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TacOps Gazette 98.01

The publishing rights for the TacOps game title passed from Arsenal Publishing to The Avalon Hill Game Company on 1 September 1997. TacOps versions 1.0.4 and earlier (the versions published by Arsenal) are now out of print and unavailable.

A revised edition of TacOps is now available on CD from Avalon Hill under the title 'TacOps Classic Edition v2.0.0'. Avalon Hill begain shipping TacOps Classic Edition on 13 March 98. Price $19.95 (US) plus postage. Only available by direct order from The Avalon Hill Game Company via 1-800-999-3222, <ahgames@aol.com>, or <http://www.avalonhill.com>.

Below are the major differences between 'old TacOps' and Avalon Hill's revised edition.

Hybrid CDROM containing both Microsoft Windows (Windows 3.1x, Windows For Workgroups 3.11, and Windows95 compatible) and Apple Macintosh (System 7.5 and later) versions of all files.

TacOps Classic game engine v2.0.0. This is the same revised game engine that was recently licensed to the New Zealand Army. It includes additional US, Canada, New Zealand, and Australian units and weapons not previously available - thus it is incompatible with any previous version of TacOps.

Includes all previously released TacOps scenarios and maps, including those that were formerly sold separately as an expansion kit.

Includes an abbreviated user guide and a scenario guide/map index provided in online help format. A paper user guide is not provided but the CDROM does contain a complete, 173 page, user guide in Microsoft Word format that the user can choose to print.

Includes Windows and Macintosh printable versions of maps 1 through 16, 100, 211, 213, 220, and 230. A color version is provided for all these maps. A black and white version is provided for maps 1 through 100. Macintosh versions are in PICT format. Windows versions are in BMP format.

Includes the following extra battle maps:

Map 100 - 6km x 10km, low fidelity map based on the Greek Valley training area in South Korea.

Map 200 - 16km x 10km, low fidelity map of Gagetown training area in Canada.

Map 211 - 15km x 30km, low fidelity map of central corridor at NTC Fort Irwin, grid 3205 to 6119, topographic map scan background.

Map 213 - 15km x 30km, low fidelity map of southern corridor at NTC Fort Irwin, grid 3293 to 6107, topographic map scan background.

Map 219 - 6.5km x 15km, desert maps with 19th Century Fortress and nearby industrial area.

Map 220 - 12km x 15km, version of Map 219.

Map 230 - 11km x 10km, low fidelity map of area near Fort Knox, Kentucky, grid 6292 to 7102, topographic map scan background.

Map 321 - 20km x 30km, low fidelity map of southern Jamaica, grid 4170 to 7089, topographic map scan background, extensive coverage by sugar cane fields coded as being at maximum growth (i.e. woods), has about 25km of ocean coastline.

Map 323 - same 20km x 30km area as Map 321 but with sugar cane fields coded as being at minimum growth (i.e. clear terrain).

Below are new features in the version 2.0.0 game engine that are common to both the Macintosh and Windows versions. [The Macintosh version has a much longer list of features that are new only to the Macintosh game engine - i.e. they were in previous Windows versions but never made it into a previous Macintosh version.]

Increased the game engine's maximum map width limit from 15.6 to 31 kilometers.

Added the following special reports: situation report, spot report, logistics report, arty/air support report, and TRP report. These reports can be viewed on the screen or saved as text files for printing

Added the following New Zealand and Australian units to the game data base: NZ infantry section P10, NZ infantry section P6, AU infantry section P9, Land Rover 90 w auto grenade launcher, Land Rover 90 w heavy machine gun, Land Rover 90 w light machine gun, Land Rover JRA110HD, Land Rover SOV (Special Operations Vehicle) w auto grenade launcher, Land Rover SOV with heavy and light machine guns, Land Rover SOV with light machine guns, Leopard 1A5 Tank, Leopard ARVM (Armored Recovery Vehicle), M113 FSV (Fire Support Vehicle) w turreted 25mm auto cannon, M113 FSV w turreted 76mm cannon, M113 w T50 heavy machine gun turret, M113 w T50 light machine gun turret, and motorcycle.

Added the following OPFOR units to the game data base (some of these new units were available in previous Windows versions): 82mm Mortar Team (dismounted), 120mm Mortar Team (dismounted), 100mm AT Gun (towed), 125mm AT Gun (towed), 2S6 SP AAA/SAM Vehicle, AT3 Sagger ATGM Team, Infantry COP Team (Combat Observation Post - dismounted), Infantry Engineer Squad, Artillery Forward Observer Team (dismounted), MTLB APC, motorcycle, SA7 SAM Team, SA7B SAM Team, T55M M1974 Tank, T55M M1974+ Tank, T62M M1975 Tank, T62M M1975+ Tank, North Korean 1V14/15 ACRV, and North Korean VTT323 IFV.

Added the following US units to the game data base (some of these new units were available in previous Windows versions): LAV Command and Control Vehicle, M119 105mm Howitzer (towed), M163 Vulcan SP AAA, M168 Vulcan AAA (Towed), M198 155mm Howitzer (towed), M551 Sheridan Tank, Infantry COLT Team (Combat Observation/Lasing Team - dismounted), Infantry Engineer Squad, Artillery Forward Observer Team (dismounted), Infantry .50 caliber Machinegun Team (dismounted), and Infantry MK19 Auto Grenade Launcher Team (dismounted).

Added CPX (Command Post Exercise) Umpire mode and features. Selecting or checking the new Options/CPX Umpire Mode menu item enables a new mode of TacOps play called "CPX umpire mode". When CPX umpire mode is enabled, the program will allow most of the options and scenario editing menu items that are normally disabled after the setup turn to be used in any orders phase. Examples: Add One Unit, Add Optional Units, Change Air Support, Change Artillery Support, etc.

When CPX umpire mode is enabled, a unit can be instantly shifted from one map point to another in any orders phase. Units to be moved are selected by holding down the shift key while clicking on a unit marker or by drag selecting a group of markers. Once one or more unit markers have

been selected, a subsequent click on an empty spot on the map will result in the selected units instantly being moved to that point.

When CPX umpire mode is enabled, the Options/Delete Unit menu item can be used during any orders phase to remove a unit from play. The unit is administratively removed as if it never existed. In other words - no wreck marker is drawn, the numbers in the game status report don't show that the unit was ever in play, and the opposing force does not get credit or points for the elimination that unit.

When CPX umpire mode is enabled, the Options/Kill Unit menu item can be used during any orders phase to remove a unit from play as if it had been destroyed in the previous combat turn. In other words - a wreck marker is drawn (if the unit is vehicular), the numbers in the game status report show that the unit started the game but was eliminated in action, and the opposing force gets full credit or points for the combat related elimination of that unit.

When CPX umpire mode is enabled, the Options/Preferences menu item can be used during any orders phase to change the maximum normal visibility limit and or the maximum thermal visibility limit.

When CPX umpire mode is enabled, units can be joined even if they are farther apart than the customary limit of 100 meters.

When CPX umpire mode is enabled, units can be manually loaded even if they are farther from the transporting vehicle than the customary limit of 200 meters.

When running in CPX umpire mode, the Game Run Out menu item is available after the end of the first combat turn in two-players-on-one-computer-mode as well as for solitaire mode. Due to program constraints, this menu item can not be available for PBEM mode or for the network modes.

When running in CPX umpire mode, two engineering menu items are now available in the Options Menu- Delete Minefields and Delete Entrenchments.

Added an instructor mode for saving and loading of saved games. If the first character of the blue force password is an asterisk (*) then that is a flag that the saved game file is an instructor prepared saved game. Such a saved game file can be loaded and played by a student without the student having the instructor's password but all options relating to altering the game will still be password protected.

Entrenchments, minefields, and artillery registration points can now also be added to a scenario by using the Options Menu/Add One Unit menu item

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I guess 'the word' travels slowly in all armies <g>. I have gotten several requests recently from New Zealanders wanting to order or wanting info on TacOps Classic. Although I hate to turn down your money - if you are an active or reserve member of the New Zealand Army then you should be able to get a free copy of TacOps Classic Edition from a local military unit - under the title 'TacOpsNZ'. In January the New Zealand Army bought a license that allows it to freely duplicate and issue the game to all its members. Let me know if that applies to you and I'll send you the email address of the New Zealand Army staff officer who is handling the NZ Army license and NZ Army distribution.

