

BCS Rules— Read This First

by Lynn Brower

This article 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**. 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 the Formation's internal 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, and the **Glossary**. Pay special attention to **Case 1.1e** Unit Types and the **Glossary**. These 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 them but refer back to these two cases frequently. The Glossary 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 Glossary section (figuring they know it is there and will look things up when needed), but giving it 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 the information packed into that section of the rules.

Sections 1.3 through 1.9 involve Core Concepts (introduced in **1.2**) which are key throughout the game and need to be understood as they affect units at multiple times in the Turn Sequence and in multiple ways.

Section 2.0 contains the sequence of play for a Game Turn. This sequence of play will be familiar to players of other war games. But players should note the Assignments 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.

Learning Formations

Understanding Formations is central to playing any *BCS* game. After reading sections 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0, new players should review the sections below again. They detail rules that affect Formations. Most of the game play concepts that prompt questions from new players are described in these sections. They contain many of the new concepts in *BCS*.

Sections 1.0 and 3.0 describe the key concepts affecting Formations: Command Radius, Objectives, SNAFU & Mixing, and Prepared Defense. The Support booklet also contains a detailed example of a complete Formation Activation.

Remember, as stated in **Case 2.5**, 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 the example describe how to use Units as well as Formations. As I have stated, it is important when learning *BCS* to understand

Formations **before** adding in the details of handling a Formation's Units.

Case 1.3 Formations. The central building block.

Case 1.4 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.

Case 3.3 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 3.2 SNAFU is the need to keep Formations well defined and with their needed Main Supply Routes (3.1) well defined and arranged to allow them to operate efficiently. Your ability to do so relative to your opponent's will show in the activity levels your Formations manage versus what his do. If you are running at 90% and he is creeping along at 40%, your forces will do very well in comparison.

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 gets a Full SNAFU and obtains full capabilities. The procedure is simple; 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 Formation's Coordination and Fatigue state. Studying the DRM list and the SNAFU Result Effects table will pay dividends in understanding how SNAFU affects 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.

Cases 3.2c Coordination and **3.2d Mixed Formations** simply describe when one Formation is interfering 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 1.7 Prepared Defense describes the capabilities and penalties applied to Formations which are placed in a Prepared Defense status. 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.

Case 4.7 HQs & Combat Trains detail the rules for Headquarters units and the Combat Trains needed to keep them functioning. 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 with that Formation's Combat Trains) define the Formation's supply line. Understanding Formation supply lines is important for using Formations efficiently in the game.

Case 3.1 Main Supply Routes (MSRs) and **Case 4.7 HQs & Combat Trains** define the logistics rules for *BCS*. In *BCS* the traditional 'trace an unblocked line of hexes from a unit to its supply source' Supply Line definition is expanded by these 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 (1.4) and Safe Path (1.9). MSR is the path leading from the HQ through the Combat Trains (CT) and then on to a game specific defined supply

source. The MSR path from an HQ to a CT is slightly different from the path beyond the CT and to a Supply Source. Study these rules carefully, especially those describing what happens when enemy action requires an HQ or CT to retreat.

Case 1.5 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 various types of Support has important Combat and ZOC effects on a Formation's capabilities.

Support is one of the game concepts in *BCS* that generates many player questions. New players should read this Case carefully. Most Support-capable units can exist in two states ("Real" or Support) while a few can **only** be Support. Units providing Support do not occupy any specific map location. Think of Support as being broken into small subunits distributed to other units of their Formation. Many units capable of providing Support can be concentrated into a unit counter and can then operate as normal (Real) units on the map. When units capable of providing Support are concentrated as a Real unit, they **no longer** provide Support to any other units. New players should read Case 1.5 slowly and carefully.

Case 2.1 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 some situations Reinforcements could be Assigned to specific Formations.

Case 2.2 Replacements details the rules for acquiring and using Replacement Points (Repls) to rebuild units in *BCS*. Players should note that both Reinforcements and Replacements are placed or used in the Reinforcements segment at the start of each turn.

