

Hi Chris,

I have visited your site many times and have downloaded a ton of files from it. Great stuff overall and, in my opinion the Assault resource right up there with the Imaginative Strategist for PB/PL. I just wish I had more time to do more with it than look at it these days. Sites like yours keep the games alive for me.

The counters are very well done, and in keeping with the original format. The charts are awesome and again are very well done. The maps found on the site - and I'm always looking for more terrain - are top notch and again consistent with the original format. Most of the work is commercial quality or better.

There aren't many sites like this; where you get so much good stuff in one spot. I visit every month or so just to check the updates, and I recommend it to any gamer, not just Assault fans. Sites like yours can make new fans for old games. I can't say enough good about it.

If you think it's worth adding, please feel free to copy, quote or critique anything I've written from the review - even if only to say "this guy is nuts, the game is perfect."

Cheers, and keep up the good work,  
RussS

### **Introduction**

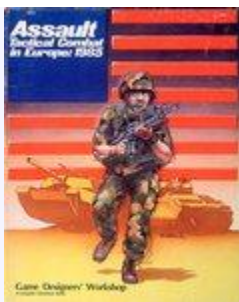
Through the 70s and 80s Platoon level tactical armored combat games were pretty popular topics. The vast majority of titles came from *Avalon Hill* (*PanzerBlitz*, *Panzer Leader*, *Arab Israeli War*) and *SPI* (*Kampfpanzer*, *Red Star White Star*, *Combat Command*, *Mech War '77*, *Panzer '44*, *Mech War 2*, and more). Practically all of these games were based on Jim Dunnigan's *Tactical Game 3*, which Dunnigan sold to *Avalon Hill* to become *PanzerBlitz*. And we've come full circle.

*AH* was pretty happy with the *PanzerBlitz* family and tinkered with it sparingly, differing with the *SPI* offerings by ignoring ugly little command and control issues, and anything that smacked of an interactive sequence of play, with the exception of opportunity fire. *SPI*, in contrast, developed a number of command and control schemes, which were mostly based on randomly selecting units for a random behavior, that was almost anything other than what a commander would want his units to do. *SPI* also experimented with plotted artillery fire, combat differential as opposed to odds based CRTs, and simultaneous movement. Some experiments worked better than others, but essentially these games were all recognizable as members of the same family.

Enter *Frank Chadwick*, and *Game Designer's Workshop*. *GDW* introduced a number of tactical armored combat games, in two major series offerings; *Assault* and *First Battle*, in that order. *First Battle* I've reviewed elsewhere with two series games; *Blood and Thunder*, and *Battlefield Europe*. I won't say that they improved on the earlier *Assault* series, but they were certainly created to appeal to a wider audience. This review deals with the namesake of the first series, *Assault*, which took on contemporary warfare in Cold War Europe. *SPI*'s *Red Star White Star*, *Mech War '77*, and *Mech War 2* all looked at this time period, and at many of the same or similar situations, but I believe *Assault* went them all one better in the Holy Grail-like pursuit of command and control. In *Assault*, the entire game system is built around simulating the command and control structure of the units involved, and players used to the *AH/SPI* titles would have to adjust the way they thought about command, and the fact that the fighting part of the game is almost secondary to getting your units in the right place at the right time, and under effective control.

Images used are taken from the BGG game pages.

Thanks: (arnaudel)(Original\_CorPse)(dude163)(saab dastard)



### **The Game**

*Assault*, by *GDW*, is a Platoon level treatment of modern combined arms combat in Europe ca. 1985. The game was

released in 1983, the first in a series of five titles in the series. The game was meant to be a simulation of the new organization and doctrine that was in the process of being adopted by the US Army at the time. The rules are detailed – this is definitely a game for experienced players – and players would do well to set up small situations on a map to help in learning the game. That said, the rules are clear and the game situations are described in some depth. In many ways, the game reminded me of SPI's [NATO Division Commander](#), but at a much smaller scale and scope. Ultimately the game puts the players in the shoes of battalion, regimental, or brigade commander standing up to NATO, or stemming the Soviet tide over the Continent.



