

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

HELI-WAR

Airborne and Airmobile Operations in Next War

by Thomas G. Pratuch

Mr. Pratuch has been responsible for a number of illuminating tactical and operational essays appearing in our pages. You can see a picture of him at leisure in the Origins photo essay in the centerfold of this issue. He is a pleasant, intelligent fellow — one you're glad that you know. We all get to know him in these pages and should encourage him to continue to speak to us. Of course he tends to like games that I'm not personally fond of — but I didn't say he was *perfect*! — RAS

It has always been a fact in wargames that a player who makes a mistake in estimating his opponent's capabilities can find himself suddenly struggling to contain an impending disaster. SPI's *Next War* raises the stakes of wargame errors. In *Next War* a careless move can reveal the soft *thump* of parachutes opening or the low hum of arriving helicopters as the prelude to countries surrendering, airfields being destroyed, and a host of other problems.

Next War is another 'supergame' from SPI with enough basic and optional rules to keep any gamer studying it for a long time. Because of its size, even the extensive coverage afforded to the game in *MOVES* 41 and 42 did not cover all of the features of the game. The purpose of this article is to present a discussion of the airborne/airmobile operational capabilities as found in the campaign game. Most of the observations and comments made here can be readily applied to the scenario games.

Order of Battle

The first step is to examine the availability of airborne/airmobile forces in the campaign game. Only units designated as airborne may perform paratroops according to the rules of the game. Airborne, airmobile, marine and alpine forces may perform airmobile operations. Commando/special forces will be discussed as a separate group. Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the order of battle data.

The first item apparent from the tables is that the Warsaw Pact player has the initial advantage in airborne/airmobile operation. Additionally, the Soviet Mi6 helicopters have a far greater movement capability than the NATO lift helicopters. The NATO player, on the other hand, builds up his capability for air transportable units. One factor that is not

apparent on the charts is that a well played Warsaw Pact game can prevent or delay much of the NATO reinforcements.

The decision of when to use helicopters and when to use air transport requires knowledge of two factors. The first is the placement of flak on the game board. The second is the range of the target area from the nearest friendly airbase.

Plotting flak ranges (for fixed ADA sites only) on the *Next War* map sheets reveal the following information. The bulk of the West German Central and Northern Sectors are covered by A and B rated flak. Only Munchen and Nuremburg have fixed ADA coverage in Southern Germany (A and B rated). The Netherlands is covered by B and D rated flak. Only the island of Sjaelland in Denmark has any fixed ADA coverage, and it is D rated. The airspace of Italy and the non-Alpine area of Austria (eastern portion) is dominated by A rated flak.

The Warsaw Pact areas are largely free from fixed flak coverage. The only intense flak areas are:

1. an east-west line thru Berlin: D rated
2. the Polish-East German border: B rated
3. Western Czechoslovakia: A rated

The situation for mobile and organic (combat) unit flak is the reverse of the fixed flak situation. The Warsaw Pact forces have excellent flak coverage capability with mobile flak. The NATO player has far less mobile flak and it is generally shorter range than the Warsaw Pact equivalent.

The flak situation forces the NATO player to rely upon air transports which can avoid tracing flight paths, reducing susceptibility to flak en route to the target zones. The shorter ranges of the Warsaw Pact fixed ADA sites and the probable concentration of mobile flak along the forward battle areas mean minimal flak threat in the rear areas. The Warsaw Pact player is best off using his long-range helicopters to effect air penetration because of the relative ineffectiveness of the NATO ADA against helicopters.

The location of the airbases generally supports these approaches by the two sides. The Warsaw Pact forces have many forward airbases aiding helicopter penetration. The NATO bases are further back from the front which, together with the short-range helicopter capabilities, forces a reliance upon air transports.

Planning Considerations

All armies that have air transportable forces utilize similar considerations in assigning airborne/airmobile missions. These points are equally valid in the *Next War* for determining the size of the mission force.

Division. Full strength divisions are used to establish new battlefields. Such forces are expected to hold out for at least two to four days, longer if supplied and reinforced. Divisional drops are planned in support of theater operations. These operations may occur up to the range of the owning country's transport range.