Case 2.3 Assignment details the Assignment process which allows Independent Units and Arty Points to be functional parts of a given Formation. Independent units are units that do not have a permanent Formation

assignment printed on the counter. These units can be traded 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 are listed on the HQ's counter. Other Arty Points are assignable to Formations as the player wishes. These are shown as markers which can be placed on the map with the HQ counter or stored off map as the player chooses.

Case 1.8 Fatigue tracks 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 3.6 Isolation defines the effect on units when they are cut off from a connection to their Formation HQ. Units lose steps when they are located outside of their Formation's Command Radius and/or the unit has no Safe Path.

Learning Units

The above should provide a new player with an understanding of how Formations operate in *BCS*. New players should **now** read **Sections 4.0** and **5.0** to learn the rules for operating *Units* in *BCS*. For players experienced in other hex and counter wargames, these sections will be more familiar.

Section 4.0 Movement and Section 4.3 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, and ZOCs of units made up of anti-armor weapons.

5.0 Combat contains the rules defining the three methods of combat between opposing

units. Players need to learn all three types:

1. **Barrages** (5.4) 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 using its separate column on the Barrage Table and its own Section, 5.3. Attack by Fire is slightly less effective than some single Artillery or Air Point Barrage.

2. **Engagements** (5.2) between ranged anti-armor weapons.

3. **Attacks** which could be **Regular Attacks** (similar to normal wargame attacks) or **Shock Attacks** (which are akin to familiar wargame Overrun Attacks).

Finally after reading these all these rules sections, new players can read the *Complete Activation Example* with hopefully better understanding.

BCS Primer Tips For Playing The Battalion Combat Series

By Doug Fitch

The *Battalion Combat Series (BCS)* is a fantastic design from the creative mind of Dean Essig. However, the system’s radical design means that nothing you have previously encountered in your gaming career can fully prepare you for it. While the game mechanics are quite elegant, previous gaming experience can hinder, rather than help, your attempt to learn the system. You must throw out everything you know about playing operational level wargames when you come to *BCS*. To quote a certain Jedi Master, “You must unlearn what you have learned.” Combined with some new terminology, this leads to a bit of a steep learning curve for the game.

The most challenging aspect of *BCS*, though, is not learning how to play the game, but learning how to play the game *well*. The purpose of this article is not to help you learn the game’s rules. There are many excellent resources for that already available. This article aims to go a step beyond the mechanics and focus on how to apply those mechanics in the new world of *BCS*. We will discuss some of the key principles I have learned (sometimes the hard way) through my experience with the system.

Forest For The Trees

Focusing on your individual battalions as discrete independent units causes players more grief than just about anything else in *BCS*. The vast majority of wargames published to date allow players to move their pieces across the board without penalty, freely intermixing them with other units from different larger organizations. Real world considerations like unit boundaries and lines of communication are not a factor. Frequently, battalions and regiments from various divisions end up stacked with one another without penalty. Or divisions jump from corps-to-corps on a weekly or even daily basis. By so doing, games have trained players to maximize the movement and attack abilities of each individual piece. One

is not only allowed—but encouraged—to shuffle units back and forth to bring maximum firepower in each attack. Do this in *BCS* and you will lose.

Trained by years of playing other games, most players’ initial reaction to *BCS* is to focus on what they can do with each of their individual battalions. They lose sight of the forest for the trees. One of the critical skills to master for success in the *BCS* is to “think big”. By that, I mean that you cannot think in terms of the individual pieces on the map. You must think in terms of *Formations*. When you look at the map, you should not see 10 or 12 units, but one Formation (usually a division though occasionally a smaller sized organization). The individual pieces are merely parts of this whole.

If you are looking at a *BCS* map and thinking, “I can move my tank battalion from this hex to attack that hex,” you are going to set yourself up for failure. Instead, your mindset needs to be, “I can send 3rd Armored Division to capture that crossroads/village/bridge.” But since the entire division cannot fit in that village, you need to think about not only the battalion or two you are going to send to capture the village, but where you are going to put the rest of the division; as well as how that division’s location (described in the rules by the ‘scientific’ term “blob”) is going to interact with the other divisions in your force. In *BCS*, you move *Formations* around the map, you do not simply push pieces. The command and logistical system *BCS* uses will punish you severely for not thinking in terms of *Formations*.

