

Crisis: Korea 1995 – Strategies and Tactics

BY CAPTAIN JOHN S. CLEAVES, U.S. ARMY

The first half of this article provides an overview of the game's major systems and mechanics. For those of you already familiar with the game, you may wish to skim or skip this half and proceed to the tactical and strategic information.

Introduction

Crisis: Korea 1995 (CK95) is a 1993 GMT Award-winning release covering hypothetical near-future conflict on the Korean peninsula. Players command Republic of Korea (ROK: South Korea), US, North Korean People's Army (NKPA) and, possibly, Chinese (PRC) forces. **CK95** combines many enjoyable elements such as a new look at the age-old battle of quality vs. quantity and the inherent tension created by the slow but inexorable build-up of US forces into, in this soldier's opinion, an elegant and accurate simulation.

CK95 is divided into a standard game and an advanced game; the latter takes a closer look at airpower, deep battle and logistics. The standard game includes four scenarios that highlight key portions of a potential war in Korea, and the advanced game booklet includes five campaigns that cover major operations and can be played with either the standard or advanced rules. The following article is designed to familiarize the new player with the key elements of the standard game and give some hints on tactics and strategy. In a future issue of C3i, I plan to present my thoughts on the play of the advanced game.

John Cleaves is a Captain in the U.S. Army, Military Intelligence. He is currently assigned as a Combat Trainer at the Army's National Training Center, Ft. Irwin, CA. Before moving to the NTC, Captain Cleaves accumulated extensive experience and expertise pertaining to the Korean theater and mission as a mechanized infantry company commander, brigade intelligence officer, and assistant operations officer for a Military Intelligence battalion, all with the 4th Mechanized Division at Ft. Carson, CO. He is also an avid gamer, with broad gaming interests ranging from *Star Fleet Battles* to Ancient miniatures to *Advanced Squad Leader* and, naturally, games covering current or hypothetical near-future wars.

System Sequencing

The CK95 sequence of play is fairly standard and non-interactive. After weather, initiative and sea control determination, each player will get a movement and combat phase (called by some underemployed gaming pundits the "Igo-Hugo" system). When the players have completed these phases, they clean up the map (Reorganization), get new stuff (Reinforcement and Replacement), see if anyone has won (Victory) and move the game turn marker (Game Record).

If, however, one player has the initiative, it's a whole new ball game. Initiative turns add another pair of movement and combat phases as well as extra exploitation movement and combat phases for the initiative player. This means that, during an initiative turn, there will be five pairs of movement and combat phases (three for the initiative player and two for the second player) instead of the normal two. The game effect of this is to produce the very realistic feel of initiative in modern combat which focuses on the concept of the "culminating point."

A force reaches its culminating point

when its ability to conduct further offensive operations has been severely degraded by exhaustion of supplies, attrition, equipment breakdown and fatigue. Units on the attack want to reach their culminating point after they have seized their objectives. The defender, on the other hand, wants to force the attacker to a standstill on his own terms and then launch his counterattack.

These effects are accurately simulated in the CK95 sequence. During initiative turns, the attacker (initiative player) will be a busy guy with all the advantages while the defender (non-initiative player) will be attempting to reduce the enemy's capacity to continue his offensive (i.e., accelerating the speed with which the attacker reaches his culminating point). While this can make for some long initiative turns, the feel is, in my opinion, right on.

Initiative

A player can gain the initiative in one of two ways. First, he can be assigned the initiative for a number of turns based on the scenario instructions. In each of the four basic scenarios and three of the four ground campaigns, one side or the other is initiating operations and begins the game with some momentum.

Second, a player gains the initiative if he scores the requisite number of victory points during the preceding turn while his opponent does not. If the preceding turn was an initiative turn, then the player must achieve the initiative victory point level (10-24 points, set by the scenario/campaign). If the previous turn was 'contested,' then he must only score more VP than his opponent. Thus, the 'defender' has the opportunity to shift the initiative by denying victory points to the 'attacker.' As victory points are awarded by destroying units

and gaining geographic objectives, the shift represents an inability on the part of the attacker to generate enough combat power to continue to kill large numbers of the enemy or capture key terrain.

