BattleTechnology

The Magazine of Combat in the 31st Century

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BattleTechnology
The Magazine of Combat in the 31st Century

Issue 0203
June 3028

About the Cover:

This issue's cover captures the final moments of a scratch battalion of the 2nd Kearny Highlanders in the tangle of Mira's equatorial jungles. Liao forces found more than they'd bargained for during a reconnaissance in force on the Davion-held border world. The encounter is featured in "Howl of the North Wind" on page 30.

Contents

OPENING SHOTS

Peace in our time…

By now, the populations of most of the worlds of the Inner Sphere must know about the upcoming marriage between Hanse Davion, First Prince of the Federated Suns, and the lovely Melissa Steiner, Archon-Designate of the Lyran Commonwealth. The wedding, currently set for the 20th of August, 3028, promises to be the single most important and momentous event of the century… possibly of all time.

News of the wedding, reported by BattleTechnology's news service in our last issue, has drawn paeans of praise and fusillades of foreboding. Never in the history of Man, it seems, have so many people held such diametrically opposing viewpoints as to just what this one, single event might herald for the future of the race.

Why all the fuss over one wedding?

Any wedding between the heads of two major houses must be viewed with an eye to the political aspects of that union. Marriage for love, at least among heads of state, is still a relative rarity, though by all accounts the Steiner-Davion match has its romantic aspects. (Interested readers might seek out *The Sword and the Dagger,* by Ardath Mayhar, a novel published by FASA which touches on the relationship between the First Prince and the Archon-Designate.)

In any case, the marital union of Hanse Davion with Melissa Steiner can only herald the political and military union of House Steiner with House Davion. In a single stroke, two of the most powerful of the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere will have doubled their respective territories, their resources, and their military might. House Kurita, in particular, must dread such an alliance, since the Draconis Combine lies squarely between the two. It is not hard to imagine the havoc House Steiner might wreak on the Combine by drawing defensive forces off from the Davion Marches with raids and feints, just in time to weaken that border for a stroke by Hanse Davion's units.

It is this basic fact of military logistics which has caused the stir among observers in each of the major houses. Steiner and Davion sources tend to wax optimistic in their belief that the Davion-Steiner alliance will make possible a true and lasting peace… either because the other major houses will seek to join what is obviously a lasting and beneficial alliance in the best interests of all, or because the Davion-Steiner alliance will be so overwhelmingly powerful on the battlefield that the other houses will be unable to stand up to them for more than a very short time.

Observers within Houses Marik, Liao, and Kurita, on the other hand, view the coming wedding as a provocation, an attempt to enforce Federated Suns/Commonwealth will on the entire population of the Inner Sphere. Such provocation, these observers warn, can only lead to war on a scale so vast and so devastating that civilization itself might not survive.

The Inner Sphere, of course, has been almost continually at war for centuries. Military experts point out, however, that the skirmishes, raids, counter-raids, and limited invasions traded among the Great Houses over the past several decades represent a relatively low level of hostilities, that the wedding could, in fact, trigger a new round of all-out warfare on a scale undreamed of since the height of the Age of War centuries ago.

Whichever is the correct answer, it is liable to be decisive. Peace across the Inner Sphere could herald a new age of prosperity and technical achievement for all Mankind. A Fourth Successor State War could well doom Mankind to eternal barbarism as he loses completely the ability to repair the shattered remnants of now largely-vanished technologies.

Peace… or war?

Our next issue of BattleTechnology will examine this question in greater detail, as we cover the wedding on Earth and the prospects for a lasting peace. We at BattleTechnology are optimists. As this issue of the magazine goes to press, we look forward to the dawning of a new age of peace and understanding, of cooperation between the worlds, of new vistas of interplanetary commerce, growth, and prosperity.

But… uh… keep your lasers dry.

William H. Keith, Jr.

— 3028 —

LIAO WEAPONS MAKER REVEALS SYSTEM PROBLEM

Dateline: Tikonov—Earthwerks Ltd. of Tikonov has revealed in a product bulletin a potentially serious problem with its newly designed SLS (Simplified Loading System) for the Delta Dart Long Range Missile system, specifically for the Rack 15 model. The SLS went on the market last year as a modification to the reload system of the *Thunderbolt* BattleMech and was intended to reduce the reload time of the LRM Rack by 50%. According to the bulletin, problems have arisen in re-arming the system after clearance of feed-related jams. Following the SLS manual, a normal feed jam can be remedied by simply engaging the built-in jam clearance system. However, in some cases if the feed track system is not first placed into neutral, the jam clearance equipment will fail, resulting in a misfeed of the next rack. The status board will indicate a clean reload but when firing is attempted, there is a chance that a misfire will occur and the rack will detonate without launching.

According to Earthwerks, the problem only arises if a reload occurs shortly after a serious system vibration such as might result from a nearby armor hit. The product bulletin states that company technicians are working on remedying the problem and that once a solution is found, the data will be provided free of charge to all purchasers of the SLS.

Right: An explosive problem for *Thunderbolts*. Defects in Earthwerks SLS may be responsible for critical LRM failures in combat.

LYRAN GALAHAD UNDERWAY

Dateline: Tharkad—The Office of Public Information on Tharkad today announced that Lyran military forces were beginning a series of military maneuvers—designated Operation: Thor—designed to test the readiness of House Steiner forces to respond to "any threat to our realm, foreign or domestic." While Steiner officials denied that these operations are directed in any way against the Draconis Combine, word of the maneuvers drew a sharp response from various House Kurita sources. Independent sources noted that the maneuvers appeared to be timed to coincide with Hanse Davion's Operation: Galahad.

Military analysts have suggested that a number of Kurita garrisons along the Lyran frontier have been depleted in recent months, possibly because of unrest within the Combine and because of unexpected problems with mercenary units under contract to the Combine. It is believed that House Kurita fears a major Steiner incursion aimed at border worlds such as Kandis, Harvest and Verthandi, where civil unrest and rebellions have occurred in recent years.

Observers have noted that all House Steiner troop and naval movements have been made in regions bordering the Draconis Combine, and that no maneuvers have been announced or observed near Marik space. House Steiner officials declined to comment on this, saying only that the maneuvers were not directed against any of the Lyran Commonwealth's neighbors, and that the timing with Davion's Operation: Galahad was purely coincidental.

WEDDING PREPARATIONS ON EARTH

Dateline: Terra—Earth, Mother of Mankind, is preparing for the gala event of the century, as the time nears for the recently-announced wedding between Archon Designate Melissa Steiner of the Lyran Commonwealth, and Hanse Davion, First Prince of the Federated Suns. The wedding, subject of intense speculation for several months, has been widely hailed both as Mankind's best chance for a lasting interstellar peace, and as a threat to the stability of the established order, a blatant attempt by Federated Suns/Commonwealth forces to impose their will on the other major houses of the Inner Sphere.

The wedding is scheduled to take place on Earth, on August 20, 3028.

FRICTION ALONG THE KURITA FRONTIER

Dateline: Harvest—House Kurita sources here have denounced the Lyran maneuvers as deliberate provocations aimed at destabilizing the Draconis Combine.

"We have incontrovertible evidence that the 1ˢᵗ Lyran Regulars are preparing for a strike against us," said General Domini Matsumoto, military governor of the Kurita world of Harvest. "Their forces are gathering on Romulus. Their agents have been smuggling weapons to the Outlands rebels on Harvest. It's beginning to look like Verthandi all over again. His Grace is not pleased, and he has given me complete authority to deal with the matter." "His Grace" undoubtedly refers to Archduke Hasid Ricol, governor of 14 border worlds within the Combine's Rasalhague Military District, but General Matsumoto would not elaborate on his statement.

Duke Ricol could not be reached for comment.

FIRST CRUCIS LANCERS ARRIVE ON MIRA FOR CELEBRATIONS

Dateline: New Avalon—Millard Jansen, a public information officer for House Davion at the palace on new Avalon, today announced the arrival of several regiments of the famed Crucis Lancers on Mira. "It's something of a reunion for the Lancers," Jansen said. "They haven't been together as a single unit for a good many years."

Jansen was unable to give precise figures for the number of 'Mech units currently on Mira, or of their sizes. The Crucis Lancers consist of a full eight regiments—'Mechs, mechanized, and support units—however, and are widely regarded as one of the best trained, best equipped, and most experienced combat units in House Davion's service.

Mira lies on the Davion frontier not far from the border with House Liao. Its position between the two Houses has frequently made it a battleground. The world was ceded to the Federated Suns shortly after a massive rising on Mira in 2344 established its independence from the old Tikonov Union.

New Avalon sources categorically denied Liao contentions that the presence of the united Crucis Lancers posed any threat to the Capellan Confederation. "There have been some reports of raids against Mira by Capellan forces," Jansen said, "but nothing too serious. Maximilian claims we're threatening his border, but that's pure propaganda. He's the one whose been making all the noise, you notice. Our people are on our own world, minding their own business."

When asked what that business might be, Jansen explained, "The Crucis Lancers are gathered on Mira to celebrate the wedding this summer on Earth."

Jansen refused to speculate on the nature of the Lancers' celebration.

Lancers on Mira: An *Archer* and a *Shadow Hawk,* both members of the 1ˢᵗ Crucis Lancers, photographed shortly after their arrival at Ciudad Mira Spaceport, on Mira recently. The jungle visible in the background is a prominent feature of this world.

WOLF'S DRAGOONS
BATTLE DRACONIS REGULARS

Dateline: Misery—Reports just received from a BattleTechnology correspondent on Misery indicate that sharp fighting has broken out between elements of House Kurita regular forces and the famous mercenary regiment known as Wolf's Dragoons. These reports appear to confirm reports received in April (see: BattleTechnology News Service, Issue 0202) of fighting between Draconis forces and Wolf's Dragoons on both Misery and Capra.

As this issue of BattleTechnology went to press, few additional details were available. Sources on Misery who agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity reported that at least five House Kurita regiments were involved in an attempt to trap Wolf's Dragoons on that world on the Kurita-Davion border. These sources report both heavy fighting on Misery, and extremely heavy casualties among several Kurita units.

Unconfirmed reports of atrocities committed by Wolf's Dragoons have been widely circulated in recent weeks, and there is speculation that these atrocities have led to the open break between the mercenaries and House Kurita. Independent observers have suggested that large-scale Kurita troop movements along the border in recent weeks were in fact aimed at neutralizing the mercenary forces.

Wolf's Dragoons, under the command of Colonel Jaime Wolf, have been under contract to House Kurita for several years and have won considerable notoriety as a crack mercenary unit in combat against Davion forces along the frontier. It is known that that contract was due to expire on 1 April 3028. Attempts to reach members of Wolf's Dragoons for comment proved impossible.
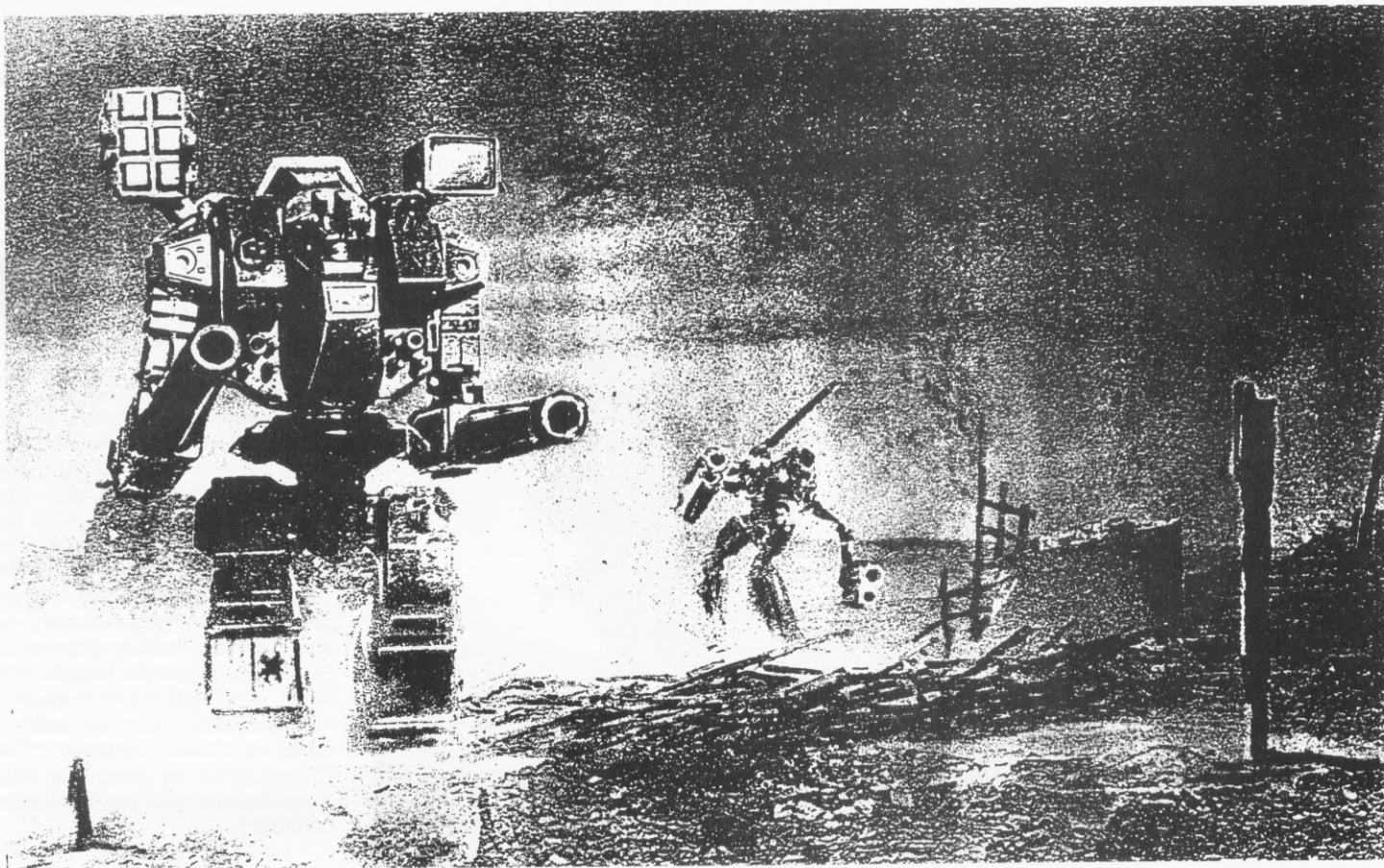
Widow on Misery: BattleMechs of the Command Lance, Black Widow Company, Wolf's Dragoons, photographed during training exercises on Misery before the April 1 expiration of their contract to House Kurita. The *Marauder* (right) is believed to be piloted by Colin Maclaren. The *Warhammer* (left) is almost certainly the 'Mech belonging to Captain Natasha Kerensky, the notorious "Black Widow."

CANDID CAMERA CAPTURES CATAPHRACT

Dateline: Exeter—A spokesperson for BattleTechnology announced this week that a photograph of the long-awaited CTF-1X *Cataphract* heavy 'Mech had been received at the magazine's Editorial Offices on Exeter. The photo, if genuine, would be the public's first glimpse of this dramatic new House Liao BattleMech design.

"The photo was taken by a long-range electronic imaging system and so it doesn't show much detail," said BattleTechnology's Barbara Morgan. "But it does suggest that the *Cataphract* must be almost ready for deployment." The photo was taken by freelance combat photographer Vincent St. Andrews in the vicinity of the Earthwerks plant on Tikonov. Critics have suggested that the controversial *Cataphract* photo is in fact the heavily-retouched image of a *Marauder*.

Various intelligence estimates have suggested that the CTF-1X, when completed, would weigh 70 tons and be armed with an autocannon/10, a PPC, and four medium lasers. These sources report that the *Cataphract* could become the mainstay of elite Liao regiments, capable of holding its own even against heavy Davion 'Mechs such as the *Zeus* and the *BattleMaster*. House Liao sources have refused comment.

Left: The elusive *Cataphract*, photographed on Tikonov.
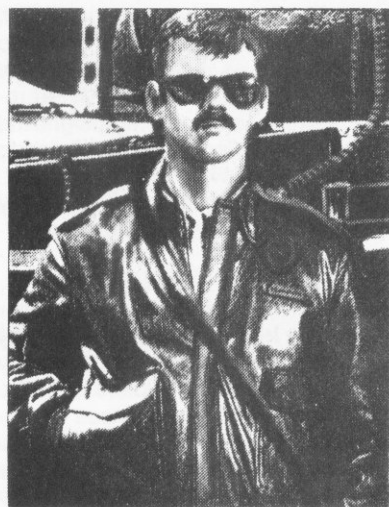
BATTLETECHNOLOGY SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KILLED

Dateline: Exeter—BattleTechnology's senior editor today announced the death of Special Combat Correspondent James Harvey Filmore. Filmore, 25, had been assigned to cover reports of fighting between House Kurita forces and Wolf's Dragoons, a celebrated mercenary unit, on the Kurita world of Misery. Details of his death were not available, but it is believed that he was killed while attempting to reach elements of Wolf's Dragoons in the hill country south of Kantun.

Filmore had been a staff reporter at the regional office of BattleTechnology on Luthien until that office's accidental destruction in April. At that time, he was re-assigned to the developing story on Misery.

"Filmore was a professional in every sense of the word," said W. H. Keith, the Editor-in-Chief of BattleTechnology, at his offices on Exeter. "He will be sorely missed."

Left: James Harvey Filmore, photographed while on assignment on Misery.

The 2nd Kearny Highlanders

BattleTechnology continues to present this column as a special service to those of its readers who are mercenary warriors. In each issue, Hiring Hall gives an in-depth review of potential patrons who could offer employment opportunities for freelance warriors. The patrons reviewed range from wealthy individuals in need of soldiers-for-hire, through corporations and merchant organizations, to the Major Houses of the Successor States. Employment opportunities screened here may include anything from individual openings for security guards or bounty hunters up to and including needs for entire mercenary BattleMech regiments.

A three-letter coding system has been developed to rate patrons reviewed in Hiring Hall. Each letter will range from A (very, very good from the mercenary's point of view) through Z (very, very bad). This code will be used exclusively in this and other BattleTechnology columns, such as Worldbook, to indicate possible advantages or disadvantages in any potential employers. The areas rated are:

NEED: *How frequently does the patron employ mercenaries? Ratings of A through G suggest a nearly constant need for mercenaries of various types. Ratings of U through Z indicate that mercenaries are rarely, if ever, employed.*

PAY: *How well does the employer pay? High ratings suggest above-average pay scales. Low ratings indicate below-average pay, or a history of noncompliance with mercenary contracts. Note that pay alone is not the only factor used in calculating this rating. Other factors which affect the financial aspect of a potential contract with the employer are taken into account, such as whether or not the mercenaries must provide their own transportation, and how lenient the employer is likely to be in negotiating terms for battlefield salvage, logistical resupply, or death benefits.*

CONDITIONS: *What are the usual conditions under which mercenaries work? High ratings indicate relatively good conditions, including access to recreational or R&R facilities, service on an Earthlike world, or soft tickets such as ceremonial guard duty or providing escort for court functionaries. Low values indicate service under bad or unpleasant conditions, such as on a world with a hostile environment, or at an isolated outpost far from recreational facilities.*

Many factors are applied to the calculations for each code value. Obviously, pay, conditions, and opportunities may vary tremendously from ticket to ticket, depending on circumstances and on changes in the employer's situation unreported to BattleTechnology since the research for this column was completed. For this reason, these codes are intended as guidelines only. BattleTechnology can assume no responsibility, written or implied, for damages, costs, or casualties incurred by readers during service to mercenary employers reviewed in this column.

2nd Kearny Highland Regiment
Northwind Highlanders

UNIT HISTORY

One of four regiments of the Capellan Confederation's Northwind Highlanders, the 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment was formed in 2363. Colonial miners on Kearny contributed both the manpower and the funds for the formation of the original unit, which has endured in various forms from that time. Though less colorful than the Marion Highlanders or McCormack's Fusiliers, this second-oldest member of the Northwind hierarchy has earned a solid reputation as an excellent combat unit down through the years.

The 2nd Kearny served in the First Andurien War against House Marik between 2366 and 2368, seeing action on Berenson and Lopez against forces loyal to House Marik. At that time the unit was a conventional mobile infantry formation; it later became one of the first formations in Capellan service to receive BattleMechs. Under the Star League, members of the 2nd Kearny Highlanders were employed on the Periphery and in the campaigns against Stefan Amaris in the Inner Sphere.

Their most notable campaign took place shortly after the Northwind occupation of Demeter in 2761. When Gladstone's Gladiators, a mercenary unit in Liao's employ, became involved in a contract dispute during that year, the result was a serious mercenary insurrection that threatened to cripple Capellan defenses. When the mercs attempted to extort demands from the Liao forces on Hsien through threats to destroy water purification equipment and a key munitions dump, the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Kearny went into action in a midnight raid, ousting the Gladiators from their powerful positions and ultimately forcing their withdrawal from the planet.

What followed was a 40-year vendetta between Gladiators and Highlanders. The Capellans sought to punish the rebellious mercenaries, thus prevent future problems of a similar sort, and it was the 2nd Kearny that was chosen to be the chief instrument of their retribution. The Gladiators, entering Marik service, continued to raid along the Liao frontier; several inconclusive clashes between the two regiments heightened the antipathy between them. Finally, in 2802, Liao's Maskirovka espionage agency obtained information on the mercenary unit's plans to move their base of operations to the Marik world of Zion. Transportation and equipment was provided to the Highlanders by the Maskirovka's Special Operations Branch. The 2nd Kearny arrived on Zion ahead of their foes and waited under cover until the Gladiators landed and began their debarkation. Then, while AeroSpace forces kept the mercenary DropShips from lifting off, the Highlanders launched a devastating ground attack. In several hours of fierce fighting, the Gladiators were destroyed to the last man. Marik reserves arrived too late either to save the mercenaries or to keep the Kearny forces from salvaging 13 enemy BattleMechs from the field.

The bitterness engendered by the Mercenary Rebellion and its aftermath continued to affect Kearny attitudes. For many long years a tradition of distrust, even outright hatred, towards mercs was a basic part of the Highlander creed. This attitude first showed up soon after the destruction of the Gladiators, while the 2nd Kearny Highlanders were employed in the defense of Lincoln against Kurita forces late in 2802; the Highlanders refused to give quarter to Daemian's Destroyers, despite repeated pleas by the Kurita mercenaries that they be permitted to surrender.

Service on the Davion frontier followed, capped in 2953 by the 2nd Kearny's most notable defeat. During the "Great Lee Turkey Shoot" the regiment's air lances were decimated by the AeroSpace forces of the Federated Suns. A later battle at Holt with the Ceti Hussars resulted in losses to the ground forces as a direct result of the regiment's ongoing deficiency in AeroSpace support. Since those campaigns the 2nd Kearny Highlanders have continued to operate along the Davion frontier in the St. Ives region, mostly in a defensive role. They are currently (3028) based at Jonathon.

MERCENARY REQUIREMENTS

Despite a well-known dislike of mercenaries, whether friend or foe, the 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment has found it necessary to begin taking on merc soldiers over the last two years. The nervousness in the Capellan High Command over the annual Davion "Galahad" wargames has led to a general move to fill out Liao forces to the fullest extent possible. Consequently the

2nd Kearny was ordered, as of March 3026, to begin utilizing mercenary auxiliaries. Hiring of mercs began soon after that, though the Highlanders continued to display a marked reluctance to obey these instructions.

Beginning late in 3027 mercenary hirings by the 2nd Kearny picked up markedly, with individual mercenary MechWarriors being sought as part of a general move to fill out a fourth full battalion of 'Mechs. This was the first time since the Gladiators incident that hiring BattleMechs were permitted to serve as part of the Kearny Highlanders. Previous to this, merc employment was mostly limited to armor and infantry auxiliaries. Special emphasis was placed on hiring mercs with AeroSpace fighters to fill gaps in the unit left after the battle at Lee.

Mercenary troops seeking employment with the Kearny Highlanders should note that there is little camaraderie between Kearny regulars and their hirelings. Though the usefulness of hireling infantry, cavalry, and air lances has been acknowledge by senior Kearny leaders, there is a notable tendency towards inferior treatment of such units both in garrison and in the field. No mercenary unit is ever hired by the Highlanders without the stipulation that unit command be subordinated to Kearny officers. As for 'Mech employment, there is no opening in the regiment's ranks for the hiring of full units (even lances); all mercenary 'Mechs are hired strictly on an individual basis.

BattleMech needs for the regiment are mostly limited to smaller 'Mechs, in the 20- to 50-ton range. Stated requirements for the new 4th Battalion indicate that it is being organized as a light scouting unit of voltigeurs. Some larger 'Mechs have been taken on as well, mostly to fill slots in other battalions vacated by smaller BattleMechs assigned to the new unit. Once again, these warriors generally encounter a certain amount of hostility, possibly amounting to discrimination or outright segregation.

TICKET DETAILS

Though naturally the precise duties of mercenary troops joining the 2nd Kearny Highlanders will vary according to the employment of the unit itself by the Capellan High Command, it is possible to make certain general statements concerning potential service, based on the unit's recent history.

Missions:
RETAINER
STATIC DEFENSE (garrison duty, training cadres, security, etc.)
MINOR RAIDS (reconnaissance, harassment)

Length of Service
12 months minimum

Remuneration
Infantry, Armor, Artillery:
(per squad per week)
Veteran, Elite: Cb 9,000-12,000
Regular: Cb 5,000-8,000
Green: Cb 2,500-4,000

MechWarriors, AeroSpace Pilots:
(per warrior per week)
Veteran, Elite: Cb 1,800
Regular: Cb 1,000
Green: Cb 750

2nd Kearny Highlanders on Guard:
Shadow Hawk of the Kearny Highlanders in the capital city of Jonathon, photographed during a recent Davion raid.

Guarantees

Advance/Completion: The mercenary unit/warrior is provided with an advance, upon signing with the unit, amounting to 10% of the pay due for a year's contracted service. The balance is due upon completion of the contract; however, the Highlanders generally pay out the balance on an ongoing basis throughout the contractual period rather than waiting for completion of the term.

Command Rights

Where possible, the 2nd Kearny Highlanders prefer to fully integrate mercenaries into the structure of their unit. For MechWarriors, this is the universal rule; full merc units are not even considered for employment.

Auxiliaries are sometimes employed under a House Command system, where a merc unit commander is answerable directly to an officer appointed by the Regimental Commander, Colonel MacHenry.

Transport

Mercenaries attached to the Highlanders are provided with all necessary transportation by the regiment. Auxiliary units with integral transport may be given preferential terms of employment.

ASSESSMENT

The mercenary soldier is urged to give careful consideration to the disadvantages of taking employment with the 2nd Kearny Highlanders. Although the unit has a strong ongoing need for mercs at this time, and offers good remuneration for services rendered, their long-standing dislike of mercs generally lowers the coding given for Conditions. Moreover, independent observers point to the essential limitations of service with House Liao as a further indication that mercs may not find the Highlanders a worthwhile employer.

BattleTechnology recommends that mercenaries seek alternative employment. On the whole, the inconvenience of life among merc-hating regulars and the uncertainty of the politico-military situation in the Capellan Confederation far outweigh the advantages of pay and other benefits which are tied to the 2nd Kearny's strong need for extra troops.

BattleTechnology
Mercenary Employer
Assessment

2nd Kearny Highland Regiment, Northwind Highlanders
CODE: E/G/O
ASSESSMENT: Negative
Good pay,
poor working conditions

___

EDITOR'S NOTE

The foregoing was compiled by BattleTechnology staffmembers prior to the expedition mounted by the Provisional 4th Battalion of the 2nd Kearny Highlanders to Mira. In that expedition, 15 mercenary BattleMechs were destroyed or seriously damaged, and the battalion was later disbanded. Hiring of mercenaries has, however, continued to fill out vacancies left by the battle losses in the TO&E of other battalions of the regiment.

On the whole, the results of the Mira expedition have reinforced the negative assessments made in our original discussion of the 2nd Kearny, raising the specter of morale problems to further complicate the basic difficulties adhering to service with the regiment.
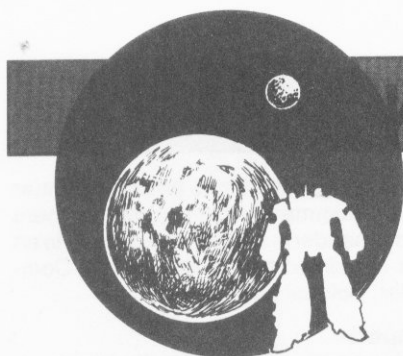
MIRA
Misty Outpost
of the Federated Suns

STELLAR DATA

Catalog # NSC L 2-803-211

Star: Surt
Type: F6III
Mass: 4.52 Sol
Luminosity: 51.4 Sol
Radius: 5.58 Sol
Stellar Effective Temperature: 6360° K.

