

A Short History of TDGs

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- It frees up a portion of the main highway for additional units to move forward or casualties to be evacuated.
- The howitzers, basically useless while attached to the prime movers, can now be used to support units under fire or be used in direct fire against a ground attack.
- The map spot placed the battery 9 kilometers from the objective city and well within the M198 range. From this position the battery can support the ambush and the primary mission to seize the objective city.

The choice to emplace on the road rather than the field is twofold:

- The surrounding area was once marshland so the chances of the field

being moist or wet precludes occupation because the battery faces getting stuck.

- Unimproved roads, while not ideal, are firmer and the surrounding farm area is most likely wide open. If not, high angle fire could be used to offset a low site to crest.

The lack of communications presents another problem. Most units supported by artillery use radio to call and adjust fire. Here a landline can be quickly run by the advance party wire section and easily cover the 1,500 meters to the battle.

By utilizing standard hipshoot procedures the battery can lay (orient) itself and the fire direction officer or

XO can compute firing data manually.

The purpose of bringing the advance party forward is not only to provide security but also to assist in any defensive or counterattack operations. It is a substantial force of 15 to 25 Marines and is already at the head of the convoy.

In general, except for a "minor" communications problem, the battery can still operate. It would be much more beneficial to lob 98-pound projectiles on the enemy rather than just commit another 150 Marines to the fight. Here the decision is to emplace and use the artillery as it is intended to be used.



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by Capt Bruce I. Gudmundsson, USMCR

The Marine Corps is currently benefiting from an explosion of interest in tactical decision games (TDGs). These simple map exercises—most can be presented on one or two pages—have captured the imagination of Marines who see their potential for freeing tactics from the dead hand of the laundry list.

One of the most interesting aspects of this renaissance is its occurrence 100 years after the first introduction of the TDG to the English-speaking world. In the late 1880s military professionals trying to find more "hands on" methods of teaching tactics imported what the Germans called the *Planuebung* (planning exercise) or the *Planspiel* (planning game)—short map exercises that required players to come up with a concept of operations to deal with a given tactical situation.

Almost immediately, however, this first generation of TDGs was "improved" by the importers. Whereas the Germans had stressed the content of a solution over the form, the Anglo-Saxon importers used the games as a means of teaching the format of orders. (The five-paragraph order was first designed by Eben Swift as a means of forcing students to organize their solutions to his TDGs.) While the Germans put a great deal of stress on having individuals solve these

problems under time pressure, English and American instructors formed their students into teams and gave them an hour or more to work out their solutions.

By World War I, some instructors watered down the TDG even further. Books, like Capt Alfred Bjornstad's *Small Problems for Infantry*, were published that provided long, detailed so-



lutions to simple tactical problems. These books were then used as catechisms—students memorized the solutions to the problems and then recited them in class.

Needless to say, such approaches (particular the last mentioned) robbed the TDGs of most of their educational value. After all, the chief benefit of the exercise is to practice the rapid analysis of a tactical situation, the quick cre-

ation of a practical scheme for dealing with that situation, and the effective expression of that scheme in the form of easily understood orders.

Focusing on format rather than content diverted the players from the essence of the problem at hand. With their minds focused on what information went into which paragraph, both student and teacher were unable to give full attention to judging the practicality of the student's solution. Having lots of time gave the student a luxury rarely afforded to combat leaders. Finally, being formed into committees freed students from the individual responsibility of decisionmaking that is the definitive characteristic of command.

Deprived of their power by these improvements, the first generation of TDGs soon slipped into oblivion. Mated with history in the classic *Infantry in Battle*, they enjoyed a short "Indian summer" during the 1930s. But by the time World War II was over, they were dead—a victim of rapid mobilization and the "school solution."

The point of this little bit of history is not to condemn those who first transplanted the TDG from its native soil. Rather, it is to remind us that even something as elegant as the TDG can be ruined if its essential characteristics—simplicity of design, practicality of solution, rapidity of decision, and individual responsibility—are forgotten.



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