

Recruits Convention March, 2009

Nam, 1967 - Inside the Iron Triangle Cold War Commander Rules, After Action Review

This year for Spring Convention of Recruits, 'Combatcolours' (Steve H.) and I ran a Cold War Commander game of Vietnam, modified for convention use. The modifications were very minor changes and I will cover those later. First thing, we will cover is the trip up and about Recruits.

Recruits

Recruits is very nice three-day convention held twice a year (Spring and Fall) in Lee Summit, Missouri, just south of Kansas City, Missouri. The Lee Summit High School is extremely nice about allowing the convention to be held in their gym. There is always a good number of vendors, both local and out of state. It normally draws a fairly good size crowd these, with players coming in all over the Mid-West (Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma) and even further! (Texas, Tennessee, etc) It is a must if you live in the area or happen to be in the area. <http://recruits.mtswebsites.com/>

This Spring convention was either the third or fourth convention for me (I can't remember right now and I know 'Combatcolours' had been to one to three more than that. Last Fall, 'Hostile Contact' (Curtis T.) rode with us to the convention, but this convention he went up with another friend of his, Alan. So with the spare room in the car, we reluctantly allowed 'Timmy!' (Tim S.) to ride with us...nah, just kidding...he was able to get away for the day this time. Like the last several times, we would drive off from St. Louis that Saturday before the sun rise, drive four hours or so to con, check in, eat breakfast, tour the vendors, set up the game, play a fun game, roll up, check the vendors again, play in someone else's game, eat diner, and drive four hours back for a fun filled 20 hours or more experience!





This convention appeared not to have nearly the usual turn out, which may have been part of the economics the way that it is today, but also there was really bad weather expected that Saturday in Kansas City and St. Louis. It did rain most of the day and there was some heavy snow in the afternoon. I found out later that it snowed hard enough that the Kansas City airport did close down for a while (probably about 20-30 miles away.) Also the three of us were busy counting the number of wreck cars and SUV's on the side of the highway on the trip back due to the snows.

Now, on to the game!

The Convention Modifications to Cold War Commander

Cold War Commander is a fun and great system. It is design mainly for one on one playing or a couple of players on each side for larger games. But in conventions, most convention players have never played the game system that they attend as they want to try something new or just want to play in scenario that interest them. Also there is generally a time restriction for how long a game can go on as the tables are to be used

by some one else later. So with that in mind, we attacked the way we were going to run this to make it entertaining for everyone.

First, everyone was going to be American players, just like in RAFM's, Charlie Company, rules. 'Combatcolours' was going to run the Viet Cong in the game and I was going to be the narrator and guide to rules and system to the players. Next thing is that ignored the Breakpoint level for both sides. We want the players to keep going for the whole game time slot. Third, the US Army was treated not as 'conscripts' as in the normal system since this was early in the war before the morale of the army started to slip and also so the players could charge VC stands without any restrictions if they want. Fourth, I upped the Command Value of the US by one point. Again, I was reflecting that this operation was rehearsed several times before they executed the plan and also give the players a better chance to do several actions each turn. Finally, the major change was the how the US CO would work. Normally when a Headquarters (HQ) stand fails its first command roll, the CO can immediately take over and keep issuing commands until it fails or stops. But in the game, once a command stand stops ordering commands, it can't start up again later in the turn (example, HQ1, then the CO, followed by HQ2, and then the CO again). So we changed that if a HQ failed its first command roll, the player gets to roll again under the CO's command value, but then it reverts back to the HQ stand. Then the CO can be used by another failed HQ, if needed. Also, for the CO's command roll, the distance from the CO stand to the unit did not matter, only the distance between the units being commanded for modifications to the command roll. The reason behind this is that the US CO is flying around overhead in a Huey and can fly where he is needed and also to keep it simple for the players. The trade off is that the CO can only re-roll for failed first time command rolls.

