

DESIGN NOTES FOR THE BATTLE OF JIRARDI PASS

By
Alan R. Arvold

One of the scenarios in Divided Ground on the 1967 War in the Sinai is “Running the Gauntlet”. It’s about the contested run through Jirardi Pass by elements of the Israeli 7th Armored Brigade on June 5, 1967. Actually there were three runs, two which occurred during the daylight hours and the other which occurred that night. As was the case with all the other original scenarios in the game, this scenario was done in a hurry and as a result, was full of inaccuracies. I originally was going to correct the one scenario, but then realized it would be better to depict the three runs in three separate scenarios.

The Mapsheet

The original mapsheet was based on the maps from the British War Office series of 1960. In that series most of the maps of the Sinai Peninsula were made during the Second World War. This was evident in the maps of Jirardi Pass. The coastal railroad (a post war construction) was missing from them. So I added the railroad to the map. Doesn't really make any difference as there are no trains to affect the battle.

The Order of Battle

Israeli: The main unit in the three scenarios is the 7th Armored Brigade. It consisted of two armored battalions (the 79th and the 82nd), one armored infantry battalion (the 75th), one self-propelled mortar battalion, and one armored scout company. It was supported by two artillery battalions from 215th Artillery Regiment (but only in the last scenario). It also had attached to it a tank company from the 46th Armored Battalion (the Armored School Battalion). The 79th Armored Battalion only had two of its three tank companies and so the attached tank company from the 46th was assigned to it for this battle. The 82nd Armored Battalion had four tank companies instead of the usual three.

Egyptian: There is much contention on which units actually defended Jirardi Pass. Different historical sources over the years have listed different units. Among the main units mentioned were the 112th and 117th National Guard Brigades and the regular 11th Infantry Brigade. As the 112th was down at Bir Lahfan I have discounted them and as I have not been able to locate the 117th's position during the war I have counted them out too. That leaves the 11th Infantry Brigade which was located north of Rafah Crossroads at the start of the war. However it had sent back one of its infantry battalion (the 90th) and its organic tank battalion (the 118th) to defend Jirardi Pass. The 118th Tank Battalion was unique in that it was equipped with Sherman tanks, some of which had AMX-13 turrets mounted on top of them (a French innovation). (Various Israeli units which passed through Jirardi Pass reported seeing both the British and French versions of the long barreled Sherman tanks among the Egyptian defenders.) The various anti-tank units were

independent units and not part of any particular brigade. There were no artillery units in Jirardi Pass so in this case the original scenario was wrong. It was supported by artillery units located off map at El Arish to the west though and I have included those. The 130mm guns represent the shore batteries that defended El Arish from attacks from the sea. It is uncertain whether the 316th Artillery Battalion was an organic part of the 7th Infantry Division or just an attached unit. For this scenario I am assuming it is an attached unit.

The Scenarios

As I mentioned earlier, there are three scenarios now to replace the original. These will be described separately.

Scenario #1: The First Run Through: This scenario is a hypothetical one. Historically the Israeli force depicted passed on through with hardly an action taking against it, the element of surprise upon the Egyptian garrison was so total. Only the last few vehicles in the Israeli convoy drew fire, causing a few losses. However this does not make for a very exciting scenario so I made the Egyptians more capable of resisting. Still I wanted to give some of the element of surprise to the Israelis, so I made all of the Egyptian units on board, except the leaders, disrupted at the beginning. Not only that, they are also fixed in place until they are attacked in any way. The only Egyptian units that are not fixed and disrupted are the trucks. The placing of the defensive positions and minefields matches that of the original scenario. The original Israeli force to pass on through was the 82nd Armored Battalion (minus one of its companies) and the 7th Scout Company, all under the leadership of the 7th Armored Brigades deputy commander. The Israeli units come on the board in less than full strength, to reflect losses incurred earlier in the day. The victory point levels are based on what Egyptian units the Israelis can destroy and more importantly, how many units they can get off of the board on the road by the end of the game.

Scenario #2: Running the Gauntlet: This scenario is a revision of the original one in the game. Because the first scenario did not really happen, the Egyptian units are still all at full strength, save for a few AT guns that were historically knocked out by the first Israeli group. The Egyptians are now fully alerted so none of them start the game in a disrupted state, though they are all still fixed in place. The Israeli force that went through this time was the 79th Armored Battalion (minus one of its companies), later reinforced by the attached tank company from the 46th Armored Battalion. Again the Israeli units are not at full strength to reflect earlier losses. Note that though the 7th Armored Brigade's Headquarters and Commander are present in this scenario, historically they did not go through the pass on this run, but instead stayed at the entrance to coordinate the entrance of later arriving units during the night. Like the scenario before, the victory point levels are based on number of enemy unit strength points the Israelis destroy and on the number of friendly units that they exit off of the board by the end of the game.

Scenario #3: Clearing the Pass: This scenario depicts the final clearing of Jirardi Pass by the Israelis. The scenario is much longer than the other two combined (40 turns – about four hours) as it took this long historically for the Israelis to clear the pass. Because of the losses incurred in the fighting of the day before, the units of both sides start the game at reduced strength. It is a night scenario, which will be an advantage to the Israelis as it will reduce the effective firepower of the defending Egyptians. The Egyptians again start the scenario alerted so none of their units are disrupted, but they are all mostly fixed in place. A few units have changed their starting position from the previous scenarios. The Israeli force that attacked this time was the 75th Armored Infantry Battalion with a tank company from the 82nd Armored Battalion attached to it, directly supported by the 7th Mortar Battalion, and indirectly supported by the off map 215th Artillery Regiment. Again the 7th Armored Brigade's Headquarters and Commander are present in this scenario as historically they did not go through the pass in the second one. In this scenario the victory point levels are based on how many enemy units the Israelis destroy by the end of the game.

Conclusion

I hope that these three scenarios give gamers a better understanding of the battle for Jirardi Pass that what the original one attempted to do.