<<...how to build a effective defense in the CRAIG scenarios? ... what is the best use for the LAV 25 IFV? Too weak for long distances, cannonfodder at point-blank range.>>

Use the LAV25s to ambush OPFOR APCs - preferably from the flanks and or rear. You can win the CRAIG scenarios just by killing most of the OPFOR APCs. The autocannon on the LAV25 can chew up BTRs and BMPs from all aspects at close and medium range. If you can find a way for the LAV25 to get a rear shot it can also kill tanks.

<<how to use air strikes in the MAP.001 scenarios? destroyed OPFOR troop transports just drop of too much SAMs!>>

Hold your airstrikes until later in the game when OPFOR has been somewhat attrited. Work over SAM sites agressively with mortar and arty HE fire - especially in the turns leading up to an airstrike - suppressed SAMs have a greatly reduced chance of acquiring an air target. Use airstrikes mainly when OPFOR makes the mistake of grouping a lot of tank or APC markers close together or when you find a company of tanks or APCs still traveling as a company sized marker. In US Marine Corps scenarios (the Marines are usually weak in the area of mobile, heavy anti armor weapons that can deal with tanks), you might consider conserving your airstrikes for use only against tanks - leaving the APC targets to your ground forces. You might consider using your airstrikes in mass - i.e. present more air targets than the SAMs can effectively engage.

<<The units look like very thin paper counters in a board wargame. It's sort of hard to believe that these graphics would be offered in a game released in 1998.>>

I don't remember getting a memo from the game gestapo indicating that traditional square unit markers could not be used in computer games anymore after a certain date <g>. I think that traditional square or oval unit markers are more useful for communicating game relevant information in a crowded environment than photo realistic markers. I intend to continue using the traditional marker format in my stuff.

<<What does PBEM mean?>>

Play-by-email. TacOps players can play two player games by exchanging binary 'orders files' as attachments to email notes. Some people carry on games for weeks at a time this way.

<<... would love to see airborne artillery a.k.a the BUFF [B-52] in the game!>>

Easy enough to replicate. If you feel the need for mass destruction just use the Options menu to give yourself some MLRS salvos and pretend they are B52 strikes - a dead grid is a dead grid.

<<What is the relation between the saved game file and the play by mail orders file?>>

The play by mail 'orders file' only contains information on the forces and move orders of the sender. The game file is a complete 'snapshot' of all variables required to restore the game to where is was at the instant that the game was saved. TacOps uses both an orders file (sent to your opponent) a saved game file (never sent to your opponent) because it allows the orders file to be smaller and it simplifies the program checking for 'cheating' behaviors during PBEM games.

<<If my opponent and I are sending only play by mail orders back and forth, how are these random factors accounted for? Will his equivalent game turn see the exact same event at the exact same time?>>

Yes. In play by mail mode, the US player's computer generates an array of random number seeds when it saves every US orders file. That array of numbers is included in the US orders file. When the OPFOR computer reads a US orders file, it stores that array of random number seeds in memory and those are what are used by the OPFOR computer for the next combat turn - just as they are used by the US computer for the next combat turn. Thus when either computer pulls a random number during the combat turn, the same number will be pulled on both computers.

<<I figured: what the hell, I've got airborne platforms with 24 machine guns (2 ea on 12 helos)- let's go kill some rear area troops on the objectives. No matter what pattern I flew, over or around the enemy inf. squads, the transport helo's waist guns would not engage ground targets - ever. I ran several tests later, all of which proved that door gunners won't engage ground targets.>>

They will engage but the circumstances have to be just right. The current probabilities in TacOps make transport helo waist/door guns fairly useful while they are entering, are inside, or are leaving an LZ. They make transport helo waist/door guns very ineffective or dangerous to use in other situations. The problem (if this really is a problem <g>) is that in TacOps, direct fire weapons currently only engage targets that they have a reasonable chance of hitting and harming. In TacOps, situational modifiers are applied to transport helo waist/door guns that make them extremely inaccurate/ineffectual unless the helo is landed or hovering and the ground target is very close to the helo (i.e. the common situation in an LZ). Your transport helos did not engage the ground targets for you because the game engine deduced that at the instant they did not have an adequate potential for getting significant effect on the ground target. Sending UH-60's on ground strafing missions can be done in TacOps just as it can be done in real life, however in order to do so you are going to have to put the helo within effective small arms range of the intended target and you are going to have to be willing to trade a lot of your expensive, hard to replace helos for a few of your enemy's easy to replace infantry squads.

<<Is there any practical way to stop TacOps Bradleys from reloading their TOWs unrealistically quickly?>>

I don't think the reload time for the Bradley's is unrealistic but alternate testimony is welcome - as always <g>. The TacOps game engine tracks the ammo and reload status for every TOW launcher in a Bradley unit marker - i.e. if there are 10 Bradleys in a given unit marker then the ammo and reload status is tracked for each of the 10 TOW launchers. A Bradley TOW launcher contains two rounds. In TacOps, a launcher's two rounds can be fired in semi rapid succession but the firing of the second round will not occur until a delay has been assessed for the time of flight of the first round plus a 5 to 15 second delay for target reacquisition. Once the second round hits or misses its target then the launcher will be out of service for at least two minutes for reloading. I was initially given the two minute value for TOW reloading by a Bradley gunner and it has been blessed by a couple of mech officers.

<<Or am I wrong in assuming it actually takes several minutes and that during the time after a platoon fires off all its initial TOWs and is frantically reloading it is, shall we say, a sitting duck?>>

You are correct in your assumption - if the unit fails to withdraw to a covered position after every launcher in the unit marker has fired its two missiles then it is a sitting duck for a couple of minutes. I have received a fair number of saved games from folks as 'bug reports' where they had a platoon of Bradleys or LAVs that was wiped out by OPFOR 'without firing a shot'. Upon inspection, in every case, the Bradleys or LAVs had fired all their missiles in a previous turn and were in effect reloading in plain sight of the enemy because the player had failed to have them 'shoot and scoot'.

<<Will any future TacOps expansions be usable with the old Arsenal published version?. Is TacOps Classic v2.0.0 compatible with older versions.>>

No and no. The Arsenal game engine had been stretched about as far as it could be with updates, hacks, and patches. It was overdue for a major rewrite. This won't be relevant to the average user but I rewrote a lot of the new edition (I did not code the majority of the original PC version) to simplify and rationalize the data structures used in the map and scenario files in the hope that a third party will someday hack out a public domain map making utility and possibly a public domain scenario making utility. Several weeks ago I cleaned up several of my personal tools and I used them to hack together a non hostile (but not exactly user friendly <g>) map making utility for the Mac version and I released that to quite a few folks as a public domain item complete with source code. At the same time I offered to publish specs that might make that possible for someone else to do for the PC version but I probably won't be able to actually do that until I get TacOps98 back on schedule again.

<<Major, are there any changes in the Avalon Hill edition compared to the one that was distributed by Aresenal?>>

Yes. TacOps Classic v2.0.0 includes the scenarios and maps that were formerly seperately published as an expansion kit. It has some more US and OPFOR units and has Australian and New Zealand units courtesy of the New Zealand license. LAN network mode works better. There is an 'extras folder' with some new large maps such as two, 30km by 15km, low fidelity representations of NTC Ft Irwin. A CPX Umpire mode of play with printable reports (sitrep, spotrep, etc) and assorted 'god tools'. No new scenarios - unless you never bought the expansion kit.

<<Does this new version of the game add any rules which will encourage a player to keep his companies & battalions grouped in a realistic way? (e.g., command & control rules, morale rules, etc.)>>

By my way of thinking (not always correct <g>) TacOps never discouraged or prevented a player from doing that. I didn't add anything new to TacOps Classic Edition that is related to command & control or morale.