The Game

The general set up was similar as the last Vietnam game that I posted up on my blog. The pictures of the game table below are to give a rough orientation of directions prior to me going into the background of the game.



The top of the picture is the East board edge and the road heading to Saigon. The bottom of the picture is the West board edge which the road to Ba Cat leads to the north edge of the table. The village is in the northwest corner of the board.



The table looking the opposite direction (top is the west, bottom is the east.)

The scenario of the game is based off of Operation Cedar Falls in 1967, just down sized in scale. Three of the four players had never played in one of our games and never played in a Cold War Commander game. While 'Hostile Contact' had played in our games before, he was great enough to help fill in the fourth player slot so that the others could run a smaller forces and pick up on the rules faster. Two of the US Army players (Mike and Matthew) were running the Air Assault elements. The other two US Army players ('Hostile Contact' and Alan) were each pushing a mechanized column. So just a quick break down of the forces:

Each Air Assault element was a weak infantry company of two infantry platoons. Each platoon had one headquarters (HQ) stand, three infantry squads (stands), and one weapons squad (machine gun stand). The weapons squad was also armed with M72 LAW rockets for bunker busting.

Both mechanized columns were pretty much the same, but with one column were a 'Bull' Plow and two trucks to full fill the battalion's mission. The mechanized columns had one platoon of mechanized infantry (1 HQ, 3 infantry squads, and 1 weapons squad with M72 LAWs) plus their tracks (2 standard M113s and 2 ACAV M113s). To give the column some extra firepower, a M48A3 tank was attached to the platoon.

Off-board, the players had access to an A-1 Skyraider with one load of napalm bombs and another load of cluster bombs, and some regular old iron bombs; an UH-1D gunship; and several tubes of 105mm artillery, but all of this could only be used after a scenario specific conditions were met first...more on that later.

Mission Briefing

“Attention! Officer in the room!” bellowed the Command Sergeant Major. The room fell very quiet after the sound of companies’ officers and non-com’s jumped to attention.

The Battalion Commander of the Up-teenth Battalion stepped in to the command post’s meeting room. *“Be seated. Gentlemen, today we are going into the Iron Triangle and start cutting Charlie’s means of operation out of business. As you know, in Operation Crimp last year, we discovered massive tunnel complexes all around this area. The local villagers are supplying the VC with food and recruits and we have not been able to stop the VC from visiting the villages. MACV has decided that if we can’t stop the VC from visiting the villages, then we will move the villages.”*

“Alpha and Bravo Companies will air lift in near the hamlet of Tien Phu. You will mostly be landing in rice paddies and some open areas. Your primary mission is to secure the local villagers working in the fields, escort them back to their huts and have them grab all of their personal belongs. Charlie Company will be divided in two mechanized columns. One column will be travelling south from Ba Cat to the hamlet on orders to engage any VC relief forces trying to stop the removal of the village. The second column will be travelling from the base camp outside of Saigon and will be escorting the trucks that move the villagers and their belongings out of the area and back towards Saigon. Also, in that column will be a ‘Bull’ Plow from an engineer outfit that will knock down the buildings of the village while both Alpha and Bravo provide area security.”

“There will probably be mostly Regional VC and limited Main Force VC as intelligence believes that a VC battalion is scattered around the area. We don’t know what the VC has in the immediately area, but I can tell you is that he will not be happy once he realizes that we are taking his gravy ticket with us when we leave. “

“One last thing, MACV was very clear on this, there will be no air strikes or artillery strikes until all the villagers are secured and in the village. So grab those villagers fast and get them back to village.” With that the Battalion Commander was finished and the CSM barked out, *“You got thirty minutes till we mount up, get moving! Hoo-Ah!”*

Turn One

Both Captains Mike and Matthew were wondering *“How did I get into this mess”* as the UH-1D’s were flying over the jungle canopy towards the hamlet of Tien Phu. The crew chief’s personal radio hanging on the bulk wall was blaring out *‘Paint It Black’* by the Rolling Stones as they approach the landing zones. Mike’s company touched down to the northwest (1st Platoon) and west (2nd Platoon) of the village. Matthew’s company touched down to the south (1st Platoon) of the village and one platoon further to the southwest (2nd Platoon) near the small bridge that crosses over the irrigation system for the rice fields.