The Objective marker mechanic reinforces this. Other games you have played basically allowed you to attack everywhere, with all of your units, every turn. And if you did not, you felt as though you failed to optimize your forces. In *BCS*, all of your attacks and artillery barrages must occur within the “Objective Zone” that exists out to two hexes from an Objective marker. Newbies view this as a restriction on their ability to attack. Experienced players find that this mechanic *focuses* their Formation’s activities.

When you place these OBJ markers out, you are making a conscious decision about your Formation's priority for this Activation. Instead of your battalions careening about the map attacking everywhere and nowhere, you now have a strong visual reminder of the task you have assigned to the Formation. This should not only impact the movement of the individual battalions you have selected for the actual attack and capture of the objective, but also every other battalion in the Formation as you consider how best to secure and consolidate your recently won objective(s). *BCS* Formations do not have the strength to successfully attack along more than one, maybe two, avenues in any given Activation. In addition to dissipation of force, spreading your Formation to the winds has more (and often worse) problems, which will be addressed below.

If there is one thing you should master that will improve your *BCS* play the most, it is to "THINK BIG". Do not let the fleeting opportunity an individual battalion's position might offer distract you from the situation of the Formation as a whole. Stepping back and seeing the big picture in terms of Formations will help you get more out of each of your individual battalions over the course of a game.

"A Tidy Battlefield"

Field Marshal Montgomery's predilection for a 'tidy battlefield' is something for which every *BCS* player should strive. The SNAFU Table punishes players whose sloppy play results in units from multiple Formations getting intermingled. This can have an ongoing and detrimental effect on the ability of your army to do... anything. Just moving a unit temporarily through another Formation's "simple Blob" results in BOTH Formations being marked Coordinated and suffering a -1 DRM on their next SNAFU roll. If you allow those units to begin their Activation with that unit still inside the other Formation's blob, then you also accrue an additional -1 DRM for Mixed Formations. For Formations like the US early in **Last Blitzkrieg**, that additional -2 DRM usually eliminates ANY possibility of getting a Full result on your SNAFU check. And it makes even a Partial result very iffy.

Again, the best way to avoid messy situations on the map is to think in terms of Formations. But you need to not just be aware of how the Formation will fit into the frontline, but also where its logistical tail will be located. The SNAFU Table will also penalize you for not keeping a tidy battlefield behind the front. Ideally, you will be able to assign a road to a specific Formation. Once you've given the road to a Formation, avoid the temptation to allow other Formations to use that same road unless it's an emergency.

Obviously, there will be times when there simply aren't enough roads to go around. The Germans face this at the start of their offensive in **Last Blitzkrieg**. However, once they cross the Our River and are able to do some broken field running, there are usually enough roads to allow a couple of panzer divisions to operate side by side. And if you can manage to pull that off, it is a beautiful thing to behold.

Because the Crossing the Streams DRM only applies from the HQ to the Combat Trains, keeping your logistical tail as short as possible will also help you avoid a tangled mess in your rear. It's often better to move your Trains (and take the -1 for Ghost Trains) than to leave them far behind your HQ. Crossing the Streams affects every Formation whose Main Supply Routes (MSRs) are crossed, while Ghost Trains only affects the Formation in question.

If you strive to maintain a tidy battlefield for your own forces, your goal should be to make your opponent's army as messy as possible. Retreating units into a neighboring Formation is a great way to Coordinate both of them (and likely leave them Mixed). Similarly, cutting the number of roads available for his Trains forces them all on to the remaining few, thus saddling him with yet another -1 for Crossing the Streams.

Inflicting negative DRM's on your opponent's Formations has a snowball effect. Having a -6 or -8 SNAFU DRM (I've seen it) eliminates any possibility of a Full result, and makes Failure very likely. This prevents him from reacting at all to the initial dislocation, allowing your units to continue to run amok and worsen his Formation's position. When you have your opponent down, don't stop kicking him.