<<Are you going to continue supporting the Apple Macintosh computer.>>

I intend to continue to code for both the Mac (MacOS only, not Rhapsody) and for Windows95 - maybe things will work out - maybe they won't.

<<I need a tactical primer ...>>

Below are some tactical primers that you might actually be able to find in a local bookstore.

"Armor Attacks" and "Infantry Combat" (large format paperbacks) by LtCol John Antal.

The following books are fiction paperbacks but for modern weapons and tactics info they are as good as a lot of nonfiction works: "Team Yankee", "Sword Point", and "Bright Star" all by Harold Coyle, and "Red Storm Rising" by Tom Clancy.

Or call the Marine Corps Association at 1-800-336-0291 and order their book called "Mastering Tactics" by Major John F. Schmitt, USMCR. $11.95 for Association members and $14.95 for non-members. This is a 8 1/2" x 11" work book that breaks down 15 of the Tactical Decision Games that appear every month in the Marine Corps Gazette. The scenarios cover everything from squad to battalion level engagements with detailed maps and the book includes an excellent Table of Organization for the USMC.

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<<Are the supply points used by a unit for a certain level of supply dependent on the item being supply (all else being equal)? I would think that the more complex the weapon or ammunition is, the more supply points it would take up to supply a unit of a given size.>>

In general the more complex the weapon/ammunition is, the more supply points it will cost to resupply a unit of a given size. Inside the game engine, each type of ammo has its own resupply cost - stated in supply points per round or per 100 rounds. The resupply cost for ammo items varies proportionally to the dollar expense to manufacture an item, the likely availability or scarcity of an item in a forward battle area, the amount of transport and effort required to move an item around (weight and bulk), the amount of effort required to unpackage or otherwise ready an item for immediate use, and similar factors.

<<I've played the Gallagher 6 scenario a few times and although I've won every time I end up with hardly any tanks or brads left at the end of the scenario. Sometimes I have to use my Arty battery to ambush OPFOR BMPs at the end.>>

Try doing the reverse - use your arty first/early in the game and preserve your ground units for use later, i.e. after the enemy formations have been weakened and broken up some.

<<How do I get my units to back up into low ground instead of exposing their ass end to the enemy when they displace?>>

Hold down the Control key (option key on the Mac) as you click a 'way point' on the map. When the unit later executes that move order, it will do so 'in reverse', thus keeping its front to the enemy as it 'backs up'.

<<By the same token I took your advice and set the SOP for most of my units to back up 200m when they receive enemy fire. The problem is every time they get attacked they don't back up. When I check the SOP the button to back up is not highlighted anymore.>>

They should begin to move back right after they are fired on but they may not cover very much ground before the 60 second turn is over. Also, whenever a unit executes an SOP order, that SOP setting is cleared so it would be proper for the buttons to be unchecked the next time you look at them if the unit did start to execute an SOP order.

<<Along the same lines I positioned my tanks so that they would be about 2000m from the lead enemy units when they entered my EA's and set their range to two thousand so they wouldn't just start firing and reveal their position. Every time my tanks get in contact though their range reverts back to 3200 and their shooting at everything and get themselves killed. Apparently they don't like my orders and are revolting, or is it part of the game, and why?>>

Units that have been given engagement range limits automatically revert to their maximum useful range when (1) they fire their first shot or (2) they receive enemy fire. In both situations the unit has probably been spotted and the most reasonable course of action (from a game design stance) is to then allow it its full range for the rest of that combat turn. If it is still around when your next orders phase occurs, you can give it a new range limit if you want.

<<...should I use recon infantry by driving them up and unloading them in a strategic position?>>

Yes - if you can do so without any chance of their being observed while enroute to or while occupying the strategic position. A recon unit is no good if the enemy knows where it is - arty usually makes short work of them in such situations. It might be better for you to settle for setting up your observation and recon screen farther back (i.e. to the west) so that you can be sure that they get into position unobserved. Heck ... in the case of map 1, you have 15 kilometers to play with. Don't get hung up on trying to keep the enemy from gaining some ground. Let him have all the ground that he is willing to pay for. Cheerfully let him bleed across the whole length of it if necessary <g>. Once you kill the last BMP you can have all that ground back just by holding a parade <g>.

<<Once you see the enemy, put smoke between him and your main defensive position (not on the enemy, he'll just drive thru it)..>>

It can also be useful to put smoke directly on advancing units - if you mix in an ICM volley from a second arty unit. Units slow down while in smoke and thus become somewhat easier to engage with arty.

<<My question is how do I establish a Forward Observation position, or Ambush when my forces cannot see outward from a slope!>>

There is a 'magic' zone along the 'uphill' side of the TacOps elevation contour line. The contour line in most TacOps maps is a dark green line that separates high ground from lower ground. The zone is about ten screen pixels wide (a hundred meters more or less). If the center point of a unit marker is in that zone, then that unit can see both high ground in all directions and can also see the low ground that falls away from the nearby contour line. In other words, if you position a unit marker just 'uphill' of a contour line then that unit can observe both high and low ground.

<<I'm in the midst of setting up a game using the Canada.scn template and map 100 and I am wondering if there is any way that forces can be designated as "off map" and have an arrival time set for them or do all forces have to start on map in this case.>>

At present there is no way to designate units as "off map" and have them enter with a delayed arrival time. Some players use a workaround which is to place such units on the map during the startup turn, near a map edge but behind a hill or in the middle of woods so that they can not be seen and so that they can not spot and with the engagement ranges of any SAM units set to zero so that they will not fire on distant airstrikes. Later - at the desired time - they are 'put into play' simply by giving them orders that move them out of their obstructed position.

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<<Can Mac and Windows players play on a network or by email now?>>

I believe that the Mac and Windows versions of TacOps Classic Edition can now play each other via play-by-email but I am not going to guarantee it or list it as a feature until it has been proven out in the real world. Cross platform play has been tested by myself and others but it was such a bear to implement that I can't help but be cautious about it. They definitely can not play each other across a LAN or across the Internet unless you use the network simply as a means to pass play-by-email files.

<<... regarding spotting ... are vehicles more/less visible when on different terrain types, or are only terrain features taken into account here?>>

The rougher the terrain the less visible are all units (more relevant before they start moving or firing, less relevant after) - also harder to spot, and harder to hit by direct fire. Woods or town adds an additional reduction to that provided by any present roughness level.

<< I have four Jamaica maps that for the life of me I can't tell apart... Which of the four maps would be used for which situation?>>

These maps are in the 'extras' folder. A short description of each map in the folder is in the text file titled 'MapIndx.txt' which is also in that folder. Note that some of these maps are very large - 16 meg systems may not be able to load or display them.

Map 321. Low fidelity map of area in Jamaica. Grid 4170 to 7089. Topo map scan background. Extensive coverage by sugar cane fields (yellowish areas) marked as being at maximum growth (woods).

Map 321. 16 color version of map 321. [Mac version does not have this map.]

Map 323. Low fidelity map of area in Jamaica. Grid 4170 to 7089. Topo map scan background. Extensive coverage by sugar cane fields (yellowish areas) marked as being at minimum growth (clear).

Map 324. 16 color version of map 323. [Mac version does not have this map.]

The 16 color versions of the Jamaica maps are very blurry but the user who originally requested these maps needed these versions for some older, low memory computers.

<<Which of the four maps would be used for which situation?>>

Use map 321 if you want to fight on a map that offers very poor movement and almost no long range lines of sight. Use map 323 if you want more open/clear terrain. Use the 16 color versions if you don't have enough memory to use the 256 color versions.

<<I seem to recall (imperfectly, yes) the Major remaking in an old TacOps Gazette (remember those?) that units moving over open terrain "wink" in an out of view to simulate minor irregularities in the ground.>>

I don't think they randomly wink out when traveling over clear terrain. I think that only applies for travel through the levels of rough.

