The Rapid Creation of Decision Games

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How to Use this Pamphlet

There are many ways to create decision games. This pamphlet describes one of these. In particular, it provides step-by-step instructions on how to create a simple Decision-Forcing Case (DFC) that can be used in three different ways. First, this DFC can be used as an exercise in its own right. Second, it can be turned into a Tactical Decision Game (TDG). Third, the DFC you create can be combined with another DFC (or TDG) to set a *Kriegsspiel* in motion.

When reading this pamphlet, it will help to have the other two booklets in this series, *Decision-Forcing Cases* and *Decision Games: A Handbook for Marines*, close at hand.

Find a True Tale (A Real-World Event)

The first step in the rapid creation of a decision game is the finding of an thorough account of a tactical situation faced by an actual leader at some point in the past. These can be found in a memoir (written by the leader in question), a biography (written about the leader in question), a unit history (written about the unit in question), or an account of the event in question.

In a few instances, accounts of this sort were written with decision games in mind. These include such classics as *Infantry in Battle*, *Infantry Attacks*, *Unofficial Histories*, and *Maneuver in War.* As a rule, however, the people who wrote the sort of stories that can easily be turned into decision games were not thinking of that purpose. Thus, you will probably have to do a bit of additional research in order to provide details of interest to the people playing the game that you built. These include such things as terrain, light conditions, weather, organization, transport, and equipment.

Find the Hero
(The Protagonist)

Once you have settled upon a source, your next task is to identify the *protagonist* of the case you are creating. If your source is a memoir, then the hero of the tale is, in most instances, going to be the author of that autobiography. Similarly, the chief character in the stories found in a biography will, more often than not, be the subject of that book. If your source is a history of a unit, then the protagonist will probably be the leader of that organization.

Find the Problem (Or Problems)

Somewhere in the real-world event you have a chosen, there is a problem that the protagonist had to solve. This could be a piece of ground to defend, an attack to plan, or an advance-to-contact to organize. It could also be an enemy action that requires a response, an obstacle to be overcome, or an opportunity to exploit.

Sometimes an event will provide you with a single problem. At other times, it will offer up a series of problems, each of which follows the other. (DFCs made out of such events are called "incremental" cases.)

If, for whatever reason, you cannot find a suitable problem in the true tale you have chosen, find another event to examine.

Find a Good Map (Recent Events)

Few of the sources that make for good DFCs provide suitable maps. Because of that, you will have to find them elsewhere. If the event is recent, you can make use of the various mapping services linked to Wikipedia. (If you click on the "coordinates" provided in the upper right-hand corner of any Wikipedia article about a town, county, state, or country, you will be taken to a long list of recent maps centered on that place.)

Find a Good Map (Distant Events)

If the event at the heart of your DFC took place a long time ago, you will probably have to find an older map. These can be found in many corners of the internet, often in places that you wouldn't expect. Thus, it helps to both patient and creative when you make your search.

Here are some tips for finding maps that you can use in your DFC.

Set the image feature on the search engine to "high resolution" or "large."

Search on the local version of the word for "map." (You can find that by using translation websites like Babelfish.)

Try several spellings of the name of the place in question. (These will often be listed in the Wikipedia article about the place.)

If you can't find the particular place you are looking for, search for another place mentioned in the source.

Look for a map that was made shortly before, or shortly after, the event in question. (Beware of maps that show features, such as canals, bridges, and highways, that were built after the event at the heart of your DFC.)

If you have a map of a battle that shows "spoilers" and is in SVG format, you can use a freeware program like Inkscape to remove items that give away too much information. (Many of the maps found on Wikipedia articles are in SVG format.)

Look at the foreign language versions of the Wikipedia articles that you use. They often provide maps not found in English-language articles.

Organization and Equipment

The organization and equipment of the forces depicted in DFCs, as well as such things as rank structure, conventions, and techniques, will often differ from our own. For that reason, you will probably have to do a bit of background research on the forces in question.

The art of finding this sort of information has a lot in common with the way you look for older maps. That is, you will have to use a mixture of creativity and patience.

Here are some specific tips.

The shorter, highly illustrated, books published by Osprey Publishing provide this sort of information for many military organizations and time periods. Many of these can be viewed on Archive.org. Just be sure to search on the term "Osprey Publishing." (If you search for "Osprey" alone, you will find lots of books about sea eagles!)

The website of Leo Niehorster has lots of organizational diagrams for units that fought in World War II.

The materials for "paint your own figures" wargames like *Flames of War* and *Bolt Action* provide lots of information about equipment, organization, and tactical tendencies.

Some of the books published by the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth contain lots of information about organization and equipment. (Others of these tells tales that can be turned into DFCs.)

Light and Weather (Sun and Moon)

If the account that you are using to create a decision game lacks information about things like sunrise, sunset, moon phase, and weather, you may have to find that information elsewhere. Before, however, you go looking for this, ask yourself if it is relevant to the problem at hand. If it's not, don't worry about it. If it is, it's time to do a little additional research.