Conversely, if you find the enemy has pushed aside one of your Formations and that Formation is now mixed up with one or more of your other Formations, you may well be better off cutting your losses and giving up ground in order to unscramble your units. The longer you are under those negative DRM's from being Mixed, the harder it will be for you to do anything about it. In many cases, you are better off withdrawing, reorganizing, and counterattacking to retake the lost positions than trying to hold on to a crumbling front.

A less dramatic situation may be one where you do not move some battalions to their full extent because it would result in either Coordination for the two Formations involved, or even being Mixed. Avoid the temptation to inflict a step loss or two on the enemy in exchange for Coordinating and Mixing your Formations. It simply is not worth the cost.

Along the same lines is the relief operation. *BCS* makes it very tricky to relieve a frontline Formation with another. To avoid Coordination and Mixing, you need to move the Formation to be relieved out of its position before you move in the relief. Rarely will the enemy allow you to do this unmolested. You could easily find yourself fighting to retake ground you just voluntarily gave up. Your other option is to move the relieving force in on top of the original Formation. But this will give you Coordination and Mixed DRM's on your SNAFU rolls, making it much harder to un-mix the Formations by getting the original force to activate and move out. The best course of action is to try to keep some reserve battalions within your Formation, allowing some units to rest and receive replacements while others hold the frontline. This will give your Formations a much longer shelf life when in combat. But even this is hard to accomplish most of the time.

Never Send a Tank To Do an Infantryman's Job

A tank has a much bigger gun than an infantryman, and it moves a lot faster, too (okay, Matildas excepted). So I should just use tanks for everything, right? Not in *BCS*. Most games treat armor like it's nothing

more than stronger, faster infantry. But *BCS* is not most games. The problem is, armor is NOT the same as infantry, and it doesn't fight like infantry. The *BCS* mechanics do an excellent job of highlighting the differences between the two combat arms.

Any unit that has an Armor Value (AV) qualifies as armor (at least for purposes of this discussion). These units are given different capabilities than the Attack-Capable units in the game (indicated by the white arrow on the counter). They use a different Combat Table entirely (the Engagement Table or Barrage Table, depending on target type). The fact that different combat tables exist should be a huge red flag that these units will not behave the same as infantry, and should not be thought of in a conventional way.

A common mistake I see with new players is using armor units to hold important real estate. Their previous years' experience of armor automatically being the strongest unit in the game has conditioned them to continue that tactic in *BCS*. This often leads to unfortunate results for the player, who is expecting their mighty armor battalion to hold off all attackers. The problem lies in the nature of armor vs. armor engagements.

When armor unit attacks a defending armor unit, it is resolved on the Engagement Table. A modified 9+ causes a defender step loss & retreat. For the US in *Last Blitzkrieg*, the German armor consistently has a qualitative advantage that results in a +2 or +3 DRM to the Engagement roll (+1 or +2 if the US is in Prepared Defense). So suddenly that big, strong armor battalion will be chased out of its hex by a 6 or 7 on the roll of the dice, which is very doable. Armor does not hold ground well. That is as true in real life as it is in *BCS*. Sure, there are times when you will have no other option, but do not expect your armor units to hold their ground for any length of time.

Another common preconception I have seen is players stacking an armor battalion with an infantry type unit (to give it some 'armor support'). While it's true that an attack on the Combat Table will see a +1 DRM for the defense due to 2 units in the stack, your opponent is not likely to humor you by assaulting the hex. Instead, he'll

drive up his own armor and conduct an Engagement. And since the rules require ALL units in a hex to retreat if one of them suffers a Retreat result, by placing an armor battalion in the hex you desperately want to hold, you have actually made it far easier to take. If you want to give your infantry units support, then use actual Support. That's what it's there for. Save your armor units for counterattacks to retake the objective if the enemy pushes you out.

But armor is not just vulnerable on the Engagement Table. It is also more vulnerable on the Combat Table. Infantry can assault that nice, impervious armor unit just as easily as they can another infantry unit or some armored cars. But since AV units are never eligible for Support, unless your armor battalion is a Dual unit, you are giving up the +1 DRM for Supported/Dual. And even a +1 could make a difference in an attack.

