

strategy & Tactics: TacOps

by Scott Love

TacOps is without a doubt one of the most detailed, realistic computer wargames in existence. Gone are all concerns of money, the building of units, and strategic goals. Your battle will involve the micro-management of units, weapons capabilities, and movement. The detail of TacOps is extraordinary and its unique approach to artificial intelligence (A.I.) challenges even the best, most experienced war-gamers.

TacOps's A.I. is based on scenario conditions. . . in other words, the game doesn't have to generate generic rules to follow. There is no "random map" feature. Instead of instructions like: "if an enemy shows up, and the odds favor the computer player, attack," TacOps A.I. is able to apply specific instructions: "take the hill at xyz grid with unit 999 and hold until turn 15."

This specific, detailed response from the A.I. is TacOps' greatest strength. The computer player is a challenge. The goals for each scenario are specific. This makes each unit important, and makes the A.I. extremely complex to combat.

Furthermore, the number of variables in the game (based on Line Of Sight, weapons ranges, armor strengths, etc.) makes it virtually impossible to come up with a sure-fire solution to the tactical puzzles it creates.

[Firing The First Shot. . .](#)

Obviously this column cannot attempt to cover the entire tactical wealth of information necessary to become a TacOps master. Instead I plan to lay out tools and a foundation for learning the game and becoming proficient. When the publishers come out with the TacOps Battle Book (I'm not sure of the title) I would recommend it as an invaluable in-depth look into TacOps.

The tools of TacOps are units. . . and all players who wish to win TacOps must become familiar with each unit under their command. What follows, then, is a brief look into each unit. Use this list as a reference during combat and you'll be able to judge better what tools fit the tactical needs of any situation. (The list is presented in alphabetical order, with US forces first and OPFOR second.)

US FORCES

60 mm Mortar

One of the backbones of infantry support, this weapon features small to medium caliber shells and is most effective when used in concert against a single target. When split into smaller units, these guns may lose short-term effectiveness, but they do act as good smoke screening defensive weapons.

AAV7 APC

This lightly armored vehicle is primarily used for river crossings and amphibious assaults. It will carry a great many marines and is armed with a .50-cal. gun and grenade launcher. The unit is best used for transport and will be quickly defeated in heavy combat.

AH-64 AT

This extraordinary attack helicopter is best loaded with Hellfire ATGMs and will yield solid results in combat. A great tactic: use the 15-second pop-up in combat, but be sure to keep moving. These helos are best when used to strike quickly and escape. Tight fire from infantry units can take them down, so be careful.

AH-64 GP

This second attack helicopter doesn't perform as well as the AH-64 AT. Sometimes TacOps loads them with Stinger missiles which make them good defensive units against air attacks. Use them in concert with AH-64 ATs.

CH-46

This is exclusively a transport chopper. No defense, no offensive. It's a bus with a rotor. Use it to move in quickly, grab infantry units, and move out. If OPFOR smells one, you can kiss it goodbye.

CH-47

This helo is also an exclusive transport. Same as the above: don't use it for anything other than safe moves.

CH-53

This large airborne bus can help move troops and has the defensive capabilities to survive minor/moderate attacks. It will still fold under sustained fire.

AH-1 Cobra

Anyone who's seen a Vietnam movie has seen this helicopter. Modern versions of the Cobra include much stronger guns which allow it to support infantry movement and attacks well. It isn't as effective as the Apache, but is good for strike-and-run missions. It has little armor, though, and will suffer near OPFOR units.

Dragon 2 ATGM

This is a portable anti-tank gun which will cut through almost anything OPFOR has. The T-80

(OPFOR's best tank) would survive a hit on the front, but that's about it. Allow the team with these guys to get into range of OPFOR's tanks and let them go to work.

HMMWV

Leave it to the Army to come up with an acronym for a Jeep. This is a big, modern Jeep which will turn into garbage after being hit by a even a low caliber weapon. Use it for speed and for scouting. It is versatile.