<<I have a PC that I usually keep at 1024 X 768 pixels. That seems pretty small when playing TacOps. Should the screen be at 640 X 480 or 800 X 600?>>

Before you run TacOps, you should use your Windows desktop screen properties menu item (left click on the desktop to summon it) to set the screen resolution to what you prefer to look at. I did a survey last year and most people seemed to prefer 800x600 on 14 and 15 inch monitors. I have a very clear and bright 17 inch monitor so 1024 X 768 pixels is my preference.

<<Should the game take care of setting the screen resolution ...>>

Not in my opinion. I think that screen resolution is something that should be left to the user to decide based on his personal preferences and his screen size - and I think it should be controlled from the Windows desktop rather than from within a running program. One of my pet peeves is the way a lot of programs arbitrarily pick a screen resolution for me and then force me to use only their choice. I didn't invest in a sharp, 17 inch monitor just so that stuff could be big and blocky looking - I wanted more actual width and height.

<<How do I use the medical units? Is there a special use for the command element? M577 Command Post M548 Load Carrier M88 ARV M578 ARV M977 HEMTT Cargo M978 HEMTT Fuel...>>

Those units have no special capabilities in the game. They were provided mostly to serve as placeholders at the request of military users who wanted to represent support units in CPXs. The M577 is a tracked command vehicle. The M548 is a tracked cargo carrier. The ARVs are Armored Recovery Vehicles. A HEMTT is a heavy transport vehicle for cargo or fuel.

<<What is the difference between a corpsman and a medic?>>

None other than the name. Noncommissioned medical personnel in the army are called medics - in the Navy they are called corpsmen. Medical personnel in US Marine Corps units are provided by the US Navy.

<<Is there a special use for the sniper and recon teams?>>

They are able to spot enemy units at greater ranges than other units. They are much harder to spot than are other units. They usually hit and kill one person per shot for any personnel target that they engage. They usually won't be spotted if they fire for only one minute or less and then move to another location.

<<What is the game purpose of the M113 PPS5 Radar?>>

It can see through smoke.

<<M113 FIST-V?>>

This is a specially equipped arty observation vehicle. If it has a clear line of sight to the impact of a friendly arty salvo, the accuracy of the next salvo on the same target will be increased by two levels rather than just one.

<<Canadian M113 w ADATS - is this a dual AD and AT?>>

Yes, it fires a missile that is effective against both air targets and ground armor targets.

<<Could anyone tell me exactly what the LAV 25 is good for? Out gunned, out armored, and only four troops per vehicle. I don't get it.>>

It is only out gunned and out armored if there are enemy tanks around. It is excellent for close, direct fire support of infantry vs infantry. It normally carries seven troops - four dismounts and three crew. In a pinch it can carry a couple more inside and a pot full on top. It provides good cross country transport. It is very fast on roads. It is easier and cheaper to maintain than a tank or tracked APC. It can be lifted by heavy helos. A lot of them can be squeezed into/onto amphibious shipping. All things considered, it fits overall Marine Corps doctrinal needs better than available tracked APCs.

<<How do I exit forces from the map?>>

The outermost ten screen pixels of any map edge comprise an exit zone. On most maps, that exit zone is a gray, frame like, border. Order a unit to move onto the 10 pixel wide, gray border that surrounds most TacOps maps. Any unit sitting on that border at the end of a combat phase will exit the map and will be removed from play.

<<As I played the Task Force Fenwick scenario, I noticed that my percent of forces exited remained at 0, even as I was sweeping in and picking my guys up with the transport helos and flying them back to the "off map squares" in the upper and lower left corners of the map.>>

The off map squares that you mentioned are not exit areas. They are artificially contrived administrative safe areas - i.e. places on the map to park your helos until they are needed for actually exiting troops.

<<I would really like to see units identified by company/platoon/squad. I think this would help the 'feel' of the game by giving you an idea of just exactly who it is that is in each fire fight.>>

Select a unit to open its Unit Orders Window. Click on the button in the Unit Orders Window labeled 'Name'. Type in a organizational name for the unit.

<<Correct me if I'm wrong on this... but I'd understood that the smoke in TacOps, when the "does not block thermals" is on, still degrades the Ph of units using thermals to fire into and out of it (but not through blocks of smoke in intermediary areas because of fear of overtaxing the CPU).>>

That is the way it currently works.

<<I've tried splitting units from the setup window without success. Instructions indicate I should be able to do this. Is there a problem with the Windows 3.1 version, or am I just not doing something correctly?>>

There are two ways to split units that are still in the Setup Window - I just did some experiments and I had no problem with either. I ran Basic Training and started with units in the Setup Window. I first selected the M1 tank marker and then I selected the Setup/Split Unit menu item - the M1 tank marker split correctly. I then selected the Setup/Split Unit menu item without selecting a marker first - the cursor turned into a crosshair and I clicked it on top of the LAV marker - the LAV tank marker split correctly.

<<Splitting units ... mounted mech platoon into two mounted sections, rather than splitting unevenly and unloading everyone. The current process requires me to perform multiple split/join/load keystrokes.>>

I won't bore you with all the problems involved with automatic splitting, but I'll give you one example. It is unusual for vehicles to contain consistent, easy to split cargo units. Say you have an AAV marker that represents 11 vehicles carrying a total of 9 rifle squads, 6 machine gun teams, 8 Javelin teams, 6 SMAW teams, 4 60mm mortars, and 2 stingers. You select and split the AAV unit into three markers. Given the mixed load that you started with, the computer can't just automatically divide out the cargo units so that a similar mix ends up in each new AAV marker. Now, assume that the computer did do some sort of automatic distribution of troops when you split a marker. In the above situation you would likely be very interested in which of the new markers had the javelins or some other weapon. You would probably feel compelled to open every marker to reassure yourself about what was in what. Now assume that you don't like the computer's division. Now you are in a situation of having to unload all the markers, do dozens and dozens of splits, joins and reloads to get exactly the mix and loading that you want. I think that the solution that requires the least number of user actions is the correct one.

<<...allow players to edit the various ratings of armor, penetration, gun size, ammo, etc. This could let people check out various "what if?" options.>>

Allowing the player to edit such things could create huge problems for the game engine and for customer support calls. The worst one would be how to deal with the potential situation where the two players of a play-by-email or a network game had 'edited' the unit and or weapons data bases and had edited them 'differently'. Customer support folks would be at a loss for figuring out if a game oddity was due to a bug in the game or due to editing done by the users.

TacOps Gazette 98.05

<<What is going on in the pic that appears in the splash screen of TacOpsCE?>>

A group of Marines are looking at a sand table terrain model. With typical Marine zeal they have painted in the road net and have marked off 2km grid squares with paper, string, and tent pegs.

<<Does TacOps factor in the speed of the target unit for combat resolution?>>

Movement is factored but not speed.

<<What about target size (I'd think an M60 would be a great deal easier to hit than a motorcycle, for example)?>>

Yes.

<<If an ATGM shooter is fired on while the missile is in flight does the chance for a miss go up?>>

Yes.

<<Show unit reports ... How to get unit ID#s in the little boxes to the left of each unit line like there was in that CPX that I was in?>>

Select a unit to open its unit orders window. Click on the button titled 'Name' then enter a name for the unit. That name will now be shown in 'friendly' CPX reports.

<< I just got TacOpsCE yesterday... I noticed that the unit and weapon data structures seem to have grown substantially in size (by 2)...does this mean that unit/weapon functionality has increased...or...does it just reflect a change in data structure organization for the pre-existing features? If the former, what can units/weapons do now that they couldn't before?>>

The change in unit and weapon data structures size has nothing to do with additional unit/weapon functionality. Most of the size increase was due to my changing bit and char sized variables in those structures into short integers. When I first coded TacOps I paid extreme attention to making variable types as small as possible- i.e. no larger than they absolutely had to be to hold the largest possible value that they would ever be asked to hold. Because Macs and PCs store data with different bit ordering, using variables smaller than a short integer added a great deal of complexity to my efforts to enable the Mac and Windows versions to be able to play each other. Using variables no smaller than a short integer simplified the cross platform data transfer issues. Some of the size increase was due to additional unit data that has to be remembered for the Situation Report. Some of the size increase was due to adding data fields to every unit record to handle unusual unit attributes that used to be hard coded as logic exceptions. And etc.

