

DESIGN NOTES FOR “ON TWO FRONTS” (REVISED)

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Divided Ground has had the bad reputation of having few scenarios, most of which are pretty bad. This is understandable, considering the fact that it was put out in a hurry in order to get it on the market before Talonsoft went out of business. One of the scenarios, On Two Fronts, is certainly the case here. It was not part of the original game, but was part of Talonsoft's official Divided Ground Patch 1.02. The scenario was designed by Kurt Miller, who had designed several other scenarios for the game. The scenario was intended to be a demonstration scenario for download as part of its advertising campaign for the game. Yet when one downloaded it and played it, one could not help but get a sense of confusion from it. The scenario had units from the 56, 67, and 73 wars in it, the orders of battle looked like they were drawn from a revolving drum, the map which was supposed to be an area just south of Tel Aviv, was actually the Chinese Farm area down in the Sinai and the scenario started with the battle already in progress. This scenario definitely has the looks as if it was created in an extreme hurry, just to get it out. I tried it out when I first got the Patch 1.02 installed and was very dissatisfied with it, letting it languish over the years in my game. Now having grown wiser and more experienced with the Campaign Series, I am beginning to see this scenario as a good concept that was badly executed. Thus I decided to work on it and make it a decent, more playable, scenario.

The Mapboard

The first part to go over was the mapsheet. The original mapsheet, marked Demo.map in the game file, was actually a cut down version of a larger mapsheet entitled chinese.map. Divided Ground had several mapsheets which did not belong to any scenario in the game. This was because they were supposed to part of bigger scenarios which were not completed before the game was released. One would think that they could have been completed and released in an expansion as happened with the other games in the Campaign Series, but alas, Talonsoft was sold off a year after Divided Ground was released and these scenarios were never completed. This did not stop independent authors from creating scenarios from these mapsheets though as my Abu Ageila scenarios are certainly evidence of this. However, portions of these maps were used to create smaller scenarios that came with the original game.

Anyway, Kurt took the Chinese Farm mapsheet and deleted large portions of it from all four sides to make a smaller more manageable map. Then he made changes to the map itself. These included putting a beach on the shoreline in the upper left quarter of the map, putting a small city on a hill on the Egyptian side of the map, moving parts of the Egyptian embankment along the Suez Canal back a hex or eliminating sections of it all together, placing fort like buildings on top of the mounds along Egyptian side of the canal, and a few other minor changes. Yet, for all the changes that he made, it still looked

like the Chinese Farm area, not some imaginary piece of ground just south of Tel Aviv. It still had all the sand hexes from the Sinai, not to mention sand dunes, something one would not see up near Tel Aviv. It still had the actual Chinese Farm on the map. The coastline still looked like the Chinese Farm area. And worst of all, he still retained all the map labels from the original map. Not the kind of Israeli coastal area one would expect.

Seeing this I resolved to make it better. I started by making the coastline somewhat more straight in the lower left hand corner of the map. Then I changed the compass symbol so that the top of the mapsheet was northeast. Thus as the coastline curves around to the left on the upper left hand corner of the map it is actually turning to the north, something one would expect along the western coast of Israeli. Next I deleted all of the sand hexes and sand dune hexsides from the map. This turned the Suez Canal into an ordinary river. Now the map was beginning to look like the terrain in that part of Israel. The lower right hand corner of the map looked a little barren with all the sand gone so I added some scrub, hammada, and an occasional rough hex at various intervals to break up the blandness of it. The Chinese Farm was still looking at me dead in the face so I deleted all of the anti-tank ditch hexsides and put vineyards and a couple of orchards in their place. Finally, I deleted all of the map labels and just put labels on the roads showing where they are going. After all, this is now a fictional piece of ground just south of Ashqelon so there is no point in labeling the towns, city, and other major terrain features. The only exception to this was labeling the Mediterranean Sea. Now the mapsheet was finally ready.

The Orders of Battle

The next thing was the orders of battle. To be honest, the original orders of battle at first glance look pretty well organized. After all, there are six battalions for the Israelis and seven for the Egyptians. However, when you open up the battalions do you see what a mess it really is, especially in the Egyptian units. I found support companies from the 56 War mixed in with these battalions from the 73 War. I found tank companies with Frog 5 and 240mm Rocket batteries. Some companies had two platoons and others with five. The artillery was farcical as no two batteries had the same gun or howitzer. Each side had helicopters for transporting infantry units. The Egyptians even had landing craft for two of their units. It seemed that the designer put in what ever units he liked with no consideration to its purpose or period of service. Now one could expect the mixing of units within a company or battalion with the Israelis. After all, they are quickly mobilizing their units in response to the Egyptian attack and the formed up units are moving out with whatever higher level organization is currently moving towards the action, to link up with their parent units at a later time. But not the Egyptians, they should be totally organized as they are the attacker.