The trick lies in the 'contested' turn, one in which neither player has the initiative. In these turns, either player may seize the initiative (and its many rewards) by scoring just one more VP than the other. It is this aspect that can make these some of the most exciting turns of the game.

Movement

Like all 20th century games, CK95 forces the player to deal with the many ways in which combat units get around.

Ground Movement:

This is standard hex-to-hex movement with units of differing movement categories (leg, light, motorized, mechanized) paying different movement costs to enter each type of terrain. One useful item is that all units of each category have the same movement points, helping differentiate them beyond the unit symbol. The downside of this system is the number of category/terrain combinations. The Terrain Effects Chart (TEC) on the north map is very well laid out and most common combinations are easy to remember after a couple of turns. I made a copy of the terrain chart to use when playing a south map scenario, and hope to see a reprint of the TEC Insert, (in *C3i magazine Nr.3 - G.B.*) that can be copied or pulled out so that players don't need to lay the north map out for scenarios 1,3 and 4.

Stacks of ground units with more than one stacking point (usually something as large as or larger than a US mechanized brigade) exert a Zone of Control (ZOC) into the six adjacent hexes. ZOCs stop most movement and restrict retreats, but do not force combat.

Another interesting feature of CK95 is the Advance/Control check. This check is made by units wishing to capture city, urban and installation hexes, whether through movement or advance after combat. It represents the intrinsic ability of these sites to resist conquest and is reminiscent of similar mechanics



in SPI's *The Conquerors* and Avalon Hill's *Hitler's War*. The check is made by a die roll on the appropriate table against the type of site entered. Size and efficiency rating are the favorable modifiers to the check.

Air Movement:

Moving units by air comes in three flavors: airmobile movement (movement by helicopter), air transport (movement by airplane), and paradrop (movement by either that ends in parachuting to the ground). Airmobile movement is a tremendous capability that allows leg and light units to move up to 24 hexes while ignoring terrain. This may be used to place units into combat. Air transport is used to move leg and light units between friendly airfields.

Paradrops are used to move airborne units from friendly airbases to any hex on the map and may place a unit in combat. The advantages to using paradrops are the unlimited range and that it doesn't use airmobile points. The cons are the limited number of airborne units and the possibility of a step loss on the paradrop table. There is no provision for dropping a unit into an enemy

hex, but the mechanics of combat are such that it makes little difference. All types of air movement are subject to air defense fire, a nice abstraction that simulates damage to the transporting unit from ground and air superiority attack with one die roll.

Sea Movement:

There are three types of sea movement: two forms of sea transport plus amphibious assault. The first type is available to all unit types and moves the unit from one friendly, undamaged port to another. Note that this is the only type of sea movement for mechanized non-marine units. This means that you cannot bring heavy units in after a marine unit has secured the beachhead, unless it has also captured a nearby port. Normally this is not a problem, but it must be taken into account in your planning.

The second type of sea movement is available to all marine units and units with a movement allowance of five or less (i.e., light and leg infantry). These units can move between friendly, undamaged ports, 'At-Sea' boxes and beachheads. Moving to an 'At-Sea' box allows the player to set up for a future invasion, while moving to a beachhead is used to reinforce an existing landing. All types of sea transport allow the unit to move half of its move allowance after moving by sea.

Amphibious assault is available only to marine units and is the only way to move by sea to a hex that is not a friendly port or beachhead. The marine unit must start in the appropriate 'at-sea' box and then move to a beach hex using the correct amount of amphibious transport units. This assault only gets the units adjacent to the beach hex—they must move into it after successfully resolving combat with any units there. If the hex contains an installation or city, the assaulting marine units must also pass an advance/control check. Once a successful landing is made, a beachhead marker may be placed, subject to the limit of the countermix. The beachhead marker has a defense strength of two, increases the stacking limit of the hex and allows further sea movement into the hex. Note that grabbing a port hex outright will obviate the need to use a beachhead

