



Tactical Combat Series

Version 4.0 vs 3.1

by Larry Brien

Dean's closing remarks in the 3.1 version rule book said "I am thankful for the amount of feedback version 3.0 got and I look forward to your comments on 3.1, but keep in mind that the door to further official system change is closed except to error correction. The TCS rules are done." Well Dean you should be careful what you say because my mama once told me "Never say Never", and that has proven to be true on more than one occasion. So once Dean handed over the reins for future development of TCS games into the capable hands of the TCS Honcho, Lee Forester, this little saying was going to come true once again.

Over the past few years discussions on the CSW TCS forum have been conducted by players, including Lee, who felt that certain aspects of the TCS 3.1 rules could be further improved and wanted the chance to make these changes. Some issues were considered to be sufficiently serious that attempts were made to address them. Many rules revisions were proposed and tested and we are comfortable in presenting to you, the dedicated and patient TCS faithful, this "final" (for now) revision.

In this article I will highlight the changes in the TCS rules, some of which are radical while others are very subtle. With few exceptions, every section of the rules has been touched in some way, whether through complete revision or through simply reworking the wording to clean up and clarify meanings by using a fresh approach. Having said this, I'm sure the Old Guard of TCS players will still recognize in TCS 4.0 the system as they have known it. What they will find is a more streamlined and smoother running system. In the end I think that we are about to introduce an excellent foundation for future TCS games.

We'll begin by looking at the tables. You could be excused for dismissing the changes done to the Command Prep Table. Many players, including myself, accepted the 3.1 table as is; after all it is only an abstract representation of a nation's "C3" (Command, Control and Communications) capabilities. But a few players felt that a broader range of Weighted Turn numbers should be assigned their own activation dice rolls, and in order to do a proper job of adjusting all this we needed someone who was knowledgeable in stats and probability ratios. Art Brochet stepped forward and offered his assistance. He developed graphs and tables to support his views for the changes that we now see in version 4.0 and, in my opinion, this was a job well done. All I know is that for me the magic number seems to take a shorter time to obtain. For example, when implementing an Attack Ops Sheet with a Command Prep + Op Sheet Size rating of "7", in TCS 3.1 you need to roll a 10+ with two dice on the 28-42 weighted turns column. That is quite a range of weighted turns during which to roll a 10+. In version 4.0 the dice are read differently and you need to roll an activation number of 56 or more on the 28 weighted turns column, but then the next column starts at 34 weighted turns and the activation number drops to 53. This is still a high roll but the odds of getting it are considerably better.

One of the most noticeable changes in the tables is the way that we deal with Point Fire. Gone is the separate Point Fire Table based on Firing Differential that we had in version 3.1. Version 4.0 has simplified the procedure but effectively kept the killing ability of armor warfare. In the new version Point Fire is handled through the common Fire Table. We now have modifiers that apply for Point Fire Differential and Range but everything is organized to make for a quick resolution so you can move onto the next action.

While we're on the Fire Table, the procedure for generating step losses on this table has changed significantly. Step losses are no longer determined by a two step procedure where you first roll to see what result you get, and, if you are lucky and roll high, you get a chance to roll 1, 2, or 3 dice and times that result by half to get the number of step losses. Now step losses are the result of one die roll. The die roll and step loss ratios have seen many revisions over the years. We all agreed that the greater the Firepower strength the higher the step losses should be, however, the problem that existed was that units at longer ranges were still experiencing heavy losses. Further tweaking of the relationship of step loss to total Firepower was done by creating new modifiers that recognized different weapon systems characteristics such as high trajectory (arty & mortar) vs low trajectory (infantry & MG) units. This had the desired effect of creating a Fire Table that rewards players for moving closer to the enemy. This is not to say that long distance shots are a waste of time but the likelihood of killing many steps is low. Machineguns are now recognized as the killing machines they are; machine gun units are no longer marked as fired and can now be used effectively even after their involvement in an SFA.

Some rules are no longer included in the new version. For example, the "Buttoned Up" rules are gone; the effect of being buttoned up was considered an addition that was too refined for the TCS level. We now handle this effect in a subtle way using Vehicle Morale, allowing us to remove an entire rules subsystem.

Consolidated Assault is another rule you won't see in the revision. This type of attack is still allowed when playing any of the TCS games, but a separate rule section is no longer needed since the Assault Combat and Overrun rules now handle this aspect of the game quite nicely.

Spotting range and the range modifiers have also changed to make more battlefield options available. For example, if a unit is in Partly Protective terrain and Dug-In the enemy will not be able to see it unless he moves adjacent or the Dug-In unit fires, at which point a +4 modifier would be applied to the spotting range and OW fire could be directed at the hex by units within six hexes. The Spotting Range Table has been carefully crafted to reflect battlefield conditions and the need to get in close to conduct mortal combat.