Regimental. Slightly smaller in scale than the divisional drops, regimental missions are assigned by corps/front. These drops are up to 15-29 hexes (in game terms) and are not expected to hold out longer than four days. The primary use of regimental drops is to block the entry of enemy reserves into an ongoing battle area while helping to encircle the same battle. Regiments are also used in the same role as battalions whenever there is a need for a stronger fighting force to achieve the mission.

Battalion. Utilized mainly when surprise is possible to seize critical areas where the need for battle is slight. Primarily used against bridgeheads, road and rail junctions, airfields, and to disrupt rear area support. These drops are up to 15 hexes into enemy territory and rely heavily upon ground force link-up, in order to preclude loss of the airborne force, within one or two days.

Soviet Operations

The Soviet player will generally have a difficult time establishing air superiority, but can sometimes obtain it by default in the Baltic and Southern Air Sectors. Because of this difficulty, early air lift operations will be with helicopter transport. As the game continues, the Soviet player has a chance to obtain air superiority in sectors. Thus, later air transport operations can become possible after having suffered losses in helicopter transport.

The following list of recommended airborne/airmobile operations has been planned into hex areas not covered by fixed flak sites (unless totally unavoidable). The recommended targets are made with the understanding that many of the optional rules (supply, air operations, special forces, etc.) are in effect.

Strategic Targets

1. Target: Denmark, island of Sjaelland (Baltic Air Sector)

Drop area: East of N44xx hexrow on island or areas contiguous to hexes N4713 and N4613. Airborne or airmobile force.

Goal: 2/3 probability of Danish surrender. Subsequent attack on Kobenhaven raises probability to 8/9.

2. Target: Netherlands (Baltic and North Air Sectors)

Drop area: Within area bounded by hexes N1133, N1130, N1531. Airborne or airmobile force.

Goal: 1/3 probability of Dutch surrender. If force is strong enough to march to Amsterdam the probability is raised to 7/9.

3. Target: Belgium (North or Central Air Sector)

Drop area: Any hex South or West of hex C0317, Airborne force.

Goal: 1/6 probability of Belgium surrender. If force is capable of attacking Liege the odds increase to 4/9.

4. Target: Italy (Southern Air Sector)

Drop area: Any suitable hex directly north or south of Milano. Subject to attack by a single A rated flak. Airborne force.

Goal: Must attack Milano for 1/3 probability of Italian surrender.

Operational Targets

1. Target: Ramstein area (Central Air Sector)

Drop area: As close as possible to Ramstein by helicopter.

Mission: Damage American base (1 of 2) that can handle US A-10, F-111, and A-7 aircraft (Ramstein #76). Addition: To destroy Reforger sites (C1529 and C1929).

2. Target: Trier area (Central Air Sector)

Drop area: Hexes C0821/0921/1020/0922/1021. Airborne force.

Mission: In conjunction with attack on Rhein-Main and Ramstein airbases the US forces could lose all F-15 fighters by an attack on Bitburg/Sprangdahlem Airbases.

3. Target: Baltic Ports (Baltic Air Sector)

Drop area: Anywhere suitable for helicopters.

Mission: Attack to seal off NATO port use of Emden (N1731), Bremerhaven (N2530), and Wilhelmshaven (N2229).

4. Target: Rhein-Main (Central Air Sector)

Drop area: Anywhere South of hexrow Cxx25 or East of C22xx. Airmobile force.

Mission: If done in conjunction with operational mission #1, all US F-111, A-10, and A-7 aircraft will be eliminated. There is a possibility (when this mission is done early in the game) of catching US AH-1 helicopters and Corps support units.

Tactical Operations (All airmobile forces)

1. Target: Bridges south of Bremen (hex C2601).

Mission: Seal off Hamburg area.

2. Target: Bridges south of Minden (hex C3203).

Mission: Seal off Hanover.

