

DESIGN NOTES FOR ODE TO OCTOBER WAR

By
Alan R. Arvold

October War was a game by SPI that came out in 1977 in the magazine "Strategy & Tactics", in issue number 61. It was SPI's answer to Avalon Hill's game "Arab Israeli Wars". It was a tactical armored wargame that dealt with battles in the 1973 "Yom Kippur" War. As I have converted the scenarios from "Arab-Israeli Wars" to Divided Ground and Middle East, it seemed only natural that I do the same with the scenarios from "October War". Note; most of my references to Divided Ground in this article apply to Middle East as well. Only in those instances where there is a difference between Divided Ground and Middle East I will list both games. So here we go.

The Mapboard

The original mapsheet was a generic representation of various types of terrain in the Middle East. Depending on the scenario being played, certain terrain types and/or elevation levels were ignored on the map. So what I did was make a master copy of the original mapsheet on Divided Ground, then for each converted scenario, made a copy of the master and made what changes were required by the original scenario instructions to it. Some scenarios use the same mapboard, so I made the six variations of the original mapsheet as described in the scenarios and labeled them by letter (A-F). Thus each scenario will either have a lettered mapsheet or the original in Divided Ground. In Middle East I just copied the maps and numbered them (1-15) so each scenario will have its own map file. The scale of the original mapsheet was 200 meters per hex, but I kept the scale on my Divided Ground maps at 250 meters per hex. As it turns out it did not make any difference in the comparative play of each game. The distance between each height level is 25 meters. A special note about the Canal-Ditch on the bottom right corner of the map. On those scenarios where the Canal-Ditch does not exist, this means both the Minor River hexsides and the Wadi hexes on both sides of the Minor River are gone. In other words it is Clear terrain at Elevation Level 0, plus what ever else the scenario puts in those hexes. (The Wadi hexsides on the map were an abstract way of representing the berms that were on both sides of the Suez Canal.)

The Orders of Battle

The orders of battle for each scenario were rather simple, just armored vehicles, both tanks and APCs, and dismounted infantry and support weapons. The only organization was by force, be it battalion or brigade level, although in those scenarios where I have multiple brigades on one or both sides I added in a divisional level as well. Converting these to Divided Ground was not a problem. However I did add Headquarters and Leader units to each side for command and control, and for supply as well. For the infantry I added Machine Gun platoons as in October War all of the infantry units are assumed to be reinforced with machine guns from their company or battalion machine gun sections

or platoons. For support units the Israelis had self propelled ATGM's mounted on jeeps and the Arabs had dismounted Sagger Teams, 100mm AT guns and one BRDM missile carrier. There are no headquarter vehicles, either by themselves or as part of platoon as in the Arab-Israeli Wars scenarios. For artillery in October War both sides have off-the-board artillery which is assumed to reach anywhere across the map. This was easy to duplicate in Divided Ground. However the Israelis have self-propelled 120mm mortars mounted on APC's while the Arabs have off-the-board 120mm mortars. Naturally I gave the Israelis self propelled 120mm mortars mounted on halftracks in Divided Ground and M113 mounted versions in Middle East (since that is what is pictured on the actual game counter) as these are what they really have in the 1973 War. For the Arabs I found that the 120mm mortars in the off-the-board set up do not range across the board and that the Israelis can stay out of their given range since it is obvious which side of the board they would be set up off of, so I gave the Arabs on board 120mm mortar units and the appropriate transport unit in those scenarios where they have them. One thing that I noticed in October War is the assumption that all indirect fire comes from three mortar or gun platoons or sections, not whole batteries. So I labeled the mortars as platoons of a mortar company or battery. The artillery I made into three gun batteries (although in reality these would be platoons within a battery) in order to simplify the Order of Battles. In October War, Close Air Support airstrikes were just one time artillery attacks for each strike, however in Divided Ground I gave actual airstrikes to which ever side had them in a given scenario. One Close Air Support airstrike in October War is equivalent to three aircraft in Divided Ground.