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Another change to the tables is on the Morale Table, where the only real change was switching the positions (and probability) of SYR results with Paralyzed results. We felt that a unit would try and save itself from being destroyed by running away before becoming frozen in fear in a state of paralysis. Vehicle Morale was also revised to show their vulnerability to fire, but of equal importance was their recovery and the triple time accumulation for activating a new Ops Sheet.

There are other changes to the tables but they are mostly minor and not worth mentioning. Veteran players would have to look carefully at the old 3.1 version tables to notice the differences.

Major changes in the rules affect only a few key sections, namely Assault Combat, Artillery, and Vehicle Impulses. Other changes worth mentioning are the LOS graph, LOS in relation to a unit's location for movement based OW, recovery from Suppression or Paralyzed morale, AA guns and Sorties, defined Rally Points on Ops Sheets, and Suppression in SYR.

We'll start with a detailed look at the changes to Assault Combat. These changes were hashed out from many different ideas, all in the name of making Assault Combat feel right. Finally, after numerous sessions undertaken to resolve this issue, we believe that the end result is the best solution that will fit any situation. Also, we were trying to decrease the amount of die rolling per assault. Otherwise, if the prolonged wristage was not addressed a health and safety disclaimer would have had to be included in all TCS games!

A closer look at the Assault Combat procedures will reveal that both the old and the new start off in a very similar manner. In order for the Assault to begin the Attacker must be in Move Mode, must be adjacent to his intended target hex, must have enough MP remaining to enter the target hex, and must endure the Defender's final OW fire. However, the Defender has the option at this time to conduct a SYR instead of final OW fire before the Attacker enters the hex, but the big change here is that only units that are not Suppressed or Paralyzed can do so. Whether or not the Defender remains in the target hex, the Attacker must endure the effects from any mines or arty barrage when he moves into the target hex.

We could say that at this time the Assault officially begins and a few changes in the combat procedure will become apparent. The Defender removes Suppressed markers at this time, but Paralyzed markers remain. Unlike the version 3.1 rules where a Paralyzed unit automatically dies after one round of Assault Combat if any Attacker still exists, in version 4.0 a Paralyzed unit may still have some life after the first round, barring elimination through step losses, or a morale check result that may also prove fatal since an additional Suppressed result would cause the Paralyzed unit to lose half its remaining steps and conduct a SYR, and another Paralyzed result would cause the unit to immediately

surrender. Any other result, however, and the Paralyzed unit will still remain in the target hex and be able to fire in Assault Combat (see TCS rule 9.1d). Suppressed units that receive another Suppressed result in an Assault Combat must either suffer a step loss or conduct a SYR, at the owning player's option (see TCS rule 22.0c and 10.0f). Once both sides are locked in Assault Combat the results can affect both players. Make sure you also read section 17.5 as it explains many of the restrictions that apply to Paralyzed units.

Another change in Assault Combat procedure is the order in which fire is resolved. If one side has only good order units that is, none are Suppressed or Paralyzed and the other side has even one unit that is Suppressed or Paralyzed, the side with only good order units will fire first in Assault Combat. Any other combination of morale conditions for either side means that fire will be simultaneous. This means that if the Defender, for example, has a unit that is Suppressed and the Attacker's units are all in good order, the Attacker will fire first. If the Defender is eliminated by this fire then there would be no return fire against the Attacker.

Terrain modifiers in the Assault Combat were also looked at. As written in the 4.0 rules "If both sides have negative terrain modifiers, cancel enough shifts for both sides to bring the smaller negative modifier to 0." What we have attempted to do here is to simplify the process of recalculating the pluses and minuses for both sides every round. This way the net modifiers would remain the same for both players and fire power maximized for quicker resolution of any given Assault.

Regarding the new Artillery rules, I suggest you read these carefully. You will find that you will no longer be able to call down a barrage on an enemy's position during your Action Phase. This decision will now have to be made in the new Aircraft & Artillery Phase. This phase, which is completed before the Action Phases, will allow both players to decide what Artillery Missions they'd like to assign. But don't despair; you'll still recognize some features of the old rules such as Spotters, Battery and Battalion Barrages, Smoke and Illum fires. Some of the new items are the Artillery Adjustment Table with Nationality (and other) modifiers. Gone is the old "Good Shoot" that simply remains on the map until the beginning of the owning player's next Action Phase. This has been replaced with a new HE mission called the Continuous Fire Mission, which can be used to harass enemy movement or to hammer a known enemy stronghold. The strength of the various HE missions has also been changed: a normal HE Mission, which will be removed at the end of the Aircraft & Artillery Phase, uses double the Fire strength shown on the Barrage marker, a Continuous Fire Mission, which will remain on the map, uses the Barrage marker's printed Fire strength, and a Fast Fire Mission, which consumes three times as much ammunition of a normal HE Mission or Continuous Fire Mission, will use four times the printed Fire strength. A Fast Fire Mission can also be combined with a Continuous Fire Mission, and these may be either Battery-sized or Battalion-sized Missions.



