

BREAKTHROUGH

by Jon Cleaves

Deceptively, Breakthrough contains the Prepared Positions mission special rule. This might make one think this is an attack-defense mission. It's not. It's a Free for All in the corner of the table. The difference between Breakthrough and the other missions with Prepared Positions like Hold the Line, Cauldron and Fighting Withdrawal is that the defender does not start on the objectives. Although the defender's troops begin the game in prepared positions, they have to move to contest the objectives. And the race is on...

This means that while the defender can indeed win by just contesting the objectives, the attacker holds most of the initial advantages with respect to taking the objectives and setting the tone of the game despite the fact that the defender starts in foxholes and is closer to the objectives when the game begins.

In order to keep things simple, this article is written as advice to the defender. You can basically turn it around for advice to the attacker, although some attacker-specific tidbits are added at the end.

THE TABLE IS A RECTANGLE!

Because the deployment areas and location of the objectives are selected by table corner and because the table is a rectangle and not a square, the choices for deployment and movement to the objectives are not symmetrical.

...the defender's choice...is the most significant of all...

THE FAR SIDE

No, not the comic strip by Gary Larson. To give us some common terms with which to describe the unique nature of the Breakthrough battlefield, in addition to the attacker's deployment area (ADA), the defender's deployment area (DDA) and the objective area (OA), we will further identify the Far Side, the Near Side, the Short Way and the Long Way.

Please refer to the diagram below. (Please note that the example table has been simplified terrain-wise to allow for more clarity in the diagrams. I am not advocating this level of terrain on the average table).

The Far Side is the table edge in the DDA furthest from the ADA.

Conversely, the Near Side is the table edge in the DDA nearest to the ADA. The Short Way is the avenue the attacker can take that moves out from the ADA and through the Near Side to the objectives. The Long Way is the avenue the attacker can take that moves through the Far Side to the objectives. The Direct Way is through the table center to the objectives.

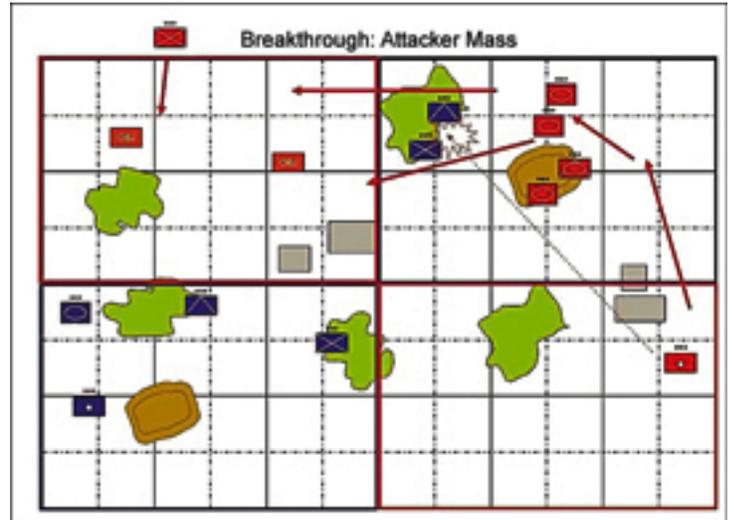
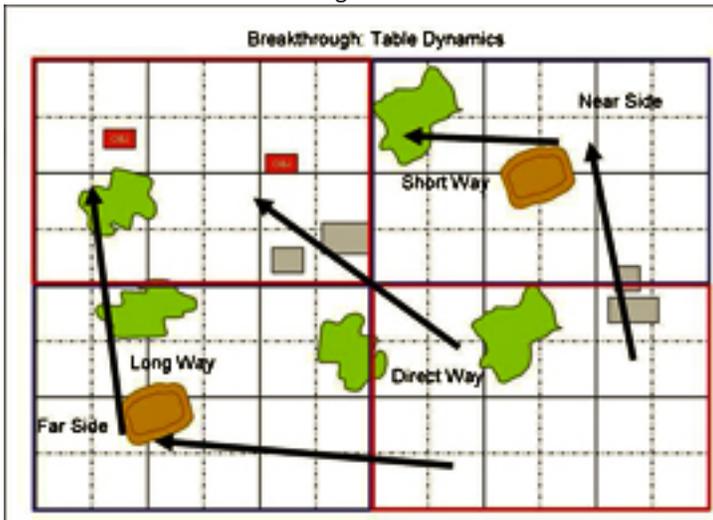
THE BIG CHOICE