<<Could the collective wisdom of this list explain why 'Unit Value' (Points) is a reflection of lethality Vs cost. Would it not be realistic to build up forces with a dollar restraint rather then a power restraint?>>

Combat power/lethality is what matters at a tactical level not dollar cost. The lethality points have two purposes in TacOps. First, the game uses them to quantify casualty, exit, and or victory points as a means to determine mission accomplishment - depending on the scenario. Second, they are provided as a way to crudely scope the relative combat power ratio between two sides for folks

who like to build custom scenarios. I don't think the dollar cost of a unit would be as relevant or useful a measure of unit combat power in a tactical game.

<< Question... As spotting is every 15 seconds, does this mean that a tank can run up a hill, cross it, and back down the other side (Small hill, or peninsula in this case) or between two clumps of trees or whatever, and not be spotted if they can do it in less than 15 seconds? (which is a lot of time to be out in the open).>>

Yes - in principle - but I don't think it can actually happen very often in practice (at least not simply because of speed) because I don't think there are many places in TacOps maps where there is '15 seconds' or less of open ground between covering terrain. In TacOps a screen pixel equals 10 meters of ground. Since terrain data cells are ten pixels (100 meters) wide, the smallest possible game relevant terrain feature must be at least 100 meters across. In TacOps, max speed for a tank on a road is 40kph or 166 meters per 15 seconds. Max speed for a tank in clear terrain is 125 meters per 15 seconds. Max speed for a tank in all other terrain would be less than 100 meters in 15 seconds. In order for your example to occur you would need to move from the last couple of pixels of a woods or town cell, cross an adjacent clear cell, and then move into another woods or town square. It would be more likely that something like this would occur due to several consecutive spotting die rolls failing - spotting is never guaranteed in TacOps.

<<I noticed that having units in large stacks seems to give better chances of their taking damage (or at least being suppressed). was wondering if they should also be giving a little better chance to damage the enemy when in large stacks as it would be easier to 'mass fire'... I guess I am suggesting that units in large stacks be giving increased fire (slight) to balance this increased risk. Even if it isn't 'realistic' I think it would be valuable from a wargame perspective. Smaller stacks are less likely to take damage (be suppressed) but are less likely to cause damage, large stacks are the opposite - balance.>>

I think an approach like that would be more appropriate to the abstractions of an operational level game than to a good tactical level game. It isn't being done at present but large stacks of units in TacOps really ought to be receiving movement penalties and firing penalties because in real life putting several companies into the same spot would cause confusion, blocked lines of fire, and reduced rates of movement. I never bothered to code these penalties in because my gaming experience indicated that sooner or later most people get taught by enemy air and artillery to not move around in large stacks <g>.

<<...several people asking that units that can't see an enemy unit still be able to be giving orders to fire at/into terrain in order to suppress possible enemy units that might be there. ... 'laying suppressive fire'. ...lay down massive fire on a It really is needed, even if it only has a small chance of suppressing the enemy.>>

On the wish list but be warned that it will have little effect beyond suppression unless carried on for very long periods of time. It will use up a lot of ammunition. A short stroll down memory lane <g>... Telling machine gun sections and sometimes whole rifle platoons to provide supporting/suppressive fire was always a very popular order in training situations in my infantry days. Rarely did the order giver seem to have an appreciation of how much ammo would be required to do what was being planned. As a 2d Lt weapons platoon commander I was often faced with the delicate problem of finding a way to let a fellow platoon commander or even company commander know in the middle of his giving a frag order that (a) with only a couple of thousand rounds per gun that I could not in fact provide 20 or 30 minutes of continuous suppressive fire on an enemy position while he worked his riflemen to the close assault line and (b) that I didn't think it was likely that enemy mortars and arty were going to let me rattle off rounds for that long from one position. This was in the low tech training/pre-MILES days so perhaps this lesson is sooner/easier learned these days. 60mm mortars would have been better for this sort of thing but

company commanders seldom thought about them because they seldom bothered to take them to the field during training due to fear of breaking them and due to lack of personnel to hump them.

<<The other thing about the Spotrep is that they contain only units that are spotted at the time the report is generated, not units that were spotted during the turn and subsequently destroyed or disappeared.>>

That was changed before the release of TacOpsCE for everything except destroyed markers. The Spotrep shows all enemy unit markers (that are still in play) that were spotted at any time in the previous combat turn, even if they are no longer spotted. Units that are still in play but that have become unspotted are reported as being at their last known location. If a spotted unit marker was completely destroyed in the previous combat turn then it will not be shown on the Spotrep. I will try to change this at some point in the future. It was too hard to do when last I looked at it.

<<It would be cool if units that went hull down (and continued to receive hull down orders each turn) for a number of turns improved their defensive positions. Probably, only infantry would get this benefit as they continued to improve their hasty positions. You can do one hell of a lot with an e-tool and " I'm about to be shot at or shelled" motivation in 3-5 minutes.>>

On the wish list but the concept is surprisingly hard to implement accurately (I have made investigatory passes at it before). What can be done with an e-tool is dependent on soil conditions. To be handled accurately every terrain cell in the map would have to have a data base field for 'improveability'. Take the NTC Ft Irwin map - its 'improveability' would vary from areas so soft/sandy that a fighting position basically can't be dug without shoring material to areas so hard that a cratering charge would be needed. Also, I think for 'average' terrain that 15 to 30 minutes is the lowest time for some level of improvement for infantry units beyond what is already handled by TacOps defilade.

<<It is the opinion of myself as well as a small group of players that the kill ratio is unrealistic.>>

The kill ratio in TacOps may be unrealistic for the calm conditions of a garrison training range. I think it is reasonably realistic for combat conditions where gunners are tired and scared, where ammo and equipment has been bounced around for hours or days with little opportunity for care, cleaning, or boresighting, and where targets are not cooperative.

<<Even taking into account the moving and other factors of the fog of war an Abrahms will destroy a T- 55 on the first shot at 300 m!>>

Hitting a target does not always destroy it, not even by the M1.

<<In a game as an example a T55 took 4 hits, returned fire and killed the Abrahms on the first shot!>>

I ran several experiments and I could not replicate this. Sounds like (a) a fluke event and (b) that the T55 was behind the M1. Still, when dealing with probabilities there is always the chance that improbable events will happen.

<<Being in the military myself in a MOS (job billet) that specializes in the TOW missile, I know from personal experience that a Tow fired from a HMMWV at a BMP1 at 2800 meters (at the front even) will kill the BMP 1 WITH NO PROBLEM!>>

I agree - most of the time and assuming that you get a good hit. That is the way it works in TacOps - when TOWs hit BMPs the BMP is generally destroyed. Doesn't always happen though.

<<In the same situation in the game (at 1500 meters though) the missile registered a hit but didn't even damage it ! The specs. on the TOW state that it will penetrate in EXCESS OF 36 INCHES OF HGS!!!>>

Penetration is irrelevant in the unusual situation where you get a hit but you happen hit a fender skirt, or the TOW is a dud, or the TOW is deflected at the point of impact.

<<It is kinda frustrating to those of us who know the real capabilities of the weapons being used in the game are not being accurately portrayed, If the were this game would provide an extremely valuable training tool for us small unit leaders trying to improve our tactical skills to stay alive on the modern battle field.>>

I think the weapons that you have mentioned are quite accurately portrayed. You may be missing the real lesson <g> which is that under combat conditions, shooting doesn't always mean hitting and hitting doesn't always mean killing. A lot of good troops have died over the years because they wrongly assumed that an impressive explosion on a target meant that the target was dead.

TacOps Gazette 98.06

<<How do I use the new 'extra' maps with TacOps?>>

First load one of the custom template scenario files: usarmy.sce, usmc.sce, or canada.sce. As the scenario loads you will be asked to select a map to use.

<<How do I use a different map with a scenario?>>

You can't except for the following scenarios: usarmy.sce, usmc.sce, or canada.sce. All other scenarios are hardcoded to use a specific map. The AI would not know what to do with a different map.

