spotting will Finish him. For battalion-level games, any stand may spot and the spotting stand is not marked. For artillery fire, I make up a reasonable-sized template for the battery that may allow it to affect multiple stands. The very common Games Workshop artillery templates work fine for this. A heavy mortar would also have a template. All stands under the template will be attacked. Heavy mortars and artillery have no range limit, and may affect any location on the table. Light mortars will affect a single stand, and light mortars should obey the standard 160 range restrictions for firing.

One further role for artillery and mortars is to drop smoke onto enemy positions to screen your own troops. Smoke gives a +1 cover modifier to all fire which goes through it which is not cumulative with other cover modifiers and it is removed at the end of the opponent's turn in the Morale Recovery Phase.

Armor

Tactical Combat is designed primarily as an infantry game. However, tanks and other vehicles often show up on the battlefield, and this rules section should handle any major differences for the game. At the smaller scale, vehicle castings will likely represent a single vehicle that can take a single hit. At the larger scale, they should represent a platoon that can take three hits, just like the infantry.

Movement

Vehicles can move up to 16ö per turn, instead of the 8ö that infantry may move. Vehicles pay quadruple costs for rough terrain (*or roll two d6s and subtract the amount from the move upon entering terrain*). Infantry units may ride in trucks and halftracks. It costs both passenger and carrier half their movement to mount or dismount.

Combat

Vehicles have their own combat table. It is very similar to the infantry table, but should be used for all combat against a vehicle. If a vehicle shoots at infantry, use the infantry table.

Anti-Tank Combat Table

Die Roll	Result	Modifiers to the die roll
1-3	Hit, Forced Back 8ö, Suppressed	-3 flank shot
4-5	Suppressed	-2 moved along a road
6	Suppressed (green troops), others No Effect	+1 target in cover
7+	No effect	+1 Firer is Suppressed
		+1 Firer at Long Range

The Anti-Tank table has several differences from the Infantry Combat Table.

1. Vehicles that are Forced Back must retreat away from the enemy a full 8ö. Be reasonable about choosing the direction. The target vehicle is trying to open range from the fire and get under cover.
2. Vehicles cannot become Paralyzed, either through the combat table or from multiple Suppression results.
3. Vehicles can become Suppressed, representing buttoning up and generally worrying about self-preservation. Suppressed vehicles cannot move closer to the enemy (they can move farther away) and cannot fire opportunity fire. They can fire in their own action phase with a +1 modifier.

General Vehicle Combat notes:

1. Unlike infantry, which can shoot in a 360-degree arc, vehicles can only shoot to their front 180 degrees.
2. Vehicles can execute close-combat attacks, just like infantry. Since the vehicle cannot be Paralyzed, only one round of combat is fought. If the vehicle doesn't win the combat, it must fall back 8ö after the round in whichever morale state it is currently in (i.e. not Paralyzed).

3. Infantry may shoot at vehicles within 2ö of them, representing light anti-tank weapons or other tactics. They may also engage in close combat with them with absolutely no modifiers of any kind except the possible +1 for Suppression on the vehicle if the infantry initiate the close combat. It's dangerous to get too close to infantry formations, no matter how thick your armor is in front.
4. Range notes on vehicles: Most main gun weapons will have a longer range than infantry weapons. However, overdoing it on the range will allow a few vehicles to dominate the table. I recommend giving vehicles a normal range of 16ö and a maximum range of 24ö.

Tank armor and tank guns

This can be wildly variable, depending on what you put on the table. Since **Tactical Combat** is supposed to be a fast playing club or convention game, here are a few broad guidelines.

1. Use only a few types of vehicles and anti-tank guns per side. There is typically no need to have a bewildering array of stuff for a fast game, and it's all relative given what you do deploy in the game.
2. Pick the mid-range gun to have a 0 modifier. For example, if you have Shermans and Panzer IVs with roughly equivalent 75mm guns, make that the basis of the table. Then, lighter guns might have a +1 or +2 to their attack, representing lesser effect. Heavier guns would have a -1 or -2 to their roll to have a greater effect. Continuing with the example, an M-5 with a 37mm gun would have a +2 die roll modifier, while a Panther would have a -1.
3. The same goes for the armor. Give the Sherman and Panzer IV a zero on the armor, while a Panther gets a +1, making it more survivable.
4. This should be adjusted game by game. If you are in North Africa, a Panzer IV is probably a heavy tank. A T-34 is a heavy tank and very hard to kill in 1941, but by 1943 it's a standard medium tank.
5. Feel free to modify these guidelines. Given the straight d10 nature of the table, a +1 or -1 goes a long way. Also, don't overdo it, as players work best and quicker when they only need to factor in a couple of modifiers. That moves the game along.