

BCS Rules - Read This First

by Lynn Brower

This file is designed to help first time *Battalion Combat Series (BCS)* players learn the rules. In most ways, *BCS* is a traditional hex and counter wargame, but there are new concepts that players need to learn. Above all players must learn the rules for **Formations** and **Units** and understand the different roles they have in game play.

Formations and Units

In wargames, each counter typically represents one *unit* (division, regiment, battalion, company, etc.) and these *units* are the focus of the player's actions in playing the game.

While *units* are approximately battalion-sized in *BCS*, these units are organized in **groups** called **Formations**. These Formations are the higher organizations (brigades/divisions) the unit counters were historically assigned to.

I believe players should read the *BCS* rules dealing with *Formations* **BEFORE** reading the rules dealing with *Units*. When players play a *BCS* game they need to think about how to operate their Formations before they move and fight their Formation's units. So, to learn the *BCS* rules, new players should work through the Table of Contents in the following order.

Read **Sections 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0** first. In Section 1.0 pay special attention to Cases **1.2 Unit Types and Classes** and **1.6 Terms**. These cases contain descriptions and definitions for terms and concepts that will be explained in depth in the remainder of the rules. There is no need to memorize these sections but players will refer back to these two cases frequently. The Terms section is especially helpful in determining what is meant by a number of new terms used in *BCS* that are not in other wargames. Players frequently skip reading the Terms section (figuring they know it is there and will look things up when they need to), but giving the section a real read before hitting the rules themselves is helpful in getting a start at understanding what things mean. Skipping it leaves them scratching their head later and not fully appreciating all the information packed into that section of the rules.

Section 2.0 contains the sequence of play for a Game Turn. Each Game Turn has a Pre-Turn phase, an Activation Phase and an Admin Phase. This sequence of play will be familiar to players of other war games. But players should note the Assignment segment of the Pre-Turn phase. Assignment is an important rule affecting both Artillery and Support of Formations. The Activation Phase is the heart of the game so it has its own sequence of play.

Section 3.0 details the sequence of player actions in the Activation phase. New players should read this section carefully and refer to it frequently when learning to play. Experienced players should do the same thing because most errors in game play can be traced to not following this sequence carefully. Case 3.1a states briefly and clearly what players do to play any *BCS* game.

Learning Formations

Understanding Formations is central to playing any *BCS* game. After reading sections 1.0, 2.0, and

3.0 new players should read **Sections 4.0, 9.0 and 10.0** next. These three sections detail rules that affect Formations. Most of the game play concepts that prompt questions from new players are described in these sections. The case titles in these three sections contain many of the new concepts in *BCS*.

Section 4.0 describes four important concepts affecting Formations; Command Radius, Objectives, Coordination, and Prepared Defense. Section 4.0 also contains a detailed example of a complete Formation Activation. Remember, as stated in Case 3.1a, players are activating Formations one by one, alternating between the opposing sides. I strongly urge new players to **wait** to read through this example until they have read through ALL the rules. Many of the details in this example describe how to use Units as well as Formations. It is important when learning *BCS* to understand Formations **before** adding in the details of handling a Formation's Units.

Case 4.2 Command Radius, simply states that the units of a Formation operate normally within a defined distance of the HQ unit. In *BCS* Formations can operate when units from other Formations are mixed together but they do so with significant penalties. Players must learn to think of operating their Formations rather than using individual units.

Case 4.3 Objectives (OBJs) introduces an important concept that requires players to focus the combat activities of a Formation's units. Formations in *BCS* have three basic methods of applying combat power against enemy units; Engagements, Attacks, and Barrage Missions. Simply stated, all Attacks and Barrage Missions must occur within an OBJ Zone which is defined by the placement of an OBJ marker at the beginning of a Formation's Activation. A player must decide where to place his available OBJ markers BEFORE he moves any of a Formation's units.

Case 4.4 Coordination simply describes when a Formation is coordinated with another friendly Formation. Formations are *penalized* when they move through or overlap with other friendly Formations. Players must think about the location and actions of their Formations BEFORE they consider the movements and actions of individual units.

Case 4.5 Prepared Defense describes the capabilities and penalties applied to Formations which are placed in Prepared Defense mode. Prepared Defense is a Formation **state** that a player must choose to apply at the beginning of an Activation before determining how the Formation will Activate. Formations placed in Prepared Defense gain defensive combat benefits at the cost of restricting their movement and offensive combat capabilities.

New players learning the *BCS* Rules should now jump forward in the Table of Contents and read **Section 9.0 Specialized Rules** and **Section 10.0 SNAFU, Supply, Fatigue & Isolation**. All nine cases in these two rules sections contain rules that affect Formations.

Case 9.1 Headquarters (HQs) details the rules for Headquarters units. HQs have two primary functions. 1) HQs define the center of a Formation's area of operations where that Formation's units must operate and 2) HQs (in combination that Formation's Combat Trains) define the Formation's supply line. Understanding Formation supply lines is important for using Formations efficiently in game play. New players should note here that **Case 10.2 Main Supply Routes** and **Case 10.3 Combat Trains** combine with Case 9.1 to complete the rules defining supply lines in *BCS*.