In my opinion, the defender's choice of table quarters in a Breakthrough is the most significant of all the preparing for battle choices in any of the missions. The defender makes the first major choice of the game by selecting which corners of the table will be his deployment area. I recommend choosing this carefully and on the basis of the following three considerations:

1. Where do you want to hide your on-table troops?

The attacker starts with practically everything he owns and can be as close to you as 12" away. You may not have more than one mobile platoon on table, so possibly you are missing some troops at start. If you split your forces between the two table quarters in which you can start, it is very easy for a mobile attacker to gang up on one portion of your force and eliminate it before the rest of your force or time becomes a factor. So, you want to keep your forces together where they are not easy to mass against. To make this hardest on the attacker, this will typically be the Far Side.

There will be situations of terrain and opponent's force when a player does not use the Far Side as his basic deployment location



and place the majority (or all) of his forces there, but the basic conservative set is to deploy within 12" to 18" of the Far Side table edge.

2. Where do you want the objectives to be?

You, as the defender, get to narrow the attacker's choices for the location of the objectives from four to two. As you are choosing where you get to deploy, you are also determining the two quarters he will have to choose from to set objectives. Look carefully at the two you are giving him as though *you* were the attacker. Do you think you'd be getting a good deal?

If there are two opposite quarters where the terrain is lighter and you give them to the attacker, you are increasing the chances that the objectives will be in the open. If you are going to contest them with mobile forces, this may be a good idea, but if you are primarily infantry, not so much. This is the most critical time to look at this choice from the attacker's perspective – which of the two choices of DDA gives you the best approaches into the likely OA and sets up the best fight for you around the objectives.

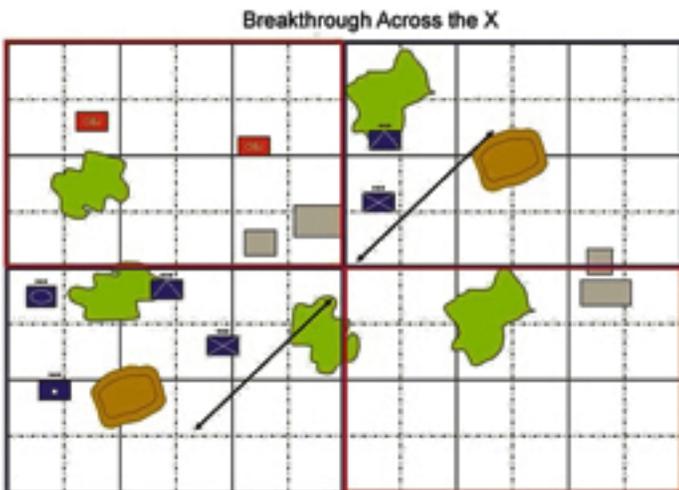
3. Best Two of Four

There are four possible set up combinations on every BT table. The defender has the choice of two pairs of table quarters and the attacker can choose one of two corners for the objectives from each of those pairs. Your choice is to pick the best pair given that the attacker can choose either remaining quarter for the OA. Often, controlling the two quarters in which he has to place the objectives is better than picking the most defensible terrain for your own deployment. The battle is NOT for your deployment areas, it is for the objectives. If the attacker spends a lot of time moving deep into your deployment position, that is generally to your advantage.

All things being equal, the best choice of DDA gives the most defensible Far Side start location and the best defender avenues into the OA with the best terrain for the defender's forces in the battle for the objectives.