3. Target: Fassberg Airbase (#45, hex C3203).

NATO ORDER OF BATTLE

Airborne/Airmobile	Commando	Transports	Helicopters
Start: It: 5 Alpine Bdes US: 1 SETAF Ambl Bn WG: 3 Arbrn Bdes 1st GJ Alpine Div AU: East Alpine Div West Alpine Div	NE: 2 US: 1 AU: 1	BE: 1 Ne: 1 It: 1 FR: 3 WG: 2	BE: 3 UH-1 Ne: 2 UH-1 IT: 1 Ab206 UK: 1 Wstlnd FR: 1 SA330 US: 1 UH-1 WG: 1 UH-1 AU: 1 AB206
GT 1 FR: 1 11th & 2/11th Abn Div			
GT 2 BE: 2 Abn Regs. IT: Folgore Abn Bde	US: 1	IT: 1	
GT 3	UK: 1	US: 1	
GT 4 UK: 16th Para Bde	CA: 1		CA: 1 UH-1
GT 5	US: 3	US: 1	US: 4 UH-1
GT 6	US: 1		
GT 7 It: Carab. Para Bn			
GT 8 FR: 3/11th Abn Div UK: 3rd Mobile Force		UK: 4	UK: 9 Wstlnd
GT 9 FR: Alpine Div 9th Marine Bde		FR: 1	
GT 10		US: 3	
GT 13 2nd Cbt Grp (Abn)		CA: 1	CA: 3 UH-1
GT 22		US: 1	US: 3 UH-1
GT 24 US: 1st Bde 101st Ambl			
GH 26 US: 2nd Bde 101st Ambl			
GT 28 US: 3rd			
GT 22		US: 1	US: 3 UH-1
GT 24 US: 1st Bde 101st Ambl			
GT 26 US: 2nd Bde 101st Ambl			
GT 28 US: 3rd Bde 101st Ambl			
Variable: Four Game turns after loss of Reforger hexes (Rule 14.78) the 82nd Airborne Division arrives with 3 transports.			

WARSAW PACT ORDER OF BATTLE

Airborne/Airmobile	Commando	Transports	Helicopter
Start: PO: 7th Marine Div CZ: 22ND Abn Bde	SU: 8 EG: 1	SU: 9 CZ: 1 PO: 1	SU: 7 Mi6 EG: 1 Mi8 PO: 3 Mi2 CZ: 3 Mi2 SU: 2Mi6
GT 2 Su: 31st, 76th, 102nd, 103rd, & 106th Gds Abn Div. 2-Marine Reg. PO: 6th Abn Div			
GT 5		WP: 1	
GT 7			SU: 1 Mi6
GT 8			SU: 1 Mi6
GT 10		WP: 1	
GT 12			SU: 1 Mi6
GT 13			SU: 1 Mi6
GT 14			SU: 2 Mi6
GT 15		WP: 1	
GT 20		WP: 1	SU: 1 Mi6
GT 25		WP: 1	

Mission: Seize airbase critical for West German helicopter raids into Warsaw Pact rear.

4. Target: Bridges north of Giessen (hex C2120).

Mission: To prevent reinforcement of NATO forces during Warsaw Pact attack against Ruhr cities.

5. Target: Koblenz (hex C1521).

Mission: Same as Tactical Operation #4 (above).

These tactical operations are based on the major Warsaw attacks occurring in the N. German Plains and Central Germany.

All three mission types (strategic, operational, and tactical) will require most of the Soviet air transportable forces. For this reason there is little capability to support attacks in the South of Germany and Austria. By the time the ground unit link-up with surviving forces is achieved, and subsequent movement made to a friendly airbase with friendly air transport/lift, there is little capability to foresee further operations.

NATO Operations

As previously noted, the NATO air transportable force builds up over a period of time. Since NATO is in the position (early in the game) of having to respond to Soviet operations, the NATO force constitutes the best reserve force for NATO. Airborne/airmobile forces kept at rearward bases provide rear area security for the airbases and make a highly mobile reserve group.

Besides containing Soviet rear area threats, the NATO forces can be used to threaten Warsaw Pact supply lines (FSH and RR Regiments). This rear area threat to the Warsaw Pact will force the deployment of mobile ADA units in rear areas to make-up for inadequate fixed site coverage. The rearward deployment will mean fewer mobile ADA in support of the front with a corresponding increase in NATO ground support capability.

There are far fewer rear area missions for the NATO player. The three primary missions are:

1. Target: Cottbus Area (Northern Air Sector)

Drop area: West of hex C53xx and North of Cxx14. Airborne force.

Missions: Damage Drewitz Airfield (#05, hex C5612) eliminating EG MiG 23s plus seizing Cottbus in order to incite Polish revolt/uprising.

