

Musings from the front: Force Composition

One of the interesting aspects of Test of Battle is that, like a real commander, you are never sure of your opposition, and your task changes from battle to battle. The key to success is balance – have the tools available to do the job – no matter what it is.

To that end, one needs to maintain a balance of:

- 1) Anti Infantry Firepower
- 2) Anti Tank Firepower
- 3) Command and Control
- 4) Survivability (a mixture of quality, armor, and morale)

With that in mind, I'm off to design my battle group – Holding force first. The Holding force is arguable the most important piece of your battle group, since it is the part that you will ALWAYS be playing with – regardless of the mission.

First off is the Core Unit – an easy choice, because its mandatory ☺ However, let's take a quick look at it for a moment, in light of our four criterion above: (My ratings are Poor, Fair, Average, Good, Excellent)

- 1) Anti Infantry Firepower – Average. Two full rifle companies and the medium tank company gives a fair amount of anti infantry firepower, including four stands that can suppress enemy stands. The added 105mm battery can also be very effective in rooting defending infantry out or stalling an attack.
- 2) Anti Tank Firepower - Fair. Two integral bazookas for the infantry, and two tanks. I'm not overwhelmed – to be honest, the only reason I gave it a "Fair" rating was the 76mm gun on one of the Sherman tanks. Otherwise, I would have rated it "Poor". The attached 105mm can technically be used to kill tanks, but for the majority of German vehicles I will be facing, they will only be able to be suppressed by this gun.
- 3) Maneuverability – Poor. The majority of the command is on foot. It has a little speed with the Sherman tanks, but overall, if it needs to get somewhere, its going to be slow going.
- 4) Command and Control – Excellent. Each company has its own command stand, with an overall battalion commander. In addition, the command stands at the company level are pure command stands – something unique to the American list – which gives added flexibility. I can be confident that I will not lack for the ability to give orders or to call in my dedicated battery.
- 5) Survivability – Average. The fact that the Core Unit is Experienced means that the stands are as hard to kill as Veterans (although they are forced back slightly easier). Morale 8 is good, not fantastic, and the companies are large (5 stands) so that it will require killing 3 stands per company for my opponent to get the victory points for reducing it to half strength. The Sherman is a solid tank – not likely to stand up to a Tiger or Panther, but against a PzK IV or anti-tank gun, as long as they don't get too close, can survive a hit or two.

Looking at my force so far, I've decided that I need to improve my Anti-Tank Firepower, and I would like to improve either my Maneuverability or Anti-Infantry Firepower. Since primarily the Holding Force is there to, well, hold – I think its more important to just max out the firepower available. The first add on I chose was the Weapons Company. This gives me an anti-tank gun (which is better than the 75mm on my Sherman), a mortar, two medium machine guns, and a bazooka. I add on a platoon of towed 3” guns, and purchase HV rounds for both the 57mm and 76mm anti tank guns.

With these additions, I now rate my Holding Force as:

Anti Infantry Firepower – Good (almost Excellent)

Anti Tank Firepower – Good (almost Excellent)

Maneuverability – Poor

Command and Control – Excellent

Survivability – Average

The final Holding force is shown below:

Holding Force

Taskforce (Battlegroup) Headquarters 1 command stand 1 jeep A & B Rifle Companies, each 1 command stand 3 infantry stands 1 weapons stand (integral Bazooka) Medium Tank Company A 1 command M4 tank 1 M4 tank 76mm Dedicated Battery (off board) 1 105L23 howitzer off Board	Experienced 8	475
Weapons Company 1 57L52 AT gun and crew 1 light truck 1 81mm mortar stand (ds) 2 MMG stands 1 bazooka stand	Experienced 8	190
Towed Tank Destroyer Platoon 1 3” AT gun and crew (ds) 1 halftrack with HMG	Regular 8	75
HV load for 57mm	Weapons Company	5
HV load for 76mm	Towed Tank Destroyer Platoon	5

With my holding force chosen, next up are my Reserves. Now the Reserves will be used in most battles (All of them, in fact, except a Delay), so again, it is important that they be well rounded. I like to think of them as reinforcing my Holding Force – not enough necessarily to launch a full scale assault (which would be needed in an Advance or Counterattack or Breakthrough mission) but enough to beef up my troop strength and maneuverability to win a Hold or Probe mission.