<<I, for one, would like a "replay last turn" so I can see what I missed when called away in the middle of a turn.>>

Restart TacOps. Load the autosave file and run combat. The last turn will be repeated.

<<In a PBEM game, does my opponent get to see what happened from his point of view during my turn? Or do units just magically appear and disappear?>>

Your opponent gets to see what happens from his point of view - his legal point of view. It looks and works exactly the same as in a solitaire game. During a combat phase, a player sees everything that is done by his units but he can't see what is done by enemy units unless he has legal lines of sight to them. TacOps is not an 'I go, you go' game - not even in PBEM mode. TacOps orders phases occur simultaneously for both players and TacOps combat phases occur simultaneously for both players. The simultaneous nature of everything is not always intuitively obvious to folks who have not yet played a game via email or via local area network. Although it may seem like Player A and Player B are taking turns sending out orders files, they are both actually in their orders phase at the same and they are both actually in their combat phases at the same time. A combat phase can not be run unless TacOps has been fed new orders from both Player A and Player B. When Player A manually enters his orders into his computer he is feeding new orders to the game. When he finishes entering his new orders then he loads a file containing his opponents orders for that same turn - thus Player A has now entered orders from both players for the same turn. Player A can now begin a combat phase. Conceptually, while he was doing this, his opponent was doing the very same thing. If this still does not seem clear then the best thing to do is to just try a PBEM game with someone. It makes a lot more sense when you are actually doing it. I wish more people could experience a TacOps game played over a local area network (LAN) - i.e. real time turn exchanges without the lag of the PBEM file upload/download process.. IMHO LAN play is the ultimate way to play TacOps. This can be approached today if two people meet on an IRC chat channel to exchange PBEM files in rapid sequence but it is absolutely a lesser experience to true LAN play.

<<Does it support full turn replay for hotseated and PBEM games?>>

Yes but not in the way that you probably mean. You can't watch an entire game be replayed automatically with 'one click' and you can't watch a one turn replay without saving and quitting the current game session. You can however choose to have the program automatically save every one minute game turn and you can then later reload each of them individually (pick and choose) for a one turn replay.

<<I was hoping to also be able to run a two player game using a serial null-modem cable but I'm not sure if this mode is supported. ... Could you please tell me if a serial game is possible without having to transfer game data manually using a third party data transfer program.>>

I don't know of a way to do it for computers running Windows 3.x . It should be possible for computers running Windows95. The original release of TacOps for Windows had an optional, traditional serial connection mode of play. I eventually removed the feature because so many people could not get it to work. Some of the problem was attributable to the game program but much was due to folks not knowing how to set up their computers for serial communications. In any case it cost me a huge amount of time and effort in trying to teach people how to do serial comms settings.

You probably can use a serial connection (or even a parallel connection) if using Windows95. Under Windows95 the network mode in TacOps does not actually care whether the network is a real Ethernet LAN or if it is a direct cable connection via the serial or parallel ports. TacOps only uses the network to send files - much the same as if you just manually copied/moved a file from a folder on one computer to a folder on the other while using the desktop file manager. If you can setup two W95 computers (prior to running TacOps) so that you have a 'shared' folder that both computers can read from and write to, then you should be able to use the regular TacOps network mode of play. For instructions on how to setup two PCs for this type of network consult your Windows95 documentation. The setup info that you would be looking for is generally in the index of any good Windows95 reference under the title of 'Direct Cable Connection'. I don't think that there was a capability like this in Windows For Workgroups 3.11 but I could be wrong.

Reminder - you can also do a 'face to face' two computer game by having the players use play-by-mail mode. They could save their respective orders files to floppy disk and then simply exchange the floppies across the table. This can be a useful emergency mode for an exercise if for some reason a network card goes down at a critical moment.

<<... what I would like to see is this and other information (such as movement costs and defensive benefits for the various types of terrain) available in quantified form, preferably in the player's manual. This would not only enhance the player's awareness of what is happening as play proceeds, but would permit a degree of intelligent planning in troop disposition and utilization.>>

I don't believe that providing detailed technical details of the game logic would provide any meaningful advantage to a player. If it did then I would feel like I had completely failed at what I have been trying to do. I think a computer wargame should allow the player to intuitively employ his units and weapons as he would in real life without having to know game rules. If the results of doing things the real world way are consistently unrealistic then I think there is a problem with the game and not with the player's command of the game's rules. The same concept should apply as much as possible to the game interface - the giving of orders, instructions, etc should be intuitive rather than rule bound. To me the ultimate compliment would be if someone thought that the best way to learn how to play TacOps was to read an Army Field Manual or a real world battle narrative. Also, a lot of the detail would have to be presented as page after page of tabular information. The data in TacOps is very differentiated by unit and weapon and other factors. The data is not organized in a simplified manner like it would be in a board game. In a board game, in order to keep things manageable for the player, the designer has to minimize as much as possible having small differences between reasonably similar things. In a computer game the designer is almost completely free to tweak and differentiate details precisely because the player does not have to look things up in order to make the next shot or the next move.

I can say with certainty that providing expansive technical detail would produce at least one very negative outcome. My email work load would go through the roof answering quibbles over the interrelationships of the details and their modifying factors <g>.

<<I do not think a disk cache would help, as I tried it and it didn't help me, but worth a try if nothing else works.>>

I have in the past recommended against using a disk cache/virtual memory with Windows 3.x or with an 'older' computer - it slowed my old, low memory, equipment down to a crawl and the hard drive seemed to be constantly grinding away. However once I moved up to a Pentium and installed Windows95 I switched over to using the Windows95 managed disk cache. I don't notice any speed drop and no unusual disk activity. My overall impression is that things in general seem to work better on a new computer running Windows95 if a disk cache is used. In my opinion the best and most economical thing that can be done to improve the performance of any computer is to add more RAM. Moving an older 8 meg machine up to just 16 megs can make an amazing difference.

<<Why do the MBTs fire their main gun at infantry? It seems that it is not very effective.>>

That is just the way that I coded it. OPFOR tanks tend to carry anti personnel (HE) shells for use against infantry. US tanks do not at present carry anti personnel rounds but have carried anti personnel flecheete rounds in the past. I chose to not bother with doing a lot of slow code to differentiate this and just went with the current abstraction.

<<... remember reading a review in cgw a long time ago... looks like the game was lacking moral for combat units? same again or...>>

I did not add any new morale or command/control logic to the TacOps Classic Edition revision. However, units do get temporarily suppressed (loose efficiency in various areas) by accurate fire and by taking casualties. Also, the infantry combat results tables are a bit liberal to reflect some troops conceptually choosing to stop firing or to otherwise remove themselves from harm's way. That level of abstraction did not satisfy the magazine reviewer that you spoke of but it has satisfied most users.

<<How does one setup Direct modem play. I have played network and PBEM but would love to get a real turn game going by modem. any suggestions.>>

TacOps does not have a built in capability to administer a direct modem connection, however a workaround follows. Use a 'stand alone' modem comm program to dial up and establish a direct link with your opponent. Once you have a link going whereby you can type lines of text back and forth then you probably also have all the link that you need to send files back and forth. At this point switch the comm program into the background (it should continue to administer the phone link with your opponent even while running in the background) and startup TacOps as if you were going to do a play-by-mail game. Do your setup, give your orders, and then save your orders file to disk. Switch TacOps into the background and bring your modem comm program into the foreground. Use the comm program to transmit your orders file (the one you just saved to disk) to your opponent. Once he gets the file, he will load it into TacOps just as if he was doing a play-by-mail game. You opponent will do his orders and send them to you in the same manner. Both of you can now run combat turns. Repeat above until exhausted <g>.

<<How do I deal with settling in a reconnaissance unit, and dig 'em in so they are as invisible as recon can be?>>

At present, TacOps does not model the best possible concealment capabilities of real world recon units.