SYSTEM DATA

Planetary System: 8 major bodies, 1 planetoid belt

PLANETARY DATA

Planet IV: Mira
Mean Orbital Radius: 5.7 AU
Orbital Eccentricity: .0204
  Periastron Orbital Distance: 5.586 AU
  Apastron Orbital Distance: 5.8197 AU
Period: 6.401 standard years
  2,337.94 standard days
Mass: 1.6 Earth
Equatorial Diameter: 12,045.8 km
Mean Planetary Density: 10.45 g/cm³ (1.9 Earth)
Mean Surface Gravity: 1.79 G
Escape Velocity: 19.69 kps
Rotational Period: 14 hours, 22 minutes
Axial Inclination: 32°29'14.8"
Atmosphere: Dense, Marginal Earth Type
Surface Atmospheric Pressure: 2.20 atm
Composition: N_2—77.8%; O_2—18%;
  H_2O(mean)—1.6%; other elements—2.6%
Hydrographics: 67% of surface covered by liquid H_2O
Temperature Range at Surface Level:
  Equatorial: 50° to 95° C.; Polar: 15° to 30° C.

PLANETOGRAPHY:

Radius: 6,022.92 km; **Circumference:** 37,843 km;
Total Surface Area: 455,851,000 sq km; **Land Surface
Area:** 150,430,000 sq km; **Inhabited Surface Area:**
132,379,000 sq km.
  Surface Topography: *Ocean/Sea/Lake* 67%;
Steppe/Plain 9%; *Low Hills* 8%; *High Hills* 6%; *Low
Mountains* 6%; *High Mountains* 4%.

PEOPLE:

Population: 2,976,000,000; **Population Density:**
.22.5 persons/sq km; **Urbanization:** 55%; **Ethnic
Groups:** Hispanic (47%), North American (19%),
Chinese (14%); East European (13%); Others (7%);
Languages: League Anglic (98%), Nuespanol (79%),
Sino-Tibetan dialects (15%); **Religions:** Church of
Blake (44%), Universal Catholic Church (27%), Neo-
Buddhist (15%); Protestant Christian sects (14%).
Capitol and Largest City: Ciudad Mira; **Other Major
Cities:** 31 with populations of 25-50 million each.

GOVERNMENT:

Allegiance: Associate Member of the Federated
Suns; *Government:* People's Democratic Republic;
Head of State: Premier Luis Real Garcia; *Head of Gov-
ernment:* Chancellor Renaldo Estevez y Ferrer; *Local
Administrative Districts:* 4.

ECONOMY:

Natural Resources: Agricultural Products, Ores,
Gems and Crystals; *Processed/Manufactured Goods:*
Processed AgroProducts, Alloys, Agro ByProducts, Ar-
maments, Heavy and Light Manufacturing; *Arable Land:*
42%; **Labor Force:** *Agricultural* (19%), *Industrial* (10%),
Resource Extraction (26%), *Service:* (45%).

FINANCE:

Currency: Mirapeso (1 mirapeso = Cb 0.657); *Per
Capita Income:* Cb 700; *Gross Domestic Product:* Cb
2.91648 trillion; **Imports:** Radioactives, Petrochemi-
cals, Light and Heavy Manufactured Goods, Electron-
ics, High-Tech Systems; *Principal Sources:* Mesartim
(20%), Almach (18%), Sonnia (17%), Demeter (14%),
Chesterton (9%); **Exports:** Ores, Gems and Crystals,
Processed AgroProducts; *Principal Markets:* Mesartim
(19%), Almach (17%), Sonnia (11%), Demeter (11%),
Chesterton (9%), Tawas (9%).

TRANSPORTATION:

Chief Ports: 25 ports, including Ciudad Mira; *Off-
Planet Facilities: Orbital:* 5; *Deep Space:* 1; *Enclaves:*
10; **Merchant Fleet:** *JumpShips:* 75; *Freighters:* 300;
Shuttles: 47; **System Jump Point:** *Distance:* 47.5 AU;
Travel Time (typical): 315 hours (13.125 std. days).

HEALTH:

Life Expectancy at Birth: 85.5 years; **Birth Rate:**
(3026) 1.8%; **Mortality Rate:** (3026) 0.8%; **Population
Growth Rate:** Increasing at 1% per year.

EDUCATION:

Literacy: 73%; **Technicians/1000 population:**
48.6; **Universities:** 1,636.

ARMED FORCES:

Defense Spending: 9.5% of GDP; **Military Man-
power Potential:** 208,320,000 (7%); **AeroSpace
Forces:** *Orbital Facilities:* 3, *Deep Space Facilities:* 0,
JumpShips: 12, *DropShips:* 60, *AeroSpace Fighters:*
95, *Escorts:* 8, *Monitors:* 4, *Cruisers:* 3; **Battalions:**
Infantry: 529, *Armor:* 41, *Air:* 226, *Mech:* 9; **MechWar-
rior Training Facilities:** 6; **Hiring Data:** D/F/N.

THE PLANET

Located in the heart of the Mirach Reach
along the border between the Federated Suns
and the Capellan Confederation, the Surt sys-
tem is unusual in being one of the very few Class
III Giants known to support a family of planets.
Two of these fall into the wide habitable zone, but
only Surt IV, the world designated Mira, supports
life as we know it. It is a curious world, full of
contradictions both physical and social, and has
been a focal point of strife between Davion and
Liao forces for a very long time indeed.

Astrography: There is a tendency to con-
fuse the planet Mira, located in the F6III star
system of the blue-white giant Surt, with the
much more famous *star* Mira. The latter, a giant
red M-class variable, lies nearly twice as far from
Earth as Surt does, but in the same general
direction. Probably Captain Raoul de Vega,
commander of the first survey mission to chart
the system in 2122, was not even aware of the
potential for confusion in his naming of the world.
Legend has it that the fourth planet in the Surt
system was the first to be picked up on sensors,
and the Captain promptly named it "Mira" (a
double meaning—"wonderful" in the Arabic typi-
cally used in astronomical naming, and "he
looks" in his native Spanish). Whether this was a
commentary on the double-takes on the sensor
crewman, a colorful way of describing the dis-
tinctly eye-like appearance of the Mesa Grande
rising out of the planetary cloud layer, or an ex-
clamation at the wonder of finding planets in the
Surt system in the first place is not clear; it
generally depends on the person relating the
anecdote and the number of beers consumed
prior to the story-telling. On the whole, though, it
is just as well that de Vega chose the name Mira
instead of following old Survey traditions and
bestowing his own name on the planet.

In any event, Surt's family of worlds is
intriguing to astrophysicists and planetologists
alike. Evidence indicates that only one world, the
huge brown dwarf designated Muspelheim (Surt
VIII) was originally part of the system. The others
were apparently captured by the interplay of
gravitation between the star and the superjovian
gas giant. Debates rage to this day in scientific
circles as to whether the captures occurred
simultaneously or over the space of several
hundred thousand years. The inhabitants of
Mira, however, don't care in the least.

Planetology: Mira's conditions can be
described as "habitable" only with a large dose of
charity. Mass and density combine to produce a
gravity of nearly 1.8 times Earth-normal. The
atmospheric pressure at sea level is 2.20 atm.
Coupled with a partial pressure of oxygen of
nearly 9.5, this makes the air of Mira subtly lethal.
The density of the atmosphere is uncomfortable
and requires long periods of depressurization
before entry into conditioned environments is
possible; the high oxygen content is doubly
dangerous in feeding fires at incredible rates and
causing hypoxia-induced hallucinations in some
people, particularly after unusual exertion.

The planetary atmosphere is only thin
enough to support life at all because of the

effects of the energetic star, which has stripped away much of the atmosphere over the past few million years. The heat also combines with the extensive hydrosphere to produce a massive layer of clouds. The greenhouse effect on Mira effectively doubles temperatures that might be found on less humid worlds. Misty, swampy conditions prevail over much of the planet. However, Mira is much more geologically active than Terra, supporting large mountain chains which in many places rise up above the cloud layers. These peaks often extend high enough to boast quite Earthlike conditions of temperature, atmospheric pressure, and humidity that serve as interesting contrasts to the marshy jungles at sea level. The largest of these high plateaus is the continent-sized formation known as Mesa Grande near the equator, perhaps the only equatorial land mass on Mira where Terrestrial colonies can flourish without discomfort.

Heat is a major problem in the lowlands, and BattleMechs must be carefully maintained and monitored to avoid adverse effects of the constant, steamy heat. Terrain on Mira is ill-suited to large-scale 'Mech operations due to the rugged mountains, dense forests, and wide expanses of marsh or open sea which are all difficult obstacles to modern methods of warfare.

Ecology: High radiation output from Surt and the harsh environmental conditions of the planetary surface have contributed to a surprising diversity and spread of life forms native to Mira. The jungles and swamps of the lower reaches of the Miran continents support lush vegetation and a variety of interesting animal forms, including pseudo-reptilian types which show a number of points of similarity to Terrestrial dinosaurs—aside from being six-limbed, homeothermic, viviparous, and much more cunning than any dinosaur that ever walked the Earth.

The biochemistry of Mira is only partly compatible with that of Earth. Humans can obtain nourishment from Miran sources, but without hideously expensive vitamin supplements they must consume better than three times the bulk to obtain the same nutritional value as Terran foodstuffs give. Miran food is cheap and plentiful, and for the very poor provides the staple diet, which leads to a curious combination of malnutrition and weight problems among those who cannot afford vitamins or Terran foods. Mira is considered *contraindicated* for persons suffering from metabolic or dietary disorders of any kind.

History: Mira was settled during the early period of Terrestrial colonization in the mid-22nd Century. The earliest colonists were of Hispanic descent; these settlers pioneered the extensive oceanic industries that were to make Mira famous. Their first ventures were in the area of pelagiculture; it wasn't until 2237 that the famous Molotosky Process for extracting large quantities of minerals from sea water was introduced. This was during the heyday of the Tikonov Union, which absorbed Mira in the first quarter of the 23rd Century. The mountain peaks, pleasant and isolated, were parceled out as estates to Tikonov nobles, who supervised the introduction of new industries. The original colonists soon found themselves ground beneath the iron heel of off-world masters, who lorded it over them from their lofty estates far above the oppressive heat and humidity of the lowlands.

The Marlette Association found it easy to promote a revolution among the oppressed colonists around the turn of the 24th Century. In 2308, however, the brilliant campaigns of Diana Chin reconquered Mira for the Tikonov Union and reimposed the aristocratic regime. However, the taste of freedom left Mira a festering sore on the Tikonov, a situation exploited by the expanding Federated Suns in 2344. *Agents provocateurs* stirred up a massive rising in that year which the Federation quickly supported with military aid, and within a short time Mira was formally ceded to the Federated Suns and accorded Associate status. From that time on, the planet remained under Federation control, though its position on the frontier of House Davion's sphere of influence made it a frequent battleground in the many wars to follow. Most recently Mira was the scene for a dramatic raid by MacCarron's Armored Cavalry, the final blow in a long series of brilliant strikes along the Capellan border.

GENERAL NOTES

Sociologically, Mira is an interesting study in how revolutionary fervor can stagnate into moribund bureaucracy. After the founding of the "People's Democratic Republic of Mira" under Davion auspices, the old symbols of the Tikonov regime were rooted out. Mountaintop estates became museums or tourist centers, a shameful waste of some of the best land on the planet. Ties with the Federated Suns remained strong, but periods of pro-Capellan unrest (usually in the wake of major conflicts on the frontier) have led House Davion to keep the planet from realizing its full military potential. Most of the planetary armed forces and AeroSpace units are employed far from Mira as both extra strength on other frontiers and hostages for the planet's continued good behavior. The 2nd Crucis Lancers, an old and well-trusted 'Mech unit, has served for years as the core of the planetary garrison. Several of the Galahad wargames held annually by the Federated Suns have been centered on Mira in recent years.

Mira today is still a world of contrasts. Large tracts of polar and mesa upland regions are heavily urbanized and industrialized; the manufacture of a variety of textiles and other agro-byproducts is a principal source of income in the interstellar marketplace. Overall, the standard of living is very low on Mira; the beeswarm millions in the numerous cities earn marginal livings at best. Symptoms of poverty—widespread problems with crime, prostitution, controlled substance abuse, and the like—are everywhere in the major population centers. Perhaps the worst conditions of all are found among the seafarers who must work constantly in the lowland heat, and in the various port cities along the lowland shores which continue to support the pelagic industries.

Mercenary troops are in demand this year on Mira, where Davion recruiting agents seem eager to build up extra hireling forces. Though the prospects for employment are good, however, it should be remembered that the Federated Suns are not noted as generous paymasters. Harsh conditions for garrison-type troops on Mira make this a less-than-attractive duty station at best. However, it is possible that Mira is being built up more as a base of operations than as a strongpoint, so mercs may find their tour in the swamps short with every prospect for action as the year goes on.

BattleTips
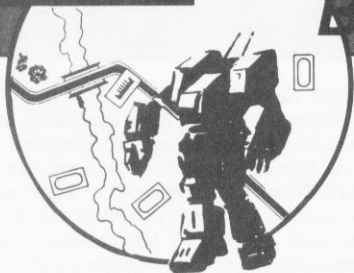
Blind Man's Bluff

Too often, it is possible to forget that there are two sides in every battle. The enemy is perceived as a faceless target, an inanimate and unthinking thing which appears in a 'Mech's HUD reticles, then vanishes in flame and destruction. This illusion is reinforced by sessions in training simulators or in holographic training scenarios, where it is impossible to escape the sense that the opponents moves are no more than a computer's electronic jugglings, or the craftiness of a scenario referee.

Military historian and author Greggson DuVall was able to compile the following BattleTips article by assembling both sides of the story, interviewing pilots, Techs and eyewitnesses on both sides of a classic 'Mech-to-'Mech action which occurred last year during a raid on Keid. The result is a combat story from two points of view... that of a Steiner MechWarrior on a recon mission, and that of the Liao MechWarrior whose mission was to stop him.

It has been said that no battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy. This elementary maxim of warfare is illustrated by this contest of skill, wits, and courage amid the ruins of a city called Bel.

Lieutenant Brian Scully keyed in the transmitter circuits of his HCT-3F *Hatchetman's* comlink, "Dark Horse to Phalanx. Have reached outer marker. Am beginning penetration." The sophisticated Thalia HM-22 communications system scrambled the signal and sent it off to the Lyran command center nearly 20 kilometers to the east. The radiotech who received the transmission relayed the cryptic message to the on-site commander. To Major Mariah Thibeaux it meant that her advance scout had reached the outskirts of the small Capellan-held city of Bel and had begun working his way into its concrete canyons.

Scully was good, she admitted to herself, but was he good enough to slip into the city, locate the spare parts dump, and escape with his information? Battalion command said yes, but the Lyran major was still skeptical about the new scout.

At the controls of his 'Mech, Scully paused, listened for, and received, the short-long-short bursts of static which signalled the command center's acknowledgement of his message. Drawing a deep breath, he took hold of the control grips, set his feet on the pedals, and started moving his 40-ton machine slowly into Bel.

Close to the center of that small city, the Capellan Confederation had built a small underground installation. This facility, intended to house a full company of Battle-Mechs, now held only one—a CN9-A *Centurion*. Even as Lt. Scully was making his covert entry into the city, the Liao technicians were bolting down the last sheet of replacement armor over a newly-repaired medium laser. The *Centurion's* pilot, Captain Daniel Gyory, stood on the floor of the repair bay, impatiently tapping his fingers on a 200-liter plastic barrel of coolant fluid. Irritated with the slowness of the repair process, Captain Gyory paced, cursing the ill luck which had brought him to this pass. Just over 24 hours ago, when the Lyran Commonwealth troops first landed on Keid, his company was strafed and bombed by a pair of Steiner Lucifer fighters. His *Centurion* took several hits, which crippled the 'Mech's left leg and destroyed its rearward-firing Photech medium laser. As severe as this damage was, other 'Mechs in his company had suffered worse; his was one of the last machines to enter the repair bay and would be the last to leave. When the Lyrans left to attack Port Anderson, 30 klicks south, the rest of his company deployed to meet the attack, leaving Captain Gyory and his *Centurion* behind.
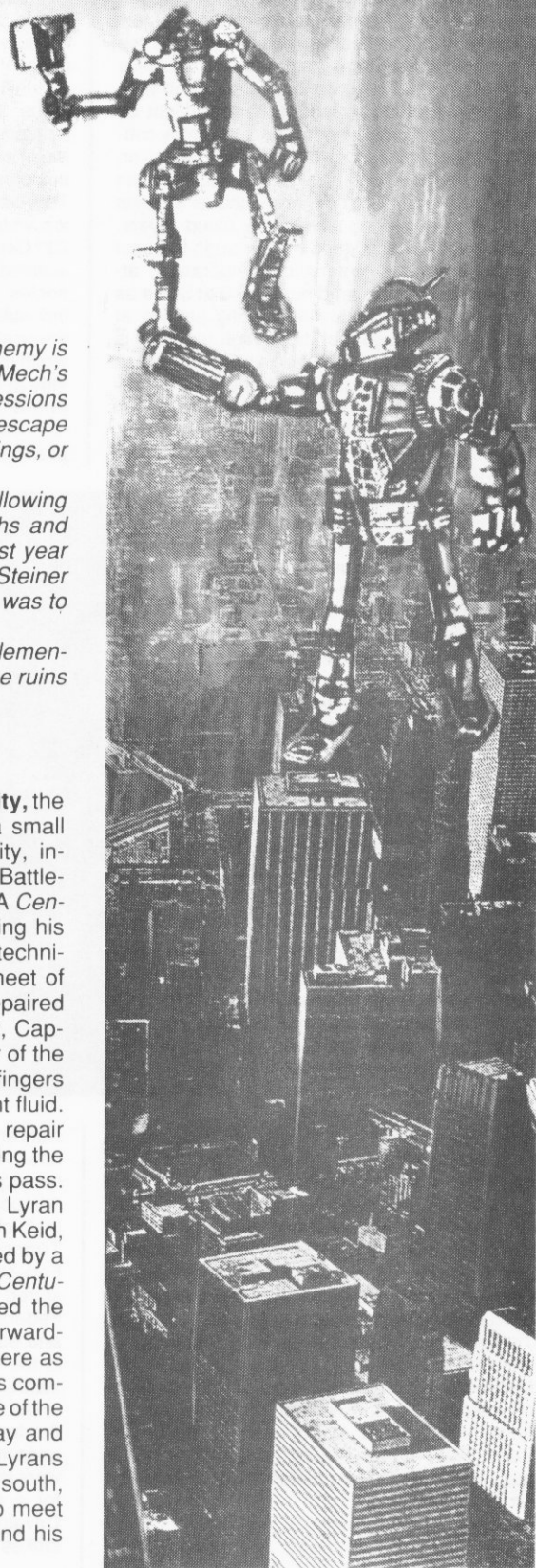
Gyory ceased his nervous pacing when he saw a comtech running across the repair bay with an electronic comp-pad in his hand.

The tech skidded to a halt in front of the MechWarrior and gasped out, "Captain, the perimeter sensors have picked up large MAD and seismic traces moving toward the center of town. From the size and intensity of the readings, it seems to be a BattleMech massing at least 40 tons.

"Commandant Deng wants you to check it out. If it is an enemy 'Mech, you are to lead it away from the center of town and destroy it."

Gyory snatched the comp-pad from the tech, quickly scanned the orders it held, and, with an electronic stylus, scrawled his name across the bottom of the pad. Thrusting the unit back into the tech's hands, Gyory began yelling for his personal tech and pulling off his uniform smock.

Just over two kilometers away, Brian Scully worked his way through Bel's outskirts. Suddenly, a pair of missiles flashed past his cockpit. A red square lit the lower left corner of his heads-up display while the word "THREAT" blinked on and off beneath it. Punching in the computer enhancement system, he saw a grey-and-black camouflaged jeep parked behind a low stone wall. The jeep's green-uniformed crewmen were scrambling to reload its pintle-mounted SRM launcher. Scully brought up the *Hatchetman's* left arm, centering the computer-generated sighting reticle on the enemy ground vehicle.

A brief flash of light at the 'Mech's wrist and a sudden jump in internal temperature marked the laser's firing. The results at the target were more spectacular. Armor incandesced and spalled away under the caress of the intense beam of light. Scully triggered the laser again. The jeep vanished in a fireball of detonated fuel and ammunition.

"Well, that's done it," Scully muttered to himself. "Even if those guys didn't have the chance to sound the alarm, that fire is certain to alert every Liao soldier for kilometers." Scully allowed himself a brief smile. "But for metal, it sure burns good."

Indeed, for metal, the destroyed jeep burned magnificently.

Captain Gyory was reaching for his neurohelmet when his personal tech reached in through the open hatch. Touching the captain's shoulder, Technician Ara Dilles said, "Sir, you'd better get on the comlink."

Gyory settled the bulky helmet on his close-cropped scalp and plugged the sheaf of cables trailing from it into the multi-connector above and behind his com-chair.

"...crossing 21st. I say again, we've spotted an enemy BattleMech, east side of town. He's moving south on Davis, crossing 21st." Gyory heard the crack-whoosh sound of missiles leaving their tubes in the background. Then the soldier's voice rang in his ears again. "Damn! Missed him clean. We can't hold him, we're pulling out. Recon V-7 moving to tan..." Then static.

Gyory shook his head. Damn fools. They should have known better than to take

"I say again, we've spotted an enemy BattleMech..."

on a BattleMech with a recon jeep. Running quickly through the code sequence which unlocked his 'Mech, the Liao captain motioned Dilles off the 'Mech's shoulder. A momentary rush of vertigo swept over Gyory as the *Centurion's* computer interface attuned the huge gyro somewhere beneath his feet to his own sense of balance. Such alignment of man and machine was necessary to keep even the smallest 'Mech from toppling over with its first step.

When his head cleared, he glanced left and right to assure himself that all power and restraining cables had been disconnected from his *Centurion* before stepping the steel giant from its repair cradle. Automatically he checked his 'Mech-status display. All indicators showed green. Plant up to full power, actuator packages functioning normally, weapons fully loaded and charged. Pivoting the *Centurion's* head, he looked back at the repair gantry where Ara Dilles still stood, giving him the age-old thumbs-up gesture.

Even though he knew Dilles could not possibly have seen him through the polarized glass viewscreen, Gyory returned the gesture and then stepped his green-and-black 'Mech out into the fading light of the evening sun.

Moving as rapidly as he dared, Brian Scully slipped through the outskirts of the city, putting as much distance as possible between the shattered, burning jeep and his

'Mech. So far that jeep was the only sign of the Capellan army that Scully had seen. He knew the attack on Port Anderson would have diverted most, if not all, of Bel's defenders from their posts. The mission planners believed that he would face only slight resistance—a few soft-skinned vehicles or a couple of platoons of infantry at the most. Major Thibeaux had argued that the Confederation would never leave a position undefended if there was a possibility of its being the objective of an invader raid. In the end the Lyran High Command won out, and Scully was sent out alone.

Pausing in the lengthening shadow of the first tall building he encountered, Scully checked his map-box. The supply dump was supposed to be close to the center of the city, a few blocks away from the low, hardened ferrocrete building which orbital scans had identified as the Liao defense force headquarters. From his present location, it would take less than 20 minutes to reach the general area of the supply dump, and about 10 minutes more to locate the warehouse. Scully made it about an hour until he could be clear of the city with the information he had been sent to collect. If, that is, he didn't run into any more opposition.

From his vantage point 10 meters above the street, Daniel Gyory searched the deepening gloom with his *Centurion's* sensor array. The wrecked scout jeep continued to smoulder sullenly, the red-hot metal creating a bright spot on the B-Tech's infrared scanners. All other readouts were blank except for the magnetic anomaly detector. The large amount of structural steel used in the city's buildings was causing confused readings on his MAD sensor.

Gyory tapped his console with the fingers of his left hand, trying to second-guess his opponent. Of course, the enemy MechWarrior would have moved on as quickly as possible, but where did he go? Not straight down Davis Street—he'd have run into Gyory's *Centurion* if he had. East? Not likely, that would take him back the way he'd
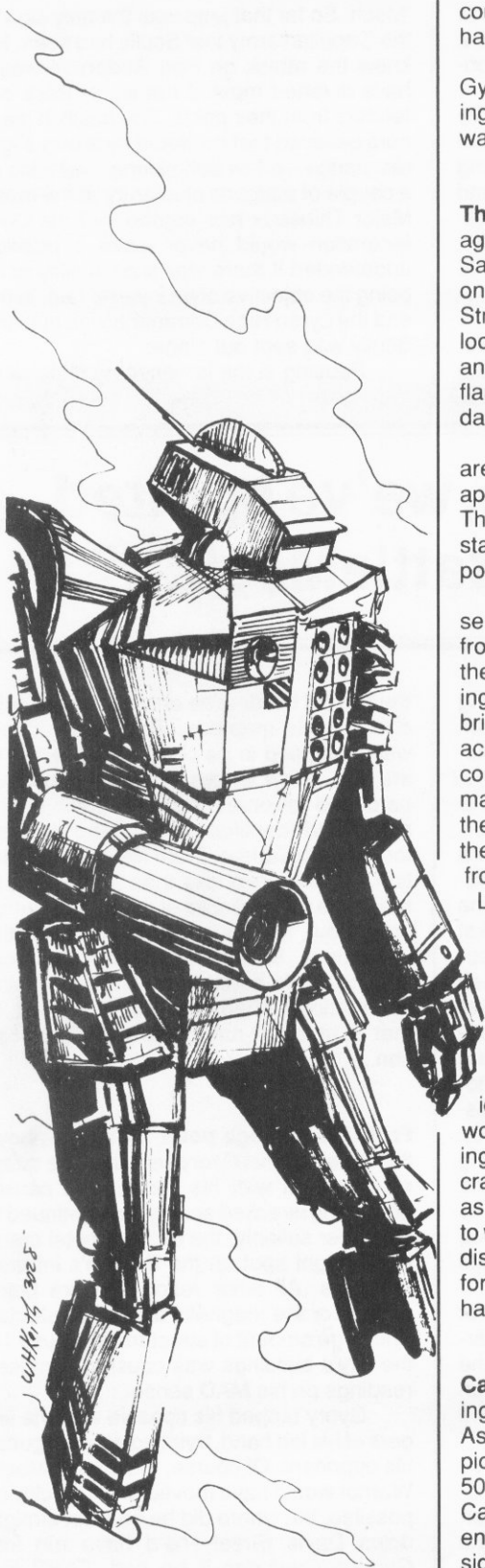
come. North? Same thing. West then, he had to have gone west.

With a last look at the burnt-out jeep, Gyory turned his 'Mech and sent it lumbering quickly down 20th Street, hoping that he was following his intended prey.

The Lyran 'Mech pilot checked his map again and turned south once more onto Sable Avenue. If he had figured it correctly, one of the large buildings lining 9th and 10th Streets would be the warehouse. Scully looked around at the tall buildings, whose anodized panels and mirrored windows flared golden orange in the light of the dying day.

"It's a pity that so many beautiful cities are destroyed by men who never stop to appreciate the sunset," Scully said aloud. Then, chuckling to himself, "Scully, you're starting to sound like a Kuritist, writing poetry in the cockpit of a BattleMech."

An alert buzzer sounded from the sensor panel. Scully tore his attention away from the reflected sunset and focussed it on the sensor display. Confused as the readings were, both the IR and the MAD sensors briefly detected a large object moving across the intersection behind him. The contact was quickly lost. Scully slid his big machine into the deep shadows created by the late-evening sun. Partially concealed by the first story of a building, which projected from its base like a monstrous foot, the Lyran scout turned his entire sensor array down the street toward the fleeting contact. Nothing appeared on the screens but the "noise" created by the lights, motors, and structural steel of the city around him. Scully briefly considered switching on the *Hatchetman's* high intensity floodlight, but discarded the idea immediately. Turning on that light would be like jumping up and down, shouting, "Come and get me!" Scully was not that crazy. He settled for walking his 'Mech back as far as he could into the gathering gloom, to wait. As he sat there staring at the sensor displays, the scout silently berated himself for becoming distracted from the task at hand.