Case 9.2 Support details the rules for Support. Support is a Formation *property*. A Formation's "support" is created by assigning Support-capable units to the Formation. These units, in turn, provide the Support functions to the Formations units. The presence or absence of Support, plus its type, has important Combat and ZOC effects on that Formation's unit capabilities.

Support is one of the game concepts in *BCS* that generates many player questions. New players should read this Case carefully. Most units capable of providing Support can exist in two states (Concentrated or Support) while a few Support-capable units can **only** be Support. All units providing Support do not occupy any specific map location. Think of these units as being broken into small subunits that have no counter on the map, but are instead distributed to other units of their Formation. Many, but not all, units capable of providing Support can be concentrated into a unit counter and can then operate as normal units on the map. When units capable of providing Support are concentrated as a normal unit they **no longer** provide Support to other units of the Formation. New players should read Case 9.2a slowly and carefully.

Case 9.3 Reinforcements describes how reinforcing units enter the map. Reinforcements in *BCS* act much as they do in other games. Players just need to remember that in most situations (but not all; see Case 9.5) reinforcements are assigned to specific formations.

Case 9.4 Replacements details the rules for acquiring and using replacement points to rebuild units in *BCS*. Players should note that both Reinforcements and Replacements are placed with Formations in the Reinforcements & Weather segment of the Pre-Turn Phase.

Case 9.5 Independent Units & Assignment details the Assignment process. Assignment occurs for Independent Units and Arty Points in the Assignment segment of the Pre-Turn Phase. Independent units are units that do not have a permanent Formation assignment printed on the counter. These units can be moved between Formations using the procedures in this case. Artillery in *BCS* is shown as Arty Points. Some Arty Points are assigned permanently to Formations and these points are shown on the HQ counter. Other Arty Points are assignable to Formations as the player wishes. These points are shown as markers which can be placed on the map with the HQ counter or stored off map at the player's choice.

SNAFU = Situation Normal All 'Fouled' Up is Case 10.1. SNAFU is a simple procedure that requires a Formation to make a die roll at the beginning of every Activation. If the modified roll is 2 the Formation fails to Activate, roll 3,4,5,6 and the Formation can make a Partial Activation, and if the roll is 7 or more the Formation passes SNAFU and can Activate with full capabilities. This procedure is simple but the details are in the list of DRMs. The SNAFU die roll is modified primarily by the state of a Formation's supply line but it is also modified by the Coordination and Fatigue state of the Formation. Studying the DRM list and the Snafu Result Effects table will pay dividends in understanding how this procedure effects game play.

Playing *BCS* for any length of time will convince you that another name for this rule could be Murphy's Rule; what can go wrong with a Formation Activation will go wrong **and** at the worst possible time.

Case 10.2 Main Supply Routes (MSRs) and **Case 10.3 Combat Trains** in combination with **Case 9.1 HQs** define the logistics rules for *BCS*. In *BCS* the traditional trace an unblocked line of hexes from a unit to its supply source definition of a supply line is expanded in these three rules.

There is a supply line from an individual unit to a supply source but that line has three parts rather than a simple trace. The first part is the connection between a unit and its Formation HQ. This part is controlled by Command Radius and Safe Path (see 1.6 Terms). MSR is the path leading from the HQ through the Combat Trains (CT) to a game specific defined supply source. The MSR path from an HQ to a CT is slightly different from the path between a CT and a Supply Source. Study these rules carefully, especially the rules describing what happens when enemy action requires an HQ or CT to retreat.

Case 10.4 Fatigue details the cumulative effects of continuing combat on a Formation's performance. A Formation's fatigue level operates as a negative DRM on the SNAFU die roll. Fatigue level may increase depending on a die roll made each time a Formation completes an Activation. The probability that this die roll will increase Fatigue increases as the scale of a Formation's combat operations increases from Barrage to Engagement to Attacks. Formations can improve Fatigue level by conducting Recovery during an Activation.

Case 10.5 Isolation defines the effect on units when they are cut off from a connection to their Formation HQ. Units of a Formation lose steps when they are located outside of their Formation's Command Radius and/or the unit has no Safe Path.

Learning Units

Reading Sections 4.0, 9.0, and 10.0 should provide a new player with an understanding of how to operate Formations in *BCS*. New players should **now** read the four remaining Sections to learn the rules for operating *Units* in *BCS*. For players of other hex and counter wargames, these four rules sections will be more familiar than the previous three sections.

Section 5.0 Movement and Section 6.0 Zones of Control (ZOCs) detail the rules controlling how units move on the map. Movement is the familiar hex by hex movement controlled by a unit's Movement Allowance and map terrain. ZOCs are slightly more complex and there are differences between the normal ZOC, ZOCs provided by assigned Support or ZOCs for units containing anti-armor weapons.

7.0 Combat and 8.0 Barrage contain the rules defining the three methods of combat between opposing units. Players will need to learn three types of combat:

1. **Barrages** by artillery, air, and vehicular weapons systems. The latter making what is called "Attacks by Fire" which are resolved on the same Barrage Table as would Artillery.
2. **Engagements** between ranged anti-armor weapons.
3. **Attacks** which could be **Regular Attacks** (similar to normal wargame attacks) or **Shock Attacks** (which could be thought of as akin to more familiar wargame Overruns).

Finally after reading these all these rules sections new players can read the *Complete Activation Example* (starting on page 8) with hopefully better understanding.