If you have access to the internet, you can easily find information about the natural light conditions during the event in question by doing an internet search that combines the date in question, the place in question, and such expressions as "sunset," "sunrise," "moon phase," and "weather." (Rather than searching on the exact location of the event, use the name of the nearest major city. For example, instead of searching for "sunrise" "4 July 1863" and "Gettysburg" use "sunrise" "4 July 1863" and "Philadelphia.")

If you don't have access to the internet, you can look for clues as to light and weather in other parts of the book you are using. For example, if the book mentions that the sun went down at 1900 two days before the event in question, then you can assume that the sunset of interest to you occurred a few minutes before or after that time.
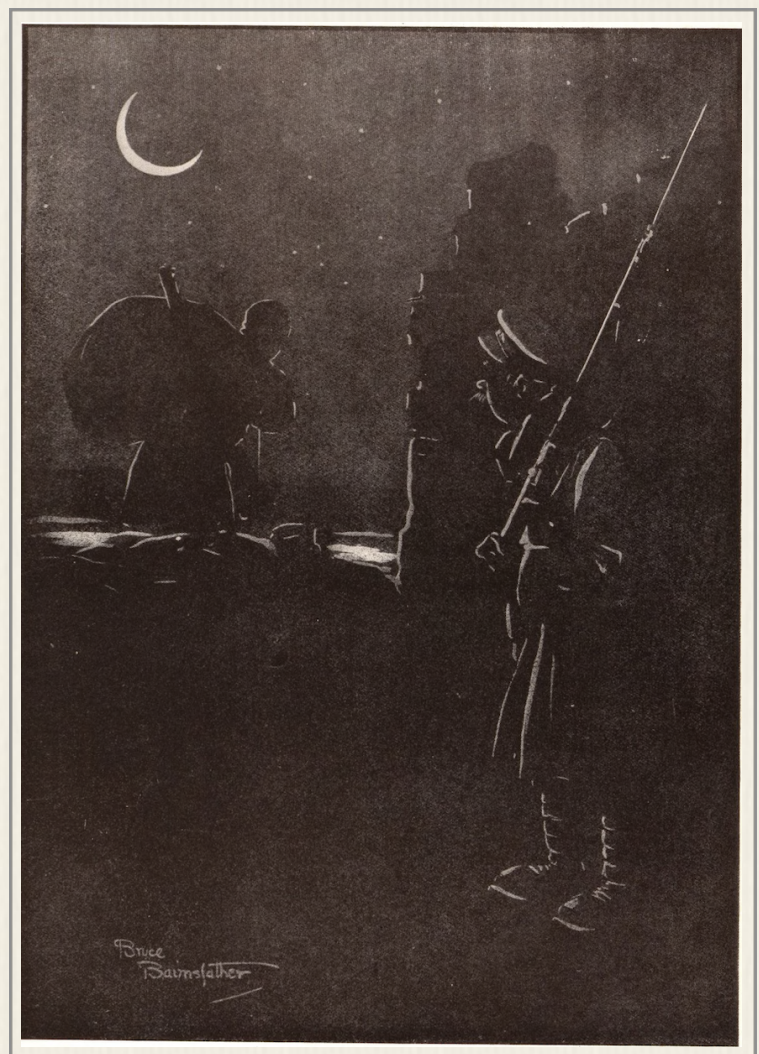
Make a DFC (Out of Your Story)

Once you have the necessary facts at hand, you can turn them into a DFC. The formula for a simple DFC is as follows:

1. Identify the time and place. ("It is 15 June 1944, and you are on the island of Saipan.")

2. Identify the protagonist. ("You are Captain John Schwabe, USMCR, officer-in-charge of the Scout Observer Section of the 2nd Marine Regiment. Your mission is …")

3. Identify the problem. ("One of your men, PFC Guy Gabaldon, went UA last night. He returned this morning with several Japanese prisoners.")

4. Use the "cold call" technique to ask students to solve the problem as if they were the protagonist. ("Captain Schwabe, what is going on here? What do you do about the situation?")

5. Ask students provide their answers, paraphrase them in ways that make the solutions more obvious. ("So, Captain Schwabe, what you're saying is …")

6. After students have explained their solutions, tell them what happened in real life. ("Here's what Captain Schwabe did …")

7. Ask students to reflect upon the DFC. ("So, what was this DFC about? Why are we engaging it?)

Turn a DFC into a TDG

All you need to do to turn a DFC into a TDG is to add a bit of fiction. If, for example, you want to explore the effect of a particular type of drone on battalion tactics, you can take a DFC based on an event from a recent conflict (such as the crossing of the Saddam Canal during the battle for Nasariyah in March 2003) and add drones of those type to the order of battle of the unit in question. (This bit of fiction need not be fantastic. It need only be untrue.)

Turn a DFC into a *Kriegsspiel*

One way to create a *Kriegsspiel* is to build a matched set of DFCs, each of which puts the player into the role of a participant in a two-sided competition. This is easiest to do for engagements for which English-language documentation is available for both sides. Thus, creating a matched set of DFCs is relatively easy for events that took place during the American War of Independence, the War of 1812, or the American Civil War. (This technique can also be used to turn accounts of a free-play exercise into a *Kriegsspiel.*)