BUILDING AND USING EPIC ARMIES

By Moko Cwiklinski

Moko discusses the best tactics for putting an army together.

BUILDING THE ARMY

"I will be proud to lead you wonderful miniatures, anytime, anywhere."

There are three basic formation types in Epic: Grunts, Fast Attack, and Support. Each has a distinct role to play on the battlefield, and it is the interaction of these differing types that creates the unique flavor of the game. Some of these types contain subcategories of formations though overall their battlefield role remains the same. Also some formations are flexible enough to fit into two different categories, and how you choose to use them will determines the formation's type.

Grunts

These are the 'Dog Soldiers' who will do most of the fighting on the battlefield, and their importance cannot be ignored. Their basic job is to take ground, hold ground, and to provide a good solid battle line. Grunts must be able to threaten an enemy with firepower and/or assault, either through sheer numbers, or by being good at one or both.

Grunts must be able to absorb hits and still remain effective as a formation. They do this by having good armour, sheer weight of numbers, or a combination of both. Lastly, Grunts must be able to hold down a good chunk of ground so they can interfere with enemy movements, ie, get in the way. Grunts may not have the firepower of support formations, or the speed and hitting power of fast attack formations, but it is only the Grunts that can go toe to toe with enemy forces and still maintain their hold on a position.

Examples:

Imperial Guard: Infantry Company, Mech Company, Tank Company.

Space Marines: Tactical Detachment, Terminator Detachment.

Orks: Warband.

Fast Attack

These are the 'Daring Hussars' of the 40K universe, and like the cavalry of old, perform the role of shock troops. Their basic job is to use their speed and hitting power to

knock an enemy off balance, either by actually attacking them, or by the mere threat of what they could do if they attacked. As the name implies they are fast, having either a base speed of 30cm, or a base speed of 25cm with the Infiltrate ability.

Fast attack formations are often small, 5 to 8 units. Finally, fast attack formations are dedicated attacking formations that often excel at one form of combat action, either through its abilities in combat, or because of its speed. It is here that the weakness of fast attack formations lie – they are really good at taking ground, but they have a hard time standing and trying to hold on to it. Fast attack formations perform their best when they are working directly with Grunt formations, dancing around an open enemy flank, or slipping into the enemy's rear areas while the Grunts hold those areas from which the enemy has already been displaced.

Examples:
Imperial Guard: Rough Riders Platoon, Storm Troopers Platoon (in Valkyries).
Space Marines: Bike Detachment, Assault Detachment.
Orks: Kult of Speed, Blitz Brigade.

Support
This is by far the largest of the three categories, and covers a host of formations, with one thing in common – they all provide support to Grunt and fast attack formations while those formations carry out their own missions. They do this by providing long range fire support, close fire support, or by disrupting enemy movements. The three categories of support formation are: indirect support, close support, and direct support.

Indirect Support Formations are formations that have a long range, 60cm+, are often BP and/or MW, and sometimes have the ability to fire indirectly. Their job is to sit back and pound enemy formations from a range at which their target simply cannot retaliate. These shots are used to soften up an enemy formation before it is directly attacked, or to break up an enemy formation before it launches its own attack. In almost all cases, indirect support formations are poor in assaults, and do not have very good armour, which isn't a problem since they are best away from the front lines.

Examples:
Imperial Guard: Artillery (Battery and Company), Thunderbolt Squadron, Marauder Squadron.
Space Marines: Whirlwind Detachment, Thunderhawk.
Orks: Fighta-Bommerz Sqwadron.

Close Support Formations are formations that work closely with Grunt and fast attack formations. Close support formations use their firepower to soften up nearby enemy formations, or by adding their Firefight ability directly into an assault involving other friendly formations. While most close support formations are small, their presence close to the front line puts an opponent in the position of trying to decide whether to shoot at the Grunts in front or the close support behind. The result is often that the Grunts take the fire, as they are the biggest threat, and this often allows the close support to keep doing its job, turn after turn.