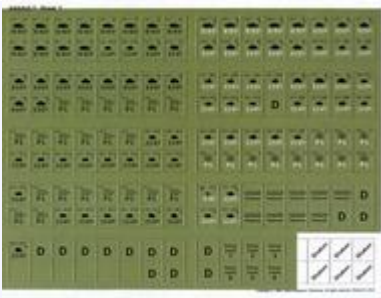
### **First impressions**

The bits and pieces are pretty good by early 80s standards, although they show their age up against contemporary titles. There are about 500 unit counters and markers, a pair of matte finished card stock maps, a couple of intimidating looking log sheets, scenario booklets and unit Fire data charts (one for each side), rules, and historical background booklets. There isn't a lot of color – the charts and booklets look like what you could get off of your own computer's word processor, again not too impressive to today's gamers. You might be a little disappointed if you picked this game up in an auction or a used game sale, maybe enough to just put it back in the box and pass it on. But then you would have made a mistake, read on.



**The Maps** – You get just two 17" x 22" geomorphic maps; the hexes represent 250 meters, and depict typical Central European terrain. You get a lot of urban areas to fight over and around, some fairly rugged mountains and rolling hills, plenty of woods to hide in and some troublesome streams to channel your actions. There's a lot of cover, and you'll need it. The maps are mostly shades of green and brown, a little blue, red for main roads and everything else is picked out in black. The look is classic 80s, non-*Avalon Hill* style.

Though they are geomorphic, there are only two, and they are relatively large for this sort of map. The upshot is that even though the maps are reconfigurable, mating end to end and side to side, you still end up fighting over large pieces of the same terrain in each configuration. With the addition of maps from the other titles, your DIY scenarios gain a little more variability, but then you'll probably do good to find one or two titles in this series, much less all five.



**The Counters** – The double-sided unit counters sport *PanzerBlitz* style silhouettes for the vehicles, while the heavy weapons and infantry units are marked with NATO symbology. The reverse side is printed with arrowheads for use in

movement, where there is limited intelligence. The units are printed in Green and Red for Americans and Soviets, respectively, and are a little unusual in that they have no combat values printed on them. The information shown on each counter is:

The unit ID

The unit type name

Target Type for non armored units -or-

Values for Frontal and Flank armor for AFVs

Movement value and mobility class (type of movement: Tracked, Wheeled, Leg, etc.)

Some counters also have a special function code, that indicates what types of units it may transport, or that it doesn't require operations points to function.



## **Rules**

The rule book is only 16 pages long, but it is dense print, and will take an effort to get through. There are no starter rules or basic game to help you learn the system, and there are only a few examples to illustrate key points. The rules are clear, if not concise and, if you have some experience with tactical games, won't really be all that much of a chore to digest. Newer gamers will be tested.

## **Mechanics**

The game scale is Platoon level, hexes are 250 meters across, and turns are 5 minutes – and it's a busy five minutes. My gaming buddies and I used to play **PanzerBlitz** with a ten minute time limit on each move, since that was the length of a game turn. That method would not be possible with this game, and players will likely take 15-20 minutes to get through their half of a five minute move, at the Battalion level or so. Because of all of the other considerations that players must deal with in a turn, the game may feel slow, until you look back on a turn and consider all that has transpired on both sides in a mere five minutes.

At its core, **Assault** works like most tactical games produced in its time. Units move and fire at one another, fire is direct or indirect, anti-armor or conventional, and infantry has the capability to conduct assaults. Units can move or fire, both in special situations. Adverse combat results in Suppression, a Hit (loss of a step), or Elimination (loss of two steps). Units must be in command control to perform most important functions.

Operational command is the key to almost all action in Assault. There is a strong emphasis on Headquarters and Tactical Operations Centers which generate operations points, thereby simulating the limits of what can be accomplished during a turn. In order to move into combat, change formation, rebuild HQs, and rally suppressed units, players must expend operations points. Without operations points, units are still able to fight, but their ability to maneuver and recover from combat effects is severely curtailed.