Crisis: Korea 1995

The Next War in Asia
Published: 1993 **Winner:** CSR Awards

Game Design: Gene Billingsley
Art Director: Rodger B. MacGowan

North Korea

2 N4523 6
XX
Kok 820
14-9-8

U.S. Air Force

A MS
F-117 -2
(4)-0-4*

South Korea

2 XX 6
L 3
7-5-5

Contents: 680 die-cut Counters; Two 22x34 inch Mapsheets depicting most of Korea; Rulebook, Advanced Rulebook and Ten Player Aid Cards; One 10-sided die; Bookcase Box

Time Scale: 3.5 days per game turn
Map Scale: 7.5 miles per hex
Unit Scale: Division/Brigade

Strategies and Tactics

marker to move more units in.

Combat

Defending stacks of units are attacked from any or all of the six adjacent hexes by comparing the attack and defense strength of the units involved and creating an initial odds ratio. The odds ratio column is found on a line on the combat table corresponding to the terrain type in the defender's hex. That is, a 3:1 in flat terrain is better for the attacker than a 3:1 in mountains. There are some adjustments to unit strengths for such things as rivers, armor in flat and leg infantry in urban terrain.

The odds column may then be adjusted for a variety of reasons, most of which are not under the player's control. Surprise is typical—you either have it or you don't. The principal column shift over which players have some control is unit efficiency. The players compare the efficiency ratings of the best units in the combat. For every rating point one player has over another, there is a favorable column shift. For stacks with different efficiencies, the player may choose which will be used for the comparison, but that unit is up first for losses.

The last modifier to combat comes in the form of die roll modifiers (DRMs). Almost all of these are under player control. I will address most of these later in the article when I talk about tactics, as obtaining these modifiers is the chief method by which players increase combat power in the attack. In addition, a key DRM is ground support by air points and attack helicopters, and I will discuss this under airpower.

Once all of the column shifts and DRMs have been accounted for, the die is rolled and the results applied. Results come in unit step losses and retreats for attacker and defender. I have found it useful to announce the final combat situation out loud to the other player in the manner "4:1 in hills +2" so that there is no confusion about where we are on the table when the die is rolled. If the defenders retreat or are eliminated, attackers advance, taking into account any necessary Advance/Control checks.

Airpower

In the standard game, each player rolls

on the air point chart to determine the number of available air points. Air points may also be provided by US Naval Aviation once the US gains control of a Sea Zone. The air superiority level (ASL) is based on the difference in available air points and generally favors the NKPA early on and grows favorable to the Allies as American airpower makes its presence felt in-theater. The ASL is used to determine how deadly air defense fire will be.

Air points can be used in two ways. First, they can support ground attacks. After odds columns are determined, each player, beginning with the attacker, may allocate air points to ground support. Each point is worth one column shift. The attacker may allocate up to four and the defender may allocate two.

Second, air points may be used to escort air movement. For each air point, up to two, allocated to an air movement operation, the player receives a favorable DRM on the Air Defense Fire (ADF) table.

In addition to air points, each player has helicopter units available. These units have a range and a combat support value. During combat, they may be used in a manner similar to air points, providing favorable DRMs to combats within range equal to their CSV. Each unit may do this twice in a turn. They are allocated along with air points, attacker first (maximum of two units) followed by the defender (one unit).

Both types of combat support from the air and all air movement are subject to Air Defense Fire. For each air transport point, helicopter or group of air points conducting one of these operations, a d10 is rolled on the ADF table. Results for air movement missions are aborts and step losses. Step losses also result in the loss of the transporting point. Results for combat support missions are either temporary or permanent loss of the air point/helicopter step. Being escorted or operating entirely in a friendly country helps, and being near enemy armor or airfields/bases makes the table more deadly. Also, the column used on the table depends on the ASL. If your opponent has air superiority or supremacy, you're not going to get a lot

done aloft.