TacOps Gazette 98.07

<<... TacOps is turn based ...>>

That needs a bit of qualification <g>. When I hear 'turn based', I think of the traditional 'I go - you go' system of board games. TacOps does not work that way. TacOps used (and TacOps98 will use) a modified turn based system. The game advances in one minute turns but movement and combat occur simultaneously for both players as does the giving of orders to the unit markers. The game pauses each minute to allow both players to enter unit movement orders and to fiddle with things like engagement ranges, priority of fires, call for air or arty support, etc. Once both players have finished their orders, the game runs one combat turn representing one minute. The units of both sides then move and fight simultaneously under computer control for one minute.

<<Does TacOpsCE work with MacOS 8?>>

TacOps Classic Edition works fine under MacOS 8 and under MacOS 8.1. I have personally run it under both systems.

<<Can you change the map scale now (i.e., zoom in and out)?>>

No.

<<Having the fixed scale was a real problem in the original, especially for things like trying to decide if you were in the woods or not.>>

Just visualize the center point of the unit marker. The center point determines a unit's game location for all combat and movement resolution.

<<How strict is the Sys. 7.6 requirement for Mac? Will it not run at all under say 7.5.5, will run with downloadable add-ons from Apple, or might run but no guarantees.>>

The program does not draw on any special System INITs or extensions so it should be OK under 7.5.5. The main reasons I said 7.6 were (a) to get away from any surviving black and white Macs and (b) Apple fixed a lot of lingering System 7 bugs when it released 7.6.

<<Can this be used with helicopter launched Hellfires to provide laser targeting?>>

Not at present.

<<I find that many units fire at the "wrong" targets. For instance, I once watched my LAV based anti-tank unit (the one with the TOW system) picking off BMP after BMP when it had visible to it a similar Red Force unit. On the next round the red unit fired back and destroyed the AT vehicle.>>

I don't see a problem with an LAV anti-tank unit engaging BMPs - BMP are very deadly units to an LAV. Units in TacOps, in general, automatically engage the closest enemy target that the unit is capable of harming. The user can override that default behavior if he wishes by using the priority targeting buttons in the Unit Orders Window.

<<Do you have any suggestions on how to deal with this issue?>>

No. I think the current default firing behavior provides the most realistic response for the majority of tactical situations.

<<Details....I like details. I assume TacOps has got them, and in spades. True?>>

I have been criticized for including too much detail and I have been criticized for not including enough <g>.

<<I've heard that the game is being used as a training aid in various armed forces. This would appear to indicate to me that it has a high degree of realism. Opinions?>>

TacOps has gotten good marks for realism except from some folks who are big fans of morale and restrictive command and control gaming concepts. As for the military users ... TacOps has had quite a few military buyers and continues to be of some interest in the military market due to its ability to work well on older computers. The New Zealand Army contracted in December 97 for an internal distribution license that will permit them to copy and issue TacOps Classic Edition v2.0.0 to every regular and reserve member of their Army. The US Marine Corps is supposedly in the process of contracting for a similar license (I'll believe it when I see the check <g>). Other militaries are currently evaluating the utility of such a license. Some schools and units in the Canadian Army, Australian Army, US Army, and US Marine Corps have used various earlier versions of TacOps in training courses for NCOs and junior officers to illustrate tactical principles and situations and to stimulate classroom discussion in tactical seminars. A US Army intelligence training course for junior officers used an earlier version to illustrate the build up of forces that would occur in a typical Soviet style, Motorized Rifle Regiment march to contact versus a mobile defense. A US Marine Corps infantry regiment has used TacOps to administer map exercises. The commander of a US Army armored battalion in Korea used an earlier version of TacOps in monthly training sessions for his NCOs and junior officers to illustrate tactical situations and to promote discussions on tactical principles and tactical problem solving. One or two Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) units have used TacOps to introduce high school students to tactical principles. A Canadian training mission to Jamaica recently used a version of TacOps to umpire a two or three day map exercise for junior officers/cadets. A US Army National Guard training unit has used a version to administer staff exercises for Reserve mech infantry battalions.

<<Is it playable by email?>>

Very much so. The game engine was designed with PBEM in mind.

<<I don't particularly care about graphics...>>

TacOps maps are very plain - they are meant to look like simplified paper topographic maps. The user interface - windows, dialogs, etc - is very plain because it was designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. The design priority was to show as much map as possible rather than wasting screen space on decorative borders and seldom used buttons, icons, etc.

<<I hate 'real' time games, but am aware that TacOps utilizes a si plot/si move system.>>

The game is played in simultaneous one minute turns. Each turn consists of two phases: an orders phase and a combat phase. In the orders phase you (and your opponent) give orders to your units using buttons in windows and by tracing the intended movement of your units with mouse clicks on the screen - but the units don't actually move until the combat phase. Each unit can have a maximum of 20 stored orders plus a panel of unit SOP settings. This allows you to provide fairly sophisticated route and disposition instructions for each unit. Once all orders have been given, the combat phase begins. During the combat phase the units of both forces, under computer control,

simultaneously carry out their orders for movement and combat for one scale minute. You only observe during the combat phase; you can not give or change orders until the next orders phase. Units move and fight during the combat phase according to their programmed orders and SOPs.

<<Oh yes...is it true that the Major is working on Panzers East for Avalon Hill and that the game will be similar in nature to TacOps?>>

That is true.

<<Speaking of contours, I assume the elevated areas in TacOps are large "plateaus" not "hills"? The only slope is at the contour it self.

That is correct - at present. A literal translation of the current TacOpsCE high ground terrain would be pancake like mesas with 100 meter wide beveled edges.

<<Is this a more accurate reflection of reality or a limitation of the software.>>

It is driven by limitations of the original game engine. When the current TacOps elevation engine was first coded, 'average' PC and Mac CPUs were still at the 30 to 40Mhz level. They were not fast enough to allow adequate game performance with more than two or three terrain elevations - I did try more. A different elevation engine is now possible but it can not be added as a free update to the current program - the ripple effects of providing a more realistic terrain system are just too great to deal with in any way other than putting out a whole new box.

<<I admit I like the way it plays (and plan to adopt something similar for future miniature games I play) I am just wondering how accurate it is.>>

I think the two level approach is accurate enough for replicating the most critical elevation related aspects of ground combat - i.e. line of sight blocks due to elevation change, influence of elevation changes on maneuver and lanes of fire, reverse slope defense, importance of defending along the military crest of high ground, etc. However it begins to prove inadequate very rapidly when you start trying to simulate real world areas that people are familiar with and that have a lot of sharply varying and or extreme elevation changes. For example - the Ft. Irwin National Training Center.

<<Judging from Avalon Hill's advertising, they are selling "Classic" TacOps as a one-off "special" to be followed by TacOps98.>>

Actually Avalon Hill plans to keep TacOps Classic in their catalog even after the release of TacOps98. 'Old TacOps' has a pretty good following for a game that never really made it into the big time and it runs well on a lot of older computer setups. Windows 3.1 and older computers are still surprisingly relevant among military and foreign users - we have several militaries working on licensing TacOps Classic. TacOps98 on the other hand will require Windows95 and a much heavier computer - probably at least a late model 486 with plenty of memory. TacOps98 could also prove to be too complex for the tastes of too many casual gamers. In which case it is possible that there could end up being two TacOps game lines - Classic for the beer and pretzels gang and TacOps98 for the grognards. If I had the time and money to do so I would have someone else take over the Classic engine and keep putting out scenario and map expansion kits for it while I focused on TacOps98.

TacOps Gazette 98.08

<< I'm curious about TacOps CPXs. They sound like a lot of fun. How are they conducted? I've always wanted to participate in one of these but never understood how they work.>>

Below is one way that it has been done ...

While a CPX is underway, only the umpire is running TacOps on a computer. The players do not run or even need to have the TacOps program. The umpire uses the TacOps program to control and generate the maneuver and combat results aspects of the CPX. The players participate by exchanging Internet email and Internet IRC chat messages with the umpire and with each other. Each player tracks his part of the war using only paper notes and a paper situation map.

One to two weeks before the CPX the umpire publicly announces what TacOps map will be used and a general starting situation. The players then print that map and organize themselves into US and OPFOR teams complete with a command structure. Once the teams have been organized, the umpire then privately provides additional info and a mission to the US commander and does the same for the OPFOR commander. The force commanders then develop battle plans with their volunteer subordinates.