**Assault** is definitely a two player game (almost impossible to play correctly solitaire), and there is a lot for the players to keep track of, but at the same time they need to be keenly aware of what their units are doing. This slows play as there is a lot for each commander to consider during every turn.



## **Set Up**

Like most tactical games, set up is freer than in a themed battle game. Each scenario will describe a map board configuration, the initial and any follow-on forces, off-board artillery, objectives and victory conditions, entry points or area boundaries for both sides, along with the number of HQs and off-board operations points for each side. There is a lot of paper based organization as well, and players will spend no small amount of time setting up their record keeping materials.

### **Game Play**

The sequence of play is very detailed, breaking the player turn down into 28 steps in four main phases:

Artillery Phase – Plot fire, resolve fire, and deploy artillery units.

First Movement Phase – Allocate operations points, rally units, move units, resolve close assaults.

Fire Phase – Resolve Fire and check morale.

Second Movement Phase – Allocate operations points, rally units, move units, resolve close assaults.

During movement, the non-moving player may resolve opportunity fire.

There is a lot of maneuver inherent in the sequence of play, reflecting just how fast things happen on a modern battlefield. There is potential for a lot of shooting, and assaults as well – games can be fast and bloody when the two forces become intimately engaged. The ability to move units following the Fire Phase allows for exploitation, and a well planned attack can take what looked like a solid defense and turn it into a confused rabble. Likewise, the range and lethality of modern weapons, employed in a thoughtful defense, can reduce a massive attack into a collection of smoking vehicles and cowering soldiers in short order. This game rewards planning more than most.

### **Combat**

There are four types of combat: Indirect Fire, Direct Anti-Armor Fire, Direct Conventional Fire, and Close Assault. All combat is odds based, with terrain affecting the defensive value of each target type.

For Direct and Indirect Fire: Offensive combat values for each unit type are found on the Direct Fire Data table, one for U.S. units another for the Soviets. The values are dependent on the unit type, type of ammunition fired (most units can fire many different kinds), and the range to the target. Also listed for each unit is a rate of fire and the amount of ammunition of each type available.

Defensive combat values are found on a separate table, and are determined by unit type and the terrain in the target hex.

The image shows a portion of a data table from a game manual. It contains several columns and rows of text, likely representing unit types, ammunition types, and combat statistics. The text is small and difficult to read, but it appears to be a reference table for combat values.

For Anti-Armor Fire: Check the Direct Fire Data table for the firing unit and ammunition used, cross reference with the target range and you'll find a decimal (d10) chance to hit the target followed by a penetration value which you would compare to the AFV's Armor Value, which will result in the decimal chance to inflict a step loss on the target. Chances to hit are further affected by special armor types (Chobham or Laminate).

Close Assaults use both types of combat, at ranges of 0, for same hex combat.

Simple, huh?

It actually isn't as bad as it sounds, once you've had a little practice.

### **Command**

Operations Points are one of the central element of the **Assault** command and control system. As a concept it is pretty simple, certain actions take command points to perform. Run out of points and you can't take those actions. Not bad so far, eh? As long as you are careful with your units, plan ahead, and don't try to do everything at once, things should go smoothly enough. But not every HQ/TOC has the same number of command points available, so some units (and by units, in this case, I mean Companies and Battalions) will be more effective than others.

One consideration of command in **Assault** is the HQ's line of sight to its subordinate units – units in LOS take fewer points to perform certain actions. So it helps to keep your higher echelon units together in order to make effective use of your available points. This can be difficult enough once the battle gets going and units start moving around, but in **Assault**, one unit looks pretty much like another unit and those tiny little unit IDs are tough to read. It is a major chore to keep track of your units under these circumstances, and significant amounts of game time are spent peering under your stacks and squinting at unit IDs. Other games have solved this problem with unique unit symbols, colored bands, or some other such marking. Unless you are an amateur counter maker, and want to produce a more distinctive set of counters for the game, you are faced with either marking up your counter set, or sucking it up and playing them as they are.