Naval Units

The seas are (eventually) the realm of the ROK/US player. Early on, the NKPA player can do some limited moving around, but it's only a matter of time before both sea zones are carrier-group infested lakes. These units provide air points and coastal gun support, as well as an increasing ability to conduct amphibious operations. The gun support is identical in mechanics to that provided by air points, and sea movement has been discussed above.

TACTICS

So, let's see what we can do with all this cool stuff.

General

- The number one consideration in CK95, after the scenario's victory conditions, is the initiative. Get it and keep it. Initiative is like having half again as many turns as your opponent. Keep careful track of where you are with respect to initiative VPs. If you are close, it's probably worth any extra losses. If last turn was contested, you need to also keep close track of your opponent's VPs. Your battle plan needs to match overall victory with the turn to turn gain of VPs. Keep the flow of battle under your control through the use of reserves so that you don't run out of steam just when your opponent can grab back enough ground to take the initiative away. For the NKPA player in most scenarios/campaigns, early loss of the initiative equals painful death.

- Keep careful track of your high-efficiency (6+) units. They will be your only reaction force when you don't have the initiative and don't have air superiority to increase your combat power. They are critical to the middle game (US forces not all in-theater, air battle in doubt, initiative ready to swing).

- Watch your overall 'post-combat posture.' Are your key units free of ZOCs so they can exploit? Are your units tasked to seize that airbase adjacent to it, so they can make an immediate Advance/Control check? Are your mech reserves on the right road? Like chess, plan ahead.

- Choose which combats to do first in a

turn according to air support available. Try to get the enemy to commit air points to battles that are less important to you, and then hammer those hexes you absolutely must have. Usually, one or two negative DRMs are not a big deal. A minus-six, on the other hand...

- Build your attacks around the '3:1 flat' column. It is the only column that gains TWO more retreat results over its predecessor. This probably reflects the age-old wisdom of 3:1 minimum in the attack. Note that 3:1 in this game is not necessarily just 3:1 in combat strength: it may include the effects of efficiency, forts, surprise, etc. This is an accurate reflection of reality wherein combat power is different from a simple count of weapon systems.

- Carefully consider standing (voluntarily ignoring retreat, 7.71) when you receive a retreat result. One more turn in Uijongbu can ruin a communist's whole day.

- This is NOT a blitzkrieg! Some of the largest tank units in the world are in some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world. That efficiency 8 marine recon is usually worth a couple of tank divisions. It can fly, sea move and grab two columns from the best of the NKPA units. At the same time, the 2d Infantry Division's tank brigade is wallowing in a rice paddy. Choose early and wisely the paths for your mech forces. Everyone can exploit if not tied down by a zone of control: use the right unit for the job, not just the "panzers."

NKPA Tactics

- NKPA tactics are built around their light infantry units. They can air move, sea move, ignore ZOCs and infiltrate, and they provide a -1 DRM in the attack. The number one tactical cause for NKPA failure is misuse of this asset. Here are some key LI considerations:

Use the "leapfrog" technique. Infiltrate LI, advance after combat, exploit move, advance after combat and get adjacent to the enemy line so that you can infiltrate again. Use LI in pairs so that one is always infiltrating a key sector and to cover a loss from a failed infiltration attempt.

Don't use the efficiency rating of LI in combat. The loss of a column shift is worth preserving the LI unit. Use those scummy motorized recon units instead.

The ROK/US rear area should be awash in NKPA LI. Marine and airborne LI should go deep and threaten key installations and mobilization sites. Grab airbases for the ADF modifier and ports to bring in more units. Do this early, as your amphibious and air move capabilities degrade over time. Normal LI should exploit/infiltrate to cut off retreats and force the ROK/US player to commit units to the rear fight. There is a DRM for multi-hex attacks, and this is a great way to get it.

- Tunnels are another key NKPA tactical force multiplier. They are only good on the first turn of an invasion, but they are critical. They don't come off until the reorganization phase, and so will be around for all of the NKPA movement phases. If you can't find a use for all of them during the first movement phase, hold some in reserve. Early on, they will soften the fortress modifier for the ROK DMZ hexes, but in later movement phases they can be used against Allied units adjacent to the DMZ that aren't getting the fort benefit for even greater effect. Plan ahead; even tunnels no longer giving the DRM allow increased stacking until the end of the turn.