Captain Gyory found himself, unknowingly, in a position very similar to Lt. Scully's. As he crossed Sable Avenue, his sensors picked up a large heat source. Ducking the 50-ton *Centurion* around the corner, the Capellan MechWarrior switched on his entire sensor array, but the momentary IR signature had vanished. Was that contact just another radar ghost? Or was it the Steiner 'Mech which had destroyed the recon jeep? Nothing moved on Sable Avenue. Only the normal readings for a city of this size and type showed on his scanners. Was there something lurking in the shadows lining the street?

Long minutes went by before Scully decided to act. If the sensor trace had been an electronic mirage, he was wasting valuable mission time and accomplishing nothing. If the phantom contact was a real threat, possibly another BattleMech, the sooner he faced it, the sooner he could finish his mission.

Scarcely 200 meters away, Gyory arrived at the same decision. Taking a last glance at the weapon stores list on his *Centurion's* MSD, Gyory stood his 50-ton 'Mech upright and stepped into the street.

At the same time, a dark grey 'Mech appeared out of an alleyway. Its distinctive reptilian head and the cleaver-shaped battle club mounted in its right hand marked the machine as a *Hatchetman*. Gyory stabbed the switch that activated his targeting computer. A red sighting dot appeared on his HUD. Even as he brought his autocannon to bear, brief gouts of flame flickered from the torso of the spindly Lyran 'Mech. Shattered glass and concrete showered Gyory's 'Mech as 90 mm high-explosive rounds slammed into the building beside him. Adding his Luxor autocannon's report to the thunder already echoing through the streets, Gyory sent a line of red tracers downrange towards his enemy. In the near-darkness, he saw the tracers stream past the 'Mech's legs, detonating against the pavement behind it. The explosions backlit the enemy machine with strobe-like pyrotechnic flashes.

Scully recovered from the surprise of seeing the Liao *Centurion* step into the street at the same instant as his own 'Mech just in time to trade wild bursts of autocannon fire with his opponent. Realizing that the Capellan 'Mech outweighed and outgunned the *Hatchetman*, Scully seized the only advantage he had. Flexing his 'Mech's knees, the Steiner pilot fired its jumpjets and leaped into the air.

The thrust of the Luxor jumpjets mounted in the 'Mech's feet lifted it high over the building and into the next street. The 45-ton machine jolted to the earth with an ear-shattering crash which jarred Scully's entire body. Flailing for a moment to

recover his balance, the Steiner scout turned and ran up the street, a wild plan forming in his mind. If he could reach the intersection up ahead before the Liao 'Mech came around the corner, perhaps he could ambush the heavier machine and bring his deadly "hatchet" into play.

Skidding to a halt, Scully put the *Hatchetman's* back up against a building and raised its right arm. The reinforced striking edge of the terrible weapon clenched in that metal fist gleamed dully in

is just too malfing fast." Scanning the indicators on the MSG, Scully saw that most of the armor protecting the delicate inner workings of his *Hatchetman's* right leg had been shot away, and a deep hole had been burned in its left torso. Too much more damage would reduce the battle machine to scrap.

As he stood there trying to formulate a plan, the THREAT warning lit up his HUD.

Scully whirled his 'Mech around, as a cluster of long-range missiles streaked past

"That Liao bastard is just too malfing fast."

the twilight. Scully could almost feel the weight of the huge club as though he were holding it in his own hand. He waited, hidden in the shadows. Seconds crept by—5, 10, 30. Then the green-and-black armored giant came into view, his battle-cry ringing inside the closed neurohelmet.

Gyory's motion sensors shrieked a warning as the Lyran 'Mech suddenly appeared in from of him. Seeing the *Hatchetman's* right arm scything forward in a vicious arc, Gyory flung up the *Centurion's* left arm to ward off the blow. Metal screamed and buckled as the hatchet smashed into the *Centurion's* arm just above the elbow. Stunned and off balance, Gyory closed his hand convulsively on the firing grip, triggering the laser mounted in his 'Mech's center torso. The laser bolt lanced into the sky, missing the Lyran by more than a meter. Staggering backwards, Gyory fired the laser again and added in a burst from his autocannon.

This time, through better aim or better luck, both weapon blasts hit the *Hatchetman*. The high-explosive armor-penetrating rounds from the Luxor-D shredded the armor on the enemy 'Mech's right leg, while the laser blew a small crater in its left torso.

The Lyran 'Mech rocked a bit and sent a pair of laser shots scorching past the reeling *Centurion*. Then it jumped again, its jet exhaust lighting the street with its lurid orange glare.

"Dammit!" Scully said, as his 'Mech recovered its balance after landing in the center of a small square. "That Liao bastard

him like a swarm of angry rocket-assisted hornets. At just under 400 meters, the Defiance medium lasers mounted in the 'Mech's arms were useless. Scully studded in the autocannon. At that range, the sighting reticle nearly blotted out the image of the CN9-A, making it nearly impossible to aim. Taking his best guess, Scully depressed the trigger. The *Hatchetman* shuddered as a long burst of 90 mm rounds thundered from the 'Mech's torso.

Bright flashes blossomed from the *Centurion's* center torso, as armor shattered and flew away, leaving a ragged line of craters gaping in its chest. Before a fresh cassette of ammunition could be fed into the HCT-3F's autocannon, Scully saw the *Centurion* raise its right arm, training the heavy gun mounted there on him.

Light flickered in the muzzle on the enemy's arm and flared from its chest.

Unsteady from the slamming impact of the Steiner's autocannon, Gyory recovered quickly, aimed, and fired his autocannon and his missiles simultaneously . In the minimal light, Gyory saw his tracers hammer into the Lyran 'Mech's right arm. Most of the missile volley hit its left arm and torso. The *Hatchetman* was severely damaged. Gyory did not intend to let his wounded prey escape. Urging his 'Mech into a lumbering run, Gyory tried to close the gap so that all of his weapons could be used.

When the computer rangefinder registered 200 meters to target, Gyory stopped short and snapped the sighting reticle into place, but before he could shoot, the Steiner 'Mech fired its jumpjets again.
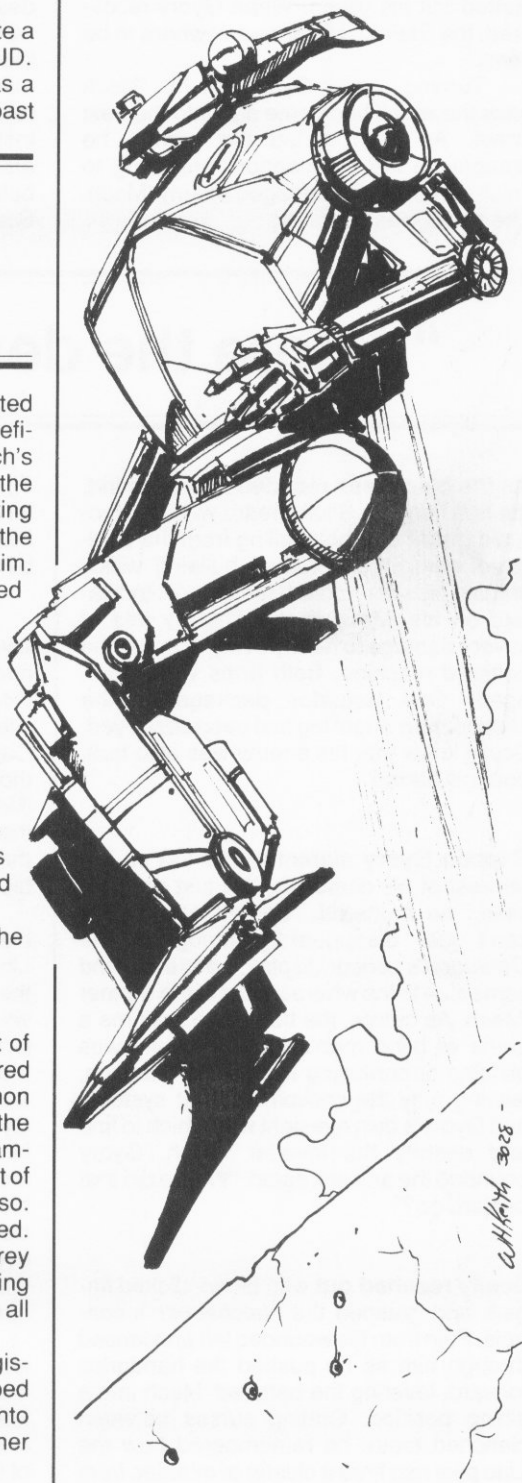
Desperately trying to track the escaping 'Mech, the Liao pilot triggered his LRMs. He followed up the volley with both autocannon and laser. The laser and autocannon bursts hit the upper floor of the building that the *Hatchetman* was jumping over. The exhaust flare of the missiles temporarily blotted out his vision. When Gyory recovered, the Steiner 'Mech was nowhere to be seen.

Turning about, Gyory ran his 'Mech back the way it had come and into the next street. As he rounded the corner, he brought up the autocannon, preparing to finish off the badly damaged enemy 'Mech. The street was deserted.

the *Centurion's* torso-mounted launcher just as the *Hatchetman* cleared the roof of the building in which he was now sitting. Most of the rockets went wide, but three hit the 'Mech's head. Even through the noise dampers and baffles built into his neurohelmet, the sound of those explosions was deafening. The three 5-kilo hollow charges were insufficient to penetrate the armor on the *Hatchetman's* head. Still, they were powerful enough to spall fragments of boron nitride reinforced steel away from the inside of his cockpit and send them flying around the cramped control cabin like rifle bullets. One of those shards tore into Scully's left bicep, lodging against the bone.

single moon of Keid glittered on something metallic. Twice Gyory whirled the CN9-A around and fired blindly, once destroying a parked ground car and once blowing out the mirror-like windows of a storefront.

"Dammit, now he's got me jumping at shadows." Gyory swore viciously as shattered glass and twisted aluminum sprayed into the street. "Where the devil *is* he?"

Scully finally managed to wrestle his crippled 'Mech into a kneeling position. Hampered by the destroyed actuators in the machine's right knee, even that minor operation took nearly 5 minutes. As he struggled with the 'Mech's balky controls, Scully could hear the rolling thunder of the *Centurion's* autocannon.

"What is he firing at?" Scully wondered, then gasped in pain as the restive 'Mech lurched to the left, throwing his injured arm against the life support control panel. The Steiner MechWarrior knew that his Liao counterpart would eventually figure out where he was and burn what remained of the shattered office building down around him. Fighting pain and nausea which swept over him at every movement of his wounded arm, Scully carefully brought his 'Mech to its feet. After taking a moment to orient himself, he slowly rotated the *Hatchetman's* torso until he was facing the ruined windows looking out over Library Avenue.

"Where the devil *is* he?"

As the blackness receded from his mind, the first thing Lt. Scully heard was the sporadic clatter of rubble falling from the shattered walls of the ruined building which cradled his shot-riddled BattleMech. Indicators on his 'Mech Status Display told of severe damage to nearly every circuit of the battered machine. Both arms were damaged. One actuator package in the *Hatchetman's* right leg had been destroyed. Scully knew that his enemy was also hurt, but how badly?

Captain Gyory slammed his fist on the armrest of his comchair. "It's just not possible," he muttered. "Something that big can't just disappear." Glaring at the *Centurion's* sensor display, he tried to find some clue to the whereabouts of the Steiner 'Mech. As before, the battle had become a game of blind man's bluff. The city was blinding or confusing his sensor readings, leaving only the cockpit starlight systems and Gyory's own eyesight with which to find and destroy the invader 'Mech. Gyory pounded the armrest again. "Where did that bastard go?"

Scully reached out with blood-slicked fingers and grasped the *Hatchetman's* controls. Pain from his wounded left arm lanced through him as he pushed the handgrips forward, levering the battered 'Mech into a sitting position. Grating curses between clenched teeth, he remembered how the Liao pilot had fired a cluster of missiles from

The shock of the wound had caused him to let go of the controls, and the 50-ton 'Mech had crashed through the roof of the building beneath it.

Gyory knew that the *Hatchetman* was hurt, but he wasn't sure how badly. Even though the exhaust trails from his last missile volley had obscured their target, the Capellan pilot felt certain that at least one of those rockets had actually struck the enemy 'Mech. He also believed that he had seen the spindly machine lurch to one side before the smoke and flame from the missed shots blocked his line-of-sight.

Eager to destroy the Lyran, Gyory ran the *Centurion* around the corner and onto Library Avenue. Except for the rubble from the shell-blasted office building, the street was empty. The *Hatchetman* couldn't have jumped again without being picked up on the *Centurion's* motion detectors. Even if the Steiner pilot had hit the ground running, Gyory still should have caught a glimpse of him as he rounded the corner. This could mean only one thing. The Lyran 'Mech was hiding somewhere waiting for him to get closer before opening fire on him, possibly even lying in ambush, preparing to use that great bloody club which gave the vehicle its name.

The thought of the *Hatchetman's* club shearing into his already battered 'Mech made Gyory's skin crawl. Turning the resolution up on his sensor array, the Liao captain made his cautious way down the center of Library Avenue. Twice light from the pale

Inside the *Centurion's* **cockpit,** a motion detector screamed for attention. The sensors indicated something very large moving inside the partially destroyed office building. Cautiously Daniel Gyory moved his *Centurion* down the street until it was opposite the shell-cratered structure. Whatever had been moving behind that broken wall had stopped. Once again, his confused scanners couldn't make out anything definite.

Aiming at the place where his sensors had detected the last movement, Gyory lifted the 90 mm gun and fired. The explosive rounds blew chunks of ferrocrete and glass away from the building and threw them across the street to rattle against the *Centurion's* armor. Laser light stabbed into the wall, creating another, smaller storm of debris and enlarging the hole blasted in it by the hammering autocannon.

Inside the ruined building, Scully's eyes widened in surprise as the *Centurion* raised its heavy gun. The black muzzle looked to be as large as that of a long-tom cannon when it finally came to rest pointing directly

at the battered *Hatchetman*. Then flame erupted from that huge dark opening. The front of the building flew away in burning shards. The high-explosive rounds were followed by the eye-searing flash of laser fire. More of the curtain wall collapsed into the street.

As the smoke and dust started to clear, Scully brought the electronic gun sight into focus, locking it on the Capellan BattleMech's torso.

The Liao MechWarrior heard a fresh cassette of 90 mm rounds drop into place in the breech of the Luxor-D gun, as the last of the dust began to settle. As he lined up the crosshairs again, a bright tongue of flame lanced out of the blasted ruin.

White, glowing tracers leaped across the narrow street into Gyory's 'Mech. They clawed away what little armor remained on the *Centurion's* damaged left arm. Warning lights flicked on, telling of damage to the internal structure. A pair of laser blasts flashed from the building, one narrowly missing the *Centurion's* head, the other slagging the armor protecting its right torso.

Before Gyory could recover from the sudden onslaught, the front of the office building exploded outward, shattering under the sudden rush of 45 tons of steel giant, its huge battleax already swinging.

Panic seized the Liao warrior. Slamming his hands down on the fire-control console, he fired his entire complement of weapons. At less than 60 meters, the Luxor long-range missiles had no time to target before they had already burned past the charging Steiner 'Mech, exploding harmlessly against yet another building. The autocannon shells, however, slammed into the *Hatchetman's* left arm, exposing myomer bundles and aluminum bone. The forward-firing laser clawed a ragged gash in the enemy's center torso. The rearward laser burned an ineffective hole in the building behind Gyory's 'Mech.

Scully felt the autocannon rounds punch into his 'Mech, but still he did not hesitate in his lumbering rush. The two monstrous war machines met with a tooth-rattling crash. Moving at a speed of nearly 55 kph, the *Hatchetman* slammed the *Centurion* back into the building. Frantically, ignoring

the pain which threatened to overwhelm him, Scully fought to keep his machine on its feet. The Capellan machine bounced off the wall behind it and fell over on its face. Even as it struggled to rise, Scully dropped the *Hatchetman* to its knees and brought its right arm down in a whistling arc.

Gyory hung face down from the restraining straps of his comchair, trying to force the badly abused *Centurion's* limbs to lift the downed 'Mech to its feet again. Before he even managed to pull its mangled arms under it, the CN9-A was driven back down to the pavement with a force like a sledgehammer smashing an egg.

A dozen idiot lights came on, warning of armor breach, of coolant system failure, of severe structural damage. Another devastating blow pile-drivered into his 'Mech's back, destroying the newly-replaced Photech medium laser and cracking the shielding surrounding the *Centurion's* power plant.

Knowing that another blow like that would most likely destroy his 'Mech and kill him, Gyory slammed his fist down on the emergency hatch release button.

Twice the Liao *Centurion* attempted to rise to its feet. Twice Scully's descending club smashed it back to the pavement. Huge rents appeared in the downed

'Mech's back. Scully saw miniature lightning storms playing in the gap where the rearward medium laser had been.

Scully brought the hatchet over and down for a third time, its hard edge cleaving straight through the already torn dorsal armor.

Suddenly a shattering explosion tore through the wrecked *Centurion*. Scully's last blow had smashed the Luxor 3M missile launcher and detonated the missiles still in its magazine. The blast tore the helpless Liao 'Mech apart and pitched Scully's *Hatchetman* over onto its back. The last thing Scully saw before the explosion engulfed the *Centurion's* head was the emergency escape hatch blowing off, but the pilot didn't make it out.

Stunned from the fall, weak from loss of blood and the aftereffects of adrenaline, Lieutenant Brian Scully lay in the street staring up into the night sky. Eventually, he wrestled his reluctant machine to its feet. He programmed his comlink to send a zip-squeal message to the Lyran field HQ.

"Encountered and destroyed enemy BattleMech. Have suffered severe damage. Will attempt to complete assignment. Scully out."

Taking a last look at the ruin which once was his opponent, Scully wondered briefly who the Capellan MechWarrior had been. Then, after a moment's pause, he sent his battered machine limping away into the gathering night.
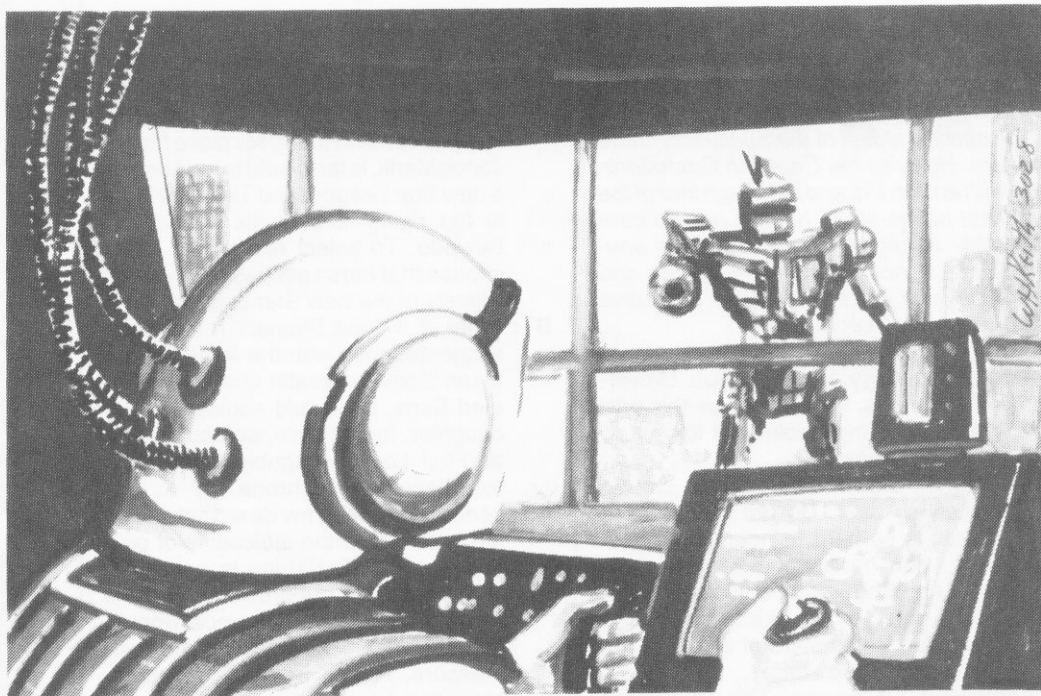
Svetlana Chan Interviews...

MAXIMILIAN LIAO

Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation

Celestial Wisdom

BattleTechnology's Svetlana Chan managed to gain access to some of the Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation's time late in May. Maximilian Liao, at age 64, is the second eldest of the Successor State leaders. He rules his Capellan Confederation with an iron fist, and, although lord of the smallest nation-state, he has proved considerably adept at manipulating his enemies. He is not to be taken lightly, and enemies who have misjudged him have paid dearly for their mistake.

BattleTechnology: We thank you, Universal Highness, for granting us this portion of your invaluable time for our so humble purposes.

Chancellor Maximilian Liao: Come, come, my dear. Do not grovel so, it makes is so hard to hear your questions. You need not prostrate yourself—kneeling will be sufficient.

BT: Thank you. I would like to ask you to characterize the state of affairs in the Successor States today.

Chancellor: Of course. The Successor States have suffered through nearly 300 years of warfare which has sapped the will of most people. They cry out for a leader to unify mankind once again, yet they do not find a clear choice. I can sympathize with them. My close friend, Janos Marik, is far too old to lead us into a new Star League, and Takashi Kurita is too rigidly tied to his concept of Bushido. To select him would be to impose that harsh philosophy over the entirety of the new Star League.

BT: What of Katrina Steiner? It has been suggested that, with the linking of the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns, she could abdicate to her daughter. In that case, we could have, as First Lord, a capable leader with experience on the throne.

Chancellor: It is clear, my dear, that you do not understand the intricacies of politics. First of all, Katrina is a woman. While this does not preclude her from ruling, it is well known that most women do not have the ability to handle such pressure. Ruling requires a detachment that few women manage to obtain.

BT: And Hanse Davion? As the youngest of the rulers, he would have the longest time on the throne...

Chancellor: You jest. Why would we want the product of faulty birth control leading the Star League? The man was not trained to lead, and his Federated Suns has continued to prosper despite his best efforts to bankrupt it. As for his possible longevity, his family has weak blood—he would wilt beneath the pressures of being First Lord.

BT: That leaves you as the only alternative.

Chancellor: Does it? Yes, I believe you are correct. As I consider it now, in light of your having mentioned it, I believe that I would be the best choice. My family's history points to a number of relatives who live to an incredible age—without a change in abilities or mental capacity. I have the experience of guiding the fate of a constituent nation-state, which gives me an insight into how the new Star League would have to be run.

My, my, your suggestion is an excellent one. I *am* the only logical candidate for First Lord.

BT: A moment ago you said Hanse Davion is doing his best to bankrupt the Federated Suns. It would please us, Celestial Wisdom, if you would be kind enough to elaborate.

Chancellor: It is obvious to even the most casual of observers that the Prince's obsession with his Galahad exercises is similar to that of a child playing with toy soldiers. In this case, however, those toy soldiers must be paid for over and over again. One might suggest that the abilities his armed forces have shown in the Galahad exercises are considerable, but the expense of his practice wars is enough to cripple his economy. It is an investment that has no return.

BT: Then the exercises do not worry you?

Chancellor: No, not at all. They are merely posturing on his part. Duke Michael Hasek-Davion has realized this and has withheld his troops from the exercises this year. I believe Hanse's shows of power are directed mostly at his own people. He has shown, with the Galahad exercises, that he can deliver troops to any world in sufficient force to repeat a Kentares massacre and end any popular rebellions.

BT: You characterize the Federated Suns as a repressive regime, yet its people have more freedoms than the citizens of the Capellan Confederation enjoy.

Chancellor: (laughs) So you have been brainwashed by Davion propagandists, have you?

BT: No, I don't think so.

Chancellor: You must understand, precious Svetlana, that people do not want freedom in the chaotic sense they enjoy it in the Federated Suns. There one may do whatever one wishes until it angers the state. If someone does draw that wrath of the state down upon himself, he is destroyed without warning. There are no clearly defined boundaries to let someone know when he has gone too far. As well, this lack of definition with the Federated system means people can slip though the cracks and be left to suffer the buffets and abuse of that anarchistic society.

In the Capellan Confederation, on the other hand, each citizen understands his or her place in the society. Take *your* case, for example. You are allowed to work for a magazine that will be distributed throughout the Successor States because it pleases me to let you do that. Were you to abuse that privilege, your role in our society would have to be reevaluated. You understand what you may and may not do, and this gives you an element of security in what could otherwise be a very uneasy life. Do you follow me?
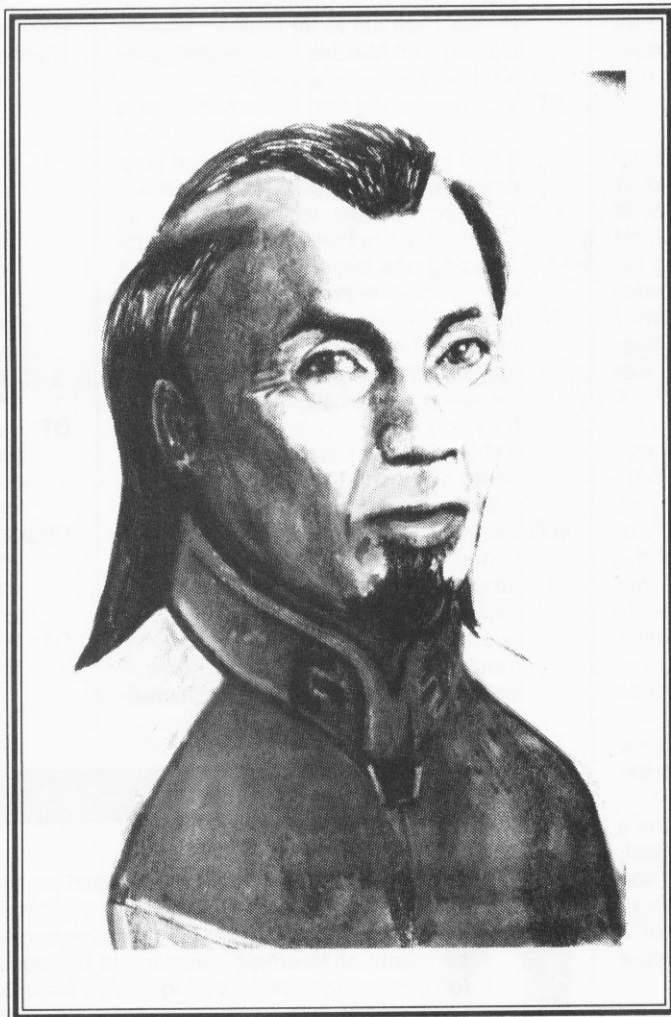
Maximilian Liao
Chancellor of the
Capellan Confederation

...also known as
"Celestial Wisdom,"
"Universal Paragon,"
and, in his own words,
"the only logical candidate for First Lord."

BT: Yes, Highness. On a different front, you have to be looking forward to a time when you might not be able to guide the Confederation. Can you evaluate your three children for us in terms of possible succession?

Chancellor: Three?

BT: Candace, Romano, and your son, Tormana.

Chancellor: My son? Oh, yes, him. He is off serving with the 2nd Ariana Fusiliers. Once he has some seasoning, perhaps he will amount to something.

BT: Then the rumored reconciliation between you has not happened?

Chancellor: Reconciliation? Why would you believe my son and I have any differences between us? He is merely going through a rebellious phase. I believe that, shortly, we will see that he is a chip off the old block.

BT: Does this mean he will supplant one of his sisters in the succession?

Chancellor: What? No, not at this point. As I said, he needs experience. It is well known that my eldest, Candace, is my heir. Her work on the economy provides proof enough of her leadership abilities. She is more than capable of making decisions with the cold deliberation needed in a ruler. If she ascends to this throne, I feel confident the Capellan Confederation will prosper.

BT: On one hand you refer to her as your heir, but then you use the word "if" when describing her ascension. Is Romano going to eclipse her?

Chancellor: (smiles) Though born of the same woman, my daughters are so unlike each other. Romano is more of a dreamer, a romantic, much as I am myself. She sees things with a vision that does not interpret the future, it molds the future. She is not afraid to act when she sees the need.

BT: Rumor has it that she sponsored a terrorist attack on some Davion officers on Kittery last November...

Chancellor: (laughs) Again you let the Federated propaganda machine deceive you. That rumor was spread as a justification for Davion troops to mur-

der thousands of civilians on Kittery. Consider this: if there was such an attack, why did the Davion forces not strike back?

BT: Your point is well taken, but Duke Michael Hasek-Davion berated the Prince for his lack of action in this case. Does that not indicate that the attack took place?

Chancellor: No, it merely indicates that the Prince only lets partial information go to his subordinates. This is a dangerous practice because it can lead to dissatisfaction. I would not want Michael Hasek-Davion displeased with me, were I Hanse Davion.