Speaking of Dual, I'd like to spend a moment discussing them. The late war US armor divisions are chock full of them. Dual units combine the best AND the worst of assault and AV type units. Among the benefits of Dual units is that they carry their own support with them, and it CANNOT be dropped. This effectively gives them an AR one notch higher than what is printed on their counter whenever they face enemy infantry. They can drop enemy support by themselves, or (if that support has been dropped), use a Fire Event to kill a step *before* attacking on the Combat Table. This means that over the course of a game, their attacks are going to bleed the enemy more than non-Dual units. But while Dual units bring along all the benefits of being AV, they also bring along the problems. When facing superior enemy armor, do not expect your Dual units to hold ground very long. All this means that you should view your Dual units as *offensive* units, and use them defensively only when you are absolutely desperate.

Learning the differences between infantry and armor units in *BCS* is critical to success. Armor should be attacking, whether on the offense or as part of a defensive counterattack. Let the infantry hold the ground. By sending the right units for the task at hand, you stand a better chance of achieving your objectives.

IGO-UGO, Not IW8-UGO

BCS uses an alternating Activation mechanic during the turn. I have seen much discussion about players trying to game this mechanic to their advantage. This is especially true when one side has several more Formations in play than the other, like the start of the *Last Blitzkrieg* campaign. The major complaint being that a player can wait to activate certain Formations until his opponent is forced to activate all his Formations on a certain sector of the front. Thus, the player has a free hand for his Activations without interference from any opposing Formations.

While this may be true in certain situations, waiting often has as big a downside as not waiting. By not activating your Formations in a certain area, you hand the initiative on that sector to your opponent. And in *BCS*, he who moves first often has an advantage, one that outweighs waiting out your opponent.

There are legitimate reasons for waiting to activate certain Formations. For example, you need other friendly Formations to move out of the way before you can activate to avoid mixing your Formations (see "A TIDY BATTLEFIELD" above). But playing games with the Activation sequence for no other reason than to exhaust your opponent's Activations on one area of the front can have a lot of unintended (and negative) consequences for you. For example, the Formation you are hoping to trap and destroy may well activate and just move away, robbing you of the chance to inflict any serious harm on it. Worse yet, the enemy may launch an unexpected attack which disrupts your Formations, and could even saddle you with some negative SNAFU DRM's preventing your Formation from even getting out of the starting blocks this turn.

Furthermore, the ability of the side with an advantage in number of Formations to wait is a subtle way of portraying the initiative such a side has. For example, the Germans greatly outnumber the US at the beginning of *Last Blitzkrieg* and the initiative is solidly with them for the first few days (even week) of the campaign. Allowing them to "manage" their Activation sequence reflects their ability to dictate the tempo of the battle early on. As the campaign progresses and the numbers

switch to favor the US, we see the initiative also move in their direction. It's just one more example of the elegance and subtleties with which *BCS* is loaded.

“Preppers”

(or Why PD Isn't a Magic Bullet)

Prepared Defense (PD) is probably the game's most overused mechanic. Many players see the +1 DRM it provides to defenders on the Combat & Engagement Tables, combined with the ability to ignore a Situational Retreat (in exchange for a step loss) and think PD is a must have. What they do not consider are all of PD's down sides, of which there are plenty.

For starters, the best SNAFU result possible while in PD is Partial. This halves unit MA and gives you only one Objective marker, thus eliminating any chance at the “Double Tap” DRM for your attacks. Your HQ cannot move while in PD. PD halves (rounding down) your Artillery Points available, which really hurts your plans to attrit the bad guys with your artillery as you sit in your defenses. If you make an attack on the Combat Table you receive a -1 DRM. When you consider that you are also ineligible for the Double Tap +1, this equates to a -2 on the Combat Table before considering anything else. I don't know about you, but I hate giving away 2 pips on my dice in any attack.