Most war engines fall into this subcategory (don't scream) for four obvious reasons: 1) they are not that fast so they cannot qualify as Fast Attack; 2) while they do have staying power, and excellent combat abilities, they cannot hold down anywhere near as much ground as Grunts; 3) they perform best when they are working directly with a Grunt or fast attack formation; 4) while some do have long-range firepower, and could perform the above indirect support duties, this is a total waste of their other excellent combat abilities, and hence a waste of points. There are exceptions, however. For example, a Shadowsword has no business rolling up into the front lines when its Volcano cannon reaches out to 90cm, and it has no other real abilities outside that, so it is indirect support.

Examples:
Imperial Guard: Demolisher Platoon.
Space Marines: Vindicator Detachment.
Orks: Big Gunz Mob.

Direct Support Formations are formations that provide support to other formations by using a unique ability that only they have. There is no need to further define this sub-category because the 'unique ability' they have is often self-explanatory. For example, a Hydra Battery provides support in the form of anti-aircraft fire, and Scouts use their extra large zones of control and unit coherency distance to screen other formations or delay enemy movements.

PUTTING AN ARMY TOGETHER

We all want to perform well on the battlefield, and the first step to accomplishing that goal is good army selection. One of the keys to this is to have the right proportions of each formation type in the army. This is called 'combined arms' and was as true in Napoleon's day as it is today and in the 41st millennium. Think of it this way: if an army contains all fast attack formations it will have no trouble taking ground, or manoeuvring around the enemy. However, it will have loads of trouble trying to hold on to the ground it takes, and will have difficulty responding to indirect support. A 'combined arms' force would have little difficulty exploiting these weaknesses, and protecting against the fast attack army's strengths.

Basically your army should contain the following proportions of formations: 35% to 50% of its points in Grunt formations; 25% to 40% of its points in fast attack formations; 25% to 40% of its points in support formations. So, in a Grand Tournament game that is 945 to 1,350 points in Grunt formations, 675 to 1,080 points in fast attack formations, and 675 to 1,080 points in support formations.

Now, it is important to understand that this is by formation, not individual units, so a Space Marine Tactical Detachment of 6 x Marines, 6 x Rhinos, 2 x Vindicators, is a 450-point Grunt formation, NOT 300 points of Grunts and 150 points of support. Keep in mind while you are doing this that you must try not go below the minimums set in the list above, so in a Grand Tournament game you are going to want to spend a *minimum* of 945 points on Grunt formations, otherwise you will lose the advantages of combined arms. Having said that, they are not set in stone. If the best you can get is 925 points in Grunts, without getting another whole Grunt formation, then you are probably doing fine. The idea is to get as close as you can to each of them, while building an army you are going to enjoy using.

HOW MANY ACTIVATIONS

The next important factor to consider is activations, or "Just what is too many, or too few?". There is no denying that it is important, and to a new general it's something he will agonise over. An army with too many formations to activate often has loads of small formations running all over the place. Now, early in the battle he will definitely have an activation advantage and will be able to manoeuvre at will, but these are small formations, and they can be rendered combat destroyed or reduced to one unit very easily. What often happens is that by Turn 3 many of these smaller formations have been destroyed and the same player with the early advantage will be struggling to keep it and may well now be outnumbered by his opponent.

An army with too few activations usually has a couple of big lumbering formations, loaded down with every unit available, and a couple of small formations, if any, bouncing around the flanks. These big formations are tough to stop, but they couldn't outmanoeuvre a crippled sloth, and are magnets for Blast markers! When you consider that a Blast marker is placed for every firing action (two if it's a crossfire), one Blast marker is placed for each kill, each Blast marker pins a firing unit, and that even one Blast marker is a -1 to Initiative rolls, you quickly realise that these formations are collecting tons of Blast markers and spending most of the game trying to get rid of them! Get the activation advantage back or you'll be lucky if they are still able to shoot and move by the end of Turn 3!

In general you want to have roughly three formations to activate per 1,000 points in the army, rounding down at the low end, and up at the top. So in a Grand Tournament game that is six to ten activations.

MOBILE WARFARE

While you often hear about modern warfare being fluid, many do not actually know what is meant by fluid. A fluid battle is one battle where the position of the front is constantly changing. This constant change of position occurs because modern forces can quickly change their point of attack, and it is this that creates a fluid environment.