I tried reorganizing the Egyptians with the units that they had in the original order of battle. After several tries I ended up scrapping the whole Egyptian force. I started over by giving them complete units from the available units and organizations side of the organization editor. I first decided that there must be an overall commander and

headquarters so I chose a mechanized brigade. I deleted two of the mechanized battalions and replaced them with an amphibious tank battalion and an amphibious mechanized battalion from the 130th Amphibious Brigade. These were my own creation and were based on a lot of research. I left out the recon battalion as the brigade already had a recon company but I kept in the anti-tank battalion (SP) to replace the anti-tank company in the brigade. Besides, the mechanized battalion had an anti-tank company of its own. The artillery I formed into an artillery group with two battalions and a regimental headquarters. I left out the Frog 5 rocket as it would not be used in this type of operation. I kept the helicopters but made them all the same type and gave them a commando company to carry into the game. With this I was satisfied with the Egyptian force.

The Israeli force was easier to work with. I basically kept all the battalions and put them all under a brigade headquarters. I cleaned up the internal organization of each battalion while keeping with the mixed character of them. One thing that I did delete from all the units was the SS-11 ATGM units. By the time of the scenario this missile system had been removed from the Israeli Army inventory. I replaced them with TOW units. The HaSini Recon Battalion deserves special note. It originally had two of its assigned recon companies and one mixed company from an armored battalion. It also had six helicopter units to carry its dismounted recon platoons into the game. I eliminated one of the recon companies and replaced it with a paratroop company and assigned the helicopters to it. The reserve infantry battalion was a little too weak to be defending such a long perimeter so I gave it a fourth line company. The anti-tank company within the reserve infantry battalion was misnamed. It should be a battalion in its own right so I removed it from the infantry battalion and gave it a battalion headquarters, making it into one. The artillery battalion I basically kept intact, treating the two extra artillery and one air defense batteries as attachments. With that I was satisfied with the Israeli force.

The Scenario

With the map and orders of battle done it was time to work on the scenario proper. The first thing to change was the entire concept of the operation. In the original scenario the time period was set as happening during the 73 War, which of course could not have happened in real life as the Israeli Navy and Air Force would have prevented it. So I reset the date to coincide with the hypothetical attack on Ashqelon, thus linking the two scenarios together. The premise here is that the Arabs need a force to secure the ground behind them so that they have a way back towards Egypt after their main operation is done. Also it serves as a diversion to draw away Israeli reinforcements from Ashqelon. Having redefined the situation I kept all of the scenario data in the header and conditions editor the same. I also kept the same number of aircraft for each side but gave each side only one type of aircraft, Shyhawks for the Israelis and SU-7s for the Arabs. I kept all of the objective hexes in their same locations.

The original scenario started with an amphibious assault already in progress, with part of the landing force already landed and the other part still coming in on landing craft. I changed this to the amphibious assault just beginning, with all of the amphibious craft

still out on the water coming in. The 130th Amphibious Brigade was totally amphibious and every vehicle in it was capable of amphibious movement. However, in Divided Ground, the unit Commander and the HQ units are not amphibious so I had to give them both landing craft. As the scenario is starting a little earlier, I reasoned that there has been no damage yet so I removed the rubble hexes and repaired the one damaged bridge across the river. There were two Egyptian pontoon bridges across the river, doubtlessly left over from a failed Chinese Farm scenario which I also removed. The rest of the Egyptian force I set up on the roads south of the river, leading up to it, just as they were in the original scenario. The exception to this is the commando company which comes in on helicopters on the southern edge on Turns 3 and 4.

The Israelis are set up the same as they are in the original scenario. There are a few exceptions though. The artillery battalion I moved to the upper right hand corner of the map. I put the brigade headquarters in the middle of the city. I added a couple of Improved Positions for the Israeli units on the defensive perimeter so every one has some sort of fortification for additional protection. The reinforcing battalions each come in on their own roads, no more mixing of units as in the original set up. The paratrooper company is coming in on helicopters on Turn 4.

Conclusion

This concludes my article for these scenarios. It is my intention to fix every badly done scenario in Divided Ground over the next couple of years so this is just the first of a long list of things to be done in the game. Divided Ground deserved better than what it got from Talonsoft and I intend to make it a better game.