Mike’s 2nd platoon starts advancing to grab some villagers that he saw just south of his landing zone. His 1st platoon secured their LZ and waited orders. As Mike was waiting, a report of a heavy machine gun was heard. On top of the hill just northeast of the village was a VC heavy machine gun team was set up to shoot at any American helicopters that would be checking out the village, but the wily Americans just landed outside of his range!

Matthew's 1st Platoon moved quickly to the north and started to occupy the village. The 2nd Platoon start to send the majority of the platoon north to check out some people they saw in the rice paddies to the south of the village and right next to 1st Platoon's LZ that they just ignored and left alone! One squad from the 2nd moved to check out the little bridge.

Both mechanized columns started to roll in but were not too happy about moving down the jungle roads. (They both only made one successful command roll!)



Alan (commanding the mechanized column on west side of the board – not in this picture) is watching the action as the air assault elements move in to round up the villagers and hold the town. Mike on the other hand is looking over at Mike's column and probably wondering, *"When are they going to start moving?"*

Turn Two

Mike's 1st Platoon started to move eastward just north of the village to move in engage the VC heavy machine gun on the hill. His platoon took some fire and one squad was pinned down. But they were able to suppress the machine gun and forced it to fall back for a while. His 2nd Platoon got the one group of civilians into the village so they could start gathering their belongings.

Matthew's 1st Platoon broke up into two groups, the first was just one infantry squad securing the north half of the village and the second group of two infantry squads and the weapons squad moved south back towards their LZ to check out what it was in the rice paddies. The 2nd Platoon, minus one squad moved up and seized the second group of villagers and also went to check out the mysterious group in the rice paddies...



Capt. Mike pondering his next move while Capt 'Hostile Contact' totally ignoring the fact that his mechanized column is surrounded by VC flags! Towards the bottom middle, Capt. Matthew's 1st Platoon just finished moving an encircling pattern around something in the rice paddies. I wonder, what it could be?...



"Those are not farmers! They're VC!"

The elements of the 1st Platoon start to engage in a brisk and heavy fire fight with two squads of VC that posing as farmers. In the close quarters fire fight, both VC squads were finally destroyed, but at the cost of an infantry squad.

Matthew's 2nd Platoon now moves up and rounds up the other villager's stand. He starts moving them towards the village when the dreaded high pitch whistle is heard... "*INCOMING!*" Two VC mortars in the wood lines to the west of the paddy fields started lobbing mortar rounds on the 2nd Platoon. In an amazing display of Viet Cong marksmanship, the two mortars eliminated one infantry squad with one round of fire! As the mortars are too far away for rifle fire, the 2nd Platoon tries to round up the villagers while under fire.

'Hostile Contact's column starts moving down the road with no flank security and the other dreaded sound to hear, that of "*Whoosh!*" of RPG's were heard coming from the tree line on the south side of the road. The second and third M113's erupt in balls of flame as the infantry squads riding on top of them are thrown all over in mass carnage. Recovering for the ambush, the lead and rear APC's dismount the remaining infantry squad and the weapons squad to move up and start engaging the two ambushing VC squads. The rest of the convoy starts trying to by pass the burning wrecks of two M113s.



Just a fraction of a second before the sound of RPG's being shot off...



And just a few minutes later.

'Hostile Contact's weapons squad and M113 ACAV starts to pour heavy fire into the eastern VC squad, suppressing it. The M48A3 is out of position and can't fire this turn.