In France, in 1940, the German Armoured Forces smashed through the Ardennes, blew a hole in the French Front Line near Sedan, turned north and headed for the channel coast. The entire time that Guderian's Panzers were moving from south to north, German forces were being funnelled through the gap and establishing a corridor behind him. Initially two Infantry Divisions anchored the corners of the breach, and two more arrived later to expand it. Guderian himself detailed Kampfgruppes to screen the right flank of his advance from the French troops to his east, while he established a series of Recon Gruppes way out on his left flank to pick up any French activity before it got anywhere near his forces. At no time was his front line ever out of contact with any elements under his command. Convoluted, yes, thin and stretched out, for sure, but it was never broken. In fact it was the French who lost control of their front line, and it was their inability to organise an effective counter-attack to re-establish that front line that cost them the battle.

In Epic, as in real warfare, you must maintain control over a continuous front. Now this isn't a single line of stands stretching from one edge of the table to the other. Nor does this line have to be straight, in fact a convoluted line is normal for what we are discussing. Nor does this line have to be a connected line, through zones of control,

stretching from one table edge to another, though it can be. Formations maintain control over the continuous front using their zones of control, and using the threat of what they can do to an enemy.

Which type of formation to use depends a lot on what forces an opponent has in a particular area of the battlefield. If the enemy has fast, mobile troops then you want to use zones of control to contain them. If the enemy has slow footsloggers, the threat of what troops can do will often suffice. In any case, by maintaining control over a continuous front you protect the objectives the enemy is trying to get at, while at the same time limiting his ability to manoeuvre around your forces (ie, he has less table area because your forces are in the way). If both sides do this then the Epic battle becomes a battle of thrust and counter-thrust, with each trying to establish a breakthrough, or bend the enemy forces back until they break. This is how modern warfare works and, because Epic reflects modern warfare well, it is how it works in Epic too. If a player doesn't try to maintain a front against a player that does his loss is almost assured because his objectives are there for the taking, while his opponents are well protected, and objectives are how this game is won or lost.

FRONTAGES

"It is with these Order dice that miniatures are truly led"

Each unit in Epic has a frontage of 3-4cm, and when you combine this with each unit's 5cm zone of control they have a frontage of 13-14cm. Since a unit must stay within 5cm of a unit in its formation, the actual frontage is smaller, and this returns an actual frontage of 8-9 cm within the formation. As each formation doesn't have to stay within 5cm of another formation, and therefore has two 'open flanks', a formation can add a full 10cm to its frontage (5cms for each open flank). So the formula to determine the maximum frontage that a formation can hold is:

(Units x 9)+5 = Frontage in centimetres

With this simple formula you can now quickly determine what the frontage of a formation is relative to the number of units placed in the front line of the formation. Note: If you are using scouts, whose zone of control is 10cm, then the formula is:

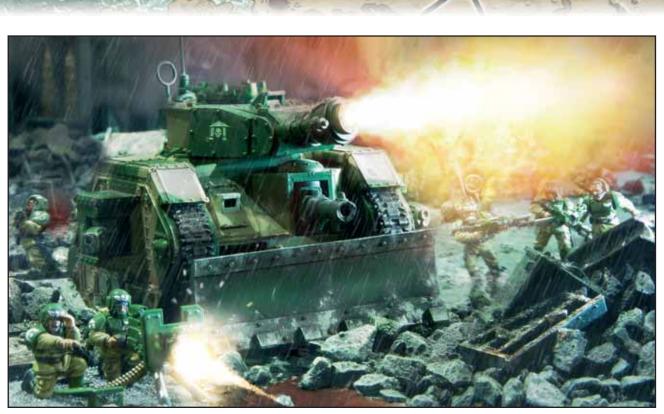*(Units x 14)+10 = Frontage in centimetres*

FORMATION DEPLOYMENTS

Another important factor in Epic is the deployment of the various formations. Because all losses are suffered from the front of a formation to the back of the formation, it's no surprise that the more depth a formation has when it is deployed the longer it will be able to maintain control over its frontage. Although a single line can exert control over a really wide frontage, it only takes the loss of two units to put a good hole in it, but despite this a single line deployment can still be useful in some circumstances. Also a formation deployed not only in width but also in depth is better able to concentrate its firepower. These deployments are referred to by using different numbers separated by a slash, with each number representing how many units are in each line of the deployment. Thus a 3/2 would be three units in the first line and two units in the second line; 4/4/3 would be four units in the first line, four units in the second line, and three units in the third line; 5/0 would be five units in the first line and no units in the second line, or in other words a single line of five units (the slash and 0 are still used even in a single line deployment for clarity). With the frontage information above and this deployment information a player can choose the type of deployment he wants to use with a formation and then quickly determine how much frontage it can exert control over.