"BOXING IN" THE ATTACKER

Back in V1's Breakthrough, defenders often placed platoons in such a manner as to force the attacker as far back into his deployment area as possible. Whether or not this was a good idea



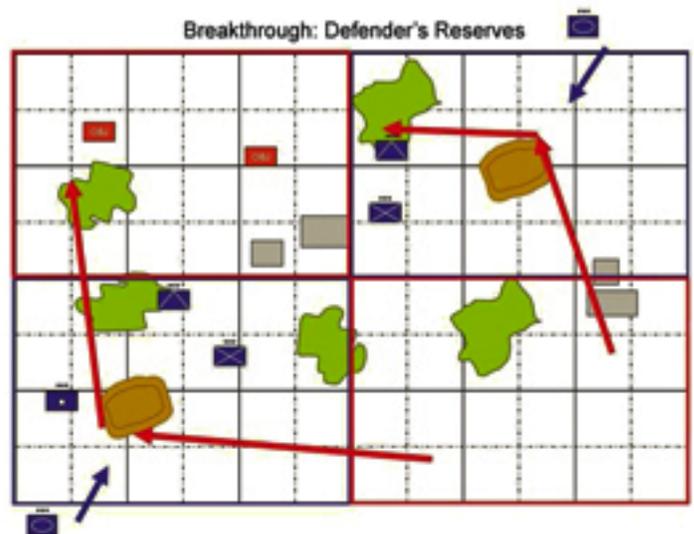
then, it is generally not a good idea now. The attacker just has too much flexibility to mass against a single part of the defender's force and his deployment area is not the objective area. If you box him in on both sides, he can pick one and hammer it. If you have a lot of force on one side and none or very little on the other, he will blow through the lightly defended side and get to the objectives before you.

WHAT IS BEING BROKEN THROUGH?

The mission fluff says that the defender does not have sufficient strength to cover the entire front which has allowed the attacker to get a small flanking force through. So, the "breakthrough" of the mission takes place outside the boundaries of the table. But it's also possible to defend "across the X" in a line running roughly through the center of the table and extending into both defender table quarters. When should this be tried? Generally when you're an infantry force with plenty of platoons on the table and the attacker is not much more mobile than you. It's often possible that a defender with one mobile platoon in his force can have all of his platoons on table. Since the attacker must have at least one platoon on the flank march, it's possible for the defender to outnumber the attacker initially in that case. This is a good situation to try defending across the X. This is also a defensive deployment that can work if you have a couple of large veteran infantry platoons and can back them with some good AT. What's key is that the attacker can't be permitted to mass against one end of the line and get through it quickly. If your force and the terrain and the attacker's force support this, go ahead and give it a try. If you are a bunch of trained infantry and he's a lot of tanks, maybe not.

DEFENDERS RESERVES

The defender's reserves can be a great asset in making the attacker cautious or making him pay for a rash run at the objectives. Rather than lament that you must keep that second mobile platoon off table initially, use it to threaten an attacker skirting the table edge. Armoured platoons are better for this than SPAT, though, because the attacker can turn and engage the platoon that just shot him in the back and armour is more survivable in such a situation. A four tank platoon is ideal in this role – very

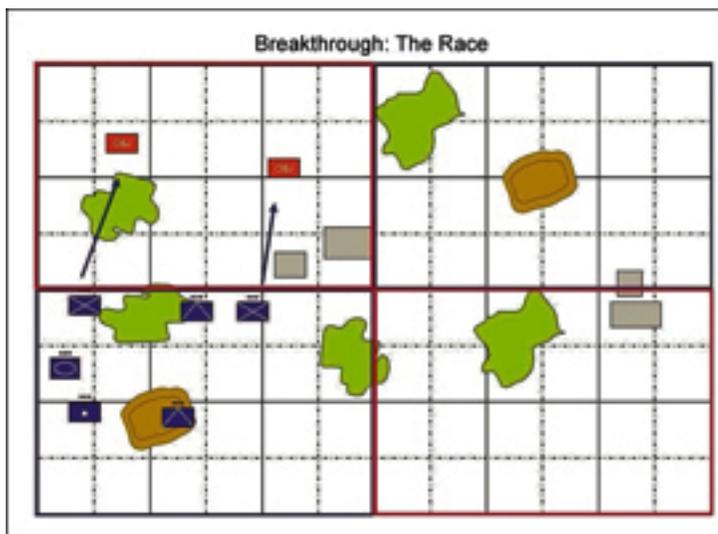


survivable and with four good shots (eight with gyros!) very dangerous on the turn of entry. Remember also, even the one mobile platoon you have can be kept off-table if desired.