BT: You make that sound like a threat.

Chancellor: Nothing of the sort. It is friendly advice. The Prince can take a look at the Free Worlds League to see what happens when a House is divided against itself. I have nothing but respect for Janos Marik as a man, therefore I did not allow myself to be swayed by opportunistic advisors who suggested we exploit the civil war for our own purposes.

BT: But it is said you engineered…

Chancellor: You be careful, young lady. Again the Davion propagandists must be congratulated on how well they do their job. It is the sacred mission of publications such as yours to set the record straight. Surely I would not sponsor a civil war in the Free Worlds League that I meant to capitalize upon and then give away Wolf's Dragoons. What farmer would sow seeds, then give away his scythe?

BT: You have made your point, Universal Paragon. What are your feelings concerning the upcoming wedding?

Chancellor: Ah, you have touched upon a subject I find romantically tragic. I must, as do all others, find this fairy-tale sort of a wedding a thing of beauty. We all are touched by the quaintness of a Prince marrying a Princess. It satisfies a need in the human soul.

BT: Why tragic, then?

Chancellor: It is obvious, isn't it? Having broken his own economy, Hanse Davion tricked the Archon into linking their two states so the Lyran economy can infuse new life into the Federated Suns. The tragedy comes in when we look at poor Melissa. She is being trapped into a marriage with a man over twice her age to become nothing more than a brood mare. It is well known she would have preferred to marry another, but her mother would not have it.

BT: What, who? Who would she have married in the Prince's stead?

Chancellor: I have heard two names mentioned. One is Hanse's nephew Morgan Hasek-Davion, and the other is Tormana Liao.

BT: But your son is already married…

Chancellor: That is a misconception. An unscrupulous woman tried to trap him into a marriage to advance her own position. That situation has since been taken care of. I understand that the Prince's refusal to let Morgan Hasek-Davion wed Melissa has created quite a rift between uncle and heir.

BT: You mentioned that the wedding of a Princess fills a void in the human soul. If this is true, why has neither of your daughters wed? Surely you could solidify an alliance with the Draconis Combine or the Free Worlds League by pledging one of your daughters to an heir of either realm.

Chancellor: Would you have me become the sort of monster the Davion agents suggest in their foul rumormongering? Candace and Romano will marry when they are ready. I would not do what Katrina Steiner has done and consign either of my daughters to a life of living with men they hate.

BT: During this interview you have mentioned, several times in fact, the Davion propaganda machine. How can you hope to counter Davion intelligence operations when they seem to have so much control over the perceptions of people inside and outside the Confederation?

Chancellor: My own Maskirovka is indeed hard pressed to counter everything, but we know the Prince's past sins will catch up with him. We welcome those whom the Prince has mistreated, and they bring us tools to use against him. Eventually people will see what sort of man the Prince truly is, and they will rise against him. His record of injustices is quite clear and public. It is my duty to expose such crimes and to comfort those who have been abused.

BT: Can you give us an example?

Chancellor: The most shocking example in recent memory is the 3027 treason trial of Major Justin Xiang [*Ed—Justin Allard*]. The evidence in this case was fictional and the court allowed flagrant violations of the laws the Prince has sworn to uphold. Then, not content with allowing this travesty to play itself out naturally, the Prince intervenes, directs a verdict and exiles this officer who had served him faithfully and honorably. Even if Justin Xiang had not been half Capellan by birth, I would have extended my hand to him.

BT: His being the son of Davion's Minister for Intelligence, Information and Operations had nothing to do with your kindness to him?

Chancellor: The Universe rewards those who are proper in their conduct. I am certain, as you edit this article, you will learn the veracity of this statement.

BT: Yes, He-Whom-The-Universe-Envies. Thank you.

Svetlana Chan had not intended to become a journalist, but the Capellan Confederation felt this was the area in which her talents could be most useful to the state. In her first assignment she exposed corruption on the planet of Necromo, resulting in the conviction of Mandrinn Kensha Joba on charges of accepting money from Davion agents.

Pleased with her performance, the Capellan government allowed BattleTechnology to pick up her contract and even let her travel to our offices on Exeter in the Federated Suns for an orientation course. She subsequently spent a year as a member of an observer team which Prince Hanse Davion allowed to watch military operations, including Galahad '27.

Her reports, while occasionally critical of the state of Liaoist military preparedness, have not been suppressed in the Capellan Confederation. Chan is a valued member of our staff and her insightful reports on the inner workings of the Capellan Confederation shed light on a dim and distant subject.

The Liao Edge on Solaris:

Home Field Advantage

...or more?

by James Williams

Solaris VII, the Game World, is probably one of the best known worlds in the whole of the Successor States. With the notable exception of places where they are banned, BattleMech brawl broadcasts from Solaris are in great demand. With a guaranteed audience, advertisers pay handsomely to buy time on these shows. BattleMech fights are big business, and some people even see the futures of the Successor States reflected in how well contingents from each of the Houses do in combat.

Because of the money involved in the Solaris games, and the supposed prophetical nature of the battles, a recent shift in the fortunes of battle have alarmed many. In this in-depth look at the Game World, we'll go behind the scenes in the big leagues to take a look at what has been happening. We'll acquaint you with the characters and scandals that have rocked Solaris, and we'll even see if history truly does ape the battles on Solaris.

THE SOLARIS SYSTEM

Solaris VII is a temperate, water-rich world that was first colonized with an eye toward industrialization. Because the virtually constant drizzling showers washed acids from factory exhaust back down on the populace, Solaris became known as a de-

Right: The Solaris Games. Critics have called them a mind-boggling and inexpressibly stupid waste of precious technological resources. Somehow, the Games retain their popularity.

pressing world. In an attempt to maintain order, the first corporations on Solaris organized BattleMech games and encouraged whole factories to back corporate teams.

The games became very popular, and with their popularity came promoters and MechWarriors who saw a way to make a quick fortune by defeating local champions. Soon freelance teams roved the planet like ancient barnstormers and bare-knuckled fighters. They would fight anyone, anywhere, for salvage rights plus whatever purse the town or factory could put up.

The usurpation of Earth, and the subsequent battles, created a strong draw for the best of Solaris' fighters. Suddenly bereft of talent, having lost corporate sponsors who had quickly tired of these freelancers kicking their champions around, and in fear of watching their golden-egg-laying goose die, the promoters got together and formu-

lated a plan to save Solaris. This system, which started over 250 years ago, still rules Solaris' games today.

The promoters worked up a feeder system that allowed MechWarrior hopefuls to train up slowly. Small towns merely had to provide an old barn or quarry where combatants could battle in exoskeletons to be included in Class 1, the network's lowest level. Each town doing this was given a share of the network's income proportional to the number of recruits they passed on up the line. The town continued to receive a portion of that fighter's income as long as he continued to fight on Solaris.
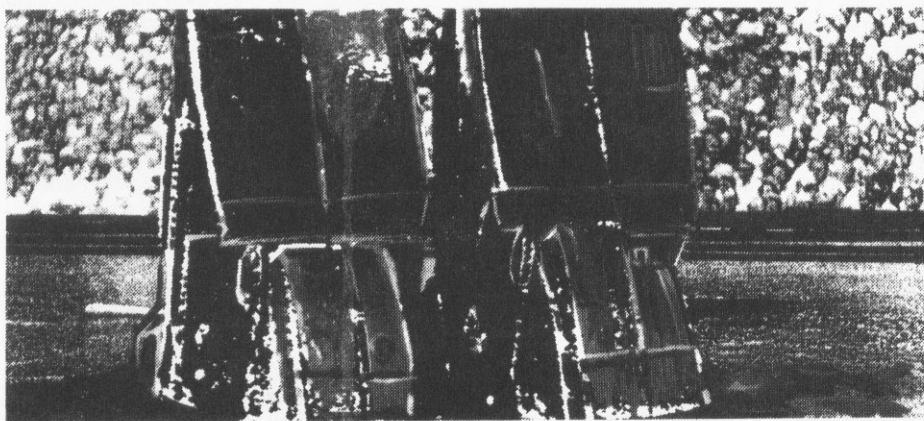
Solaris City—where BattleMechs fight one another to the death.
Millions of fans watch these matches, betting fortunes on the outcome. In the Steiner Arena (above), tens of thousands of spectators can witness 'Mech combat in person.

Class	Mech Weight
1	Exoskeleton
2	Light
3	Medium
4	Heavy
5	Assault

As towns become cities, the arenas become more complex and the battles more dangerous. While some suggest the feeder system is a simple five-tier set-up in which the lowest rank deals with exoskeleton fights, and the top, Solaris City, handles assault 'Mech battles, the network is actually more complex. While the five tiers do establish (with few exceptions) the upper category of 'Mech licensed to fight in each class of arena, the battles themselves vary wildly.

In a Class 3 facility, for example, it is permitted for one heavy 'Mech to be pitted against a medium 'Mech. In theory, before this match takes place, permission must come from the nearest Class 4 facility (which could elect to stage the fight itself, since it involves a heavy 'Mech), but rarely has such permission been requested and never has it been refused. Fighters and 'Mechs working their way down the ranking system (most often half of an "overmatch" battle) are generally considered burn-outs, or fodder for some up-and-comers, so no one cares what happens to them.

If a fighter survives the 5- to 10-year journey it will take him to rise from a Class 1 fighter to a fighter on the Solaris City circuit, he will have beaten considerable odds. He will also have made a large amount of money for the town that first sponsored him. For this reason many of the smaller towns

actually go out to Galatea (the famed Mercenary's Star) and recruit hard-luck mercenaries. A number of Class 1 towns, like Sofia, Nowhere, Avondale, and Fort Defiance, have used the monies earned by their winning tradition to build training facilities that promise more of the same fine performers the towns have become famous for.

The Solaris City circuit is, by far, the most lucrative. All the biggest fights, no matter what the weights are of the 'Mechs involved, are fought in Solaris City. Mech-Warriors are all ranked by a pyramid system of 8 levels, and may only challenge fighters on their level, or one above them, to a battle. All fights are considered "restricted"—meaning the 'Mechs must be of matched weight, unless the fighters waive that restriction. Restriction waivers are seldom requested, generally only when an owner/operator is involved in making the request.

Some fighters on the Solaris circuit fight in what has become known as the "Open" class of fights. In the Open class, a phantom entity developed just over a century ago, the purses for the fights are much bigger, and the media distribution much wider. A fighter with 12 or more kills rises into this class and may, at his discretion, decline challenges from fighters who are not yet in the Open class. When the Open class was created, many pointed to it as the death of the fight system, but the influx of cash it attracted has quieted most opposition to it.

Because corporate sponsors pulled out when the network was created, the promoters decided to allow nobles—both on and off world—to own "stables" of

Why Bet on Machines Instead of Men?

Debate has raged back and forth over the subject of setting matches between machines instead of their pilots. Originally this was allowed because the nobles were scrambling desperately to put pilots inside their machines. Handicappers soon noticed that the expertise of a pilot might decide a battle between two evenly matched 'Mechs, but even a marksman in a *Locust* could not defeat a *Warhammer*. In addition, bookmakers found it much easier to keep track of the repair status of a 'Mech than to find out the condition of the pilot.

While most people have come to accept this way of doing business, there are those who point out that a pilot can make a big difference. Most recently, the 3027 champion, Justin Xiang, got his start when he replaced Fuh Teng in a match that pitted a *Vindicator* against a *Hermes.* Xiang won in the *Vindicator,* starting a number of protests, but officials noted the *Vindicator* should have won—it was heavier and better armed than the *Hermes.* They concluded that those who had placed bets on the basis of pilot name had just made bad choices.

'Mechs in much the same way that strings of race horses are owned on other worlds. Challenges, except in the case of grudge matches, are actually made between *machines,* not pilots. This has created some confusion in battles where a last-minute pilot substitution was made, but this is rarely done. Still, a grudge match is the only way to ensure that one particular pilot will be fighting another in any given battle.

OTHER FACTORS

Victories are decided neither by 'Mech nor by MechWarrior on anything approaching a consistent basis. If they were, Solaris would have become bankrupt ages ago because every gambler in the universe would have long since won a fortune at the games. What are the other factors involved, and how do they affect the games?

One important consideration is the location of the match. The Big Five arenas in Solaris City are the settings for the most important matches in the network. Virtually all the Open fights occur in these forums, and all of the battles for championship are held within their confines. Plans for the construction of a massive facility combining all of the different features in these separates facilities were torpedoed by the arena owners' cartel. Since then no one has doubted that these five arenas are, and will continue to be, the hub of gladiatorial 'Mech combat in the Successor States.

THE FACTORY

Located in the heart of the Montenegro district of Solaris City, the Factory can be either the most boring or the most exciting of the arenas. A syndicate of Free World League industrialists acquired the old manufacturing facility when they took over a multi-system corporation. Instead of scrapping the utterly outmoded factory, they rewired it for holovid cameras and turned it into an arena.

The Factory was constructed on a 'Mech-sized scale. Through the corridors and up the ramps where industrial 'Mechs

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Right: "Twisted steel, rusting metal, and shattered ferrocrete rubble have turned the Factory into a nightmare ruin." Here a *Rifleman* hunts for its foe within the devastated ruins of the Marik arena known as the Factory, one of the Big Five in Solaris City.

used to carry parts for the sub-assembly of shuttlecraft now stalk those 'Mechs' more lethal cousins. Twisted steel, rusting metal, and shattered ferrocrete rubble have turned the Factory into a nightmare ruin. 'Mechs slated for a battle in the devastated maze generally start on different levels and hunt for each other to delight the crowds who watch on closed circuit holovision from another nearby building.

As can be expected, Free Worlds League natives seem to adapt to battle here very well. In 3026 Marik fighters battling in the Factory won an impressive 30% of their fights, followed by Kurita and Steiner, tied at 23%. In 3027 that percentage dropped to 27%, with Kurita and Steiner at 24% and 20% respectively. The fluctuation would have been considered minor except for one little thing—a jump of 14 percentage points by Liao forces in just one season.

The Factory has long been considered a location that favors the thinking fighter. Because scrap metal is strewn everywhere, magscanners are useless and there's plenty of cover for small agile 'Mechs. The need for tactics is stressed when one notes that in small 2-on-1 battles featuring light 'Mechs against mediums or heavies, the larger 'Mechs take a disproportionate amount of damage and even lose some battles.

Liao fighters, who favor traditional Liao 'Mechs like *Vindicators* and *Centurions,* have not generally been classed as tactically-minded. While game fighters, their general lack of discipline and solid grounding in tactics has left them at a disadvantage compared to the fighters trained by their more bellicose neighbors. Liao fighters did especially abysmally in the Factory because Marik warriors did their best to maintain their honor in their home arena.

Most shocking of all in this Liao rise was that 9 of those 14 percentage points gained by Liao came at the expense of Davion fights. While Davion fighters tend to ex-military that some people classify as renegades, the quality of their training is seldom doubted. For Davion fighters to have suffered such nasty losses, and even deaths, to Liao fighters in the Factory came as a big shock to many.

THE JUNGLE

The Liao home arena has been described as a massive terrarium, but this analogy really does not do justice to the magnificence of the facility. The building encloses a little over two square kilometers of jungle in the heart of the Cathay slums in Solaris City. It first started as a Buddhist
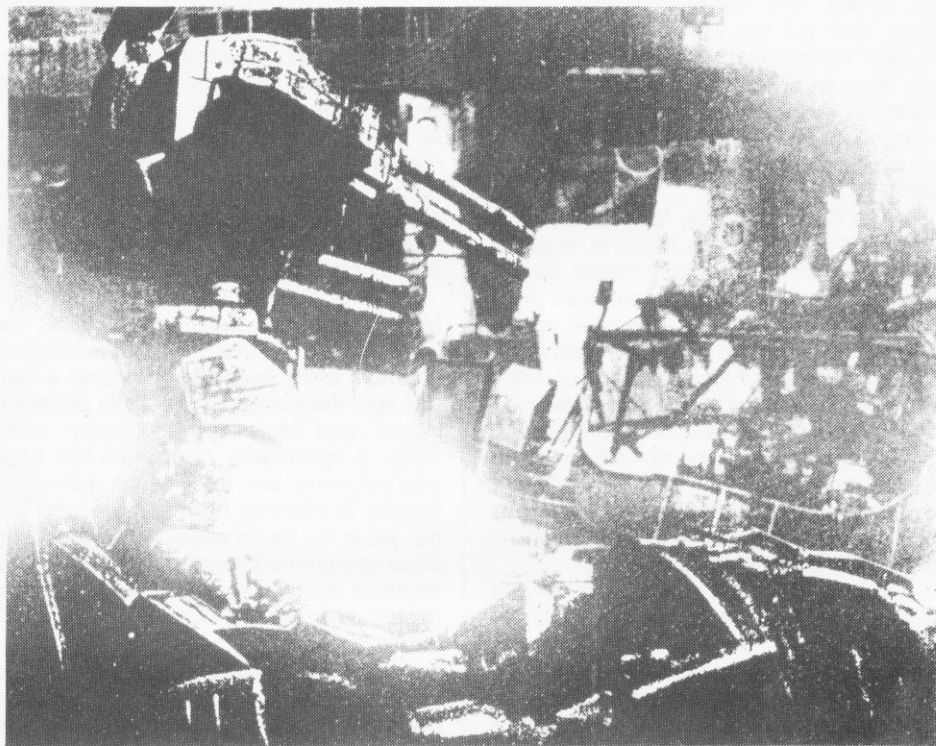
Right: "The atmospheric controls make this arena just like a slice from the Spica jungles." A Liao *Archer* claims victory in a match on his home ground—the Big Five arena known as the Jungle.

sanctuary and peace garden, but the project failed when a large corporation decided to relocate to Tikonov. Geraldo Ling, an industrialist, adopted the garden and added enough in the way of terrain design to make the place suitable for 'Mech combat.

The atmospheric controls make this arena just like a slice from the Spica jungles. When 'Mechs are not battling within the garden, a horde of gardeners and attendants repair the damage and visitors are allowed to tour the grounds. It can be safely said that the Jungle is an attraction either with or without fights raging in it.

All battles are recorded on holovideo and sent via a closed circuit system to a nearby building for viewing. The Lings have a multitude of different viewing theaters—most with their own entrances—and the crowds tend to segregate into national groups to watch the fights. The Lings, it is reported and widely believed, make more money off concessions than they do off the wagering that goes on in their facility.

As would be expected, Liao fighters fare well in this environment. In 3026, they won 20% of the battles fought here, but that only tied them with Kurita and placed them behind Davion (35%) and Steiner (21%). While Liao fighters regularly bested Marik combatants, they suffered loss after loss to Davion forces. As one-time champion Philip Capet remarked, "We trashed them on the real Spica, so why should it be different here?"

As with the Factory, 3027 brought new life to the Liao contingent on Solaris VII. Capellan fighters won a record-breaking 44% of their fights, forcing Davion, Steiner, and Kurita to drop way back in the Jungle rankings. Most embarrassing of all, Marik fighters won only 1% of their fights in the Jungle—a miserable showing that left them behind even the ragtag fighters who claim allegiance to the various Periphery lords.

The Jungle has generally been considered an arena in which a tactician will do well. Liao fighters had an edge in their battles there just because of the amount of time they spent training in and studying the

layout. Even with this greater familiarity with the Jungle, they still finished well behind the tactically adept Davion and Steiner fighters. Kurita fighters, it has long been imagined, could do better in the Jungle except that the ducking and hiding common there offends their sense of what is right and honorable in a combat.

The only other time Liao fighters gained anything close to that much ground in a season came back in 2973 when the Jungle was totally redesigned and landscaped for the season. Once the other fighters got used to the new layout, the Liao edge dulled.

THE ARENA

Located on the outskirts of the Silesia district of Solaris City, the Steiner Arena stands as a relic of the past glories of mankind. A coalition of industrialists, with money pumped in from entertainment circles, built the Steiner Arena to be a 'Mech-sized replica of the Coliseum on Terra. Using a mixture of reflective ballistic

glass and missile detonation systems, this Arena allows patrons to actually sit in stands and watch the 'Mechs battling below. Luxury boxes ring the Arena for the rich, and general admission seating is provided at a price reasonable enough even for a Class 4 facility.

Kurita fighters dominated the Arena in 3026 with an impressive 40% of the victories. Davion, Steiner and Marik ran about even, and Liao's 7% victory total kept it 2 points above the Periphery contingent. In 3027 Liao came back to take third place with 15% of the victories, behind Kurita with 37% and Steiner with 16%. Marik remained even, but Davion lost ground to Liao and Periphery forces.

The Steiner Arena is a crucible in which a fighter's nerves are tested. There is no cover, no need for tactics. In this open expanse, fighters are expected to slug it out, and the majority of battles in this location pit teams of multiple 'Mechs against each other. While sorting out victories by nationality is difficult in those settings, the improvement by Liao forces could not be denied. The improvement was originally put

Above: "'Mechs might require an hour to hunt for each other in this frozen killzone, but when contact is made the fighting runs fast and furious." Hot action in a cold climate in the Davion arena known as the Boreal Reach.

down to a rumored influx of new 'Mechs, but this explanation proved false. Many commentators finally had to concede the Liao forces were responding to the example their new champion offered them, and this bolstered their spirit and their desire to fight.

ISHIYAMA

Ishiyama is the Kurita arena. It dominates the Kobe district and looks very much like the "stone mountain" indicated by its name. Within the confines of this beautifully crafted ferrocrete mountain is a labyrinth of tunnels and gorges that rival the natural caverns of the world. Ishiyama is a place of haunting beauty, and the battles here proceed as if choreographed.

Ishiyama was designed by one individual, Anjin Ito, but he broke the plans down into several parts before the building started. It was not uncommon during its construction to have one work crew cutting into or modifying something another crew had created two years before. Rumors of secret passages and hidden chambers abound, but the original plans were destroyed so this has not been confirmed by anyone. It has been suggested in public and in private that not even the arenamaster knows all the secrets of Ishiyama.

As would be expected, fighters from the Draconis Combine win a plurality of the battles in Ishiyama. In 3026 they won 37% of the fights, but this share slipped to 30% in 3027. (It is rumored the Coordinator will commit seppuku if his people lose any more

ground, so the Kurita battlers have stepped up training for the 3028 season.)

Once again Liao MechWarriors gained impressively from 3026 to 3027. Davion loyalists have complained about how the Justin Xiang/Philip Capet fight was scored, but precedent backed up the arenamaster's ruling. The Davion supporters might have more correctly blamed the number of *Vindicators* used by Liao fighters as the source of their trouble. Ishiyama, with its gorges, certainly favors jump-capable 'Mechs.

BOREAL REACH

Not to be outdone by anyone, the Federated Suns has the largest, most complex facility on Solaris VII. Boreal Reach is a four-square-kilometer arena located between the Black Hills district of Solaris City and the Cathay slums. The site lies half-buried in the earth and required the

construction of two geothermal generating centers just to service its power needs.

Boreal Reach is an icy wilderness. The whole facility is refrigerated and the battlefield is cycled through a weather program that is unpredictable at best. Not only do fighters oppose other MechWarriors—in Boreal Reach they fight the arena itself. This danger is offset by the extremely low temperature of the arena which makes overheating much less of a problem. 'Mechs might require an hour to hunt for each other in this frozen killzone, but when contact is made the fighting runs fast and furious.

In 3026, to no one's surprise, Davion fighters finished first in this facility by winning 40% of their battles. Liao came in a dismal last with only 2% of the victories. Boreal Reach seemed especially kind to the Periphery pilots, letting them win 7% of their battles. As one commented after a nasty fight, "Hell, we're used to having everything against us. Boreal Reach is nicer than the planet I came from. If I win here, maybe they'll let me stay for a while."

Davion did not surrender its ownership of the Boreal Reach title in 3027, but Liao's forces really came on strong. They picked up 17 percentage points over their 3026 finish, slicing it in almost equal portions from Davion, Steiner, Kurita, and Periphery fighters. Marik fans were overjoyed that they lost no ground, but they did not brag about it as their fighters did not engage any Liao fighters within the confines of Boreal Reach in that season.

Boreal Reach has long been considered the most demanding of the battle arenas. In it a fighter must be a tactician if he wants to make the best of the ice caves, floating icebergs, and transient blizzards offered by the arena. In addition, a Mech-Warrior must have good aim and the nerve to handle battles at very close quarters. 'Mechs that have done well tend to have medium lasers, autocannons and SRMs—all weapons that favor shorter range battles.

Opinions vary as to why the Liao fighters picked up those 17 points, but we do know it was not from being picky about who they would fight inside Boreal Reach. Promoters found Liao fighters ready and willing to take on any competition in Boreal Reach, and if the opponent was a Federated Suns expatriate, so much the better. This aggressive attitude bled over into the other statistics we will analyze.

In addition to the analysis of how well a pilot performs in a given arena, handicappers have often looked at the pilot matchups

Percentages of Victories of one House over Another

House Victor	versus House					
	Davion	Liao	Kurita	Steiner	Marik	Periphery
Davion	———	70%/12%	48%/50%	60%/57%	63%/61%	97%/98%
Liao	30%/88%	———	18/%/27%	25%/50%	48%/65%	70%/93%
Kurita	52%/50%	82%/73%	———	57%/48%	67%/70%	98%/97%
Steiner	40%/43%	75%/50%	43%/52%	———	53%/60%	93%/95%
Marik	37%/39%	52%/35%	33%/30%	47%/40%	———	96%/97%
Periphery	03%/02%	30%/07%	02%/03%	07%/05%	04%/03%	———

to determine what they believe the outcome will be. As noted above, no serious bettor looks to the pilot to determine a winner, but the pilot might determine bets on the length of the fight, what weapons will be used first, and so on. Obviously, on Solaris, you can bet on virtually anything.

One percentage often touted as being valuable is what many refer to as the "virgin" percentage. This is, despite the name, not concerned with the number of fights the combatant has had. Instead, it is the percentage of first-time fights he has won. In 3026 House Kurita and House Davion led the league with 32% and 30% victories in this class. Analysts agreed that the high sense of honor felt by the Draconian fighters, and the excellent training of the Davion ex-military, made them formidable opponents when a fighter had not faced them before.

In 3027 the percentage shifted quite a bit. Davion and Kurita fighters tied with a virgin percentage of 27. While Steiner edged into third with a 19% victory rate, House Liao came in a very respectable fourth. Liao had won only 12% of its virgin matches in 3026 but a year later took 18% of them. It is true that many Davion fans maintain this was skewed by the inclusion of Justin Xiang's fights in the computations—a controversy we will cover shortly.

Similar to, but considered even more useful than, the virgin percentage is the percentage of grudge matches won by a particular House contingent. As would be expected, House Kurita excels in this category. In 3026 they won an impressive 48% of their rematches, leaving Davion a distant second with only 28% victories the second time around. While Davion backers note this percentage is lower than the Kurita figure, they like to point out that very few invitations for rematches were issued to them in 3026, and none came from defeated Kurita fighters.

3027 saw another upheaval in the percentages. Kurita lost 11 percentage points. While this did not drop them from first place, it did trim 6 points from their lead over House Davion. House Liao, on the other hand, won 20% of their grudge battles—a 15 point improvement over 3026. To the aggravation of Davion backers, Justin Xiang only fought one repeat match, so this increase could not be blamed on him.

The last statistic for us to look at really tells the tale of the shift between 3026 and 3027. Presented in the table above, it is a chart of the percentage of victories of one House over another. The first percentage listed in each column is for 3026 and the second for 3027.

Looking across the top line of the chart, it is clear that House Davion beat House Liao in 70% of their meetings during 3026. While this was not the best percentage of victories logged against House Liao, it did contain some of the most important battles. Through fighting and defeating a long line of Liao opponents, Philip Capet ascended to the Champion's Throne and was said to preside over the exclusive area of the club known as Thor's Shieldhall in the Silesia district of Solaris City. This gathering place, known as Valhalla, is the place where MechWarriors come to be seen and to enjoy the company of their peers.

In addition to his own impressive string of victories, Capet put his training as a drill instructor to good use and developed a cadre of young MechWarriors who were equally rough on Capellan fighters. Billy Wolfson and Peter Armstrong led this pack of warriors who seemed destined to dominate the Solaris battlefields for the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately for all of them, the destiny they felt wrapped up in was not their own. Enter Justin Xiang Allard.

WHY THEY CRY FOUL!

Justin Xiang Allard arrived on Solaris unheralded, but he did not stay unknown for long. Certainly the holovids of his treason trial had made it as far as Solaris, but on this world, newscasts are fillers for sports programming, not the other way around. When he first showed up in February of 3027, virtually no one recognized him; and because he no longer answered to Allard, no one recognized his name.