Everybody loves to have their cake and eat it, too. And I think this may be one reason why folks seem so enamored with PD. Unfortunately for them (but fortunately for historical verisimilitude) PD in *BCS* is a tradeoff. It is a nice way of showing the posture of your Formation. Either your Formation is mobile or it is not. PD hurts a mobile (even a moderately mobile) Formation far more than it helps one.

All of which is not to say that PD is never useful. If your Formation is where you want it to be, and you are willing to trade casualties to hold terrain, then PD is warranted. But the trend among folks I have played is to enter PD as a matter of course. It is their default position. PD doesn't even provide any better protection from Barrages than regular terrain. You should think hard about entering PD as a protection for your units when just locating them in terrain will serve you just as well without any of the PD downsides.

Do not underestimate the consequences of PD on the Combat Table. Sure, you ignore those Situational Retreat results, but it costs you 1 step to do so. If you were not in PD, you would have to retreat. But the retreat is only three hexes and you suffer no losses. Meanwhile, there's a chance that the enemy suffers a step loss while you do not. You are trading ground for time, and perhaps even getting ahead in the attritional battle, by not going into PD.

Again, there is definitely a time and place for PD, but it should be integrated into your overall plan and not merely a kneejerk reaction every time you go to activate a Formation. Putting armored Formations into PD requires even more careful consideration.

“Kicking Puppies”

(Jumping HQ's & Trains)

BCS places an emphasis on logistics, and that should guide your strategy as well. It is extremely difficult, costly, and time consuming to destroy a Formation by attacking all of its combat units to death. The highest number of casualties you can inflict on a defender in a given attack is two (three, given certain retreat situations). Your typical infantry battalion would need to be attacked at least three times to eliminate it through combat alone. Given the mechanics of the Objective Zone, this means it will take at least a few turns barring the commitment of several armor units to use their Attack by Fire capability on it. Rarely have I seen the situation where a player has two or three spare armor battalions sitting around with nothing better to do than barrage a single infantry battalion.

No, in *BCS* the key to beating the enemy is disrupting his command and logistics. This is done by jumping his HQ's and Trains. Jumping the HQ gives the Formation Coordination, drops its PD, and Ghosts its Trains. That's at least a cumulative -2 SNAFU DRM on its next Activation. Jumping his Trains will usually put them beyond Optimal Distance, as well as ghosting them, which robs the Formation of a +1 SNAFU DRM and inflicting a -1 DRM. Another possible net -2 DRM (-3 if you do both). There is also a chance that by jumping his Trains you could cut his MSR. The MSR will not

be Complete and thus impose a -3 SNAFU DRM on the Formation. And if he cannot move his Trains to Complete an MSR by the end of his next Activation, the Trains will come off the map, to be followed next Activation by placement of a MSR Blocked marker. Those MSR Blocked markers really up the ante.

Jumping HQ's and Trains hastens the snowball effect mentioned earlier. By piling up negative SNAFU DRM's on the enemy, it makes it much harder for him to react to your attacks and to salvage his position. Once you've reached a point where you have started inflicting negative SNAFU DRM's on the enemy, do everything you can to continue doing so in future turns until the Formation is sufficiently isolated as to literally wither away.

An abundance of roads can make cutting a Formation's MSR difficult. It may require a substantial commitment of your forces and a few turns to accomplish, but if you can bag a number of enemy Formations, your efforts will be handsomely rewarded. Remember, removing the last combat unit of a Formation from the map will frequently permanently remove the entire Formation from the game (unless the Formation has some straggler units showing up on the OOA). In a long game like *Last Blitzkrieg*, the absence of an entire division or two could be decisive in the late game struggle. And the best way to remove large chunks of a Formation in the same turn is to starve them off the map, not attack them.

Separating Units From HQ's

While cutting MSR's will accelerate the demise of a Formation, to truly eliminate units through Isolation you need to separate them from their HQ. Isolation effects are only implemented if a unit is either out of Command Radius or has no Safe Path (or both). Removing a Safe Path can often easily be accomplished by “ZOCing in” the unit in question. However, this has repercussions when it comes to retreats due to combat. Without a Safe Path, a unit will not retreat, but takes a step loss instead. If you really need that hex, do NOT “ZOC in” the defender. You will regret the time (and often steps) lost attacking the unit, turn after turn, as the Isolation effects slowly take effect.