Players may wonder what the different artillery strength values represent. Here is the breakdown:

4H – 120mm/122mm Mortars and Howitzers
5H – 152mm/155mm Howitzers
6H – 122mm/140mm Rockets
8H – Aerial Bombs and Rockets

One may wonder why the 122mm/140mm rockets are stronger than the 152mm/155mm howitzers. It is because they can put more rounds into a target hex in a single fire mission than the howitzers possibly could. Players may also wonder that since the 4H value represents both the 120mm mortar and the 122mm howitzer, how do know which ones are the mortars and which ones are the howitzers? I don't, I just take every three 4H's and put them into an artillery battalion and any that are left over I make into on-board mortars.

The Scenarios

There are fifteen scenarios in October War, thirteen that came with the game and two more which were published in Moves magazine #32. The time scale of a turn in October War is two minutes, compared to six minutes in Divided Ground. To convert I merely divided the number of turns in a given October War scenario by three (rounding any

fractions up) to get the equivalent number of turns in Divided Ground. I then added one extra turn to each total to account for the difference in the map scales between October War and Divided Ground. Now one would think that the units in Divided Ground would move three times as fast as those in October War but as it turns out, units move a little more distance on the map in three turns in October War than they do in one turn in Divided Ground, hence the extra turn. (Example: Scenario #5 is fifteen turns long in October War, in Divided Ground this would be six turns long.) In scenarios where the defender is given Improved Positions in October War, I gave the same number to the defender in Divided Ground. In October War the defender is given minefields in some scenarios, to which they also received the same number in Divided Ground. In October War minefields come in three levels which easily correspond to the 1-1, 2-1 and 3-1 minefields in Divided Ground. One of the scenarios in a night scenario, again I made sure it was a night scenario when I converted it.

The scenarios are either simplified versions of real battles or part of the two three-scenario semi-historical campaigns in October War. However I made them each into individual scenarios, each with its own set of victory point levels based on unit elimination, units exited, and/or objectives captured. However Scenarios 11-13 (the Egyptian Campaign) should be played as series as the Orders of Battle for both sides are hypothetical. One thing that I have noticed about these scenarios, the attacker does not have a lot of time to accomplish his goals. He must plan out each turn as he goes along and have a general plan of action before the scenario begins. There is no place for fancy maneuvers in these scenarios because of lack of time.

Bonus Scenarios

After my October War scenarios were initially posted, I received complaints about the way the Canal is portrayed on the map in those scenarios (1, 5, 6, and 7) where there is indeed a Canal. While the Canal as portrayed is true to the one on the mapsheet in the original game, these complaints do raise several valid points about the Suez Canal and are listed as follows:

1. The Canal is a big ditch completely filled with water, not a wadi with a minor river running down the middle of it.
2. While the outer edges of the Wadi hexes portray the berms on both sides of the Canal in terms of the extra movement cost to cross the hexsides, they do not block line of sight between non-adjacent ground level hexes as the real berms would do.
3. The Wadi hexes allow units to exist and move around in them and use them for hull down positions, something that the real Canal would not do. (Okay, units with amphibious capability (BTR-60, BMP, and M113) could move around in the water but they could not fight from them.)
4. The Canal did not, and to this day does not, have any hard bridges crossing it like it does on the mapsheet. These bridges should be pontoon bridges as these are what were historically used during the war.

With all these points taken I resolved to keep the Philistines happy and created alternate maps for the scenarios in question. In these maps the Canal is more historically portrayed with Wadis filled with water, sand berms on both sides of the Canal, and pontoon bridges crossing the Canal. Thus Scenarios 1a, 5a, 6a, and 7a in Middle East and Scenarios 1 (alt), 5 (alt), 6 (alt), and 7 (alt) in Divided Ground are nothing more than the original scenarios using these alternate mapsheets.

Conclusion

I hope players find these scenarios fun and quick as they are really not much more than that. Now another Middle East tactical game has been converted to Divided Ground and Middle East..