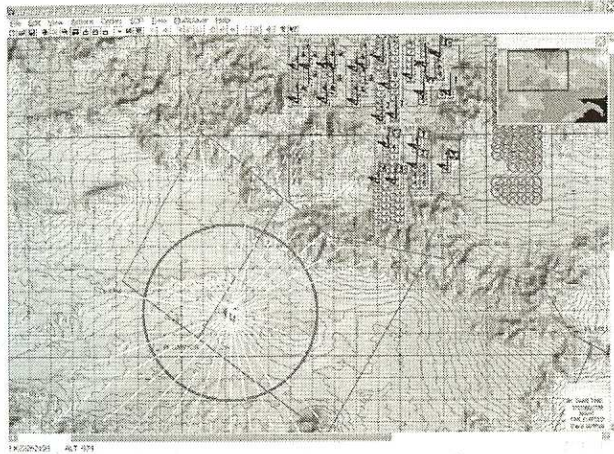## Building an Engagement Area

When building a defense, the key to success is to build outward. Let us explain. When a real-life armor battalion wants to construct a defensive position, the battalion commander usually goes right out into the middle of his sector. He usually takes his company commanders with him. They find a spot on the ground where they can look back, and see all of their fighting positions. They then place a marking device (like a big, one-sided, orange blanket called a VS-17 Panel) on this spot. The battalion commander says something cryptic like, "This is where we want to kill the enemy." All efforts then focus around this point.

Now back to **ATF**. Below, we have used **LOS Fan** from the **View** menu to find a spot on the ground that provides clear observation from points across your sector. That's important. If there is a gap where you can not place units to put direct fire on the enemy, the enemy is probably going to pick that spot to breach. You will not be able to get your units there in time to plug the hole. What follows is a drive by shooting (the enemy's driving!)

Back to our real life example. The engineers begin to build obstacles, which will guide, corral, and force the enemy into this point (it's called the center of the engagement area). The engineers also begin to dig vehicle and dismount holes for the armor and infantry, ensuring that they can all see the engagement area and fire directly on it.

We want to do the same thing in ATF. Push the enemy away from areas where we do not have good observation and coral him into areas where we have great observation. When we put our vehicles in, we must be able to range the decisive point. We must be able to see the decisive point.

The best way to ensure that you get good firing positions for all of your vehicles is to let the computer do the work by using the **SBF/Defense** formation. Give your hierarchies this formation and plan a path orienting them generally in the direction of the enemy. Now, when you move them into your sector, they will automatically try to find good firing positions with good observation for their weapon ranges.

See what we've done here? We put a hole at our decisive point just to keep track of it. Now we are going to put all of our hierarchies down so that they have a direct LOS to the center of the engagement area. Make sure the hierarchy is in range. Your tanks can only shoot effectively to 2500m (two and a half squares). Your M2A2 Bradley's can range to 3750m with their TOW missiles.

We actually grabbed some of the Bradleys and emplaced them by unit, just to prevent all of our units from getting bunched up. After we've placed all of our hierarchies, we will dig them in by placing vehicle holes on top of them.

An often-overlooked step here is to make sure your holes are facing the right direction. Drag-click over all of the holes and then right-click on any of them. When prompted to enter a direction, enter a direction in the general orientation to the enemy (in this case, 5400).
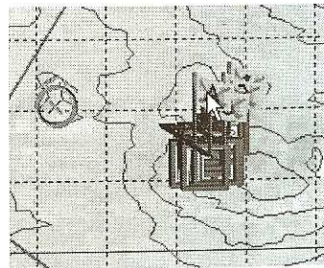
HINT: If you ever want to get at your holes *after* you have placed them on units, you can turn the display of all of the units and hierarchies off by using **Vehicles**, **Platoons**, and **Companies** from the **Echelon** sub-menu of the **View** menu. Then, drag-click over the group of holes you want to adjust and they will be selected.

Now we can start putting our obstacles in. We want to use the right-click method to make sure that every obstacle is observable by as many vehicles as possible and in range of direct fire. An obstacle not covered by direct and indirect fire is a waste of resources.