FORMATION INTERACTION

"I don't want good Generals, I want lucky dice."

If there is one thing I just love about Epic, over Epic 40K and earlier editions, it is the interaction that occurs between differing formation types. In Epic 40K an all Land Raider army was a potent force, while in Epic it would get cut to pieces! Sure Land Raiders are good tank killers, but they are average in a shoot out with infantry, and down right mediocre in an assault. So, if they are not working

with a formation that can provide them some protection from an assault, they are a waste of points. Now, a Space Marine Tactical Detachment is a good all-round fighting force that can perform well in most situations, but it will have a tough time in a shoot out with tanks. Well, put a detachment of Land Raiders in behind them and the combination of the two detachments will be able to take on all comers. Now this is what I mean by formation interaction! Now when you put an army together, start thinking about the way each formation fights, its strengths, its weaknesses, and then buy formations that complement each other, either by protecting another formation's weakness, or enhancing its capabilities.

COMBAT GROUPS & RUNNING THE ARMY
"If you can't do the job then I will find some miniatures that can."

Now that you have all of the above put together its time to organise the army for battle. One way to do this is by putting each formation into a larger organisation called a combat group. You can call them brigades, or regiments, or anything else you want, but for convenience I'll refer to them as combat groups. Each combat group is made up of two to four formations of any type, though they should be able to work together, as explained in formation interaction above. Artillery is an exception to this as their range allows them to provide support from almost anywhere on the battlefield, so they are often left out of combat groups.

When you organise these groups think of 1) what mission is the combat group going to perform and/or 2) do the formations in the combat group complement each other and/or enhance the mission capability of the combat group? For example, if a combat group is going to carry out delay/containment duties for three turns then it doesn't have to worry too much about any possible weaknesses in the combat group (it only has to stay in the enemy's way for three turns). So, you decide to allocate 1 x Space Marine Bike Detachment, and 1 x Space Marine Tactical Detachment to this combat group, with the information on frontages, and depth above you can now figure out exactly how much frontage they will be able to hold.

If the combat group has to hold the line while at the same time pin the enemy in place, it's going to have to be a real threat to the enemy or it will not be able to perform its job. So, you might decide to use 2 x Space Marine Tactical Detachments and a Predator Detachment in this combat group. There is no doubt that this combat group is a threat and can take on all comers, so it will be able to pin the enemy in place.

DA BATTLE
"No battle plan ever survives contact with the dice."

Now that you have all the forces organised into combat groups it's time to come up with a plan for the coming battle. All you have to do is assign each combat group a mission to achieve in the overall plan, and then during the battle execute those orders for each combat group. If the battlefield situation changes then you can quickly and

easily modify the original plan by assigning new missions to the affected combat groups, or all if needed. You can even go so far as rearranging your combat groups (there's certainly nothing to stop you), and it is a good way to modify plans.

Why is this combat group stuff so important anyway? Because two military concepts are very important in war, and because Epic reflects war very well they are important in the game also – they are conservation of force, and unity of effort.

Conservation of force is ensuring that only a minimum of force is used in secondary efforts, thus allowing the maximum of force to be used in the main effort.

Unity of effort is ensuring that every single element that makes up the army is contributing to the success of the main effort. Nothing can or should be wasted.

If you organised your army into combat groups, and then assigned each of the combat groups orders, then you have, by default, obtained unity of effort. How? You know what you want to accomplish in the battle, and therefore you are going to give each combat group orders that help achieve that goal, so by default you have created a unified effort by all elements of the army!

As you have organised the army into combat groups, and you organised those combat groups with their particular mission in mind (ie, only chosen the formations that the combat group will need to accomplish its mission), then by default you have obtained conservation of force. You sure aren't going to put an expensive Dread Mob, or two Land Raider Detachments in a combat group that is being assigned a delay/containment mission, right? Especially when there are much cheaper formations that can

perform the same job just as well, right? So, by default, you have accomplished conservation of effort.

Thinking On Your Feet
"There isn't any problem that cannot be solved by the reasonable application of bigger dice."

