

'One Rule for you.....' (Part Four)

The concluding part of a series comparing the results achieved using two popular sets of rules for the same scenarios.

The story so far....

This short series of articles closes with a summary of the key differences in approach between the rule sets **GHQ MicroArmor The Game** and **Rapid Fire**. The exercise of comparison was to an extent subjective but attempted to follow a logical path and adopt a neutral position favouring neither publication. So here it is..

Conclusions

Both sets of rules give a fast and enjoyable game which of course is the ultimate objective as far as I can see. **GHQMTG** to my mind uses the more scientific and logical approach to the complexities of battlefield combat between 1939 and 1945 and does so in a very simple way. John Hernandez has obviously taken the pain in order to make the gaming experience a recreational activity and not a re-visitation to our math's classes more painful moments, for the rest of us. There is no sore head coupled with a residual nausea factor and *'why did I bother?'* feeling after playing. The rules do not answer every question fully and for me there is still the 'no retreat' issue but on the whole, the gaming experience is a very unambiguous and pleasurable one. Major strong points are the *Cohesion* principle which mirrors very well the ability of your force to perform as you would wish, the way artillery is handled; realistic, exciting, frustrating, unpredictable and possibly unique and finally the armour versus armour combat which seems to be firmly grounded in technical capability and fact but simplified to a very easy Damage Table. The biggest problem perhaps is adaptation to larger scales particularly the one which we prefer to game in; 28mm.

In this regard the various compromises necessary would lead me on to the same ground which I may appear to be critical of within **Rapid Fire**. That is, unrealistic movement and weapon ranges. John Hernandez did not write these rules for 28mm therefore the problem is mine not his. There are also one or two other small niggles such as 'rough terrain types 1-3'. They incrementally affect movement but what are they? They appear on the play sheet but not in the rules. Another is the lack of clarity around direct artillery fire. Artillery pieces are classified thus: 75mm IG (1), 25pdr (2), 122mm (3) with the bracketed number representing the number of impacts possible per firing. It actually indicates the number of artillery pieces in the battery. For example, a (3) impact gun can fire indirectly with all three impacts landing on the same coordinate or alternatively in a straight line pattern north, south, east or west of the first impact. That is clear. What is not clear is what happens when these guns are employed in the direct fire role. Do they get one, two or three chances to shoot at the same target? If the answer is no, then IDF is much more useful than DF. We chose to interpret this as multiple shots at the same target.

Another area of ambiguity is 'facing restriction' for firing. I remember being publicly castigated at Partizan two years ago by a paying punter who told me I didn't know what I was doing with **GHQMTG**. I had the facing restrictions rules all wrong. "*Tanks can fire 360 degrees with no restrictions, the firing template is only for limited traverse weapons such as assault guns, ah so*". I'm sure that's what he said. Being a good listener I went back to the rules and via discussion with Phil and others, revised my interpretation but it is still not clear. Hernandez makes no statement on the matter of all round visibility and only says *'a stand faces in whatever direction the model mounted on it faces'*. The firing arc template does have a specific section related to its use with limited traverse weapons but the template itself has some strange white lines printed on it for added confusion! We have since allowed turreted tanks and rifle platoons to fire 360 degrees except if placed in medium improved positions or better. Support weapons, towed guns and

limited traverse vehicles use the template always. Interestingly, **Rapid Fire** appears to restrict turreted vehicles to 180 degrees visibility (that is, 90 degrees either side of straight ahead).

Rapid Fire needs no endorsement from me. It is a hugely popular rule set which has rightly gained this position through gamers buying and using it. The games are simple and enjoyable and the mechanisms easy to use. The games feel right if one can suspend the necessary amount of disbelief which is of course a prerequisite in all wargaming. The universal problem I keep coming back to (applicable to all rule sets in all periods) is that situation where one of us says something like; "*But surely those infantry can see past the edge of that ridge*" forgetting that the figure is 30mm+ high and looking over a model hill which in fact, if in keeping with the ground-scale, would make the soldiers over 50 metres tall! Battlefield visibility is the single biggest reality gap in all wargaming and I see no practical way to solve it. If the figures are kept to the scales we use now then our tables would need to be the size of football fields to accurately cater for ground scale and the vertical dimension. If the figures were matched to conventional table scales they would be microscopic. I think there is a case for limiting battlefield visibility to less than 1,000 metres (scaled down) in all periods and all theatres with perhaps the exception of open flat desert. I recall my numerous visits to battlefields such as Neerwinden, Oudenaarde, Waterloo, Ypres, Omaha Beach and Falaise, standing where historical units were supposed to have been and was myself able to see not much more than a couple of copses and the roof of a farm. Most wargaming takes very little account of perhaps the most significant factor in war – the ground over which it is fought. The argument that the dice deals with this through the chance element is not at all satisfactory.