THE RACE

You are the defender, but you don't start with possession of the objectives. At some point you will have to go into the objective area with something and duke it out with the attacker for control. I suggest you start right away.

The classic move is to place at least one infantry platoon on the Far Side in a position to move at the double into the objective area and dig in as quickly as possible. Normal infantry can make one move at the double on turn 1 and be within 4" of the objective. They can then try to dig in on turn 2 or GTG. Which is best depends on training, terrain, what the attacker has on flank march and how hard he is pressing with on-table forces. If you have good terrain to approach the objectives, you can take it slower and make a concerted attack to the objectives. Don't set within 10" of the attacker entry area or you will be assaulted and or flamethrowered by his arriving flank march! Remember – he can't win before turn 6!



FLANK MARCH

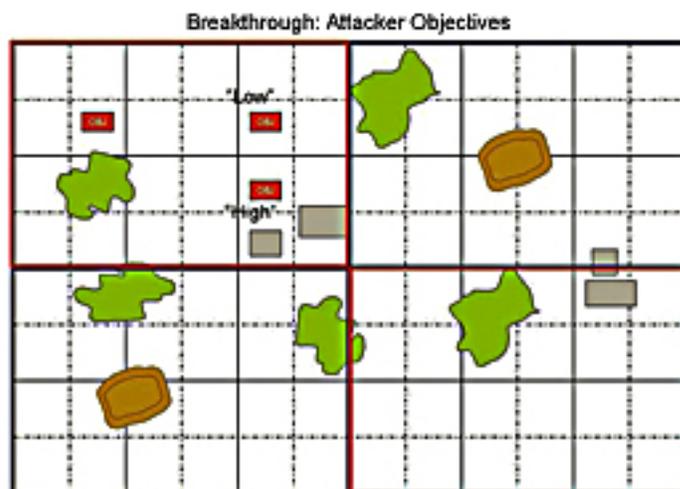
Back in V1 an attacker could hold his flank marchers as they rolled an arrival result to show up on table as a group, but not in V2, so a multiple platoon flank march is likely to arrive piecemeal. This, combined with the inability to support the flank march with independent teams, has caused attackers to generally choose a single safe flank marching platoon and to conduct the primary attack with on-table troops. Good flank marching platoons will be survivable – four-tank platoons, heavy tank platoons (crocs are good for this) and large infantry platoons, better if veteran and/or equipped with flame. The defender should take this into account

along with the fact the flank march will not contain such things as COs, 2ICs or observers.

THE "HIGH" OBJECTIVE

There are two basic ways for the attacker to deploy his objectives. The first is to deploy both objectives as far apart from each other as possible and both 8" from the flank march entry edge. The second is to place the objective closest to the attacker deployment area "high", that is, within 8" of the table center. This typically indicates an attacker goal to attack along the Short Way or the Direct Way or some combination. Be careful, however, as a crafty player may use this as a deception. It generally makes no sense to set the far objective "high" as this moves it further from the flank march entry, closer to the defender but not appreciably closer to the attacker's starting forces.

NIGHT HURTS



Note that at night, your reserves will not enter the battle as quickly and your racing infantry will not typically get into the objective area in time to roll to dig in before he rolls for his flank march the first time. As an attacker, I'd pretty much declare night in a Breakthrough as a matter of course, so if you're defending against a force that can, expect it and take it these things into account as you choose reserves and deploy.

IF YOU REMEMBER NOTHING ELSE....

....remember these two things: Breakthrough is a Free for All in the corner of the table and the attacker cannot win before turn 6!

Good luck!

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