War is a dynamic environment in which anything that can happen, will happen. There are three plans in every battle – yours, his, and the one that occurs when the two plans come together. You must have a plan for a battle, and you must try to implement the plan you have devised, but you must also be ready to change it. You can successfully accomplish this by, every turn, having a formation or a group of formations in reserve, and by being willing to shift formations from one combat group to another. Two major things can occur that will force you to change your plans: 1) you suffer an irrecoverable setback due to a failure by friendly troops, or successful enemy action; 2) the enemy presents an opportunity that must be exploited. In both cases you should have a reserve available to counter/exploit the above situations immediately, and then, because you have organised your army as above, you can quickly and smoothly modify your original plan to cover the new developments.

Objectives
"Infantry storm positions, Cavalry overrun them, but it is with dice that battles are won."

In Epic 40K and Adeptus Titanicus, the main objective in every battle was the destruction of the enemies forces, all other objectives were secondary. In the current edition of Epic, capturing actual physical objectives is of primary importance, and the destruction of the enemy has become secondary. So in an effort to put some life into those Grand Tournament scenario objectives, here is what I feel they represent.

Take and Hold: These represent key positions that are critical to maintaining your position along this front. The enemy also has these positions in his area of influence. As these positions are very obvious, their locations are known to both sides. While the loss of one of these positions is bad, it will not force you to abandon this position, but it does bring its long term stability into question. The loss of both of these positions renders your position here entirely untenable.

Blitz: This represents the point at which your lines of communication enter the front line in this sector. If we lose control of this position, the flow of supplies to your troops is going to drop off measurably, but that alone will not force you to abandon this sector. However it will make this position very unstable and it will take very little enemy effort to bust your position (ie, lose control of Take and Hold and the Blitz and you *do* lose the battle).

Defend the Flag: If all of the key objectives on the ground in the enemy area of influence are still under enemy control, you are fighting a losing battle. Most troops aren't stupid and they will recognise they are fighting a losing battle, as will the high command, so it's a sure bet that unless you pull off a miracle you'll be put in a penal battalion, while this position is abandoned because of your incompetence.

They Shall Not Pass: This is the same as Defend the Flag, only worse. Not only have you not taken any objectives in the enemy sector, but you can't even manage to push troops into the enemy sector. You'll be lucky if they put you in a penal battalion!

Break Their Spirit: This is what happens when the biggest, baddest, meanest formation in the army is broken in front of everybody else, BIG TROUBLE!! If you were a Grunt Imperial Guard infantryman and you saw a bunch of Blood Angels Marines running scared past your position, how long would it take you to catch up to them?

Old Saying I do Not Know From Where
"Keep your hands on your gun, but keep your eyes on the bear!"

Put more clearly, while the destruction of enemy forces is important (ie, keep your hands on your gun), you shouldn't do it to the point that you lose sight of your primary objectives, which are on the battlefield (ie, keep your eyes on the bear).

THE BIG DAY
"Give me a fast tape measure and a lot of dice, 'cause I am going into harm's way."

Are there sneaky tricks and traps that an opponent can pull on you with his favorite army? Sure there are, and so can you, but this article isn't about tricks and traps, it's about armies and tactics. Nobody can give you a style of play, or put together your favorite army composition for you. All that can be done is to give you the proper tools to use, and give you an idea how they work, and then let you develop your own style of play. Tricks are nice, and so are traps, but they will only work once against the same opponent; sound tactics, good organisation, and good play are always more effective. Every army is different, learn its weaknesses and its strengths and use them to your advantage, rather than some neat trick you found on some hidden website. If you follow the dictums given in this article, you are not going to win every game you play, but it's a sure bet that you're not going to get blown out either. And a close game is always a good game, and a good game is always a fun game. Since the entire object of these games is to have fun you will have obtained the ultimate prize, and this article will have succeeded in its purpose.

Authors	*Moko Cwiklinski is a regular at the Epic forums. You can chat to him about anything Epic. Go on test him!*
Further Information	*The Epic range is widley available. Contact your nearest Games Workshop or visit the website for details. (See the How to Order pages on page 94).*
More Epic	*Turn to page 30 for the Chaos Death Wheel.*
Websites	*www.Epic-Battles.com*