With that in mind, my first choice was to pick up another company of infantry, give it another platoon to bring it to full strength, and then some bazookas for some anti-tank capability. I cannot stress enough that in most of the games of TOB that I have played, it is infantry, not armor, that wins the battles. However, I do need some more mobile firepower, so I chose medium tank company, added another tank platoon to it for staying power, and upgraded one of the Sherman tanks to a 76mm gun, with HV ammunition. The 76mm gun has enough penetrating power to eliminate most German tanks with ease, and it is powerful enough to even make a Tiger or Panther pause a little before getting to close to one. With the HV ammunition, it is even more lethal. With those two choices selected, it is time to pick up some reconnaissance in the form of a recon jeep. At 15 points, it is a steal – mounted, it can get anywhere on the board in a hurry, and then I can dismount the crew as a patrol stand to spot the enemy – giving me more survivability than the jeep by itself. I felt lacking in off board assets, so I picked up a battery of 155mm howitzers. Normally only coming in on a 1-3, since I have a dedicated battery attached to my core unit, this battery now comes in on a 1-5, and is big enough to ruin anyone's day. It is essential for driving infantry out of Built Up Areas and other hard cover, as it will still hit them on a 1-4 when it comes in. With 100 points left, I chose one of the best deals in the game – the Regimental HQ. With its ability to place two orders anywhere on the board with its staff radio, it is invaluable once the bullets start flying. Even with the rule that allows company commanders to be replaced, the one turn delay imposed by their death can be big enough to turn the game against you. With the Regimental HQ on the table, it is likely that you will not have that problem.

After adding the Reserves, I've upgraded my force to the following:

- Anti Infantry Firepower –Excellent
- Anti Tank Firepower –Excellent
- Maneuverability – Poor
- Command and Control – Excellent ++
- Survivability – Good

The final Reserve force is shown below:

Reserve

Regimental Headquarters 1 command stand 1 jeep	Veteran 9	60
Staff radio truck	Veteran 9	40
Rifle Company C 1 command stand 2 infantry stands 1 weapons stand integral bazooka	Experienced 8	100
Add infantry platoon to Company C	Experienced 8	20
Add integral bazookas to Company C		10
Medium Tank Company B 1 command M4 tank 1 M4 tanks	Regular 8	180
Add M4 tank platoon (Tank Company B)	Regular 8	80
Upgrade M4 to M4 76MM (Tank Company B)		25
HV load for 76mm	Medium Tank Company	5
Cavalry Reconnaissance Platoon (-) 1 recon jeep with MG	Experienced 8	15
General Supporting Artillery Battery 1 155L20 howitzer (off-board)	Experienced 8	65

With my Holding Force and Reserves picked out, the last thing to do was pick out my Assault Reserves. These would only be used in an Advance, Counterattack, or Breakthrough mission. I wanted to create a force that would fix my woeful lack of maneuverability, as well as be able to either flank march and operate behind enemy lines unsupported, or, with the Reserves having already located a weak point in the enemy line, be able to punch a hole and drive through to the enemy rear areas. The obvious choice was the Armored Infantry Company. With a two rate of fire, plus halftracks, plus the ability to move and fire their integral bazookas, this unit is arguably the hardest hitting company the Americans have. I added an extra platoon and halftrack, and then a Sherman for ant-tank capability and suppression. I made the whole company Veteran 9. I did this for two reasons: the extra survivability and the extra morale. This was my assault unit, and I wanted to make it as hard as possible for the enemy to hurt it. The extra point of morale was necessary since it was more than likely this unit would not be getting the +2 to morale for being in cover that my other troops would get. I had some points left over, and sticking with the fast moving and hard hitting theme, I chose the M16 halftrack. With four .50 caliber machine guns, this thing has a four rate of fire and

is lethal to infantry and light vehicles alike. Finally, I chose an M5 Stuart – immune to small arms, it was extra mobile firepower for my strike force. The 5 points remaining I took the only thing available to me – some canister for the 37mm gun on the Stuart. Hey, you never know 😊

Now, part of the reason I chose the Regimental HQ becomes clear. There is only one command stand for the Assault Reserves, making it rather inflexible. However, with the two extra orders from the Regimental HQ, it allows me to effectively split my force into three pieces (should I need to) and still maintain command and control.

My final force evaluation is:

Anti Infantry Firepower –Excellent
 Anti Tank Firepower –Excellent
 Maneuverability – Good
 Command and Control – Excellent
 Survivability – Excellent

The final Assault Reserve force is shown below:

Assault Reserve

Armored Infantry Company D 1 command stand 2 infantry stands 1 weapons stand (Integral Bazooka) 2 halftracks with MG 1 halftrack with AAHMG	Veteran 9	245
Add Armored Infantry Platoon (Company D) 1 infantry stand 1 halftrack with AAHMG	Veteran 9	65
Add integral bazookas to armored Infantry Company D		15
Attached M4 tank (Company D)	Veteran 9	130
AAA Auto Weapons Platoon 1 M16 MGMC	Veteran 9	80
Light Tank Platoon 1 M5 Stuart tank	Regular 8	60
Canister rounds for 37 (Light Tank Platoon)		5

My next article will deal with how to use these troops – what troops/missions will be problematic, and how to deal with them.

Until next time – Good Hunting !

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