### **Scenarios**

The game contains only three scenarios; Probe, Meeting Engagement, and Counterattack. Each scenario has a description, a set of victory conditions, command Ratings, and a number of turns in length. Each scenario also comes with six different sets of forces for each side, which are determined at random prior to the start, effectively giving the players 36 different possible variations on each base scenario. That makes 108 scenarios, which sounds a lot better for replay possibilities.



The scenarios come in two small booklets, one for the US one for the Soviets. The US booklet contains the map configuration and wind direction, but is otherwise in the same format as the booklet for the Soviets. The scenario background descriptions are a little short (this is addressed elsewhere), and the IDs of the units designated in the Force Levels are pretty cryptic – it takes more than a few minutes just to sort out your forces and get ready to set up. Then each player has some bookkeeping to do, filling out copies of the Command and Morale record for each HQ and TOC, and all of the units under their control. Add in the Ammunition supply record, and Artillery Fire Mission record and your prep is done. You will feel like you are in the command post for these units when you play this game.

Mercifully the forces in most scenarios are small enough to be manageable – this game would be (is) extremely difficult to play with larger forces.

### **What's missing?**

Frank Chadwick has gone to great pains to model a realistic command and control structure in this game, and I think he's done a pretty good job. But it's almost too much to handle in a tactical game when you are effectively acting as

the Battalion commander, as well as every tactical commander all the way down the line. I would like to have seen some optional simplified command rules so that the players would avoid getting overwhelmed by the details involved in operating a Battalion in battle.

**Solitaire** – Forget it. Unless you are just trying an experiment to see if you can plan a better attack/defense against a fixed adversary, it is practically impossible to play this game solo. There is too much hidden information that makes up too significant a part of the game for it to play out the right way.

### **Overall Impression**

A gamer of today would have to look past the visual shortcomings of this game and get into the meat of the system in order to give it a fair shake. This game is almost 30 years old, and despite showing its age, it has some features that were ahead of its time for the day. For instance, a separate direct fire system for anti-armor combat is a staple of the **Panzer Grenadier** series today.

The command and control rules are arduous and time consuming, even Chadwick recognized this, and he significantly streamlined the processes in his later **First Battle** series. This kind of bookkeeping was for the truly hardcore and you don't see it in successful titles these days.

The tone of my review sounds like I'm being pretty hard on the game, but actually I quite enjoyed it when I was playing, and this was one of the favorites in my gaming group. A lot of it had to do with the contemporary subject matter (along with most of my gaming friends, I graduated college in the mid 80s, and we mostly went our separate ways afterwards), and the fact that many of us had military backgrounds and understood better than most what Frank was trying to do, and recognized that he had just about pulled it off. The game simply felt more real than many of the other titles that occupied us.

To me, when we played this game it felt something like a chess game: cautious opening moves, positioning pieces for offensive combinations resulting in flurries of activity, then regrouping, consolidating and defending, while preparing for the next push. It took more planning to put together a successful attack, and it felt like a real accomplishment when the plan came together.



One other great thing about this game, which was almost a Frank Chadwick trademark, was another eight page Briefing Booklet. What Frank gives us here is a tight little treatise on the organization, doctrine, and equipment of the two protagonists. It's a little bit analysis, a dash of history, and a smattering of designer's notes, and it goes a long way to help players understand why some of the things in the game are the way that they are.

This is a difficult game, no doubt, the learning curve is steep. This is a game that you plan to play all afternoon or evening; 2-4 hours from pulling out the box to packing it back up again – even for a small scenario. But once you've played it a few times, and gotten past the fact that not only are you the battalion commander but also every squad leader, cannon cocker, and tank commander wondering which shell to load for the next shot, you will have a much better understanding of what it takes get an armored battalion into the fight, in near contemporary conditions. This is a good game, but I don't expect to see its like again.