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Vehicle Impulses have revolutionized the way that we use AFVs in TCS. You can still use tanks to accompany infantry in short infantry MP hops, in a sort of “consolidated assault” but we needed to create a more realistic atmosphere and greater flexibility to reflect how tanks were actually used in WWII warfare. Now pure tank actions can be divided into three independent sub-phases where they can perform various functions during a turn. So, for example, a tank will now be able to move up to one third of its Movement Allowance during the first impulse, in the second impulse flip over to Fire Mode, and in the last impulse fire a PFA and thus end its impulses in that Action Phase. Another tank could conceivably fire either one SFA or three PFA for its three impulses. Another interesting feature is that a tank could, in response to an Overwatch Trigger, bug out and retire out of harm’s way rather than fire.

A LOS graph has been included as an extra aid for Line of Sight determination in each new TCS game. I’ve playtested using this graph and found it to be a useful tool. A major change in the LOS rules is the provision of three variations on the methods for determining a hex’s base elevation. The use of contour lines superimposed on our game maps is nothing new in TCS but some players still find it a little confusing to interpolate the elevation of a hex. We had a lot of last minute discussion on this one point. We all agree that LOS plays a very important role in TCS. Our findings seem to indicate that we could offer players the three methods and allow them to decide on their own before the start of play which method of elevation determination they prefer without any adverse effect to play. Rule section 8.0 explains the differences among the Standard, Simplified, and “Contour head” methods of elevation determination. Other than this the basic LOS rules remain unchanged. One of the players who started the ball rolling was Rick McKown; his initial help started the mental juices really flowing, and then Larry Davidson brought this all together in the end by writing clear and precise examples for the LOS rules. It is always a pleasure to have fresh eyes review what was becoming an unresolved problem. Jean Jodoin was also instrumental in writing up some of the examples included with version 4.0.

A Recovery-based Overwatch Trigger was introduced to represent units being pinned down under fire. Recovery from a Suppressed or Paralyzed marker will no longer occur in the Clean Up Phase in version 4.0. As a final sub phase in his Action Phase, a player can allow his units to Recover, but now a little risk is involved as his opponent can fire a Recovery OW, even with units that are marked as Fired; the only stipulation is that they must meet the normal conditions for firing (e.g., have a clear LOS, be in range, etc).

We also decided that the AA guns were not being utilized to their fullest potential in TCS. AA guns can still be used in an Area or Point Fire action but now they can also be used in their normal role of providing protection against ground support attacks by enemy aircraft. The player must now decide which role these assets will play during each turn.

Some TCS players have had problems understanding the way Op Sheets and Rally Points have been handled in the

rules. Some players have expressed the view that the rules governing the location of the Rally Points are much too vague. For example, concerns have been raised over the practice of players establishing a Rally Point in front of the currently existing frontline. Lee Forester and his band of playtest brothers tried out a number of ideas to guide players in handling this issue. Some ideas were found to be too restrictive in approach while others just didn’t feel right. We finally decided on a simple but logical method; to quote from rule 6.12c: “Rally Points are designed to be safe locations away from enemy units. Rally Points should not be assigned to cause a formation to advance toward the enemy while unassigned.” In the end all that is recommended is that you play TCS games to have fun. Use the Ops Sheet rules as they are meant to be used and avoid the gamey manipulation of the rules.

As could be expected with all the items mentioned above, the Sequence of Play has changed. As noted, we’ve introduced a whole new phase, the Aircraft & Artillery Phase, and some modifications have been made to some of the other phases, but the original TCS system has proven itself to be very robust and able to take the changes well. TCS was certainly not butchered into something unrecognizable. It is still the “full meal deal” that we all love with just a few items added for flavor.

With few exceptions you will find that the older TCS games play very well with the new rules. Some players have reported how easily the games flow (you can check out the link on the CSW forum to Lee’s version 4.0 updates for the older TCS games). So far AFH appears to be the only one of the older games where concerns have been raised: we’ve heard from two dedicated AFH players, Scott Johnstone and Ethan McKinney, who have taken upon themselves to play this one and have found some problems. I think AFH was designed with a number of special rules that mimic the actual situation that had frustrated the Soviets. Nice game if you’re purely in for the historical feel but I have to admit that as much as I love history I like a little fun in the mix as well. AFH remains a “must play” but the jury is still out as to a proper fix under the 4.0 rules. I can say that the core rules for individual TCS games are sound even if played with the new version. Only minor changes for some of the games have been required.

As of the end of summer 2008 the various isolated TCS communities throughout the world have been given the opportunity to become one. We have been blessed with the help from Hans Kishel, who has created VASSAL files for all the remaining games except Omaha. TCS gamers now have the opportunity to seek out opponents and challenge them on any game they fancy. All this in time for the release of the next TCS game in line, GD’42!

While there may be some other items or rules changes that I’ve omitted, I hope that you’ve enjoyed this brief glimpse into the “new world order” of TCS and have come to realize that we’ve simply improved on the old. We hope that those of you who are familiar with the system will return for a fresh experience and that those of you who are new to TCS decide to stay once you’ve played 4.0.