Xiang won his first battle by coldcocking a *Vindicator's* pilot and taking his place in a fight at the Steiner Arena. He faced Billy Wolfson in a Hermes II from Lord Brighton's stable. Certain people suggested the fight had been fixed because of the abnormally low odds against Wolfson, but others pointed out that Fuh Teng, the *Vindicator's* pilot, was coming off a serious injury and had not fought for over a month.

Xiang skillfully dealt with Wolfson, forcing the younger pilot to punch out of a burning 'Mech. The two pilots exchanged hot words, and Wolfson later vowed to avenge himself on Xiang. (One of Wolfson's friends said he was reluctant to fight Xiang again, but Capet and Lord Brighton—who wanted the ejection bond repaid—convinced him to demand a rematch.) Xiang, it appeared, had bet heavily on himself to win. In addition to the purse, the bets and the 100,000 Cb ejection bond Lord Brighton surrendered to him, Xiang became a very rich man in his first night at work.

Davion nobles moved to have Xiang barred from fighting and to have the loss overturned, but the Fighting Commission rejected their claim. They had correctly pointed out that Xiang was not certified to fight at the fifth level and that new certificates could not be issued until the next season, but their greed came back to haunt them. The Commission agreed with a spokesman for Fuh Teng who noted his brother had been killed only a month previously, right at the start of the season. In accord with a little used precedent established a dozen years before, Fuh Teng—as the executor of his brother's estate—gave Sze Teng's certificate to Xiang. The Commission let the victory stand.

Wolfson's defeat was the first loss suffered by one of Capet's cadre in the new season, and it seemed that many fighters took it as an omen that Capet's people were no longer invulnerable. Like a single crack in a dam, that loss started the House Davion edge crumbling.

A shift in the bookmakers' attitudes—and the odds on the fights—started when they learned the *Legend-Killer* Gray Noton had befriended Xiang. Noton was the first Champion in conscious memory to retire while at the top of the heap. Even though he'd not fought publicly in five years, he was still accorded a place of honor in Valhalla and his advice was sought by many. His open encouragement of Xiang told many folks Xiang was a fighter to watch.

A real uproar exploded when the Commission made the decision to log Xiang's victories as Liao wins. Nobles from the Federated Suns hated the pilot for what he had done to the AFFS, but they could not stand to have his victories tallied in the Liao column. They point out that Justin Allard had graduated from Sakhara Academy and had served with the AFFS. How could his victories be considered as belonging to Liao?

The Commission ruled that because of his mixed blood and because he was fighting under a certificate issued to a Capellan fighter, he would be considered a member of House Liao. Xiang himself said, "Those nobles will get their wish. They will see my victories tallied up for House Davion, only they'll be in the loss column."

Legend-Killer

Gray Noton came to Solaris VII as a youngster. He maintained he'd stowed away on a ship inbound from the Periphery and had come to see what all the excitement was about on Solaris. Though often repeated during his lifetime and to him, Noton neither denied the story, nor offered to expand upon it. His vagueness about his past and his occasional absences from Solaris VII led to many guesses about his background, but no one ever heard the definitive story. Or, at least, no one ever told.

Whereas Noton might have been deceptive concerning himself, there was no doubt about his abilities in a 'Mech. As a boy of 14, he indentured himself to the master of a Class 1 arena. Inside a year Noton had defeated all comers in his weight class, and a few above him. Scouts marked him as a pilot with a natural talent for 'Mech piloting. Offers flooded in.

Noton chose shrewdly and worked his way up through the fighting system. In doing this he avoided the mistake made by many young fighters. Nicknamed "Mayflies," these fighters jump straight into the rough-and-tumble battles of the larger circuits without the seasoning the system can give a fighter. They burn out in a season, and another shining star is forgotten.

By 3010 Noton was 25 years old and easily capable of breaking into the Solaris City circuit. Joking with a reporter that "the competition isn't good enough," he left Solaris and put in a five-year stint with a mercenary company assigned by the Free Worlds League to clean up the Periphery Bandits out in the Rim Commonality. As if he were a holovid personality sent to war as part of a patriotic effort, dispatches and holovid clips of Noton in action were hot sellers; and two "documentaries," it was discovered later, were staged and filmed without Noton's knowledge in the Lyran Commonwealth by a couple of disreputable distributors.

Noton returned with a nearly mint-condition *Rifleman* and agreed to fight on the Solaris Circuit. Although he'd never fought in the fifth circuit before, the people backed him by betting on him. Noton avoided the flamboyance and theatrics of most other fights, yet showed all of their skill and then some. After a series of fights against a number of "champions," fans christened Noton "Legend-Killer."

Noton designed and had emblazoned on his *Rifleman* a crest with a cartoon ghost in the center of a circular sight. That symbol marked the Solaris Champion for the next seven years. Noton surprised many when he stepped down at the end of the 3022 season.

Noton, who went into the import/export business upon retirement, died unexpectedly in 3027. Even in death he supported Justin Xiang and willed him his business and his *Rifleman* for his final battle with Philip Capet.

the Galahad exercises. There are rumors, probably spurious, that Prince Hanse Davion has offered these fighters commissions in the AFFS. This is doubtful because the pit fighters of Solaris seldom take well to the discipline and coordination needed in a military operation, but recruiters can always hope for another Gray Noton among the fighters on Solaris.

It has often been suggested that the battles on Solaris are a window into the future of warfare in the Successor States. Parallels have been drawn between the 3012 season on Solaris and the death of Prince Ian Davion on Mallory's World a year later. Examples like this extend back to the earliest battles on Solaris.

As with all predictive arts, like astrology or phrenology, it is much easier to retrofit the connections that it is to tell what is coming in the future. Still, the general rise in Liao skill and pride may reflect a resurgent nationalism in the Capellan Confederation. Indeed, the winning season of 3027 and the heady start of the 3028 season (Liao fighters are 10-5-2 against Davion opponents) could become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy if they help dispel the idea of Davion invincibility that the Galahad operations seem to engender. If nothing else, House Liao will dominate the Solaris Games in the short term and might even start a dynasty that others will have to work hard to destroy.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Even though Xiang left Solaris in midseason 3027, the Liao contingent continued their strong drive. Xiang, it is reported, invested a large portion of his personal wealth with Fuh Teng. As a result, Teng Stables has expanded and purchased a controlling interest in a fourth circuit training facility. Liao fighters associated with Teng Stables get training and excellent equipment. Unless these fighters leave Solaris, Liao should be a force for the next few seasons.

The Davion contingent remains weakened. Xiang's meteoric rise to the Solaris Championship savaged the Davion ranks.

In addition to the deaths resulting from Justin Xiang's crusade, a number of fighters with Davion loyalties have been lured back to the Federated Suns by the attraction of

About the Author

James Williams, inspired by stories about Gray Noton, traveled to Solaris VII in 3016 when he was 15 years old. Like Noton, he apprenticed himself to an arenamaster, but his mentor recognized that Jim was not another Gray Noton. Instead, because Jim was literate, he employed Jim to write up press releases about the fights in the local arena. Jim quickly realized he had a talent for sports writing, and on Solaris that was almost as good as being a MechWarrior.

Over the past 12 years Jim Williams has become the premier analyst of fights on Solaris. A favorable mention in his column ("You Bet!" in the Montenegro Monitor) can earn a young fighter the recognition he needs to get good fights and bigger purses. Jim says his greatest thrill was doing an interview with Gray Noton just before the Champion retired.

Howl

of the

North Wind

by Captain Ian Fraser

The DropShip lurched as it descended through Mira's upper atmosphere, and I heard muffled curses. There wasn't much of the usual pre-drop banter on the com channels, but that was only to be expected. My people were still new to one another—and to me. And it hadn't exactly been a comfortable passage.

Worst of all, nobody really knew what to expect when we hit Mira.

Outside, the DropShip looked like a battered old *Mule*-class cargo hauler, and in fact that's what the old hulk had started life as. But the *Maskirovka* boys had got hold of her years ago, and the good ship *Sun Tzu* hid a lot of secrets now. Like 40 small BattleMechs making up what the official TO&E was calling "4th Battalion, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment, Northwind Highlanders." They called us that because the paymasters and the supply clerks back on Jonathon had to call us *something* when they filled out requisitions, pay vouchers, and personnel files. And they called me a Brevet-Major because the Book said a battalion was supposed to be led by a major or equivalent. Neither designation, strictly speaking, was accurate.

"Descent profile nominal," said a voice on the ship's Control frequency. It was a cold, unfriendly voice. Or maybe I was just reading a chill into it because everyone thinks of *Maskirovka* people as frosty, heartless spooks. The "Masked Rovers" aren't popular with MechWarriors, particularly MechWarriors who have the kind of reputation for outspokenness as Highlanders. This "Recon in Force" the spy laddies had whipped up into Davion space wasn't doing much to change my opinion of them either.

"This will be a simple mission, Major," a little man with a round face and old-fashioned glasses had told me at the beginning of the last briefing on Jonathon. "A good chance to season the men in your battalion, and an easy way to give the Davions a headache or two."

Right. My "battalion" was an *ad hoc* affair, a collection of light 'Mechs scraped together especially for this recon mission. Every unit in the 2nd Kearny Highlanders had donated men, of course—all the hot-shot Recon Warriors who couldn't take orders or didn't get along with their COs. Add a sprinkling of newbies called in just to fill out ranks a bit, and scatter mixed mercs who wanted to sign on individually because no regular merc unit would have them, and you had the perfect recipe for trouble. We'd been together as a unit less than a week before the spooks packed us aboard the *Mule* and sent us on our way.

Somehow, I had a feeling the Davions on Mira wouldn't be the ones getting headaches.

"First Company secure for landing, Major." That was Campbell, and as usual he sounded irritated. I was the one Major Stirling had picked to lead the new battalion, even though Captain Colin Campbell had reached a company command slot nearly a year before my promotion to the same rank. Probably he thought he could run things better. I was tempted to offer him a chance to try. Campbell piloted a *Phoenix Hawk*

and had most of our best-trained Warriors in his three lances. But most were in *Commandos*, lightweights handicapped by a lack of decent jump jets.

"Second Company ready." Unlike Campbell, Sandy Sinclair was someone I knew I could rely on. She'd led the Recon Lance in my old company in 1st Battalion; now she was a new captain with a larger command. Maybe she wasn't experienced—but lack of experience wasn't stopping *me* from pretending I knew what I was doing. At least Sandy would have a shot a a job she already knew. Her company was mostly *Wasps* and *Stingers* that could act as "eyes ahead" for the rest of our people.

I waited a long time before I keyed in the Company Command circuit. "Third Company, report status," I said. It didn't come out as the level, unflappable voice of command I'd hoped to project, thanks to some unexpected lurching that threw me against the harness of my *Vindicator's* cockpit.

"Voelker, aye, aye." He was even slow answering. I didn't like Fritz Voelker, and I suspect the feeling was mutual. He was a mercenary, piloting an ugly *Jenner* that had seen better days. Voelker didn't get along with people, but he'd campaigned on Mira twice before and had an impressive service record. He wasn't my choice to command Third Company, though…that was a decision Colonel MacHenry, the 2nd Kearny's CO, had made for me. Odds were Voelker was in the slot because the *Maskirovka* wanted him there, and his loyalty wasn't likely to be to me, to the rest of the Battalion, or to the traditions of the Kearny Highlanders. Voelker struck me as someone whose loyalty began and ended just beyond the skin of his 'Mech. His status report wasn't encouraging, either. "We're as ready as we'll ever be, I guess. 'We who are about to die' and all that…"

I could sympathize with the man even if I couldn't like him. A *Mule* is not designed to carry 'Mechs in the first place, and it certainly isn't equipped to deal with a combat op. This ship had been heavily modified to accommodate the battalion's 40 'Mechs, with spartan quarters and extra supplies for the 'Mech pilots set up on one of the upper cargo levels. But there was still a difference between these makeshift cocoons and proper 'Mech bays on a real DropShip. *Sun Tzu* couldn't drop us to target from orbit; she had to land. She didn't carry any spares, and we'd left all our Techs behind back on Jonathon. We were on a quick recon mission—get in, investigate reports that the Davions were building a new base out in

Mira's equatorial jungles, stomp on it "if feasible," then head for home. The *Mule* with its *Maskirovka* crew, hidden gimmickry, and innocent appearance, was supposed to get us down on Mira without being noticed. So far it had worked.

"Three minutes to touchdown," the crewman's voice reported. "Initiating Operation RedLine." Now the bumps and jars were worse than ever, and deliberate this time to boot. *Sun Tzu*, broadcasting the ID of a Federated Suns supply ship with a military shipment for the base we were to investigate, was now giving a very convincing imitation of a vessel in distress. The plan was to look like a freighter gone out of control, drop past Davion radar, and debark the battalion before search & rescue birds showed up. Another cargo hold aboard contained some lovely-looking wreckage they'd find floating in the sea, while the *Mule* sat at the bottom of that same ocean and waited for our signal to bug out. A squadron or two of AeroSpace jockeys were supposed to be staging a raid further out in the system to draw off local ships and give us our chance to run for home when we had to.

I just hoped the fake wreckage was all there'd be. If the *Mule's* performance was

any more like a ship out of control than it felt at the moment, there'd be a lot more flotsam out there than anybody had planned for.

Suddenly the violent motion ceased. "Down safe," someone told me from the Bridge. "Get your people out, Major." Big cargo doors were already grinding slowly open on all sides of the *Mule's* large main cargo deck.

"Right." I switched to General Command channel. "Fourth Battalion, debark."

"First Company, by the numbers, debark," Campbell was saying before I'd even finished the order. His 'Mechs were our best for securing a perimeter fast; Voelker's would follow. Third Company had a heavy proportion of *Panthers* and *Vindicators*, 'Mechs that packed a good PPC punch, and in fact it contained most of the battalion's largest machines. Of course, our largest 'Mechs were only 45 tons, so that wasn't saying much. Some goofball back on Sian had decided that the "recon" part of our mission orders should outweigh the "in force" and decreed we were to stick to light stuff—*Vindicators* and *Phoenix Hawks*, *Wasps*, *Commandos*, and a few other machines that were supposed to compensate for small size with better speed. I

wHKeith 3008
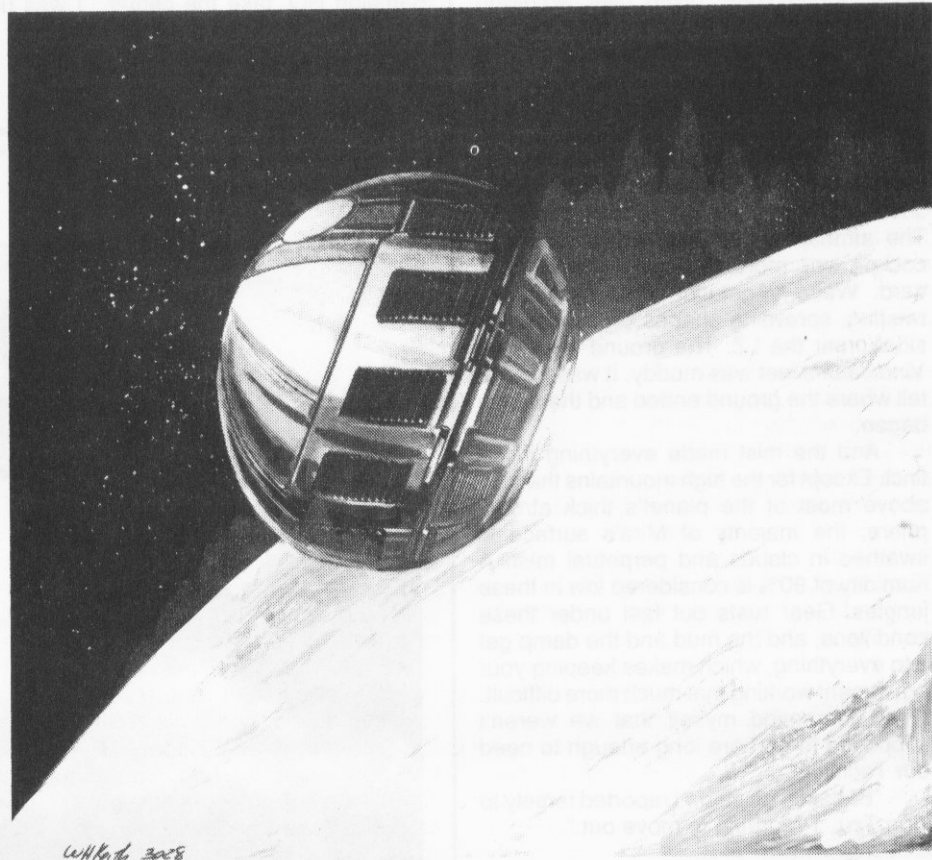
wished that fellow a long and interesting life, preferably in a *Maskirovka* interrogation cell.

Sandy Sinclair took her people out once Voelker's "heavies" were clear. I followed, leading the four 'Mechs of my Battalion Headquarters Lance. A lot of battalion commanders would have gone out first—the old "don't send men into any danger you won't face yourself" routine. I stayed back. Too much caution? No, not really. Sending your commanding officer into the field first when you don't know the score is an open invitation to disaster. That's doubly true with an untried unit. A live CO watching a situation map and shouting orders can pull together even the most confused mess. A dead CO won't help anybody. At least that's what they taught us at the Academy.

Mira was even worse than the briefings had said it would be.

They say the polar regions of Mira actually had had snow showers a couple of times in the past century. Most of the time, though, temperatures at the poles are in the comfortable 15°-20° C. range. The same goes for the high mountains and plateaus closer to the equator. According to the background I'd been given, over two billion people had found reasonably comfortable places to live on Mira. Very few of them had tried to settle in the lowlands near the equator, though.

My external temperature gauge read 84° C., a cool, breezy day in Mira's lowland jungles. That would mean trouble later; shedding heat was sure to be a problem. The atmosphere outside my pressurized cockpit was more than twice Earth standard. Weird vegetation rose in stumpy, twisting, sprawling shapes on rugged hillsides near the LZ. The ground under my *Vindicator's* feet was muddy. It was hard to tell where the ground ended and the ocean began.

And the mist made everything indistinct. Except for the high mountains that rise above most of the planet's thick atmosphere, the majority of Mira's surface is swathed in clouds and perpetual mist. A humidity of 90% is considered low in these jungles. Gear rusts out fast under these conditions, and the mud and the damp get into everything, which makes keeping your equipment working that much more difficult. I had to remind myself that we weren't supposed to be here long enough to need our Techs.

"Battalion off ship," I reported tersely to *Sun Tzu*. "Preparing to move out."

"'Firm," the controller answered in a distracted tone. "You have two minutes before main engine ignition." Any 'Mechs near the ship would fry if they were caught in the circle of destruction those engines would create. Knowing that crew, I knew they'd keep to their timetable whether we actually got everybody clear or not. They had to get the freighter underwater fast before the Davion garrison scrambled search craft.

"Two minutes," I acknowledged. Switching to Company channel again, I repeated the words, adding, "Let's move out. Recon Company to the front."

"Recon Company, disperse by lances and advance to 264 degrees," Sinclair ordered promptly. "Command Lance on point." Sandy was one officer who liked to lead from the front, Academy training or not. That was fine for a lance commander. Whether it would work for the whole company was another question, but I kept quiet. Things were shaky enough in this unit; I wasn't about to try to force my people to change their styles now. The 'Mechs of the Recon Company, all twelve of them, started moving quickly into the jungle and the mist.

"First Company, take the right. Third Company to the left. Advance by column. Battalion HQ, take the center." I was un-

comfortably aware of the seconds ticking past.

The battalion responded smoothly, and I started to allow myself a shred of hope that they might pull the mission off after all. Like most of the "good ideas" that filtered down to the field from Sian, this raid looked easy enough on paper. Every year Hanse Davion put his people through a series of wargames, code-named "Galahad," to rattle cages along the frontiers and intimidate his enemies. This year somebody—maybe the *Maskirovka* people, maybe the Chancellor or his staff—wanted to rattle back. Before we left Jonathon, Jock Armstrong, whose *Wasp* was already taking up its accustomed position behind me, had claimed that the orders must have originated with "Mad Max" himself—Maximilian Liao. He'd said it in a whisper, though, and with no one else around. "Mad Max" wasn't the kind of appellation you used for the Chancellor when there were other people, particular *Maskirovka* types, in earshot.

In any event, the 4th Battalion moved into the dense jungle in search of a Davion base that might—or might not—be part of this year's "Galahad" operation. Once we located it, we were supposed to do as much damage as possible, reminding Davion that House Liao still claimed Mira as its own.
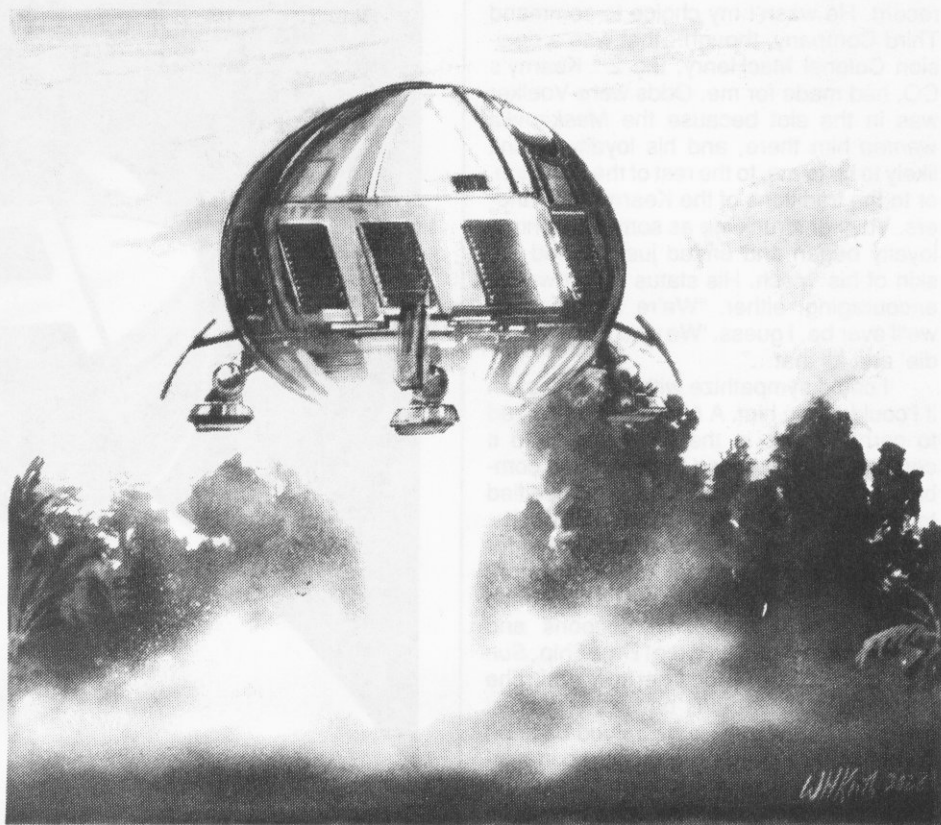
McCarron's Armored Cavalry had done the same sort of thing five years back as part of a whole string of border raids; now we had a single small target and one battalion instead of a dozen worlds and five regiments. Times were getting tough in Capellan space, and a bigger operation was out of the question. So we were told.

Behind us the thunder of DropShip engines shook the ground as the *Mule* lifted off. So far, everything was going as it was supposed to. Davion aircraft would have Stefan's own time spotting our 'Mechs in the dense jungle; on Mira even IR wouldn't do much good. Our Intel reports placed the Davion base about 30 klicks away, near another inlet on the shallow Equatorial Sea. We wouldn't reach it before nightfall; Mira's short day would be over all too soon. I was just as happy that we would be making our final approach under cover of darkness; with the perpetual blanket of clouds overhead, it would be a black night.

We kept our pace slow, with frequent stops to let our heat sinks do their jobs. The terrain alternated between rugged, jungle-clad hills and rugged, jungle-infested swamps. A time or two we spotted some of the native swamp life, oversized behemoths like Old Terran dinosaurs lumbering through the muck. Safaris to hunt the beasts were supposed to have been popular with the Tikonov nobility back before Mira was taken into the Federated Suns, but I didn't want to go hunting for one of those things in anything less than a fully-loaded *Atlas*. After dark we couldn't see them anymore, but we heard them now and again. Our progress slowed to a crawl as visibility dropped. Between the darkness and a thickening fog, we weren't going anywhere very fast. I finally ordered a halt, setting Sandy Sinclair's people on rotating perimeter guard. One lance at a time would keep their scanners peeled for trouble; everybody else reduced to maintenance power only and tried to get as much rest as they could in a cramped 'Mech cockpit.

I studied Intel maps and reports on the base from *Maskirovka* contacts for what seemed like the thousandth time. As usual they didn't tell me much. Aside from some local units—infantry and armor, with a few antiquated 'Mechs—the only real garrison on Mira was supposed to be Davion's 2nd Crucis Lancers, a pretty good regiment. But everything in the Intelligence data pointed towards a base about five times larger than a single RCT would need. We knew they were bringing in supplies, spare parts, repair facilities, all sorts of goodies, and dropping it down in the lowland jungles where nothing would show up from orbit. But was the project as extensive as the reports claimed? The number of question marks and speculations in the reports made it clear that no one was sure. Fourth Battalion was there to find out…and it was an honor I was none too eager for, just now.

"Ian! Major Fraser!" I woke up with a start, doubly surprised that I had gone to sleep in the first place. Sandy Sinclair's voice was sharp and urgent. "Perimeter patrols have found remote sensor units to the north."

That brought me fully awake. "Did they trigger them?" If they had, our presence here wasn't a secret any longer.

"Can't tell. I've pulled them back…but you know how hard it is to spot stuff around here. We could've set off alarms twenty times already, for all I know."

"Right. Get all Recon Company 'Mechs on a tight perimeter, full sensor scans. I want to know about every leaf that comes through here on the wind." Switching circuits hurriedly, I sounded the general alert. "All Lances fall in. Company Commanders, report ready status."

Then I keyed in my situation map. We'd stopped near the edge of a marshy area, about five kilometers south and east of where we believed the enemy base might be. It was a good defensive position, with swamps impassible to 'Mechs on one side and high, rugged hills on the other. A sluggish, shallow river marked our front, ideal for battle cooling. If there was an enemy patrol coming our way, we could hold them off without much trouble. I hoped. First Company was strung out along the river bank already, with the Third drawn up further back to keep an eye on our escape route. As I watched the map, the symbols representing Sinclair's Recon 'Mechs began to gather at the northern end of First Company's line, ready to spread out to watch for enemies approaching our camp.

Then it didn't matter any more as the northwest side of my map came alive with symbols representing enemy units.

"Bad guys bearing 295 degrees, range 5500, closing," said Campbell. His voice was unnaturally calm. "Orders?"

I thought about it. The data being relayed by First Company sensors showed a regiment or more massing beyond that river. Our 'Mechs were lighter, presumably faster, than most of what the Crucis Lancers used—if that *was* the 2nd Crucis Lancers out there. We could outrun them. And miss getting any idea of what was at that base.

"I've got blips to the south," Voelker reported at that moment. More trouble.

"First Company, wait one," I said, panning my situation map to study Voelker's portion of the line. Units south of him would be in the swamp… "Third Company, do you have an ID on those targets?"

Voelker took several seconds to reply. "No visual yet, Major," he said at last. "But our external mikes are picking up sounds that could be hoverfans."

"Wonderful," I muttered. The swamp was impassible to BattleMechs—but not to hovertanks. Ordinarily tanks would be poor matches for 'Mechs, but this was no ordinary situation. If they broke around behind our position, they'd cut our line of retreat across the plains. Pulling back into the hills would be a lot harder, and a lot slower…

"General orders," I said, switching to Company Command channel and trying to think fast. "First Company, form a defensive line in that river and hold as long as possible or until I say different. They probably don't have a clear idea of our strength yet, so make it look like there's an army here. Third Company, stop those hovertanks. Be ready to move out on my orders. Second Company…" I studied the map again. The Davions were closing in from two sides, and that made the hill line look awfully attractive. Too attractive. "Second Company, I want scouts in those hills. Look for unfriendlies. And see if you can get a visual on that base if this damned fog ever thins out at all. Dawn'll be here in half an hour or so."

We had some time to prepare, but not much. Without knowing what Sandy would find, the situation in the hills was still a mystery. The regiment or more facing Campbell's men had a little under ten klicks to cross. The hovertanks were closer and moved faster. I decided to take my lance to join Voelker and see the situation there first-hand. We cut in jump jets and bounded southwards, ignoring the fires we were starting in the dense, moist underbrush.