On the other side of the battle, Capt Alan overhears on the Battalion commo net that 'Hostile Contact's was ambushed and took heavy casualties. So deciding to be a little bit more cautious, he dismounts his infantry platoon to provide flank security and proceeds down the road slowly looking out for booby traps and ambushes...which was a very good thing!

As the lead M113 ACAV neared the bend in the road, the VC ambush tried to set off a road side bomb...the VC rolled all 'ones' for the attack! It appears that the M113 ACAV drove over the electrical wires and cut them with its tracks!!! Not to be discouraged, the two hidden VC squads in bunkers open fired with rifles and RPGs and hit the M113 ACAV with multiple rounds and RPG rockets which were amazing bounced off of the troops' gear and the angle of the slope on the front armor, but it did crack the driver's periscope causing the driver to stop (suppression). Little did we know then, that this would be the luckiest M113 ACAV in all of South Vietnam! As for the next couple of turns, it was repeatedly hit with RPG rounds but glancing them off with that fine 1.5" thick Aluminum armor!!!



The Luckiest M113 in all of South Vietnam leading the western mechanized column.

Turn Three and Beyond!

Ok, I sort of lost track by now of what happen on what turn...so we will do sort of a general summary of the rest of the game by the player's force.

Capt. Alan continued to methodically attack and destroy the two VC bunkers, including getting the M48A3 up close enough to use its Beehive rounds on the bunkers.



Bunker Busting Alan!

After clearing out the bunkers, Capt. Alan was able to mount up and push on and link up with Capt. Matthew's command. But just before that happen...

Capt. Matthew was finally able to get the last group of villagers in the village to gather their belongings. Finally performing that task, he called up to the Battalion commander in the overhead Huey requesting permission to call in the airstrike on those annoying VC mortars. As the area could now be called a 'Free Fire Zone' permission was granted. In true gaming spirit, why settle for some 105mm howitzers, when you can call in a Skyraider with 'snake and nape' (cluster bombs and napalm bombs). The call was successful and even though the center of the attack deviated, the VC mortars were still in the attack zone...



"Sandy One, this is Bravo Two-Niner, I have a mission for you. I want snake and nape along the tree line just west of my marker" "Roger that, Bravo Two-Niner. Sandy One, out."



"I love the smell of napalm in the morning...it is smell of victory."



Just another gratuitous photo of the 'snake and nape' attack!

Part of 'Hostile Contact's column started to arrive in the village while his dismounted troops, a M113 ACAV, and the M48A3 blazed away with rifles, grenades, machine guns, LAW rockets, and 90mm Beehive rounds...to almost no effect!!! One attack was like 30 dice and a complete miss! Eventually the VC's got tired of shooting or was running low on ammo and decided to '*di di mau*' out of the area. But 'Hostile Contact' finally got one of the two VC stands before they left.

The 'Bull' Plow got to the village and started to doze over the buildings.



The 'Bull' Plow getting ready to knock down the north half of the village.

Mike's platoons provided security to the engineer in the 'Bull' Plow. A couple of VC squads showed up in the woods to the east of the village and Mike's command made short work of them, but not without losing two of his squads.

With that, the VC's decided that they had enough and started to pull out of the area and let the Americans alone.



Capt. Alan's column linking up with Capt. Matthew's command. Hmm, I wonder if 'Hostile Contact' noticed that Alan's command is completely intact?



As the Battalion Commander's Huey watches over the final destruction of the village, the infamous VC sniper, Long Phu, pops up out of a spider holes and takes a shot at the 'Bull' Plow. Missing (yet again), he crawls back into the tunnel complex to hide and reappear some other day.



The mission is complete, time to call in the Huey for a lift back to the base camp.



Beer and BBQ Water Buffalo Time!

Well, I think every one had fun and found it a challenging scenario. Besides having a lot of people drooling over the terrain made by Combatcolours, we received some great praise for being professional and knowing what is the right flavor for the game by Mike, the one air assault player. The reason that this was a big thumbs up was that Mike was in South Vietnam with the Marines in 1969!