HMMWV Mortar Carrier

This is a slightly better armed Jeep than the one above. It features an 81-mm mortar and is best used for quick shots. These Jeeps, or "Hummers" are best used in groups. . . the metaphor of a swarm of bees applies.

HMMWV Air Defense

This Jeep carries 12 quite effective Stinger missiles and proves to be an excellent defense against OPFOR helicopters and aircraft.

HMMWV w HMG

This Hummer holds a .50-cal. machine gun and is quite effective for short times (with such light armor it has little staying power) in supporting infantry attacks. It is most effective against OPFOR APCs.

HMMWV w LMG

This Jeep, thought it carries a machine gun, is almost useless. I've had more success using them to divert enemy troops (OPFOR thinks they might be dangerous and sometimes pursues) than in actually trying to support infantry with them.

HMMWV w Mk19

This Hummer comes with a serious bite. As a support unit for infantry, the Mk19 grenade launcher is quite effective at medium ranges. OPFOR BTRs and BMPs are quite vulnerable to this unit's firepower.

HMMWV AT

This Hummer is amazingly powerful, considering its pathetic armor. . . the six TOW ATGMs it holds can decimate anything OPFOR puts on the field. Just watch out — like any HMMWV, a scout with a pocket knife could disable it.

INF Squad

Infantry is best used to hold positions and dig in. They tend to get shredded in the open or during an attack. But once they're entrenched, they can hold their own against almost any OPFOR unit (including tanks). To give you an idea of TacOps's scale, these squads generally hold 13 men.

Inf Scout Team

Don't discount these guys. Use them to cut through the fog of war. They hide well and can't be easily spotted if they're not moving. Use them to spot for artillery strikes, or use them even to ambush other units (they can get quite close without being detected — sometimes within 100 meters).

Infantry Team, 4 men

These guys are sort of filler for a LAV25. They die quickly and I haven't been able to figure out what good they are. Kind of like the filling in a twinkie. . . why bother?

Infantry Team

Half the size of a squad, these teams are best used at close range. They also are wonderful in rough or wooded terrain. Their small size allows them to move easily and they've enough armament to be used as a significant unit. . . though they're easy to overestimate and can be eaten for a tank-snack.

Javelin ATGM

Big guns. They've got great range and good accuracy and will significantly damage anything out there. They're great against tanks when used in groups, though they're not much for defense.

LAV 25 IFV

This small vehicle has an effective machine gun against infantry or lightly armored opponents, but isn't worth much else. Use it for scouting.

LAV 25 AD AFV

This wonderful little vehicle carries 12 Stingers and a 25 mm gatling gun which can shred any OPFOR helo or aircraft. But keep it hidden — no armor to speak of.

LAV 25 AG

I couldn't find much on this one. It seems to be a non-existent vehicle, or perhaps one in development. Its gun would help in taking out APC's I suppose. Call it a medium attack weapon.

LAV 25 AT AFV

This a serious slammer. With 16 TOW missiles, it can bite almost anything on the board. Again, though, don't get caught with your lightly armored pants down.

LAV 25 Mortar Carrier

This sucker is best used in large groups to support infantry. Set up a bank of these units in a protected area and screen your attacks. But be careful, at short range they're next to useless.

155 mm SP Hwtzr

When looking for a long range weapon, try 20 kilometers. This thing can rain on any OPFOR parade, but I haven't had much luck with the unit when shooting at tanks. It seems best to pound on APCs and infantry units.

M113 APC

This vehicle has no guns, no armor, and three flat tires as far as I can tell. Extremely vulnerable and much less useful than the M2 Bradley. I'd only hitch a ride on one if the war were over. . . and even then I'd have to lose a bet. They are good for moving troops along your rear lines.

M125 Mortar Carrier

Think of this as a bull's eye which throws darts back: they pack a moderate punch but stand out like sore thumbs and tend to make great OPFOR targets. I found that these guys were used best when they weren't moving. Or, if you can afford to use valuable units in this way, as diversions.