- There are several NKPA mechanized formations behind the front. They are almost as important as the LI. Keep them together, commit them to an attack avenue and DRIVE! They are difficult to redeploy, but in the right terrain (namely roads) they can really stir up trouble. Once the tunnels are gone, these units are mostly useful for their high density of combat factors to stacking points. Some also have good efficiencies. Do not focus on them for exploit, as every unit has that capability and LI are best at it, but note that they can potentially get deeper under the right conditions. Although it rarely happens, don't overlook the effect of armor in flat and hills terrain.

ROK/US Tactics

- Have nerves of steel. In most situations, you will be in the react mode for what seems an eternity as the communist

hordes swarm over you. Be patient. Play *Top Gun* or *Heartbreak Ridge* on your VCR...

- Keep your high efficiency units in key positions to react. In a multi-division battle, efficiency is not so important. In the rear areas where engagements involve only a couple of units, a one or two efficiency difference can be crucial. Small 6+ units (like marine battalions) are better in this role than covering ROK divisions. Don't throw them away!

- Remember the rules for Advance/Control. Some hexes he can't get into without starting adjacent to them and even then he needs to roll a die. Accept risk in non-vital areas using this rule like extra units. Deep targets that have airfields/installations nearby are more dangerous to him in terms of ADF. You may leave some of these uncovered to defend other sites. He will have to take the ADF to land adjacent, and still can't start trying to move in until next turn.

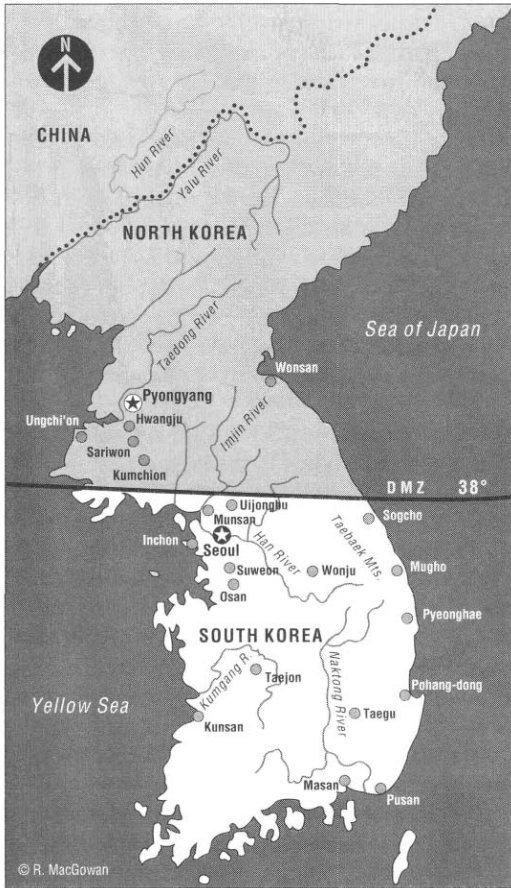
- Balance defending mobilization hexes against other VP sites in the area. The mob site may not even produce a lost unit and if it does, it will be the same as losing an installation or city that could have been defended instead. My experience is that it is not worth the effort.

- Using helicopters early is usually an exercise in giving him VPs. These units are extremely valuable and should be preserved in the early game. If you must use them, do so away from armor and escort the mission with airpoints.

- After the air superiority situation has changed, however, it's a whole new ball game. With a typical mix of helicopter units, the ROK/US player will have 7-8 helo points that can be used twice, for around 15 combat support points. That's more than the most air points the NKPA can have on the first turn of the invasion and more than the ROK/US average until game turn 7. They are the principal combat multiplier on the Allied side in the first, critical, five turns.