But returning to **Rapid Fire**. I feel there are several fundamental anomalies within the mechanisms, chiefly concerned with movement, armour versus armour combat and weapon ranges. The relative effectiveness of armoured vehicle HE fire relative to that achievable with **GHQMTG** I cannot comment on as fortunately, I have never been under fire from an armoured vehicle. Interestingly, during a recent conversation with a prominent gamer it was also pointed out that **Rapid Fire** had caused more arguments at his local club than any other set of rules because of the ambiguity of the play sequence. No one could agree on move and fire priorities and the rules lay out was described as extremely user unfriendly. As an aside, this sparked a further conversation about a general contrast in UK authored rule sets versus US authored rule sets. His observation was that UK rule sets tended toward a conversational and in many cases unclear style of layout and writing. This provided many opportunities for variable interpretation and 'handbags at twenty paces' (my phrase not his). He believed that US authored rules generally followed a disciplined and clear sequence with little manoeuvre room for the creative thinker. I alas could not comment on this point as I am not a rules junkie and tend not to buy every new set which hits the market.

Meanwhile back at the article....I have detailed most of the specific queries pertaining to **Rapid Fire** in the main body of the text (see also Articles Two & Three, November and December 2004 WI, Issues 206 and 207) and do not intend to repeat them here. My opinions are just that, opinions and I have the greatest respect for Colin Rumford and Richard Marsh neither of whom I know personally. Their figures, vehicles, terrain and gaming ideas are at the top of the hobby and inspirational to all who see them. I own all of their published material and have enjoyed reading many of the scenarios authored by them over the years. So, as a paying customer I feel at least I have earned the right to comment on the product. I think it is sensible at this point to go back to the reasons for writing this article. I wanted to see what happened when two different sets of rules were used to fight the same scenario. The answer is in most cases a different result. If we play tested three or four other commercial sets of rules we may achieve yet more differences but I don't have the time or energy for that so let's leave it there for now. Comments and death threats to the usual address please.

Twelve key differences between the two rule sets

1. **GHQMTG** is specific about ground scale, **Rapid Fire** is not.
2. **GHQMTG** refers to a 'three minute turn' in the designer's notes section. **Rapid Fire** is not specific about the representation of time within the game turn.
3. **Rapid Fire** is specific about figure to man ratios and model to vehicle ratios whereas **GHQMTG** tends to work in terms of 'platoons' of variable strength.
4. **Rapid Fire** uses alternating turns per player whilst **GHQMTG** uses alternating 'actions' within any given turn.
5. **GHQMTG** offers any playing 'element' the choice of move or fire but not both. **Rapid Fire** allows almost all elements to move and fire or fire and move.
6. **Rapid Fire's** broad categorization of vehicles and guns can tend to equalize the edge often reported in combat by veterans. This was quite obvious in the *Kamenowo* scenario where the Short 50mm PzIIIs did very well against T34s at normal and long ranges during our play tests.
7. **GHQMTG** offers advantages for 'side shots' as well as 'rear shots' on armoured vehicles
8. **Rapid Fire** suggests ammo limitation which adds edge and makes decision making more critical
9. **GHQMTG** allows platoons to act largely in isolation and without cognizance of the wishes of their parent body (unless of course orders are issued pre game) which could be construed as rather unrealistic if taken to the extreme.
10. In **Rapid Fire** cumulative damage is a one way process with no option of recovery. **GHQMTG** deals with the issue of fighting effectiveness as opposed to battlefield casualties which means that elements can recover from serious situations.
11. **GHQMTG** has an innovative and 'skill based' approach to artillery fire whilst **Rapid Fire** offers a more traditional and predictable outcome.
12. Most tanks and guns seem generally more effective in terms of causing some damage under **Rapid Fire** whilst **GHQMTG** creates many situations where fire/close combat seems to have little or no effect on the enemy.