Voelker's *Jenner* was standing like a stone statue in the middle of a clearing, facing out towards the marsh. It looked like the machine itself was staring out at the impenetrable mist, searching for the enemy. My board showed the other 'Mechs— 4 *Vindicators*, 5 *Panthers*, and a pair of *Javelins*—taking up positions in a ragged line along the edge of the marsh, spaced at 90-meter intervals to cover as much ground as possible in the shortest possible deployment time. My scanners showed multiple targets flickering at the very edge of detection range, out over the marsh. The whine of hoverfans floated in across the marsh, surprisingly loud. Sound carries better over water than land, and the high atmospheric pressure of Mira amplifies noises all out of proportion.

"What's the bastard doing?" Voelker was muttering softly. "Why doesn't he attack?"

I kept my eyes on the sit board. "He's circling. Why attack if he can outflank us?"

The mercenary grunted at the other end of the comline. "Then we'll shift to meet him."

"That I doubt," I answered. On the map, a cluster of blips was starting to close in fast. But others were still hanging out at extreme range, still moving towards the far end of Voelker's lines. "Looks like he's going to harass us while some of his boys get in position."

Down the line a *Panther* raised its PPC arm and opened fire, aiming off into the mist. Even the awesome energies of a particle beam had trouble piercing the fog. I started to speak—old habits die hard—when Voelker's voice snapped out a reprimand. "Belay that firing, Ling," he said harshly. "Let them get close enough for it to do some good."

Trouble was, visibility was so low the PPC would be at a real disadvantage once the target *was* close enough. The bulky weapons were powerful, but ponderous to aim at short ranges.

I keyed in my *Vindicator's* LRM system and let fly, more to give the other guy something to think about than with any real hope of hitting. The mist swallowed up the missiles in an instant, but the situation map followed them in. Explosions rippled on the map, while distant thunder sounded off in the foggy swamp. My on-board tracking computers showed a probable hit on one of the hovertanks out there.

"Good shooting, Major," Jock Armstrong called out. At the same time Voelker, rather reluctantly, chimed in with his own congratulations. A moment later an answering volley of missiles replied from the enemy, but they were scattered. A spurt of water from the edge of the marsh 10 meters in front of Voelker's *Jenner* was the closest shot. Meanwhile the hoverfans were growing louder, and the blips on my screens continued to accelerate.

"Get ready, boys," I said softly. Hovertanks were fast and maneuverable...but no match for BattleMechs in a standup fight. Their commander was being smart, risking some of his tanks to keep us busy. We had to drive this group back fast so we could still react to the others in time.

With beautiful precision, ten hovertanks cut through the clinging, swirling fog like parts of a single machine. In the darkness they were shadowy blobs, their running lights giving just enough illumination for LI gear to pick them out. We probably looked much the same...and that gave me an idea.

"Switch to normal imaging," I ordered Voelker, "and cut in searchlights. Let's give these laddies a sight to remember!" Voelker, for once, was quick to react. I could almost hear the wolfish smile on his face as he passed the orders on to the rest of his men. I flipped up the light intensifiers over my eyes and dropped ordinary binocs down to replace them, then swept my hands over the board that controlled the *Vindicator's* external lights. Searchlight beams stabbed through the dark and the fog, a startling glare even for someone ready for the change. Someone still using LI gear would surely be blinded for a moment or two.

Continuing the same motion I brought both my 'Mech's lasers on line and centered the crosshairs on a looming *Saracen*. The beams lanced out, bathing the tank's lower hull in an eerie glow. Armor boiled, and an instant later smoke billowed out of the cratered hull. Around me the other 'Mechs of Voelker's company, backed up by Battalion HQ, were letting fly with SRMs, lasers, and PPC beams. A *Whirlwind* tank seemed to disintegrate before my eyes as four different *Panthers* found the range and unleashed their particle beams. That was too bad. A better-trained unit would have selected more targets and spread the joy around more.

A big *Drillson* hovertank swept within a few meters of me, swerving aside at the last minute as the driver regained his sight and realized just what he was headed for. I saw a blue crest blazoned with a rampant gold unicorn and a brief glimpse of a black raven painted over the grey and green camouflage on the glacis. Then the tank was gone, the turret swinging to pump laser fire into Voelker's *Jenner*. The whip antenna made it likely this was a command tank, maybe even *the* command tank, but I couldn't shift fire fast enough to catch it.

"Advance into the water," I ordered as the tanks wheeled and skimmed back out into the swamp. Those *Panthers* would be building up heat fast firing their PPCs; and even at night, jungle temperatures on Mira were nothing to laugh about.

A few shots pursued the hovertanks before the mists closed in to hide them from view. As the 'Mechs advanced into the murky water, I glanced around. Three of the enemy tanks were smoking hulks along the shore...but one *Panther's* head was a twisted ruin, and five other 'Mechs had taken a number of hits. Cavalry rarely had much hope of taking on 'Mechs in open combat, but a few skirmishes like this one could sap Third Company's strength as badly as a stand-up fight with a unit of BattleMechs.

"Shift east," I told Voelker. "We've got to cover more of this shore line and keep them from getting around our flanks."

"Right," the merc answered. "But we can't block everything, Major. And enough bad guys can knock out our line sooner or later...we've got to pull out."

"I hear you. But we need to buy some time first. I've got to get the rest of the battalion out..."

As if on cue, Sandy Sinclair's voice sounded in my ear. "We've got troubles, Sir. You'd better get up here and see this."

* * *

Second Company was leapfrogging slowly into the hills north and east of the river, slowed down by the dense jungle growth and the rugged ground. By the time I brought my HQ Lance up to join her 'Mech, daylight was beginning to brighten the clouds. The mist was starting to lift some, too, especially away from the marsh's edge. That was a mixed blessing, though...dense fog would protect our people from the overwhelming strength still moving slowly towards Campbell's river line. But it also made it that much harder to fight back.

I had the sit board scaled up to cover the entire battlefield. Those 'Mechs facing First Company were almost creeping; if they had wanted to attack, they could easily have done so by now. Perhaps they were still uncertain about our strength—we could have concealed a lot of extra 'Mechs in the denser jungle behind the river—but it seemed more likely that they were going slow to let other troops deploy on either side without spooking us. They'd be fast enough pushing forward if they thought they had us on the run. Meanwhile those hovertanks were still causing trouble off to the left; since I'd left the scene, Voelker had reported two more sorties and three more of his 'Mechs badly enough damaged to leave them all but out of action.

And now there was Second Company's news to contend with. On the other side of the hill line, moving slowly through the jungle, one of Sinclair's troopers had spotted a column of heavy 'Mechs. *Archers* led the group, and their big LRM batteries could chop us all to shreds if they had a chance to get into position behind our lines. We were fast running out of options.

It was already clear that we were up against more than just the 2nd Crucis Lancers here. At least one regiment was massing on the open ground across the river—more could be hidden behind them—and

Sinclair's reports made it plain that there could be anything up to another regiment in the flanking move to the north. Nor were hovertanks supposed to be attached to Mira's regular garrison. Intel data programmed into the *Vindicator's* Warbook said the unicorn crest I'd seen on the command tank belonged to a merc regiment, the 6th Armored Cavalry…and last reports had placed them on the Kurita frontier with the 1st Crucis Lancers. What other surprises were out there?

So far the Davion 'Mechs in the jungle hadn't taken any notice of our scout 'Mechs. With luck, they didn't even know we had spotted them yet, and they didn't know we were in position in the hills. I didn't much like relying on luck, but right now it was about the only thing we had to cling to. If we were going to get out of this trap we'd need all the luck, and all the skill, we could muster.

Leaving the rest of the HQ Lance lower down on the slopes, I moved up to join Sinclair's *Javelin* on a spur of the hillside above the enemy column. The bright greens and oranges of the 'Mech's camo paint blended in perfectly with the jungle backdrop. Anyone down below would have mistaken her 30-ton machine for another clump of trees. I hoped my own 'Mech was blending in as well.

Visibility had increased quite a bit with the dawn. The Davion column was perhaps two kilometers off, still well north of our lines and fighting through the jungle at a snail's pace. It was hard to judge numbers, but I counted six *Archers* for sure. Through image intensifiers, I caught a glimpse of a regimental crest on the leading 'Mech. In a flash the Warbook identified it.

The 1st Crucis Lancers were on Mira, too.

Sinclair seemed to know what I was thinking. "Just how many of them are there, anyway?" There was a pause. "Major, take a look northwest. Bearing…348."

I called up a new external camera view, looking out beyond the upper end of Campbell's line. For a few long moments the mist lifted, and we had our first clear view of the Davion base.

It was big…even bigger than the reports had claimed—those reports we'd all dismissed as exaggeration. There were four *Union*-class DropShips sitting on ferrocrete pads. Around them was a small swarm of LoaderMechs extracting supplies and equipment. Figures in E-suits scurried about purposefully. I counted eight 'Mechs in plain sight near the perimeter fence, and several huge Mobile Repair Bays with partly-disassembled machines standing near the center of the facility. A row of regimental banners drooped listlessly in front of what had to be the base HQ. I picked out the colors of five different Crucis Lancer regiments before I stopped counting. And it wasn't just the 'Mech units, either. I saw several tracked vehicles scurrying about, a dozen or so armored hovercraft, and the lean, wicked shape of a Long Tom sniper cannon. House Davion was here in force, and my scratch battalion of Kearny Highlanders had blundered right into the middle of their concentration.

"We've got to pull out fast," I said. "Any objections?"

Her chuckle was grim. "None from me, Major. But I think *they* might have something to say about it…"

The first glimmerings of a plan were starting to take shape, but it was going to be tight. If all our 'Mechs had been equipped with jump jets, we might have made it out easily. But most of Campbell's men were in *Commandos* and couldn't jump. That would make things tough.

"Situation reports," I ordered. "Voelker, what's going on?"

The comline roared with the sound of SRMs discharging before he spoke. "Another wave of them attacking now," the merc responded at last. "I've got three undamaged 'Mechs left, and three more that can still maneuver, at least a little bit. Two are destroyed, and all four of my *Panthers* have taken leg hits, and one of them's lost jump jets entirely." He paused. "That cavalry CO knows his stuff. I don't think we're hurting him near as bad as he's hurting us, and I figure we've only got a few more minutes before he's got us blocked to the southeast."

"Start falling back towards Campbell's line," I told him. "Have pilots eject if their 'Mechs can't keep ahead of those hovercraft."

"Into that heat?" Voelker's voice was grim. "I think they'll stay put and take a few of the bastards with them. I know I will." That was the first time he'd admitted that his own *Jenner* wasn't able to keep up with the others.
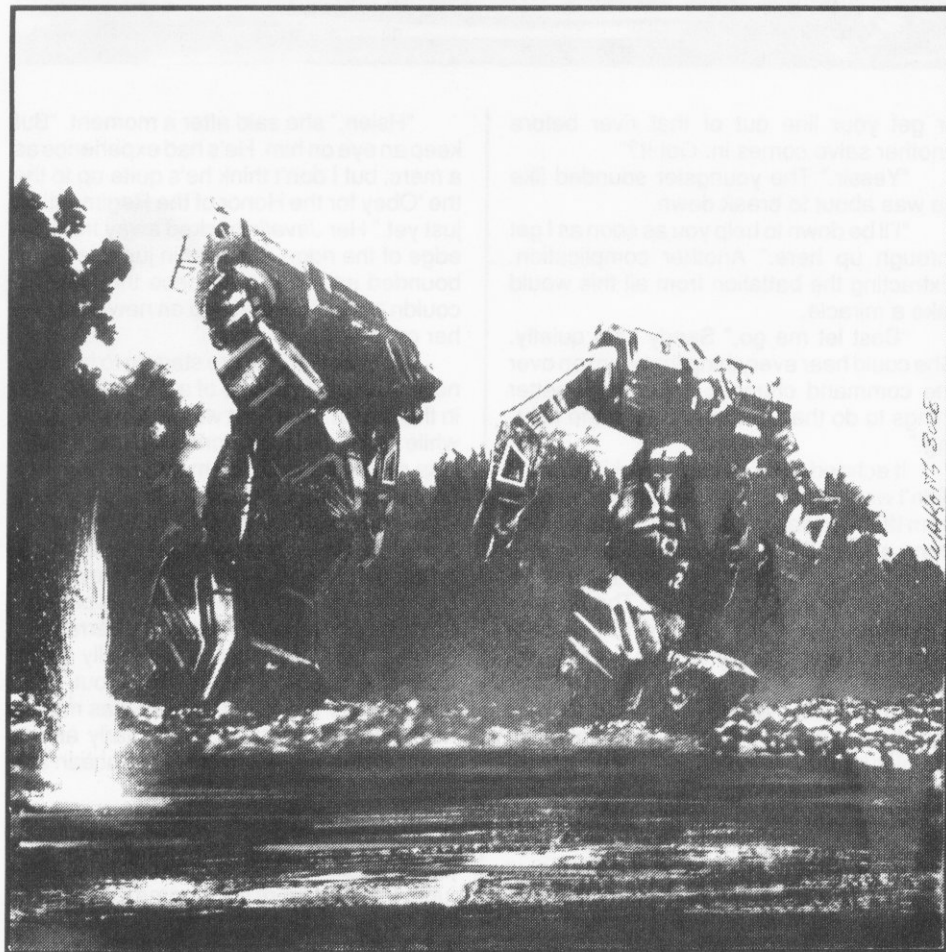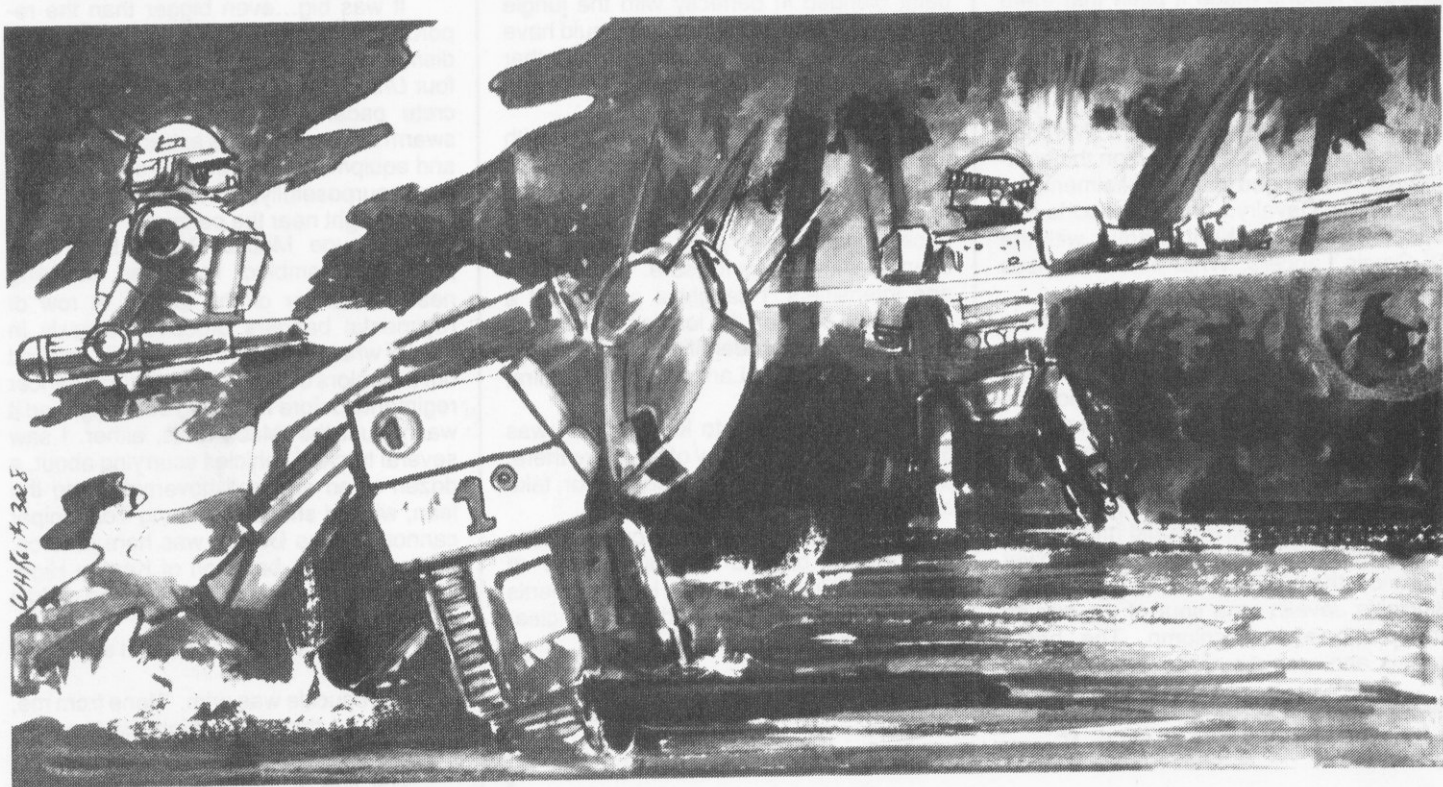
I couldn't think of anything to say that didn't sound trite. "First Company," I said at last. "Campbell, your report."

An unfamiliar voice, sounding young and scared, responded. "The Captain's dead, Sir," he said. "So's Commander Dunbar."

I cursed silently. The enemy wasn't even that close yet—maybe another kilometer off. They must have started some long-range shooting to break up the river line early. And of course Campbell's light 'Mechs couldn't stand up long against any kind of firepower. "Who is this?"

"Commander Crane, Sir. Fire Lance." I could picture him now, a fresh-faced youngster proud to be given a shot at his own lance command. Now he was trying to run a company.

"Right, Crane. What happened?"

"Arty, Sir," he answered. "They caught the Skipper—Captain Campbell—on their first shot. Commander Dunbar bought it trying to pick him up after he ejected."

Artillery! With visibility what it had been up to now...what it still was along the low-lying river banks...that meant spotters. A few Davion soldiers in E-suits nearby could bring in Long Tom fire and break the line in no time flat. "Crane," I said slowly. "I want you to get your people looking for artillery spotters near your position. Take them out,

or get your line out of that river before another salvo comes in. Got it?"

"Yessir." The youngster sounded like he was about to break down.

"I'll be down to help you as soon as I get through up here." Another complication. Extracting the battalion from all this would take a miracle.

"Best let me go," Sandy said quietly. She could hear everything that went on over the command channel. "You have better things to do than get mixed up in the fighting."

It echoed what I'd been thinking...but I didn't want to send her down there. Leading from the rear was all very well for debarking from a DropShip in a quiet LZ. Here, it smacked of cowardice. I wanted to be down there, to help my people fight. The temptation to lose myself in battle and forget about command responsibilities was overwhelming.

But if I did that, no one would make it out. A commanding officer has to watch the big picture and let his subordinates handle the little ones. Voelker was out of the action now, Campbell dead. Sinclair was the only officer with enough experience left who could hold that line while I found a way out of the trap. "Okay," I agreed. "Take command of the First. Which of your Lance leaders do you want to take over for you?"

"Hsien," she said after a moment. "But keep an eye on him. He's had experience as a merc, but I don't think he's quite up to the the 'Obey for the Honor of the Regiment' bit just yet." Her *Javelin* backed away from the edge of the ridge, then cut in jump jets and bounded into the valley once the Davions couldn't spot her. I passed on new orders to her company.

Voelker's men were starting to fall back now, taking advantage of a lull in the action in the marsh. The First was holding, waiting while their enemies continued the relentless march towards them. Monitoring their company communications, I heard young Crane organizing a hunt for Davion infantry. A few minutes later jubilant shouts proclaimed the discovery of a small hovercraft and a five-man scouting team in a patch of trees near the river's edge. A barrage of SRMs, more than we could really spare under the circumstances, took it out. After that, artillery fire from the base was more a nuisance that a threat, particularly after a new bank of fog rolled in off the ocean and reduced visibility again.

Some of us would get out of the trap; the Davion *Archers* couldn't cut through the jungle as fast as light 'Mechs could move on jump jets. But there were some of Voelker's people who couldn't keep up, and there were all those *Commandos* in First Com-

pany. Could I leave all those Highlanders behind to die? There didn't seem to be any way out.

I had Commander Hsien start to filter Recon Company 'Mechs down the slopes past the head of the Davion flank column. Some of them would make it out, whatever happened to the rest of us. By the time they were in motion, Sandy Sinclair had taken charge by the river.

"I've got them ready to fight," she told me. There was an artificial cheerfulness in her manner that was jarring. "Voelker's people are starting to come in, too. I'll send the ones with jump jets up to you. They'll be able to get out."

She was reading my mind again. "Maybe better to pull the *Commandos* out and hold with some jumpers," I said.

"Come off it, Major," she said quietly. "They'd never get clear. Best thing for the *Commandos* to do is to hold on and buy you some time. If we do it right, they'll never even realize the rest of the battalion's slipping away." She paused before going on. "They've all volunteered, Ian."

I swallowed. First Company was almost entirely old Highlander hands. They took the 2nd Kearny's motto, "To Obey," seriously. I was just finding out how seriously. Damn the High Command and their recon mission, I thought angrily. They were throwing away these men's lives...for what? News that there were more Davions on Mira than we'd thought. Was that news worth the cost?

It had to be. I didn't want the sacrifice those Warriors were offering to be worthless.

"All right, Sandy," I said at length. "I'll come down to take over. Pick someone to trade 'Mechs with me, so we can get the *Vindicator* out with the others."

"I'm ahead of you, Major," she replied. "But you're getting out with the troops. My *Javelin's* already on the way up; I'm sitting in MacNeil's *Commando* now."

"Belay that!" I was angry—at her, at the Davions...at myself. More than ever I felt I should stay with the rearguard. "You're pulling out!"

"With all due respect, Sir," she said with an ironic edge in her voice. "I know the situation here now. I'm already in position. And I volunteer."

"But..."

"The brass needs to hear about the troops here. And that base. Somebody goofed on the Intel for this one, and it won't be easy to get them to believe what we've found. Who are they more likely to listen to? Me...or you?"

She was right, of course. The CO's first duty was supposed to be to the Mission. Higher-ranking officers were supposed to know more about strategic questions than their juniors. But that didn't make the situation any easier to accept.

I turned my 'Mech to face east, away from the river line and the Highlanders digging in for their last stand against Davion. "You've got the command, Captain," I told her. It was hard to keep the emotion out of my voice. Words couldn't convey all things I wanted to tell her. "Give 'em hell."

"Tell the folks back home we went out swinging," she answered. "I think those Lancers are in for a few surprises."

The Battalion HQ followed me as I moved down the hillside, angling south to move past the head of the slow-moving Davion column. My board showed the rest of the Recon 'Mechs strung out in an uneven line ahead of us, with a few tail-end Charlies still climbing the hills out of the river line to join us. The *Archers* of the Crucis Lancers were still almost a kilometer away. They had probably seen our retreat by now, but the terrain and visibility problems made it unlikely that they would be able to attack for a while longer. And we could safely ignore the hovertanks to the south, now. The jungle was too dense for hovercraft.

"All 'Mechs, jump jets may now be used. Let's speed things up, people!" Jump jets are uncertain things at best, particularly when you've got inexperienced pilots...and especially when the terrain is as difficult as those Miran jungles. But they'd give us a fabulous edge in speed over the slow-moving Davion BattleMechs, which had to fight their way step by step through the thick vegetation.

like the far-off howling of a chill Arctic wind...or the cry of a wounded animal fighting for its life. It might have made some Davion pilots think twice before attacking. I know I would, faced with crazy Warriors raising such a din as they calmly waited to face such odds.

Switching frequencies, I called the DropShip. "Warlord, this is Clansman. Emergency call. We need a dust-off...fast."

"Acknowledged, Clansman. Coordinates?"

I remembered a clearing about a kilometer back along our line of march. A quick glance at a computer readout gave me the reference numbers, which I relayed to the ship. "We have at least two regiments of 'Mechs plus armored cavalry in the area," I added. "Get in here fast, Warlord...or there won't be a reason to come at all."

"'Firm," the cold voice replied. There was no comment on my estimates of troop strengths. "ETA...12 minutes."

It would take us longer than that to get there. And a lot could go wrong before we were safe on board—assuming we would be safe there. I hoped the AeroSpace feint at the other end of the system was really keeping the enemy occupied.

I held up my lance near the base of the ridge line, waiting for the last refugees to catch up. The sit board's projections of the Davion march rate were not looking good; it was starting to look like some of their 'Mechs would be pretty damn close by the time we were able to round up the last stragglers and head for the new LZ. And I was starting to worry about them showing up while we were still boarding the *Mule*.

More than anything, though, I was wishing for a chance to vent some of my

"Let 'em know they're up against the Northwind!"

Over the Company Command channel, I heard Sandy Sinclair exhorting her people to stand fast. "Let 'em know they're up against the Northwind!" Someone back there had switched on a tape of regimental bagpipe music; the wavering notes sounded distantly over the comline. My external mikes picked it up, too, off in the distance—the defiant "Northwind March" was being broadcast over a 'Mech PA system for all to hear. At this range it sounded

frustration on the enemy. I wasn't going to step meekly aboard the DropShip without firing another shot. The Kearnys dying on the other side of the ridge deserved better than that.

SubCommander MacNeil in Sinclair's *Javelin* was the last fugitive to join us. By that time I had six other 'Mechs at hand—my *Vindicator*, two *Wasps*, a *Panther*, and two *Stingers*. Not exactly a formidable force, not compared with those *Archers*. But the

Davion 'Mechs were primarily designed for long-range fighting, and in the jungle we'd be able to use guerrilla tactics—strike quickly, then jump fast to disengage. All we needed to do was cause enough confusion to keep the flanking column off balance. One good attack would make their commander a lot more cautious in pressing the pursuit.

At least it sounded good when I explained it to the others.

We set up in a series of muddy, soft-bottomed depressions close to the projected route of the Davion march. The minutes dragged by like hours as we waited. Off to the southeast *Sun Tzu* landed, and the first few 'Mechs were reported boarding. I spent some time updating the DropShip's captain on the situation, but mostly I watched, waited, and worried. Was I doing this to make sure the others would have time to board...or just to assuage a guilty conscience? I wasn't sure, and I didn't really want to know.

Then the waiting was over.

The first *Archer* broke through the jungle growth like a maddened animal, thrashing at clinging branches and ripping a small tree out of the ground the way a man might toss aside an uprooted weed. Mud smeared the camo paint and oozed out of the ankle joints as the machine moved forward. A second hulking metal figure was just visible behind the first. With the jungle so thick here, it was doubtful if they knew we were waiting for them, but by now MAD readings in the lead *Archer's* cockpit would be going wild as they registered the hulls of my seven 'Mechs.

"Fire!" My order wasn't necessary; even as I spoke all seven 'Mechs were letting loose a barrage of beams and missiles at the lead Davion machine.

No light or medium 'Mech stands much chance fighting an *Archer* one on one. When seven small 'Mechs unleash everything from light lasers to PPCs on a single target, with missiles thrown in for good measure, it's a different story. Hits erupted all over the 'Mech's body. My PPC struck it square in the upper torso, only a meter away from another particle beam hit by SubCommander Ling's *Panther*. The *Archer* staggered back, armor boiling from half a dozen places and pieces of one arm crashing into the undergrowth. It caught the second 'Mech in the line by surprise; the lurching collision kept both of them busy long enough to allow us all a second volley. This time the lead *Archer* went down and stayed down, the head blown away by lucky missile hits.