The better way to inflict Isolation effects is to separate the combat units from their HQ. This is accomplished by jumping the HQ (usually repeatedly) to force it to retreat up its MSR and away from its units. Circling back to the first issue discussed (thinking in terms of Formations), you should develop your attack plans with an eye to dismembering the Formation, ideally decapitating its head (the HQ).

The Indirect Approach

(Apologies to Capt. Liddell Hart)

With the introduction of the Hard & Soft Jump rule, the comments about jumping your opponent's HQ's and CT's need a little modification. While the bulk of the above sections remain valid, the manner in which you go about achieving the goals must change. Being able to blast a hole in the enemy's line and then launching your mobile units like a heat-seeking missile directly at his vulnerable HQ and CT is an ability of which historical commanders could only dream. The Hard & Soft Jump rule is designed to address the player's omniscient view of the battlefield given by the limitations of the medium (in case you missed it, this is a recurring theme in Dean Essig designs over the years). Essentially, now when one of your units enters a hex containing an enemy HQ or CT, there is a 2 in 3 chance your opponent's assets are not there. In other words, your G-2's best guess about the enemy HQ's location was wrong.

This has some significant ramifications for how you go about disrupting your opponent's forces. If you make a beeline for the HQ counter and enter the hex only to find that it is empty, the opponent gets to reposition the HQ (or CT) to establish another Complete MSR without penalty. I have seen many situations where this actually helped the defender more than the attacker. It can be quite frustrating to put your opponent's Formation in an untenable position, and about to administer the coup de grace by jumping his HQ, only to see the HQ disappear and appear in another hex that undoes all the work you just accomplished (often at a price). Do not despair, though. You are not condemned by this new rule to play an endless game of Whack-A-Mole. You need merely adjust your thinking.

Instead of thinking about jumping the enemy's HQ/CT, you should be thinking about cutting his MSR's. You can achieve much of the same effects as physically jumping an HQ by instead just cutting the MSR. Recall that a Complete MSR runs to/from a supply source, through a CT to an HQ. By placing a unit or ZOC in any hex of the enemy's MSR, the CT is no longer in a "Legal Hex". This will require the CT to flip to its Ghost side and move. If the MSR is not Complete, you've saddled your opponent's Formation with a -3 SNAFU DRM and starts it down the road to MSR Blocking DRMs. Even just having the CT in Ghost mode gives a -1 DRM and you have likely eliminated the +1 Optimal Distance DRM, too. But it gets even better.

Rather than trying to overrun the HQ's hex, you should instead aim to surround it, or at least cut off all viable routes that could be used for an MSR. With his MSR cut, your opponent now has a choice to make. He can leave his HQ in place and accept the penalties (which are severe) of having an MSR Blocked marker on his Formation, or he can voluntarily displace his HQ. This causes the same effects as if you had overrun the unit (loss of PD and marked Coordinated). Remember that it is impossible to permanently cut an opponent's MSR because of his ability to displace his HQ/CT as far as necessary to reestablish it. However, by forcing his HQ to displace farther to the rear, you are also achieving your prime objective of separating his HQ from his line units.

Instead of a dagger thrust at your opponent's HQ hex, you should be looking to cast a wide net across his potential MSR routes. The deeper and wider the net, the more harm you will do your opponent by forcing his HQ that much farther from his combat units. Instead of the direct approach of overrunning the HQ itself, you will be more assured of the results you want by taking the indirect approach of cutting MSR's and leaving the HQ's hex alone.

A Hard Day's Night

It's easy to forget that those little cardboard counters we push across the map represent flesh and blood soldiers. Soldiers get tired and need rest and a warm meal. *BCS* brings this reality to you with its Fatigue mechanic. Fatigue affects two aspects of the game: as a SNAFU DRM and a Formation's chance to get a second Activation.