On a Saturday or a Sunday the umpire and the players gather on specified Internet IRC chat channels and the CPX begins. Normally there is an admin channel that everyone monitors, a private channel just for the umpire and the US team, and a private channel just for the umpire and the OPFOR team. Each team privately gives its starting orders and intentions to the umpire (usually in military terms rather than game terms). The umpire then enters his interpretation of the players instructions into the TacOps game and he executes one or more TacOps turns. As significant events occur on the umpire's computer, he sends a summary of the action to the players and he gives them an opportunity to ask questions, to state new orders, to call for arty and air support, to reorganize their forces, etc. The umpire then again enters his interpretation of the players instructions into the TacOps game and he executes one or more TacOps turns. This cycle repeats until the game is over or until everyone is exhausted.

<<If we can't get a release date for TacOps98, how about some screen shots on the Avalon Hill Web page?

The problem with putting out screen shots is that what I have right now is ugly as hell <g>. I have an apparently eccentric approach to game coding - I start by coding and debugging the game engine and then towards the end of development I grudgingly start worrying about trying to make things pretty.

<<By the way, what kind of system requirements will TacOps98 require?>>

Windows95 or Mac System 7.5/newer, 256 colors (or 256 shades of gray for notebook users), somewhere between 16 and 32 megs of RAM, 90 MHz CPU will probably be tolerable - more than 133mhz would be overkill. Just about anything sold in the last two maybe three years ought to be OK. Memory will be much more important than CPU speed - some of the maps are likely to be huge. So far I have not needed to use DirectX drawing routines (I don't want to use them if I can avoid it) but I will probably end up using DirectX sound routines. By the way, I am coding the map so that it will display according to what the user wants in the way of screen resolution (i.e. similar to the approach used in old TacOps). By that I mean that if you set your screen to 800 x 600 or 1000 x whatever then you will see more map rather than more detail. Pet game peeve ... I

didn't shell out for a 17 inch monitor just so that everything could get bigger and blockier <g> - I got it to see more map!

<<When, if so, would you expect TacOps to operate at a level ...>>

Me being satisfied with TacOps? I do not expect that to ever happen.

<<What I am interested to know is if there are any plans to develop the game engine in the mentioned direction. If there are any such plans, when would you estimate them to be implemented?>>

I want to and I intend to increase the fidelity of the TacOps game system but I can't afford the luxury of having a detailed plan of how and when it will be done. I don't have a nice neat milestone chart linking specific concepts and blocks of code to completion dates. What I do have is a long list of items to add to the game that I and others think will improve it. I will add what I can from that list, in the time available between those periodic points in time when I have to stop coding and sell something in order to keep going.

<<If not, what are the main reasons?>>

There are only two that matter - niche market and lack of money.

<<My question is : Which web sites do you recommend for info and to find other PBEM players?>>

http://www.feist.com/~chimera
http://www.delectables.com/tacops/tacops.html
http://www.avalonhill.com

You might also subscribe to the TacOps mailing list. It is about to have to find a new list server but it will be up at its current address for at least two more weeks. To subscribe to the TacOps mailing list, send a message body of "subscribe TacOps" to majordomo@lists.stanford.edu

<<I'm having trouble reloading saved games in the PC version.>>

In order for the Windows version of TacOpsCE v2.0.0 to reload a saved game, the saved game file has to be located in the same folder as its scenario. I know that is a dumb way for it to work but it happened as a side effect of my fixing a file loading bug at the last minute before release and it slipped through the final testing. If you want to really simplify things for the Windows version of the game engine, move all the scenario and map files out of the folders that the installer created for them and just put them all into the TacOpsCE folder, at the same directory level as tacops.exe. Some folks don't like the clutter of this approach but you will never again have to surf through the various folders for a scenario or a map.

<<This does not apply to fire and forget weapons, such as Javelin, correct?>>

In TacOps, the Javelin ATGM travels fast enough that a gunner firing from a previously unspotted position will probably not be fired at before his missile hits. Technically the game engine does not bother with 'fire and forget' for the Javelin but the game effect works out as if it did.

<<I've read that TOW cannot be fired from the Bradley while the vehicle is in motion, but if I'm remembering correctly I've observed precisely this in some of the games I've played. How is this accounted for?>>

In TacOps, moving Bradleys do a short halt during the time of flight of fired TOWs. They maybe should pause a bit longer but they do pause. When a moving Bradley has to do this short halt in order to fire it gets a 'to hit' probability penalty.

<<I am told that in the game, moving to an improved position does not alter the unit's protection from fire, but only the spotting distance to them. In other words, there are no true hull-down positions in the game save dug-in.>>

Entering an entrenchment increases a unit's protection from fire - the unit becomes harder to hit when shot at by direct fire, the unit is likely to take less casualties from accurate indirect fire, and the unit is less visible (until it does something to draw attention to itself).

<<My gripe is that there is no provision for attaining a hull-down position outside of an entrenchment. I also wonder about something similar for personnel units. Is the possibility of their getting behind something solid accounted for in the game?>>

Yes - two ways. It is handled abstractly by (1) units having three basic disposition modes - exposed, defilade, and entrenched and (2) by 'to hit chance' and 'casualty chance' modifiers that are associated with other than clear terrain. When you click on the 'defilade' button in a Unit Orders Window, you are giving the unit an order to spend a few seconds 'conceptually' finding the best cover and concealment in its immediate vicinity. The marker does not actually move. The assumption is that a unit can always find some better way to situate itself relative to the enemy other than just standing upright in the open, and that finding and occupying such a position is mainly a function of expending time. When a unit is in other than clear terrain, it is harder to hit. The rougher the terrain, the greater the 'to hit' penalty.

<<We want larger maps!>>

You will get them. You know 'bigger maps' is kind of like the 'if only I had more Tigers' mantra that I used to hear from opponents in my miniatures days. In the real world (where 'the map' is infinitely large) you still can't usually maneuver around an opponent - all that happens when you move laterally is that you run into the defensive line of another regiment or division.

<<Lastly, could we change the East-West orientation of the game, which is linked to the graphics? The graphics of the units can be "flipped" using a graphics program, so that OPFOR can attack from the West and exit East instead.>>

TacOps98 works that way. The silhouette markers have two possible graphic faces - one faces East and one faces West. I thought about going to eight graphic faces but I decided that it would take too much memory.

<<In TacOpsCE, I can't find the 'run it' button under 'review Scenarios'.>>

The review button is not in the Windows version of TacOpsCE. Its support code provoked me once too often and I destroyed it.

<<Does TacOpsCE postulate combat by humans and try to model the critical aspects of command, communications, moral, and psychology ... ?>>

I don't have any new morale rules/logic in hand that I consider to be realistic or to be supportable against criticism given the TacOps grand tactical scale. In the last couple of years, I have had extended email discussions with a few folks who were willing and able to converse about morale and varying efficiency at more than the superficial level of 'I want it' <g>. None of those discussions led to anything that I considered to be codeable or defensible. The discussions always

drifted to a close when we tried to get into the details of (1) identifying, quantifying, and tracking of recent combat stimuli that might be relevant to causing a modification in will or efficiency and (2) what detailed modifications would be appropriate given that stimuli have accumulated to a point where will or efficiency should be modified.

The current TacOps morale model for the most part assumes that the fighters are exhibiting the best case situation of morale and efficiency. They will continue to do their duty unless they are thoroughly suppressed by incoming or recent accurate fire. If you as their commander tell them to get up and move forward into harm's way they will usually do so. That is the situation that all competent commanders devote their training toward achieving. That is the most troublesome kind of enemy to have to fight. Until I can find a defensible approach to implementing stimuli based variable morale and variable efficiency then I will to continue to cheerfully model just the best case.

Last shot ... the current TacOps combat results tables for weapons effects against infantry are a bit liberal on producing casualties. I originally made them so to partially reflect the combat attrition effect of people temporarily choosing to take themselves out of harm's way.