

COW 2023

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The Battle of Redditch, 2027: On-Side

The Battle of Redditch, 2027 was the first formal outing for my City & CEMA game of Brigade-level modern urban combat. Ideas for the game have been kicking around in my head for a couple of years, but its only in the last few months I've focussed on getting it written and playable. I'm not going to go into too much detail on the development and design choices of the game as you can read these on-line in my designers notes at <http://www.taunoyen.com/games/cityandcema>.

The rules are based around NATO's USECT urban doctrine, where the phases of an urban operation and defined as Understand, Shape, Engage, Consolidate and Transition. In City and CEMA the game progresses through each of these stages.

- **Understand** – the players read the background briefing, look at their orbat, study the map and then use "Knowledge Points" to buy possibly useful information like where the CCTV is, the potential sympathies of the population in different parts of the city, flood risk, utility networks and even where the local B&Q is!
- **Shape** – each side is given an allocation of Command Points (CPs) and uses these to buy capability cards, including both indirect fire support and more modern elements such as UAVs, satellite coverage, EW, cyber attack and defence, HUMINT and so on. They also have an allocation of Field Engineering effort. They then make their plan, using marked maps, and once both plans are ready the laydown starts – defenders on the map and the attacker on a number of avenues of approach. Then alternating card by card we work through all the capability cards the players have bought to try and shape the battle.
- **Engage** – The Engage phase splits into 3 sub-phases, C2, Fire & Movement (IGOUGO) and end of turn actions. The C2 phase is similar to the capability card part of the Shape phase, but each turn players get a new budget, and that budget will be affected by things like the Emissions Control (EMCON) state, the amount of EW and Cyber being directed at them by the enemy, and the state of their command elements. There is then a comms check out to each battalion, and then, attacker first, each side can move and fire their elements, and assault enemy positions. There is opportunity fire for the non-phasing player. The end of turn sub-phase includes things like moving civilians, evolving any fires that have broken out, and completing any engineering tasks. A copy of the turn sequence is attached.
- **Consolidate and Transition** - This is run as a discussion phase, first with the two sides debating the "what next", and second conducting a brief analysis of the damage wrought on the city in terms of civilian deaths, displaced persons, destroyed buildings and ruined infrastructure.

A key element of the game is how the collateral damage has been integrated into the CRTs used for combat, with shading indicating when and how much rubble is created and icons indicating when to roll for civilian deaths or refugees, fires or infrastructure damage. Each area of the board has 4 key numbers, its protection value, its size (which equates to movement points), the maximum rubble it can take, and the roll for the presence of civilians after a civilian icon comes up on the CRT. There is also an "Adverse Opinion" track which increments each time something "bad" happens – although the sides may have different sensitivities to the impact of this.

For COW I decided to set the game in Redditch as it's just down the road from me in Birmingham, and I didn't have to learn Estonian in order to gather all the information. It's also apparently the 2nd most unhappy town in the UK (after Colchester!) and only marginally bigger than Bakhmut!

For the game I had two teams of 3, with Ken, Robert and Charlotte playing the attackers (Red) and Julian, Stephen A-M and Rob D playing the defenders (Blue).

The Understand phase went well with the defenders both buying the B&Q sheet so they could make more defence works, and the Flooding sheet – which would become crucial later. The attackers learnt more about the population so as to work out where their sympathisers were, and about the sewer system and a sewer main that could be used for infiltration. For the Shape phase the defenders decided to focus on Cyber and Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) with little interdiction, whilst Red bought a wide suite of both attacking and defending measures. This paid off in spades when it came to working through the cards as it became obvious that Charlotte had used family knowledge to successfully second guess her father, and several times as Blue played some ace ISR or Cyber card Charlotte would play its counter.

A key discovery by Blue with their ISR though was the location of the Red Bde Tac HQ and their Step-Up HQ (the game currently enforces a BAOR era management of HQs). Artillery fire was brought down on both, the Brigadier escaping but using up a couple of his lives, but Step-Up was destroyed. This made Red C2 very vulnerable from the outset.

With the start of the Engage phase Blue bought more fires down and took out the Brigadier. This gave Red very few command points each turn, although Blue was also suffering from a tight EMCON state. Red chose to go right flanking, attacking the city from the east – but the myriad blinds helped to hide this initially from Blue – just as Blue's sea of blue dummy and true blocks gave Red very little to go on – hence the importance of ISR. A brief engagement along the A435 resulted in a nice fire in the woodblock there, and Blue eventually being forced back towards the Amber Valley Country Park. Blue forces in fact seemed to be falling back rather quickly in response to the Red advance, and the reason for that became apparent when Blue blew the reservoir at the head of the valley, flooding it and rendering the whole valley temporarily impassable, and giving Blue a safe flank. However, a Red Special Forces team had made its way up the sewer pipe and deep into Blue's rear on the hunt for the Blue HQ, and was joined in the task by other Red forces that were swinging N behind the flooding. To help give Blue an extra headache, Red's agents in sympathetic areas on the W side of the flooding managed to stage a riot to protest about Blue's behaviour – the presence of civilians impacting movement and firing. And that's about where we had to call time.

Before we went into the game wash-up we spent some time going through the Transition and Consolidation phases. Both sides described how they expected the rest of the battle to play out, and I then totted up the figures to give a rough estimate of civilian deaths. The flanking move had meant that kinetic engagement had come quite late, so there wasn't too much rubble, but Blue had flooded a whole chunk of the valley. My battle damage assessment was that there had been about 360 civilian casualties, of whom 72 were dead.

A number of really useful points and observations were raised during the post-game discussion. Red found the huge array of Blue pieces somewhat daunting at the start – and leading to quite a cautious approach, but which they recognised as a very effective way of creating the necessary fog-of-war for an urban game. Players liked the capability card play, and whilst the rules and QRS seemed daunting each component of the game was quite quick and simple to execute and it was expected that playing would speed considerably with more familiarity. The per turn movement distances were seen as too

long – and something I'd restricted anyway after my last playtest, one of the issues being the mix of rural and urban areas on the map. We had a good discussion about enhancements, including using touching blocks to show columns of march (with fast movement but reduced combat), or penalising a unit which attacks having moved a significant distance. In the introduction to the game I'd highlighted how much I was inspired by SPI's NATO Division Commander and this may be another area where that game has a solution in its use of modes. We also had a good chat around the Adverse Opinion track, including a capability card to reflect a BotNet and magnify the enemy's AO, or allowing a side to "spend" the enemy's AO to make bad things happen to them!

The energy level in the room was high the whole game, with lots of chat going on and the players really engaging with the system, which was as much as I could ask for – my thanks to them for being such great players and play-testers. I'm now working on the feedback and getting a next release of City & CEMA ready and looking for the next opportunity to put in it front of some players.

As mentioned at the start the full designer's notes are at <http://www.taunoyen.com/games/cityandcema> and I've got vague plans to create a Vassal Module for the game which will also appear there in due course.