"Fall back," I ordered tersely, triggering my jump jets and bounding straight backwards. Flames reached upwards to lick the feet of the *Vindicator*, adding to the fires the other 'Mechs were starting as they jumped over the tangled foliage. I saw the second Davion 'Mech push aside the smoking wreck of the leader and swivel its torso, tracking us, but we were down and hidden by the trees again before it could get a shot off. A moment later a random spread of LRMs arced overhead, exploding uselessly almost a hundred meters beyond us.
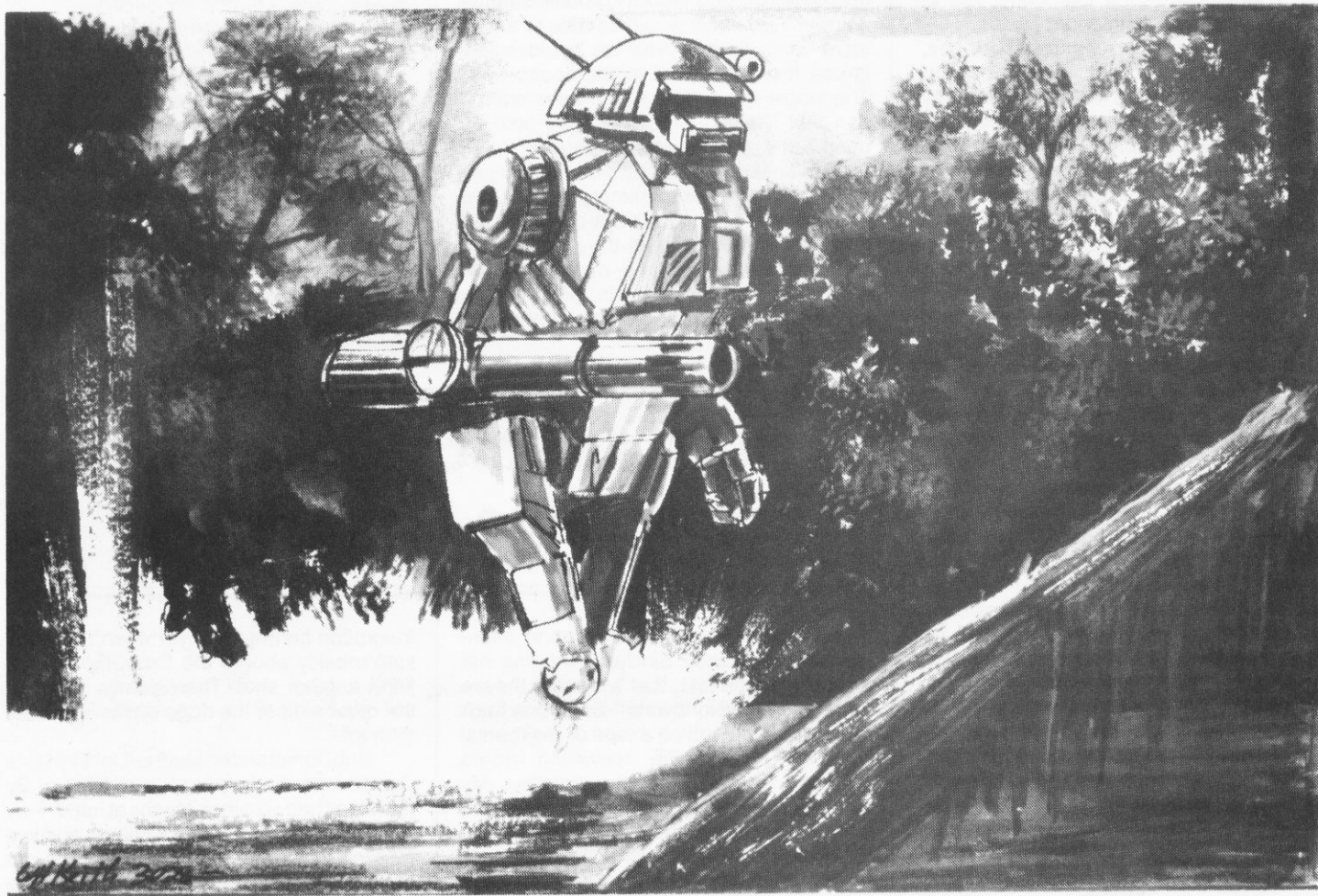
We waited again, venting overheated coolant and refilling our missile racks for another strike. The external mikes picked up the sound of heavy metal feet marching through water, mud, and soft clay; other 'Mechs in the column were certainly deploying to take us in a skirmish line this second time. Surprise wouldn't help us any more.

"Keep your eyes open," I said softly. "Remember, focus fire on the target I designate before you jump. Move fast...don't give them time to react. Stick to the plan." The litany was supposed to help them keep calm. Or was I doing it strictly for me?

This time two *Archers* appeared almost simultaneously, about 60 meters apart and moving slowly. I heard sounds that were probably others further away in the same line, but they were swallowed up by the jungle. Turning quickly, I blasted the farther of the two 'Mechs with laser fire, then triggered missiles and a PPC blast. At this short a range, the particle beam went wild, but the other shots hit. An instant later explosions and slashing energy beams rippled over the 'Mech. It barely had time to launch a volley of LRMs in our general direction before it toppled and fell with one leg missing.

But the second *Archer* struck back, engulfing Armstrong's *Wasp* in a green flare of laser fire. This pilot didn't waste missile shots at such short range.

"Jump!" I yelled. My jump jets flares again as the *Vindicator* leaped, forward this time to pass directly over the second *Archer* and land behind it. Flames rose around it; the other 'Mechs in my rearguard added to the fiery confusion. The pilot of the Davion machine would be desperate to break free of that ring of fire—maybe desperate enough to let us get away.

Jock Armstrong cried out as his 'Mech landed, stumbling. A leg actuator weakened by the *Archer's* laser fire failed; the *Wasp* sprawled face-down in the muck. And just then another Davion 'Mech, this one a *Crusader*, came crashing through the trees, lasers firing as it advanced.

A beam splashed across my *Vindicator's* right arm, scouring a gash in the PPC mounting. I pivoted and back-pedaled, firing one of my own lasers in return. By now the heat gauges were redlining; jump jets and PPCs and laser fire coupled with the humid Miran heat were all taking their toll. So was the burning vegetation only a few meters away. If I could get off a shot with my particle cannon...if it was accurate enough to hit...if it wouldn't push my heat levels past the shutdown mark...

Too many ifs. I loosed a volley of SRMs and backed up again, but fiery green lances kept on playing across my 'Mech. An *Archer*, maybe the one we'd trapped in the fire before, edged into the little clearing and paused while its pilot took in the situation.

I reached for the jump jet control, then jerked my hand away. Red lights were flashing on my board, warning me that the heat buildup was reaching critical. If I tried to cut in the jets now, odds were I'd push the reactor over the line. Anything I did would probably have the same results.

But I'd forgotten about Jock Armstrong. In those critical seconds as the *Crusader* pilot sized up his chances, Jock's *Wasp* was levering itself upright between the two enemy 'Mechs. The *Archer* opened fire on him, but in an instant Jock made his move. Fire roiled from the *Wasp's* jump jets, sending billowing smoke and spurts of flame into the undergrowth at the *Archer's* feet. Newton's Laws did the rest.

Jump jets are meant to be used to lift a 'Mech straight up, from a standing position. For Jock's *Wasp*, starting almost prone, the thrust was straight back. The *Wasp* plowed forward into the *Crusader's* back, knocking it over. The larger 'Mech's legs were left a tangled ruin.

I doubt if anyone could have salvaged any usable parts from the *Wasp* at all.

Armstrong's sacrifice gave me my chance. The *Crusader* was down, the *Archer* recoiling from the flames. I turned and ran, watching my gauges and jumping just as soon as I could. Following the plan I'd sketched out only a few minutes before—or was it a lifetime or two—the rest of my guerrillas had scattered. Ling's *Panther* was due north of me, its PPC blazing out to ignite the jungle and attract attention his way while MacNeil led the others towards the landing zone.

"Ling! Withdraw now!"

"Can't do it, Major," the MechWarrior replied. "Both hip actuators are out. I'm stuck."

"Then eject! I'll pick you up."

Like so many others that day, he refused to listen. "Never mind me, Sir. I'll just keep up the diversion a while longer. You get out of here and let them know what's happening. Bring back the whole damned Northwind and give these guys a kick in the ass from me!"

"I'll give 'em two or three, Ling," I told him, turning east again. Behind me, light played off swirling fogbanks as Ling fought the last battle along.

They bought us the time. Voelker at the edge of the marsh, Campbell and Sinclair by the river. Ling and Jock Armstrong and Archie MacDougall, all lost in the rearguard action. They slowed the Davions down long enough for the DropShip to pick us up. At least the AeroSpace forces did their job, drawing off the Davions so we could reach our JumpShip and head for home.

But in the end it wasn't worth a damn. No one in the Capellan High Command believed that the entire Crucis Lancers could really be on Mira. I remember one fatherly chap with enough braid to clothe a small army saying, "Hallucinations are only to be expected when you're dealing with Mira's oxygen overpressures, after all"—as if I'd been driving with my cockpit unsealed, breathing that air direct the whole time.

His was the charitable view. Other Liao officers, though just as eager to deny my reports, were less willing to look for excuses that might protect me. So now the Northwind won't be going back to avenge the men of the 2nd Kearny who died on that hellhole...and Ian Fraser won't be there to argue the issue.

I just hope the ones who did make it keep the memories of those brave Warriors alive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Captain Ian Scott Fraser, formerly of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment, Northwind Highlanders, was cashiered by order of the court martial convened following the unsuccessful Capellan raid on Mira in April of 3028. "Howl of the North Wind" was excerpted by the author from his book, "To Obey: My Life with the Northwind Highlanders," scheduled to be published later this year. Captain Fraser frankly admits that the book, and this story, were written primarily as a defense against critics who have acccused him of mishandling his temporary command of the provisional 4th Battalion of the 2nd Kearny.

Fraser is currently unemployed and lives on Chesterton.

Technical Readout

BTX-7K Battleax

Overview: In spring of the year 2513 AD, General Olaf Sternson of the Star League Military Procurement Division put out a call to bid on a new design of BattleMech. The performance characteristics of this new design describe it as "a mobile 'Mech with enough firepower to destroy or severely damage any 'Mech of the same class or lower." A number of different armament manufacturers went after the lucrative contract, including Earthwerks, Inc., the creator of the much vaunted and feared ARC-2R *Archer* 'Mech design.

Earthwerks' answer to General Sternson's requirements was the BTX-7K *Battleax*. It incorporated a heavy weapons array as well as substantial maneuverability and defensive protection. In addition, it was at that time the largest 'Mech with jump jets.

The *Battleax* prototypes were field tested extensively with other 'Mech designs that had been developed by other firms. During the final selection process in late 2515, the WHM-6R *Warhammer* design of StarCorp Industries was selected over the *Battleax* and three other prototypes.

Earthwerks acknowledged that the *Warhammer* design did have a somewhat more substantial offensive and defensive capability than the *Battleax*, but they pointed out that it was less maneuverable and that the differences in both offensive and defensive systems were negligible. In fact, there had been some talk about the similarity of the two designs and the possible reasons for it. In the end, most officials chalked it up to parallel creativity.

Even though StarCorp received the Star League contract, Earthwerks refused to give up the *Battleax* design and started limited production at their construction facility on Hyperion. Production continued to 1250 units as the Earthwerks Promotions Department began a League-wide advertising campaign. Ads and holos appeared in all the major military and arms industry journals and briefing holos, promoting the *Battleax* as an opponent to the *Warhammer*. Such slogans as "Why blunt your attack with a *Warhammer* when you could use the fine, clean edge of a *Battleax*" became

commonplace to the point that Earthwerks and StarCorp were almost on the edge of economic warfare. By 2520, sales of the Battleax were outpacing those of the *Warhammer* to many League households, although the Star League still bought only *Warhammers*. Earthwerks had produced an additional 6000 *Battleaxes*.

The situation came to a head during Star League maneuvers with forces of House Marik in early 2528. A *Battleax* had broken away from a wargaming engagement and was trying an end run to get behind its opponents. It was more than fate that a *Warhammer* intercepted it. The confrontation got serious rapidly, and no one has proven which MechWarrior activated his weapons controls first. But in the end, the *Battleax* was defeated, and the pilot was forced to eject when his fusion pile went critical.

Little interest remained in the *Battleax* design after that, and Earthwerks ceased production, having completed 9700 units. The 'Mech received the reputation of being a "poor man's *Warhammer*," and this designation has stuck to this day. It is estimated that perhaps 500 'Mechs of this type still survive on the battlefields on the Succession wars today.

Capabilities: The BTX-7K *Battleax* is a heavy 'Mech with increased maneuverability. The VOX-280 engine powers its PPC weapons as well as the Rawlings 58 jump jets. Additional ETW Ceramic Heat Sinks allow the excess heat from weapons discharge to be rapidly diminished.

The *Battleax* is armed with two Donal Type II PPCs similar to those of the *Warhammer* design. In addition, one Holly Short Range Missile Six-Pack is located on the 'Mech's right shoulder. Instead of a heavy laser armament, the *Battleax* houses two Doombud Long Range Missile Five-Packs on its chest, giving it an extended range support capability lacking in many other heavy 'Mechs.

The *Battleax* is protected with standard Kemplar 5000 armor that allows the unit to take a heavy amount of punishment before

it is put out of action. Placed about the vehicle's surface in such a way as to make offensive assault-type actions feasible, the *Battleax* can be considered one of the heavier armored 'Mechs within the Successor States.

Over the centuries, the *Battleax* has developed a reputation as a pilot killer, something that is hard to live down. There have been numerous instances of cockpit fires or electrical system shorts that have killed *Battleax* pilots while on maneuvers or during actual combat. The *Battleax* 'Mech type has not aged as gracefully as many other 'Mech classes, and little repair work is being done on those *Battleaxes* that are disabled. It is to be assumed that the *Battleax* type 'Mech will no longer be operational within the next 50 years.

Variants: Differently equipped *Battleaxes* are quite common in the Successor States today, although there are no official variants of the vehicle. Usually, these variations involve the removal of the jump jets and the upgrade of the LRM packs or some other changing of the weapons systems. *Battleax* PPCs have also been used to replace PPCs destroyed on *Warhammers*. The *Battleax* limb is then repaired using whatever is available, including simple grasping hand mechanisms.

Notable 'Mechs and MechWarriors

MechWarrior "Strider" McGee

Currently in the Assault Lance of Hammon's Company of House Davion's Chisholm Raiders, "Strider" McGee has earned his fame through the use of his *Battleax* "JackBoots." Although repeatedly reprimanded for his unusual tactics, Strider continues to successfully use his jump-capable heavy 'Mech in numerous "death from above" encounters. He has had the *Battleax's* legs replaced three times now, but he continues to subject his 'Mech to damage of this nature. The only reason his superiors allow him to continue is his success at disabling enemy 'Mechs with the tactic, allowing capture of those 'Mechs fairly intact (except for the head assemblies). Opinions lean toward McGee's luck running out eventually, however, if he insists on keeping up these tactics indefinitely.

Lieutenant Akura Simchawa

Currently assigned to the Sun Zhiang Academy of House Kurita, Lieutenant Simchawa has piloted a *Battleax* all of his career. Even though his 'Mech is quite maneuverable for a heavy type, he is as cautious with it as Strider McGee is incautious. His tactics are meticulous, and he only uses his jump jets to get out of concentrated fire or into cover. Even though his style is not flamboyant, it has led him to considerable success and a post as instructor at Sun Zhiang.

STATS

Mass: 70 tons
Chassis: Earthwerks BTX
Power Plant: VOX 280
Cruising Speed: 42.9 kph
Maximum Speed: 64.3 kph
Jump Jets: Rawlings 58
    Jump Capacity: 120 meters
Armor: Kemplar 5000
Armament:
    2 Donal Type II PPCs
    2 Doombud Long Range Missile Five-Packs
    1 Holly Short Range Missile Six-Packs
Manufacturer: Earthwerks, Incorporated
Communications System: Neil 9500
Targeting and Tracking System: RCA Instatrac Mark SV

Type: **BTX-7K Battleax**		*Tons*
Tonnage:	70 Tons	70
Internal Structure:		7
Engine:	VOX 280	16
Walking MPs:	4	
Running MPs:	6	
Jumping MPs:	4	
Heat Sinks:	15	5
Gyro:		3
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	128	8

	Internal Structure	Armor Value
Head	3	9
Center Torso:	22	20/7
Rt./Lt. Torso:	15	18/6
Rt./Lt. Arm:	11	14
Rt./Lt. Leg:	15	16

Weapons and Ammo:

Type	Loc.	Critical	
PPC	RA	3	7
PPC	LA	3	7
SRM 6	RT	2	3
Ammo (SRM) 15	RT	1	1
LRM 5	RT	1	2
LRM 5	LT	1	2
Ammo (LRM) 24	RT	1	1
Ammo (LRM) 24	LT	1	1
Jump Jets	RL	2	2
Jump Jets	LL	2	2
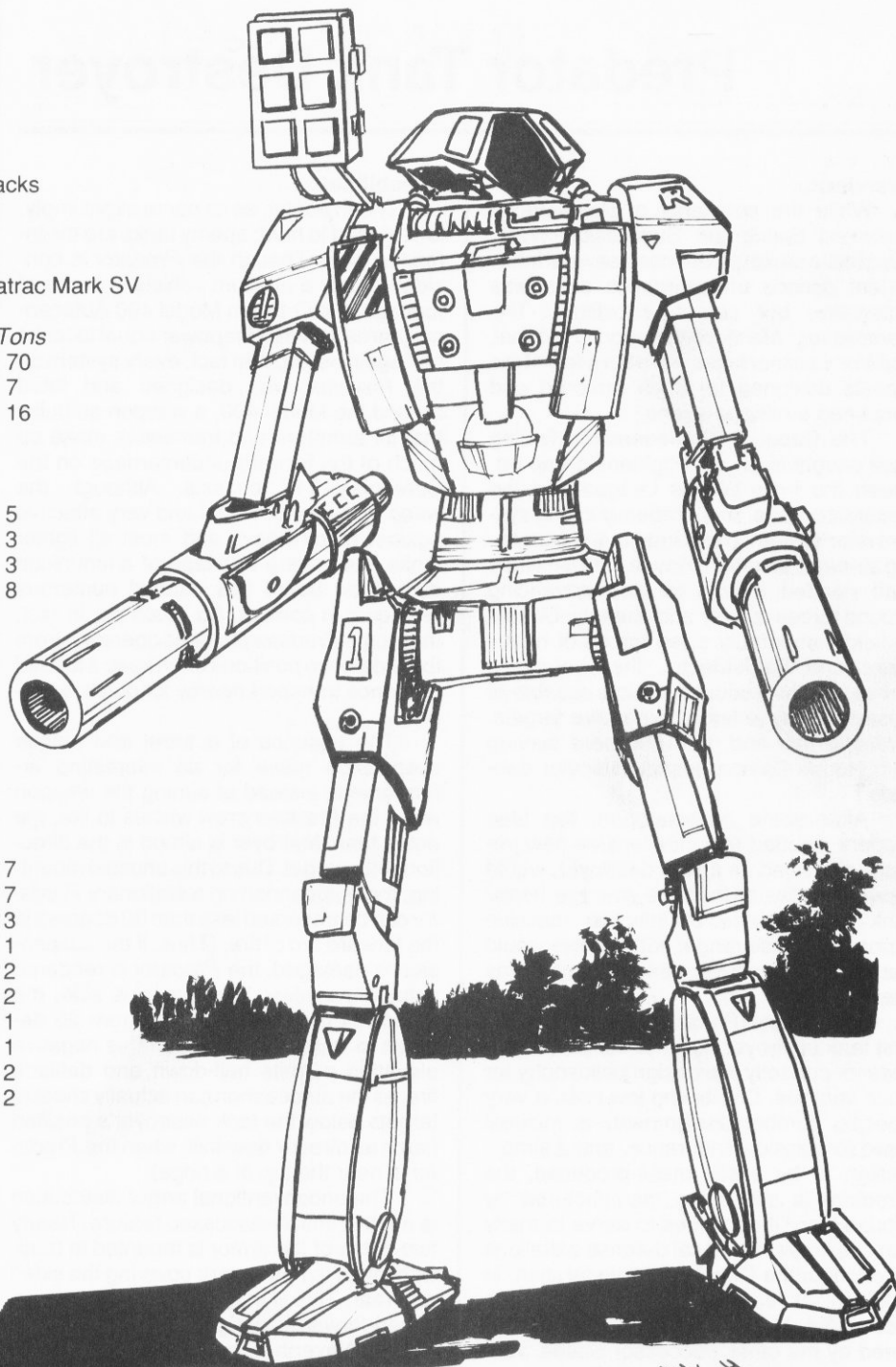
Technical Readout

Predator Tank Destroyer

Overview:

While the popularity of BattleMechs fluctuated during the Succession Wars, main battle tanks experienced several intermittent periods of resurgence as a less expensive, but potent, substitute. The *Demolisher*, *Manticore*, *Patton*, *Rommel*, and *Von Luckner* tanks were but a few of the models designed for such armored and combined-arms operations.

The Capellan Confederation, finding itself caught in an ever-tightening trap between the Free Worlds League and the Federated Suns, was gradually losing system after system. Desperate at the worsening strategic situation, House Liao's military staff needed a way to stop advancing ground forces quickly and cheaply. Unable to field comparably sized forces of heavy tanks and BattleMechs, they sought a cheap, easily-produced vehicle capable of destroying these large, expensive targets. (*Demolishers* and *Von Luckners* serving with House Davion posed particular dangers.)

After some consideration, the Liao leaders decided this inexpensive new vehicle, classified as a tank destroyer, would have to be faster than the average heavy tank and capable of inflicting massive damage at close range; nothing else would matter. The *Predator* tank destroyer was their solution.

Though the *Predator* was neither the first tank destroyer built nor the last, it represents perfectly the design philosophy for such vehicles. Combining low cost, a very specific combat assignment, a minimal need for mission endurance, and a simple design to be easily mass-produced, the *Predator* is still being manufactured by House Liao. It continues to serve in many tank destroyer and local defense battalions throughout the Capellan Confederation. In addition, at least several thousand have been sold, loaned, appropriated, or captured by the other Successor States, various mercenaries, and Bandit Kings.

Capabilities:

The *Predator*, as its name might imply, is designed to hunt; enemy tanks are the intended prey. Though the *Predator* is considered only a medium vehicle in terms of tonnage, the Q-Beam Model 400 Autocannon carried gives it firepower equal to tanks half again as large. In fact, every system on the *Predator* was designed and fitted around the Model 400, a weapon so bulky that its armature and framework make up much of the forward undercarriage on the Ceresplex T17 chassis. Although the weapon is very powerful and very effective against many heavy and most all lighter tanks, the severe shortage of ammunition carried on board has caused numerous problems in combat. So much so, in fact, that some *Predator* platoons operating from fixed-defense positions often keep a loaded ordnance transport nearby for quick resupply.

The absence of a turret and unique suspension make for an interesting arrangement; instead of aiming the weapon when the *Predator* crew wishes to fire, the entire tank destroyer is aimed in the direction of the target. Due to this unusual mounting, the autocannon on a stationary *Predator* can be traversed less than 30 degrees in the forward arc of fire. (Thus, if the suspension is damaged, the *Predator* is rendered virtually harmless.) On the plus side, the autocannon can be elevated from 25 degrees to minus 10 degrees. This negative elevation permits hull-down and defilade fire, as the autocannon can actually shoot at targets below the tank destroyer's position (such as directly downhill, when the *Predator* is near the top of a ridge).

The unconventional armor distribution is another much-discussed feature. Nearly two-thirds of the armor is mounted in front, with much thinner armor covering the sides and rear. This is in keeping with the 'front-aimed-forward' design of the tank destroyer. Nevertheless, it is a source of contention with some, and clearly a potential trouble spot for anyone who crews the *Predator*.

The rear-mounted VOX IC engine has worked well on this vehicle, providing excellent acceleration and maneuverability and a top speed of almost 90 kph. (It also gives the *Predator* balanced weight distribution throughout the chassis.) The communication and tracking systems were designed and produced by a local Capellan-branch consortium formed by Magna (the weapons firm) and VOX (the power plant manufacturer), the first time these two corporations have ever joined forces. The resulting designs were unspectacular, but inexpensive to maintain or replace, and certainly adequate for the job.

In fact, everything about this tank destroyer is "workmanlike" rather than "elegant." Hastily designed and cheaply built, it has fulfilled its combat objectives well, but without flourish or any sense of glamor. One only has to ask the four-man *Predator* crew whether any expense was made for their comfort—then stand back, as they respond in unexpurgated detail.

Battle History:

The *Predator*, like most tank destroyers dating from as long ago as 20th-Century Terra, was designed to destroy targets its own size or larger. This is most often accomplished by deploying large numbers of them in the tanks' direct path of advance, then engaging from a defensive position, preferably one offering protective cover. Being tracked, they can go anywhere tanks can go.

Thick frontal armor and a relatively high speed may even allow the *Predator* to close with its target—while withstanding enemy fire—until it is in position to shoot, often with killing effect. *Predators* do make excellent "ambush" vehicles for urban combat, as they engage tanks (and even BattleMechs) in a deadly game of hide-and-seek. Tank destroyers, the *Predator* included, are primarily defensive vehicles, however. With limited ammunition and thin side armor, they often do not survive for long during prolonged attacks.

Variants:

Predator variants are virtually impossible to manufacture because of the integral chassis placement of the autocannon, and other design features make the task equally unlikely. Any reduction in armor directly jeopardizes the crew, the selection of a smaller engine offsets the *Predator's* speed advantage vis-a-vis conventional tanks, any smaller weapon minimizes the tank destroyer's combat effectiveness, and so on. As peculiar as this design may be, it becomes utterly unworkable with any substantial modifications.

Notable Vehicles and Pilots:

Lieutenant Toni "the Tyger" Lee

This petite, demure woman is a *Predator* platoon commander assigned to a House Liao tank destroyer unit on the planet Tikonov. When encountered in social situations, the plain-featured Lee is polite and even somewhat shy. In combat, however, her personality is instantly transformed into that of a battle-hardened veteran, as she efficiently barks orders to the crew of her *Predator*, known as the *Song of Sorrow*. The *Predator*, maintained in excellent condition, is painted a dull gold overlaid with a brown-and-white tiger-stripe pattern. Though Lee despises her current assignment on this world, she carries out her duties unfailingly and without complaint, an example she strongly encourages among her subordinates. Since she assumed command, her platoon has been responsible for seven confirmed enemy kills and 13 damaged, compared with only one *Predator* loss.

STATS

Mass: 45 tons
Chassis: Ceresplex T17
Movement Type: Tracked
Power Plant: VOX IC-225b
Cruising Speed: 57.7 kph
Flank Speed: 86.9 kph
Armor: Starshield
Armament:
 1 Q-Beam PLC Model 400 Autocannon
Manufacturer: Ceres Metal Industries
Communications System:
 Magna-VOX KS2525
Targeting and Tracking System:
 Magna-VOX TTS4000
Cost: Cb 893,563 (new);
 approximately Ch 760,000 (used)

Type: **Predator**		*Tons*
Movement Type: Tracked		
Tonnage:	45	45
Cruise Speed:	5	
Flank Speed:	8	
Engine:		20
Rating:	240	
Type:	I.C.E.	
Control:		2.25
Lift/Dive/Rotors:		0
Power Amplifier:		0
Heat Sinks:	0	0
Internal Structure:	4.5	
Cargo:	0	
Turret:	0	
Armor:	48	3

Location	Points
Front	30
Lt./Rt. Side	6/6
Back	6

Weapons and Ammo:

Type	Facing	
AC/20	Front	14
Ammo (AC) 5	Front	1
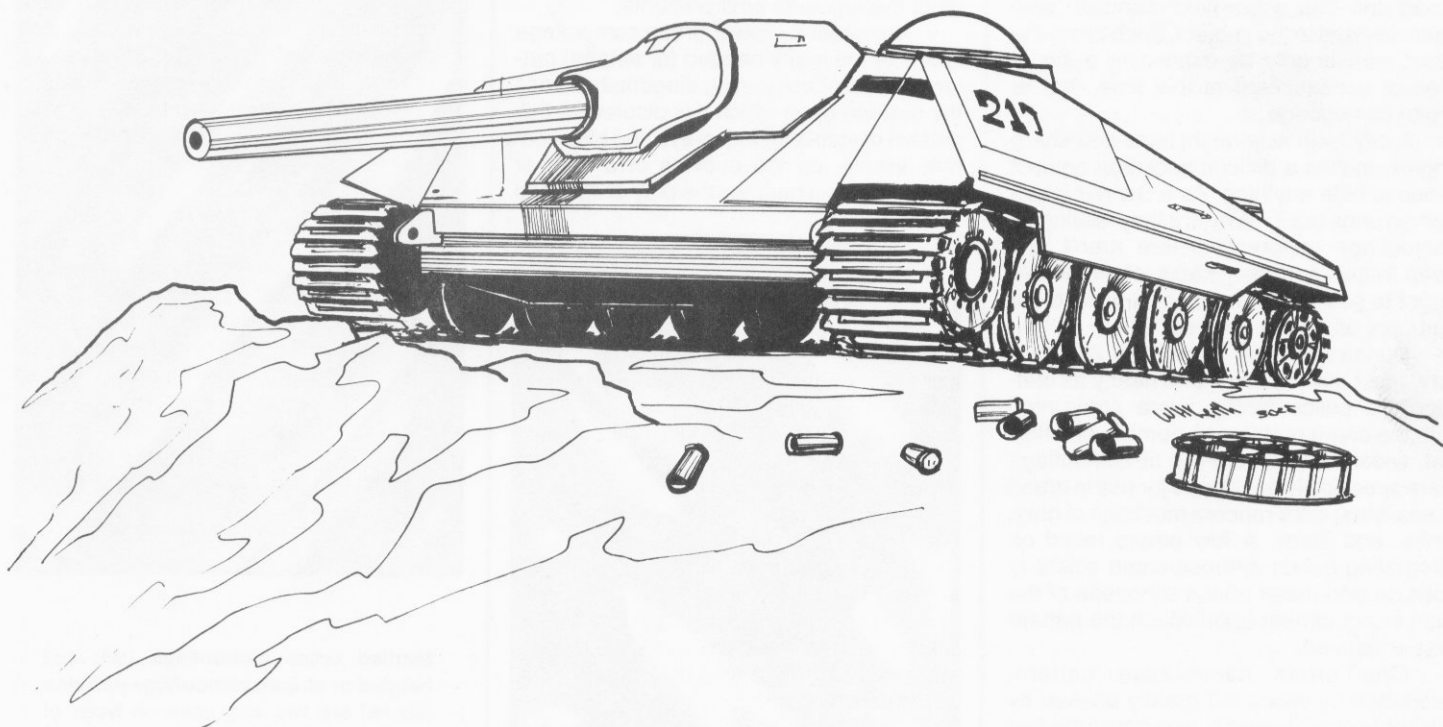
BattleColors

Urban Camouflage

Hiding something as big as a Battle-Mech might very well be described as impossible, even under the best conditions. The best one can reasonably hope for is to confuse its outlines and/or reduce its signature.