M1A2 Tank

This sucker is the heart and soul of US tanks. Its long range and strong weapons make it effective against anything in the game, and it's armor protects it from everything but special OPFOR tank-killing units. Unfortunately, OPFOR has had the time and exposure to develop some extremely effective weapons against the M1. Don't get overconfident and these guys will serve you well.

M2 Bradley

These trucks were created as M1 tank partners and carry 7 infantry men. They aren't well armored, so when OPFOR is engaged, unload them quickly. A solid machine gun hit will disable one, and could fry the men inside as well. Offensively the Bradleys aren't bad at all: they carry a TOW missile which can chew up any armored vehicle while the large machine gun can seriously damage infantry or APCs. These vehicle are great all-purpose units which are best used to support larger plans — tank & infantry attacks, movement, etc.

M3 Bradley

This version of the Bradley is identical to the M2 but carries a few more TOW missiles and a scout infantry unit. This thing performs extremely well in conjunction with scouts — drop them in a forward, protected area and then ambush armored units with the TOWs.

M60 MG Team

This four-man team hauls with it a large machine-gun. Good against APCs and best used supporting larger infantry units.

M60A3

This old tank carries a pea-shooter and has little armor. They're quite difficult to use effectively, given OPFORs T-72 tanks. I'm hardly an expert at TacOps (though I am getting better) and had a hard time keeping these guys alive. For the purposes of writing this article I switched in these tanks with a scenario and lost within a few turns. These guys are best in

museums.

M901 ITV

An M113 loaded with a few TOW missiles. They don't last long in any attack, but seem perform well offensively. Try using them first, deplete their ammo load, and then forget them. Pull them back to a safe place just to increase your end casualty rating.

OH-58 Kiowa AT

This helicopter serves a double role as a scouting craft and supportive attack chopper. It carries Stinger missiles to ward off enemy aircraft and Hellfire missiles for attack firepower. It tends to suffer from its dual purpose, never fulfilling either role as well as a dedicated chopper might. Use it for support, covering flanks, etc. Be sure to use SOPs to give this chopper its maximum advantage.

Oh-58 GP

This scouting helicopter carries only two Stinger missiles as weapons against other flying aircraft — it serves best to find OPFOR's SAM units and ZSU-23s. They're extremely weak crafts — a strong wind could knock one out of the sky. Keep them in pop-up attack mode and they might make it to the end of the battle.

SMAW Team:

This two-man team carries SMAW anti-tank weapons and are best used to ambush tanks from hidden locations. They die quickly in battle and must engage tanks at close (by tank standards) ranges. Thus use them sparingly and avoid leaving them in the open.

Stinger SAM

The payback from this two-man team is extraordinary. They are extremely effective against helicopters and planes and, when hidden, difficult to kill. If they're spotted kiss them goodbye, but they're a snake in the grass which should be used judiciously.

TOW ATGM

The extreme range and lethality of this team makes it an effective weapon against many units. Better than Javelin and Dragon units, rely on this four-man team to kill just about anything you point them at.

Truck

I include this unit only so that this list is complete. . . it will carry 16 men but has absolutely no worth in battle whatsoever. Don't bother showing it to OPFOR. . . they'll be insulted, though probably will waste the ammo to destroy it.

UAV

These Unmanned Aerial Vehicles are fantastic for artillery sightings at long ranges and give you the necessary intelligence you need for a battle. Don't waste them by bringing them in too close.

UH-60 Blackhawk

This is an army transport helicopter. It will hold a maximum of a squad and should not be used for anything but moving troops to and fro.

OPFOR FORCES

2S 120 mm SP

This effective mortar tube mounted on a turret is quite dangerous in concentrated numbers, though it is lightly armored.

122 mm SP Hwtzr

This is a main artillery unit (though of medium strength) for OPFOR. While it suffers from light armor, it can do a fair amount of damage to US forces.

2S22 120 mm SP Mortar

This unit is almost identical to the 2S 120 mm SP, but is even more lightly armored.

152 mm SP Hwtzr

This howitzer unit is very lightly armored and cannot survive even single, light attacks. However, it is quite effective in shredding exposed troops and can damage M1 tanks from the rear.