- The ROK/US player must continually be driving towards the initiative. Each tactical gain or loss affects the VP count, and even the outskirts of Seoul aren't as

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important as an early swing in initiative. You must carefully gauge the right time and place to launch counterattacks. Are there armor units and airfields to provide ADF modifiers? Is there an efficiency 6+ unit you can afford to lose? Is there a town you can recapture cheaply?

- Don't overlook the offensive capability of your airmobile capacity. It is too easy to get into the rut of reacting to NKPA strikes. Toss a couple of units in HIS rear area. Block a mech corps at a key road junction. Pin down an airborne or marine unit. Watch the expression on his face when you make an Advance/Control check on a nuke site on turn 2.

STRATEGY

Let's turn now to the big picture.

NKPA Strategy

- Take Seoul now. Seoul is like Cemetery Hill. If the sun sets on the first day and you have a foothold, you've made a game of it. If you never touch it, US troops are going to build up until you

can't take it anymore.

- In the non-invasion campaigns, the NKPA must still go all out early on. You must be aggressive, coming at the Allies from all directions all the time so that, when I Corps and the CVBGs show up, you are laughing at them from strong defensive positions.

- Take a look at the east. In one game, my NKPA opponent conducted a series of low odds attacks, even using tunnels and airpower out in the eastern mountains. I chuckled with evil glee until the third turn of this when, thanks to the appropriately bloody CRT, both our front lines were gone and his second line eastern forces were moving on my right flank!

- Don't be overly concerned about your own rear. If you commit too many forces to reserves and airmobile watch, you will miss out on the opportunity for an early knockout blow. If you are aggressive enough, your own threats will keep him too busy to launch a lot of stuff deep. You

need those forces NOW. Let the People's Guard take care of the people.

- The ROK/US will eventually get enough forces to counterattack, but not in the first two turns. You must create two or three threatening breakthroughs on the first turn. If you get off to a slow start, he will bottle up your biggest threat with the 2d ID and smile. He has time, you do not. It's that simple.

ROK/US Strategy

- Dissipate his attack. Kill a key unit, stand instead of retreating, put an airmobile unit in a hex he needs. Bend like a reed in the wind. Do not let him get ahead and go to ground.

- You must defend the avenues into Seoul at all costs. There is no subtlety in this area. Some genius put the ROK capital next to the world's fourth largest army. You need to get in the way.

- Dance around in the east, using the terrain to allow you to relocate some

units to the critical sector.

- As I have pointed out, the system is bloody, a fact of life in this theater. Even at 3:1 odds in flat terrain, there is a 50% chance the attacker will suffer a step loss. Comparing this to the replacement rate, it won't take many attacks to run down an offensive. Watch the CRT for those times when +1 DRM really does increase the chances he will take a loss. Tie this in to a strategy geared to take away the initiative early.

- Finally, don't let him concede. You have suffered through his offensive and held him off, and now the planet's mightiest military machine is ready for action. You have four CVBGs off the coast, a heavy corps, gobs of marines, more helicopters than all other air forces combined, 30 air points and the USS Wisconsin. Make him play it out.

Conclusion

As a player, I think CK95 is a great game. It has cool toys, communists, tension, Hind-Ds and the DMZ. It combines the action of Gettysburg, the terrain of the Bulge and the tools of the Gulf War.

Based on my study of the current situation on the Korean peninsula, I believe that **CK95** is also a great simulation. It lives up to the purpose behind any near-future game: you can use it to answer the question, "What if they really did it?" From my analysis of the theater, all of the key elements are present, and those that play a secondary role are elegantly abstracted. The only thing that's missing is the emphasis in the NKPA on artillery (to the tune of 1000 tubes in a US division sector at the point of attack), and I think it's safe to assume that Gene spread that effect into the high combat values for the NKPA units, still equipped with T55s and T62s.

Having said all that, it's off to the Advanced Game and some isolated units, missile strikes and Stealth. See you down the road...

As part of Captain Cleaves' article on the Advanced Game in the next C3i, he'll be including a sidebar article on *A Company Commander's View of the Next Korean War*. Given the current tensions, it will likely be sobering as well as enlightening.