HINT: See the blue-outlined obstacles at the bottom of the figure? We highlighted them by drag-clicking over them. This is a good way to set the attitude of a bunch of obstacles at once. After selecting them as a group, right-click on any one of them and enter an attitude. The attitude will change for the whole group.
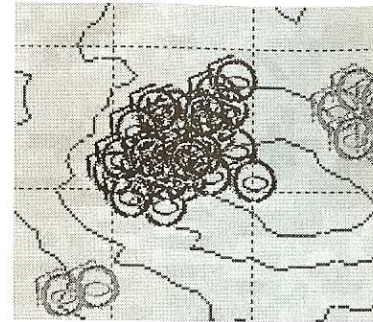

A question you might ask after you have played ATF for a while is, "What good is my infantry?" After we complete our discussion on the defense, we will address this question fully. But now is a good time to point out one good use: Infantry is an unbreachable obstacle that covers *itself* with direct fire. Put infantry on a vulnerable flank or to tie off your defense to a blocking terrain feature, like so.

Now, back to that real life example. The battalion commander has shown his company commanders and his engineer where he wants to kill the enemy, at the decisive point. Now he hops in his HMMWV (or his tank if he's hooah) and rolls back to his TOC (tactical operations center). He grabs his S-3 (operations officer) his S-2 (intelligence officer) and his FSO (his high-speed artillery guy) and shows them where the decisive point is. He also shows them where his company commanders will be digging in their companies, and basically where the engineer will put his obstacles. Now they begin to feverishly plan the defense. The S-2 starts picking spots he needs to look at. The S-3 starts deciding where and what needs to be in the reserve. The FSO begins planning fires and CAS (close air support) to support the defense. And they're all focused on the decisive point, the center of the engagement area, which the battalion commander was standing on an hour before. (By the way, the planning is a lot more painful than this, but you get the idea.)

We have built our engineer works and direct fire systems around the engagement area. Now it is time to overlay the intelligence (COLT's and scouts), fire support (mortars and artillery), maneuver (reserve), and air defense over the defense so that they also support the battle plan at the decisive point. Here's how it will all look when it is put together.

You might be saying right now, "That reserve looks like a whole lot more than a platoon." (Or you might not. The standard size of a reserve is two levels lower than the unit size, i.e. platoon for a battalion, company for a brigade.)

The answer is, "Yes". This reserve is a platoon of four plow tanks. It also has two Volcano minelayers, an APC with a MOPM minelayer team, and two smoke generators to keep it concealed. Why all of these for a platoon reserve? The answer is maneuver. You may have to go plug a hole in your defense. You may have to breach your own obstacles to get in position. You have to be flexible. The more mobility and counter-mobility assets you have, the more flexible you are.
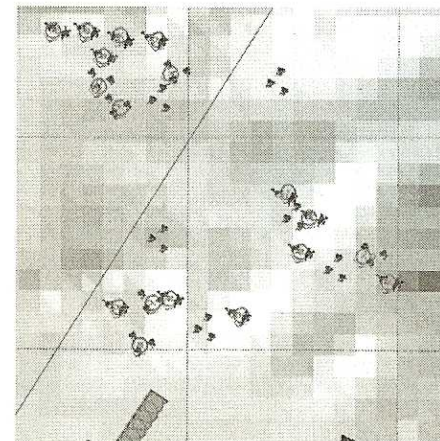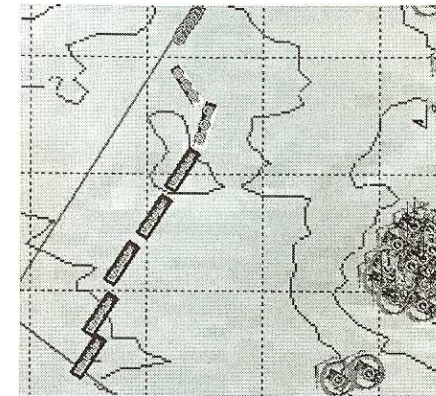
Also look at how every thing we have placed wraps around the decisive point. Our COLT's and scouts can see the approaches to the decisive point and the point itself. Our Artillery and our mortars (just northwest of the reserve) can range the decisive point and beyond. ADA is layered so that it has observation and coverage from the decisive point back. The reserve is positioned to rapidly reach a position to overlook the decisive point from the center or either flank.

The last piece is CAS (close air support). This is something you can't solve during setup. Find out how long it will take the aircraft to begin moving by right-clicking on an A-10 and selecting **Vehicle Specs** from the aircraft's context-sensitive menu. It says 900 seconds (or fifteen minutes). So you will have to call your CAS (change the stop-node of the A-10 to a go-node) fifteen minutes before the enemy reaches the decisive point.

Did you hear that? Many people talk about the decisive point like they know what it is, but do they really? Most people (who think about such things at all) think of the decisive point as a point in time when a key event must occur. But it's much more than that. It's an actual point on the ground (as I hope we have shown here). It *is* also a point in time. In the defense, the