Given that the SNAFU Table has the greatest single impact on your army's effectiveness, managing negative DRM's when you roll on it is vital to success. While Fatigue accretion depends on the dice, it is not entirely random. You do have the ability to influence the rate at which your Formations acquire Fatigue. The two activities in the game that do not carry any risk of increasing Fatigue are movement and defending. If you want to do anything else, you will have to evaluate the potential Fatigue impact.

Attacking on the Combat Table carries the biggest Fatigue risk, with a 50% chance of picking up a Fatigue level. Any Fatigue that your Formation does accrue will require an entire Activation (or game-turn, if using the highly recommended Orders option) to get rid of. In a short game like *Baptism By Fire*, that's a considerable portion of the game that your Formation will be useless. Given that, you should not be blindly attacking everything you can, just because you can. A vulnerable enemy unit may not be worth the hit to your future SNAFU rolls. Instead of attacking it, can you surround it, or force it out of its position through maneuver (remember, movement does not increase your Fatigue)?

The Engagement Table and Attacks by Fire only increase your Fatigue on a 2 or less. So your armor units can wreak more havoc on the enemy without Fatiguing as quickly. But if they are facing enemy infantry, they suddenly become a less attractive option for grinding down the bad guys. Because armor attacks infantry with an Attack by Fire on the Barrage Table, the end result is the same thing as an infantry unit's barrage, but with twice the chance of increasing your Fatigue.

If killing enemy steps tops your priority list, barraging is the most cost-effective option in terms of Fatigue. Only a 1 in 6 will increase your Fatigue, regardless of the number of

barrage attacks you make in one Activation. That said, don't get too 'trigger-happy.' I have seen players make one lone barrage attack in an Activation, only to see their Fatigue increase when they roll that 1 on the Fatigue Check. So, to kill a single enemy step (and sometimes none at all) they have saddled their Formation with an additional -1 DRM to every future SNAFU roll they will make. Yet another example of the recurring theme in *BCS* of:

“Just because you CAN do something, doesn't mean you SHOULD do something.”

Since any amount of qualifying activity still nets only one roll for Fatigue, if you make an attack (thereby giving yourself a 50-50 chance of picking up Fatigue) maximize your offensive efforts in the same Activation. This is a situation where you definitely want to shoot it if you have it. The lone barrage attack won't hurt you because the attack you made earlier in the Activation has already inflicted a 3 or less Fatigue check on you. Likewise, make sure you can get as many attacks on the Combat Table for a single Fatigue check as you can.

You can also find yourself under the Fatigue 8-ball if you do not pay attention to when you use Second Activations. In v2.0, you cannot do any activities “for free” when it comes to Fatigue in the Second Activation. You will have to roll at least as a 33% chance of Fatigue increase unless you attack (50%) or obtain a Fail SNAFU to let you off the hook. Second Activations represent you demanding your Formation goes above and beyond in Tempo...but to fit it into the same “day” everyone else had to work with. Doing so, at all, is exhausting and in *BCS* terms may contribute to the increase in Fatigue. In other words, you'll want to consider the risk that occurs when you conduct a Second Activation 'merely' to flip your Trains or some such. It might be better to pass on that now, and accept the -1 SNAFU mod for your next real Activation.

Fatigue management can make or break your efforts in the late game portion of any *BCS* scenario. By having a solid plan, not getting distracted by small, fleeting opportunities, and staying focused you stand a much better chance of managing your army's Fatigue and giving yourself a decided edge over an opponent who ignores his Fatigue until it's too late. Once in Fat-4, your SNAFU results will suffer greatly, and you will be denied any chance of a Second Activation. Your enemy could and should thank you.

Summary

The above points hardly comprise an exhaustive list, but they will hopefully give you a framework for approaching *BCS* in a successful manner. *BCS* oozes with subtleties. Understanding (and eventually mastering) them gives you the keys to enjoying this rich system. The beautiful design and hours of great gaming justify the time and effort required to adequately learn the *Battalion Combat Series*. An exciting line up of future games in the series will allow players to explore operations on all fronts of the Second World War in new and interesting ways, and I hate to see anyone miss out on what is the best game design to hit the industry in the last few decades.

May your dice stay hot!