2. Target: Praha Area (Central Air Sector)

Drop area: Hexes C5323/5422/5523/5622/5722/5623/5724 Airborne force.

Missions: Seize Dresden to cause uprisings in East Germany and Poland. Seize Praha to affect Czechoslovakia. Damage airfield at Praha (#22, hex C5526) to knock out CZ MiG 21s.

3. Target: Muritz Area (North Air Sector)

Drop area: Within 2 hexes of hex C5001. Airborne or Airmobile force.

Missions: Damage airbases at Rechlin (#24, hex C4701) and Neuruppin (#27, C4704) to eliminate most of Soviet SU19 units. Additional attack to Neubrandenburg to start Polish uprising.

The West German helicopters can perform an airmobile attack on Pilzen in order to cause Czechoslovakian uprisings. But as there is not another purpose of any note for the NATO player, there is no reason to consider it an important air operation.

Commando Operations

While an integral part of the air assault operations, there is little that can be specifically stated about commando/special forces operations. Without any ground attack factors, these units are doomed to annihilation if faced with a conventional combat unit. Whenever player intelligence of the opposing forces uncovers support units or airfields without ground combat units, then use of the commando forces is recommended. These units will largely end up being one-mission forces. One burden placed upon the NATO player is the limitation of commando to helicopter lift. A possible change to the game is the presence of *breakdown* air transport counters. Currently an air

transport could (with optional rules in effect) carry 3 commando battalions. Breakdown air transports, where 1 air counter could carry 1 commando battalion, would be subject to all the same rules as a full-strength transport. However, there would be no steps to the air unit. Loss of 1 step would mean elimination of the transport and the commando battalion. Commando battalions would have to paratroop using the same rules as conventional airborne units. Commando movement allowances would be the same as provided for leg infantry in the optional rules.

Closing Comments

The following optional rules are recommended for use when playing with air operations (Rules 20.0, 21.0, 30.0 and 32.0) for airborne/airmobile attacks:

5.7 Leg Infantry

10.15 Special Forces stacking

22.0 Airfields

31.0 Special Forces

50.0 & 51.0 Political Unreliability.

One rule that I have modified is (8.53) Airborne supply when playing with (17.0) Optional Supply. My version of (8.5) reads as follows:

[8.5] In the Game-Turns following airlift (or amphibious landing for marines) airborne/airmobile/marines are considered to be out of general supply. Such units are subject to Optional Supply (17.0).

[8.54] These forces may be resupplied by dedicating air transport or lift helicopters to carrying supply points. Air transport are allocated in the same manner as a paratroop mission. Helicopters may perform resupply during the owning player's movement and combat phase. Each air unit step carries 1 ammo point. Loss or damage to the air unit step means loss of the supply point.

[8.56] Resupply missions may never give a division base more than 2 ammo points (see Case 17.61). Independent organizations may never have more than 1 ammo point (see Case 17.47).

[8.57] Air units flying resupply are subject to movement/placement on the map in the same manner as when carrying combat units. In addition, aerial resupply units are subject to flak combat.

[8.58] Aerial resupply may be used for regular ground combat units that are out of general supply.

I am sure that some of the readers feel that the points mentioned were all well and good if the opposing player leaves such openings. Mobile flak can dramatically change the ability to perform some of the listed missions. This is why players of *Next War* must be familiar with the rules on flak suppression. The missions I have presented here I feel to be essential, basic missions in any game. The timing of the missions is a function of the type of game played (Tension, Sudden War, or Spring Maneuvers) and the reinforcement schedule. As sessions of *Next War* are played I am sure that opponent force dispositions will lead players to perform airborne/airmobile operations different from those presented here. If I haven't presented your favorite paratroop — there's nothing personal in the omission. ■■

HELICOPTER RANGES

Country	Type	Rng	Intercept Rating	Lift (INBNS)
SU	Mi6	(54) 60	1	3
EG	Mi8	(33) 28	2	1
PO	Mi2	(28) 20	2	1
NATO	UH-1	(36) 32	4	1
US	Ch53	(21) 42	6	3
IT, AU	AB206	30	3	1
UK	WstInd	32	4	1
FR	SA330	34	8	1

Parenthesized ranges are re-computed since *Next War's* publication