

THOUGHTS ON ARMY LISTS

by Jon Cleaves

Several times a week I get requests for thoughts on FoW army lists in my mailbox. I am flattered that my fellow players think enough of my views on such things and enjoy helping where I can – if indeed any of my comments constitute “help”...lol

As I find myself making several of the same recommendations over and over again, I thought I'd share these with the general player public in the off chance they might be useful.

Please mentally add “IMO” to the end of every sentence. This is just one guy offering opinions; I make no claim that everything or anything I say will work for everyone or anyone. Also, my advice is geared toward the list's viability in a competitive setting under basic competition conditions.

The first piece of advice I always give is to find your “style” and play to it. So many times in so many game systems I have not followed that advice and paid dearly. By playing against your style not only are you forcing yourself to act out of your nature and therefore placing an unnecessary obstacle in your path, playing counter to your style is also often less enjoyable – and that's no fun.

What is a playing “style”? In my view, it is a combination of types of troops one likes to play combined with the method by which one likes to win. Do you like “hordes” of infantry, “swarms” of light tanks, rank upon rank of guns, a few monster tanks...? Do you like to win by grinding out the opponent in a massive multi-round assault or a swift precision strike with a few light fast troops? 18 Brit infantry or 4000 Zulus?

One way I have suggested to friends on how to determine one's style is this: Pick one battle or match up from each of ten genres: ancients, medievals, fantasy, napoleon, late 1800s, WW1, WW2, east asia, middle east, sci-fi. Then pick which side from each battle you'd like to be. Look for a pattern.

Once you have a basic idea of your style, then it's about the history. I am not a fast painter and so any force I do from scratch I am going to be with a while. If I am not really into the history of the force, then I will quickly lose interest and move on to some other project. Ditto for the research – has to be something that captures my interest over time. I'd suggest the same to others.

Ok, so you've got a force you're interested in and it suits your style of play – what next? At this point I recommend what I call “situational football” (non Americans please bear with me here...lol).

Situational football is what coaches use to describe preparing specifically for particular events that commonly come up in games. If you have 20 seconds left on the clock in the fourth quarter and no time outs down by 2, you should be able to get one play in and get your field goal unit on the field – because you already practiced it. Same with the four minute drill, the on-sides kick, the no-huddle, the 2-point conversion, the fourth-and-1, etc.

In FoW, there are situations common enough that it is prudent to think through how your list will handle them: taking the near objective no later than turn 3 in a HTL attack, what's on the table at start in an Encounter, how you will defeat a 33-stand strelk company/panther platoon/turner turnbull/5.5” gun battery, how will you defend in a glider assault seize and hold, how will you screen off one half the battlefield in an FFA and win on one o b j e c t i v e, what order will you leave the table in a fighting

withdrawal defense, etc? These things will happen to you and you can't wish them away. The funniest one is – “well, I don't have a plan for tigers/panthers/IS2s/crocs/etc, I'll just kill everything else.” Sure, the other guy could do something dumb like leave the crocs off in a breakthrough and never get them so you don't have to worry about them...lol...but a good player will not let you just “kill everything else”. Yes, it is possible to just “kill everything else”, but you have to have a plan that counteracts the fact that he will be using those systems actively to prevent exactly that. Well, unless he forgets to bring them into play, that is...

Here's just one example – defeating MW strelk. My basic method is to shoot them as they advance from 10.1” away with enough shots to reduce them below QoQ level before they can assault. If they force me to the table edge and/or the o b j e c t i v e before I have them below QoQ, that's a problem. The big issue is that in MW, the Soviet can have two or more such units, so whatever plan you have for doing what I just said to one of them, you might have to do in two places on the battlefield. If you are planning an MW german force with black pioneers (rifle teams) and ferdinands, you just might not be able to pull this off. Hoping that you don't fight a strelk player in a MW event is not a viable course of action. If your force cannot generate enough shots to whittle them down to below 15 stands before they get to you, that's cool – as long as what you do have can work a tactic that gets it done some other way.

The challenge becomes, and this is one of the fun things about army build games – for me at least – is that what works to solve one of those problems might make it harder to solve another. The method of fighting that gets the job done is to have a base combined arms team that is flexible enough that you have *tactics* to solve each such problem with the troops available. If you try to do it just with troop types, something will go uncovered. In other words, if your plan for panthers is to have a higher AT with your IS2, then that IS2 has to have a role in other solutions as well.

The specifics of the list need to also take into account the specific conditions of the event in which it will be played. Playing in a five round event that is FW, HTL, BT, Cauldron, FFA is different than a six round event that is FFA, FW, HTL, Enc, BT, FFA is different than a three round event that is FW, BT, Enc. It also matters greatly, at least to me, who will be there – but that is the subject of another article, methinks...

So, when I see a list in my inbox and open the mail, the first thoughts that go through my mind are the basic things the list will be called upon to do. Does it have the tools to dig out Turnbull? Can it hold off two strelks and a storm group in FFA with time left to counterattack? What are its vulnerabilities to five panthers? How slow is the list in developing an HTL or Cauldron attack? What parts of it will be on the table when the gliders come in and will that be enough?

And if the exchange ever goes like this:

Me: “Hey, that's a great looking force. About the only thing I see is that you'll only have two platoons on in an encounter and the choices of which platoons are difficult.”

Thee: “Yeah, I got that, but the tourney this is for doesn't have an Encounter mission in it.”

Then you don't need advice from me!

Good gaming.

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