AGS17 Team

This machine gun unit will die easily but can threaten any APC unit. It can prevent Bradleys and LAVs from owning the field.

AT4 Spigot

This long range unit can kill M1 tanks without fail. It is less accurate than the US Javelin, but has a longer effective range.

AT7 Saxhorn

This vehicle has a medium range and can be killed easily when running up against an AT4 Spigot; however, it is also fast. Use it to move in, strike, and move away. With two missiles, plan your strikes well.

BM21 MRL

This unit provides strong artillery support from beyond the edge of the map and a battalion can clear an entire grid square of almost anything less armored than M1 tanks.

BMP2

This IFV is similar to the US Bradley and serves similar functions, but its light armor prevents it from living much longer than the time it needs to offload troops.

BMP3

This unit is simply a more heavily armed version of the BMP2.

BRDM2 APC

This lightly armed and armored jeep-like vehicle isn't useful against anything but infantry units. Use it for scouting. Its ineffectual machine guns make it almost worthless for ambushes.

BRDM2 AT

This sucker has one of the longest ranges in the game (5,000 meters) and can kill almost anything on the board. Keep away from it. (Though its light armor insures a fairly quick death if you manage to get close enough.)

BTR80

This vehicle carries an entire squad and has fairly good defensive capabilities. A medium machine gun provides its only weaponry, but it is best used to get troops through moderately difficult areas.

Mi28 Havoc

This solid helicopter rivals (but doesn't quite equal) the Apache. Its weapons and armor suit it for pop up attacks, and it can harass US forces throughout the game. A good US player will know to target these units first.

Mi24 Hind

This chopper is most effective against Infantry and APCs and can carry an 8-man squad. A good multi-purpose helicopter which will damage US forces if not quickly shot down.

Inf Squad

This well armed squad of 8 men will destroy any vehicle that gets within 800 meters, including M1 tanks (from the rear).

Inf Team

This is simply a smaller, slightly less effective version of the Infantry Squad.

PKM MG Team

This machine gun is quite deadly within 2,000 meters, though its team will die quickly in an attack. Stay away from these guys.

SA16 SAM

This anti-aircraft weapon is quite deadly and will easily take out US air forces. The one-man crew dies when fired upon, but only if you can find him.

SPG9 Team

This three-man crew simply carries a big gun which will slice through any US vehicle it can find. M1s are vulnerable from the rear and sides. The crew themselves will die under fire, but expect to lose a few vehicles in the process.

T72m Tank

This tank holds up poorly against the M1, but serves as a mainstay of OPFOR forces. Try to keep in its optimal range — the M1 has a slightly longer effective range.

T80U ATGM Tank

This tank is well-armed and armored. At 5,000 meters it will kill any US unit it sees. It is well-matched against the M1. Keep away from it.

T80U Tank

The lack of anti-tank weapons makes this tank less of a threat against M1s, but other units beware.

TFO Tank

I couldn't find anything solid on this tank; it seems to be still on the drawing boards. . . same armor as an M1 with a larger gun. It'll shred anything on the map.

Truck

Here's the OPFOR version of the same. Holds troops and dies nicely.

UAV

These Unmanned Aerial Vehicles are fantastic for artillery sightings at long ranges and give you the necessary intelligence you need for a battle. Don't waste them by bringing them in too close. (Same as the US version.)

ZSU-23-4

This great anti-aircraft gun can take out US helicopters right and left and will threaten airplanes as well. It even works well against infantry.

ZSU-23

This gun doesn't move but is identical to the above. Not as effective because it can't move.

That wraps the list of units in TacOps and should provide you with a fair grasp of what tools

are at your disposal. When in doubt, compare weapons ranges to those of enemy units.

SOPs

The other absolutely vital thing you use and understand in TacOps are SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures). Read all the SOPs for each unit and use them intelligently. It'll mean the difference between units sitting in the open like ducks and units which actually respond to the battle around them.

I hope this list has provided you with a starting point for understanding TacOps. The complexity of the game is extraordinary and the AI quite dynamic. Enjoy.

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