The reduction of a 'Mech's infrared, magnetic, electrical, or radioactive signature is a task which must be left up to sophisticated electronic counter-measure equipment. Unfortunately, such jamming gear is becoming increasingly scarce, as the universe becomes more lostech.

On the other hand, the outlines of even the largest BattleMech may be broken up and confused by the use of camouflage.

The subject of camouflage is such a broad one that entire field manuals have been devoted to the subject. Such being the case, we will only be examining a single area of concealment at this time, that of urban camouflage.

A city, with its straight lines and sharp angles, makes a difficult backdrop against which to hide anything. As a Steiner infantryman once put it, "Why are they issuing us camouflage uniforms? There aren't any trees within a dozen klicks of here. We ought to paint store-fronts and ground-car bumpers all over ourselves."

During the latter part of the 20th century, most military units, and nearly all metropolitan police forces, were confronted with the same problem. A number of different, widely-varied patterns of camouflage were specifically developed for use in urban areas. Most were random mottlings of gray, white, and black. A few others relied on alternating bands of those same colors to confuse and break up the silhouette of the man or equipment upon which the pattern was employed.

One urban camouflage pattern, scoffed at by critics but greatly praised by the soldiers who wore it, was developed on Terra during the middle of the 21st century. This unorthodox design consisted of vertical stripes of black, gray, and white, interspersed with similar bands of dark blue, green, and mustard yellow. Amazingly, this "billiard table" camouflage was very difficult to spot among the shattered walls and ruined buildings of a city-become-battleground.

Today, there are as many urban camouflage patterns as there are fighting forces to use them. Due to space limitations, only two of the most common are being presented here.

The first is the common mottled urban camouflage, which some people have likened to a black-and-white holo of woodland camo. Depicted here in what is called "high relief," this pattern is most useful in a city whose buildings are primarily constructed of light-colored materials. In its subdued form, where all of the colors are muted and darkened, mottled urban camouflage will fit most metropolitan environments.

The second type of urban camouflage is one of the many banded (or striped) patterns. Most often running diagonally across the surface upon which it is displayed, this pattern of light and dark grays and black not only breaks up the outlines of a man or 'Mech, it also simulates the play of light and shadow along the lines and edges of a city's buildings.

In using camouflage, however, one should always keep in mind that no camouflage, regardless of how closely it matches the surrounding terrain, is positive concealment. A trained observer will be able to spot the anomalies between camouflage and background with ease. Even an untrained eye will be able to spot it eventually. Many inexperienced warriors have made the often fatal mistake of relying too heavily on camouflage. It should also be noted that camouflage of any sort is only effective as long as the unit so concealed remains stationary. Even the slightest movement can obviate the effectiveness of camouflage. The human eye will pick up on motion before detail. This consideration is especially critical in an urban environment, where the background is static. In a forested or desert environment, there is always some kind of natural motion. In a city, there is nothing short of an earthquake that would make a building move.
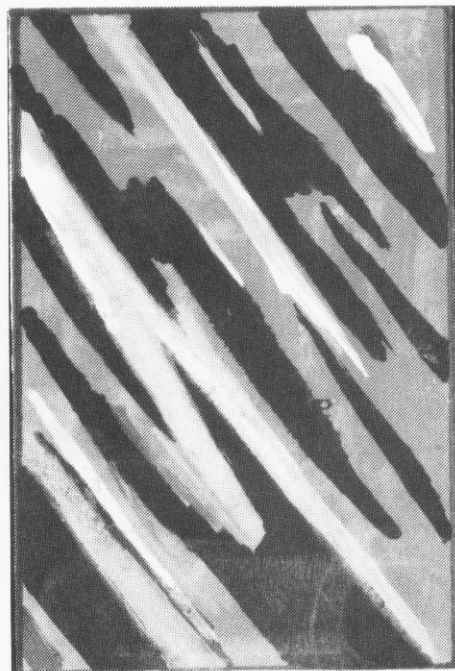
Mottled urban camouflage (left) and **banded or striped camouflage patterns** (above) are two very common types of camouflage that have been found to be effective in city environments and among the broken grays and shadows of ruins.
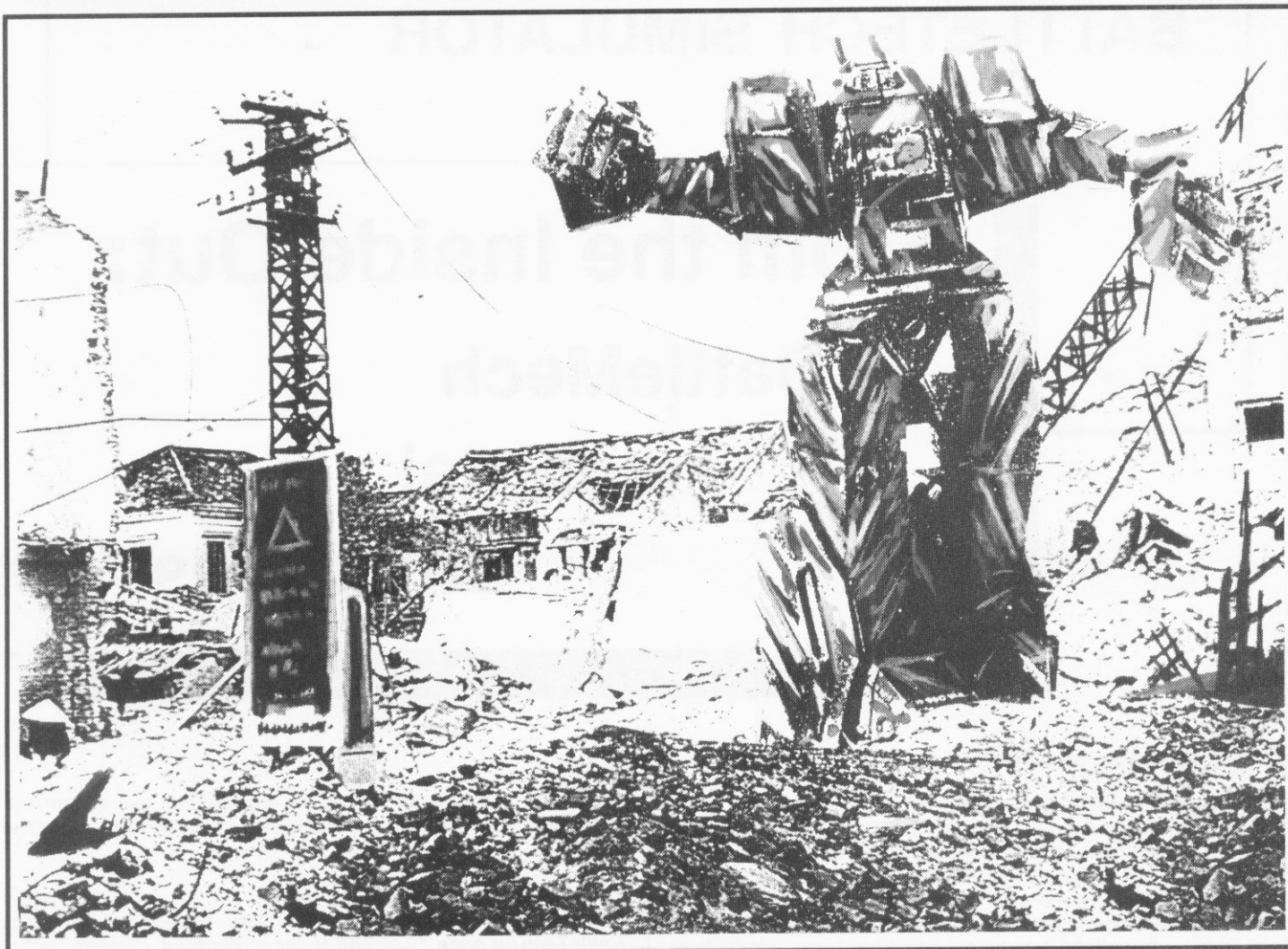
Urban camouflage, such as the striped pattern on the *Archer* shown above, help break up a BattleMech's form among the straight-edged and sharply contrasting shapes common to the city environment.

Other factors which must be considered when selecting a camouflage pattern are: the age of the city; the appearance, condition, and construction of its buildings; and the predominant style of architecture. Even the relative amounts of industry and vegetation with the city must be taken into account.

These factors, and others, may be illustrated by the following examples, both of urban areas which do not fit the common conception of a city landscape, and of camouflage patterns which may be used by their garrison forces.

Taedang City: Situated on the northeastern land mass of the Capellan world, New Westin. Taedang City is built almost exclusively out of the reddish variform granite which is common to the surrounding highlands. Relatively young as cities in the Inner Sphere go, Taedang's buildings have not yet acquired the coating of grime and soot which is common to most urban areas.

As a result, most vehicles and 'Mechs used by the garrison there employ a dark reddish-brown base color, with tan, dark brown, and rust-red tiger stripes.

Toask: Built in the center of a heavily forested area on the Marik-held world of Ryerson, this city is one of the few metropolitan areas in the midst of a nearly worldwide logging industry. The sylvan environment surrounding Toask is reflected by its large parks and many tree-lined boulevards. Here, a garrison commander might opt for a modified woodland camouflage of brown and green intermixed with a gray-green urban pattern.

Luthien: Often called Black Luthien, the capitol of the Draconis Combine is an old city whose many industries have layered its building with a thick coating of grime and soot. Here, many of the BattleMechs and armored fighting vehicles are painted with a mottled black, dark gray, and dark blue camouflage scheme.

These, of course, are extreme examples. Most urban areas provide a regular background of various shades of gray. They can be handled with a standard camouflage pattern of those same colors.

Considering the no-holds-barred, frequently no-quarter nature of urban combat, a well-selected and properly used camouflage scheme is vital to the warrior whose life depends upon seeing the enemy before the enemy sees him.

BATTLETECH SIMULATOR

From the Inside Out:

BattleMech Internal Structures

by Jack Freeman, MechTech P.E.

As everyone well knows, combat in the 31st century is a nasty business; casualties are often staggering, both in terms of men and materiel. Yet BattleMechs—those huge fighting machines often found in the thick of things, the vehicles that make such combat possible—quite often survive somehow. Admittedly, many carry a crazy patchwork of original high-grade 'Mech armor and hastily-fitted tin foil, while others may be missing a heat sink or laser here and there. Still, their longevity is well-described and frequently legendary; nothing can be handed down throughout the centuries from generation to generation as a family heirloom, unless it is in one piece (more or less).

How do they last? What is their secret? Well, there appear to be several keys to a BattleMech's ability to survive: 1) how skilled its MechWarrior is; 2) how quickly it can move to outmaneuver the opposition; 3) whether its weapons have a long enough range to strike an opponent without being hit in return, and 4) the quantity and location of the armor physically covering the 'Mech. Also of importance is the availability of spare parts and good technicians, but the best tool-wielders are of no immediate use after the 'Mech has left the shop and is locked in combat. This also assumes that the combat situation is roughly equal—overwhelming odds never speak well for surviving, if you are among the outnumbered party.

Once a MechWarrior is in his 'Mech and on the battlefield, though, there is little that he can do to improve substantially his chances for leaving it alive (besides beating a very hasty retreat, a method that most superiors find unsatisfactory). Skills improve only slowly, and too often, too late. When available, a few weapons may be substituted between battles for greater effect, but the engine and armor generally remain with the 'Mech from its manufacture until its final destruction. The decisive element regarding this last point—armor—is ultimately determined by the vehicle's overall tonnage and internal structure, the concept to be focused on in this technical essay.

The Internal Structure

As shown on the Internal Structure Table on page 38 of *BattleTech* (or page 79 of *The Rules of Warfare*), different Battle-Mechs have different numbers of internal structure boxes, depending solely upon the weight of the individual 'Mech. The smallest 'Mech (at 10 tons) possesses 19 boxes allocated between its eight locations (including the head), while the largest 'Mech (at 100 tons) is equipped with 152 boxes.

As soon as the total number of internal structure boxes is known for each tonnage, one can find out the maximum allowance of armor that weight of 'Mech may carry. Keep in mind that armor must always be allocated in .5- or 1-ton increments, and so it is necessary to round *down* to the nearest increment. For example, the internal structure of a 10-ton BattleMech would permit a maximum of 41 armor points. Unfortunately, the most that can ever be used is 40 (2.5 tons), and so under the best of conditions the 'Mech would have one fewer armor point than the structure could conceivably hold. Of course, any model of 'Mech may carry less than its maximum allowance (and almost all do).

Table #1 shows the total tonnage for each 'Mech, the total number of internal structure boxes (added up from the *BattleTech* Internal Structure Table), the number of internal structure boxes per ton of 'Mech weight, the maximum tonnage of armor possible given that internal structure, and the ratio of armor weight to the 'Mech's total weight. Values for structure boxes per ton and armor ratios were rounded to the nearest digit.

Clearly, not all 'Mechs have been created equal. Obviously, a 100-ton 'Mech is a tougher opponent (offensively and defensively) than a 10-ton 'mech, but curiously enough, the smaller 'Mech is the more "efficient" combat vehicle—at least from a defensive standpoint. Ton for ton, the smaller 'Mech possesses more internal structure boxes, and thus more spaces on which to hang armor. This is the reason why as much as 25 percent of a lowly 10-ton 'Mech's weight may be Star Guard armor (or any other brand of your choice), compared to "only" 19 percent for a 100-tonner. I don't mean to imply that five 20-ton *Wasps* or *Stingers* are a fair match for an *Atlas*. Nevertheless, one fundamental engineering maxim appears to hold true, even with BattleMechs: the larger (or bulkier, or more expensive) the system, the less inherent efficiency it has.

Sharing the Wealth

BattleMech armor is not simply lumped together to provide a defense; it must be distributed—point by point—between 11 distinct hit locations: head, center torso front, center torso rear, left torso front, left torso rear, right torso front, right torso rear, left arm, right arm, left leg, and finally right leg. The Internal Structure Table and the "Allocate Armor" section on page 40 of *BattleTech* (or page 80 of *The Rules of Warfare*) describe how many armor points each location may receive (from the maximum armor tonnage possible, given in Table #1 above).

Table #2 summarizes the maximum number of armor points that may be assigned to each area, and the ratio of that location's maximum armor to that 'Mech's total number of armor points (all ratios on this table were rounded down to the nearest digit). As mentioned above, a 10-ton 'Mech has a theoretical maximum of 41 armor points. A total of 9 armor points may be assigned to the head, and 9 is 21.9 percent of 41 (or a ratio of .219). Note that the front and rear torso sections are not divided here, because this particular aspect of armor allocation is a design choice and not a fixed design requirement.

Since every BattleMech regardless of tonnage may have 9 armor points assigned to the head, it only makes sense that those points would be a far greater percentage of a small 'Mech's total armor allotment. As the 'Mechs become larger and heavier, these 9 points gradually lose their significance (except to the MechWarrior, whose life often depends on them!), as their share of the total armor finally drops to less than 3 percent.

Again, though, comparisons are being made fairly here because the distribution is on a ton-by-ton basis. In this respect, one can judge the merits of a BattleMech's armor more objectively. Since the sum of all ratios must equal 1.000 (within a few rounded-off thousandths), every 'Mech will have its own strengths and weaknesses, minor variations but still worth taking note of. (When adding up all the ratios, don't forget to include two arms, two legs, and the left and right torso—they each have their own ratio.)

The Final Analysis

Table #3 is a summary of the best- and worst-protected BattleMechs with regard to each hit location. The information was taken directly from Table #2 (though in some cases, the rankings were based on a few additional decimal places I generated that did not appear in the table shown above). The three best tonnages and the three worst tonnages show which 'Mechs may have certain strengths and weaknesses its MechWarriors should be aware of. And if the tonnage of your 'Mech isn't shown among the worst, then relax. You probably have nothing to worry about—except for that lance of *Stalkers* on the near horizon...

TABLE #1
INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND ARMOR TABLE

Total Tonnage	Total Internal Structure Boxes	Boxes /Ton	Maximum Armor Tonnage	Ratio of Armor: Total
9	9	9.999	9.9	.9999
10	19	1.900	2.5	.2500
15	26	1.733	3.0	.2000
20	33	1.650	4.0	.2000
25	43	1.720	5.5	.2200
30	51	1.700	6.5	.2167
35	58	1.657	7.0	.2000
40	67	1.675	8.5	.2125
45	75	1.667	9.5	.2111
50	83	1.660	10.5	.2100
55	91	1.655	11.5	.2091
60	101	1.683	12.5	.2083
65	102	1.569	12.5	.1923
70	107	1.529	13.5	.1929
75	114	1.520	14.0	.1867
80	122	1.525	15.0	.1875
85	130	1.529	16.0	.1882
90	138	1.533	17.0	.1889
95	145	1.526	18.0	.1895
100	152	1.520	19.0	.1900

TABLE #2
MAXIMUM ARMOR DISTRIBUTION TABLE

Total Tonnage	Head	Ratio	Center Torso	Ratio	L/R Torso	Ratio	L/R Arm	Ratio	L/R Leg	Ratio
10	9	.219	8	.195	6	.146	2	.048	4	.097
15	9	.163	10	.181	8	.145	4	.072	6	.109
20	9	.130	12	.173	10	.144	6	.086	8	.115
25	9	.101	16	.179	12	.134	8	.089	12	.134
30	9	.085	20	.190	14	.133	10	.095	14	.133
35	9	.075	22	.184	16	.134	12	.100	16	.134
40	9	.065	24	.175	20	.145	12	.087	20	.145
45	9	.058	28	.183	22	.143	14	.091	22	.143
50	9	.053	32	.189	24	.142	16	.094	24	.142
55	9	.048	36	.194	26	.140	18	.097	26	.140
60	9	.043	40	.195	28	.136	20	.097	30	.146
65	9	.043	42	.202	30	.144	20	.096	28	.135
70	9	.041	44	.202	30	.138	22	.101	30	.138
75	9	.038	46	.199	32	.138	24	.103	32	.138
80	9	.036	50	.202	34	.137	26	.105	34	.137
85	9	.034	54	.205	36	.136	28	.106	36	.136
90	9	.032	58	.207	38	.136	30	.107	38	.136
95	9	.030	60	.204	40	.136	32	.109	40	.136
100	9	.029	62	.201	42	.136	34	.110	42	.136

TABLE #3
STRONGEST- AND WEAKEST-ARMORED BATTLEMECH SIZES
(BY HIT LOCATION AND TONNAGE)

AREA	RANKING					
	Best	2nd	3rd 18th		19th	Worst
Head	10-ton	15-ton	20-ton	90-ton	95-ton	100-ton
CT	90-ton	85-ton	95-ton	25-ton	40-ton	20-ton
LT/RT	10-ton	40-ton	15-ton	25-ton	35-ton	30-ton
LA/RA	100-ton	95-ton	90-ton	20-ton	15-ton	10-ton
LL/RL	60-ton	40-ton	45-ton	20-ton	15-ton	10-ton

NAIS TRAINING SIMULATIONS

by Major Z. Hans Schmidt
Staff Simulations Officer
New Avalon Institute of Science

In this issue of BattleTechnology, we introduce a new type of combat simulation originally designed by tactical instructors at the renowned New Avalon Institute of Science. House Liao readers may find these two training modules of special interest since they reflect House Davion planning for the possibility of future high-level conflict between the Federated Suns and the Capellan Confederation. All MechWarriors, regardless of their House affiliations, should find these simulations useful in sharpening their tactical skills and in improving their understanding of small-unit combat maneuvers.

NAIS TRAINING SIMULATION #0163
Forced Reconnaissance

Introduction:

This scenario is an NAIS tactical combat training simulation for MechWarriors and other ground vehicle combat personnel. Its general purpose is to improve a warrior's skill in tactical combat situations, such as those that may be encountered after graduation and upon entering service with an active combat unit.

Some of these combat simulations are historical reenactments (and will be described as such), but many others describe purely hypothetical confrontations. Some may even involve lances or companies from famous House or mercenary units. Most, however, will be strict simulations containing typical formations that might be found anywhere in the Successor States or even in the Periphery.

This particular scenario is intended for two or more players. (Four players would be ideal, with each player controlling one lance or platoon.) For optimum training benefits, this scenario should be played twice, with players exchanging sides.

Background:

When aircraft are scarce or otherwise occupied, reconnaissance forces of varying strength are more frequently sent across a planet's surface in search of the enemy. These forces may range in size from a lone skimmer to entire companies of combined 'Mech-tank teams. In this engagement, two forces of moderate—and roughly equal—strength from House Liao and House Davion make direct contact and neither side intends to yield.

Game Set-Up:

This scenario uses Expert BattleTech rules and any BattleTech map of the players' choice (the Attacker and the Defender may mutually agree, or they may select a map at random). Any terrain features shown on the map should be treated as in effect. All combat units are considered to be in perfect working order. The Defender and Attacker may set up simultaneously. At the beginning of each turn, randomly determine which player has combat initiative for that turn. All MechWarriors and weapon-equipped vehicle crews are assumed to have skill levels of Piloting 5 and Gunnery 4.

Defender:
Units from House Liao
'Mech Lance:
 Crusader
 Shadow Hawk
 Phoenix Hawk
 Wasp

Recon Platoon:
 4 *Swift Wind* Scout Cars

Deployment:

The Defender may deploy some or all of his units in the west hexrow (01xx) of the map with 0 MP required to enter the map (i.e., all units may expend their full movement allowance during the first turn after entering the map). It is not required that every Defender 'Mech and vehicle be deployed during the first turn, but all must enter from along this hexrow whenever they enter the game.

Attacker:
Units from House Davion
'Mech Lance:
 Centurion
 Centurion
 Centurion
 Centurion

Recon Platoon:
 4 Jeeps w/SRM-2

Deployment:

The Attacker may deploy some or all of his units in the east hexrow (15xx) of the map with 0 MP required to enter the map. It is not required that every Attacker 'Mech and vehicle be deployed during the first turn, but all must enter from along this hexrow whenever they enter the game.

Special Rules:

Once they have entered, units of either side may withdraw off their respective edge of the map at any time. If they do so, however, they may not re-enter during the scenario. Units may not withdraw in any other manner.

Victory Conditions:

This scenario has no time limitations and is to the death (or until one side is routed). The last side to have a functional 'Mech or vehicle (i.e., capable of movement) on the map wins.

NAIS TRAINING SIMULATION #0069
Breaking Through the Gap

Introduction:

This scenario is an NAIS tactical combat training simulation for MechWarriors and/or AeroSpace Fighter pilots. Its general purpose is to improve a warrior's skill in tactical combat situations, such as those that may be encountered after graduation and upon entering service with an active combat unit.

Some of these combat simulations are historical reenactments (and will be described as such), but many others are purely hypothetical confrontations. Some may even involve lances or companies from famous House or mercenary units. Most, however, will be strict simulations containing typical formations that might be found anywhere in the Successor States or even in the Periphery.

This particular scenario is intended for two or more players. (Four players would be ideal, with three players each controlling the vehicles of one lance and one Davion player controlling both Tank and Air lances.) For optimum training benefits, this scenario should be played twice, with players exchanging sides.

Background:

A two-lance, close-assault force of 'Mechs from House Liao are moving south in an effort to penetrate a weak spot in the Davion line. Their objective: to go as far as they can and create as much havoc as possible. A nominally weaker force of Davion 'Mechs and tanks—with limited air support—are trying to hold the position and stop the Liao advance in its tracks, at all costs.

Game Set-Up:

This scenario uses Expert *BattleTech* and *AeroTech* rules and any two *BattleTech* maps of the players' choice (attacking players select the upper map, defending players select the lower). Maps should be placed end to end, so that the xx01 hexrow of the upper (north) map is at the opposite end of the xx17 hexrow of the lower (south) map. Any terrain features shown on the maps should be treated as in effect. All combat units are considered to be in perfect working order. The Defender sets up first and moves second.

Defender:

Units from House Davion
Medium Lance:
    Enforcer (Piloting 1, Gunnery 1)
    Enforcer (Piloting 3, Gunnery 3)
    Enforcer (Piloting 5, Gunnery 4)
    Enforcer (Piloting 5, Gunnery 4)
Tank Lance:
    Scorpion (Piloting 3, Gunnery 3)
    Scorpion (Piloting 4, Gunnery 4)
    Scorpion (Piloting 4, Gunnery 4)
    Scorpion (Piloting 5, Gunnery 4)
Air Lance:
    Sparrowhawk (Piloting 1, Gunnery 1)
    Sparrowhawk (Piloting 2, Gunnery 2)

Deployment:

The Defender may deploy the Medium Lance and the Tank Lance anywhere in the bottom eight hexrows (xx10 through xx17, inclusive) of the south map. All units of the Medium and Tank Lances must be deployed at the start. Units of the Air Lance will enter the game on a later turn, as described in **Special Rules**.

Attacker:

Units from House Liao
Heavy Lance:
    Charger (Piloting 1, Gunnery 1)
    Charger (Piloting 1, Gunnery 1)
    Charger (Piloting 2, Gunnery 2)
    Charger (Piloting 3, Gunnery 3)
Medium Lance:
    Rifleman (Piloting 3, Gunnery 3)
    Shadow Hawk (Piloting 2, Gunnery 2)
    Griffin (Piloting 4, Gunnery 4)
    Stinger (Piloting 3, Gunnery 3)

Deployment:

The Attacker may deploy some or all of his units in the top hexrow (xx01) of the north map with 0 MP required to enter the map (i.e., all 'Mechs may expend their full movement allowance during the first turn after entering the map). It is not required that every Attacker 'Mech be deployed during the first turn, but all must enter from along this hexrow whenever they may enter the game.

Special Rules:

Either or both *Sparrowhawks* of the Davion Air Lance may enter the game equipped with bombs, if the Defender wishes. However, doing so will delay their entry into the scenario, depending upon each fighter's loaded thrust rating after taking its bombload into account. During the movement phase of the appropriate turn, one or both aircraft may enter either map and conduct combat normally, as per *AeroTech* rules. The fighters are not required to enter together, nor during the first turn they are eligible to do so. Likewise, once entering, they are free to exit and even re-enter the map, as often as desired. (They may not be re-armed with additional bombs, however.)

Thrust Rating	Fighter May Enter On:
10.0 (no bombs)	Turn 2
6.8 through 9.8	Turn 4
5.0 through 6.6	Turn 5
4.0 through 4.8	Turn 6
3.4 through 3.8	Turn 7
3.0 through 3.2	Turn 8
2.6 through 2.8	Turn 9
1.0 through 2.4	Turn 10

Victory Conditions:

The scenario lasts ten turns or until no functional units remain on the board, whichever comes first. Victory Points (VP) for both sides are totalled up at the end of the scenario.

The Defender receives 15 VP for every enemy 'Mech destroyed and 10 VP for every enemy 'Mech incapacitated (no longer capable of movement).

The Attacker receives 10 VP for every friendly 'Mech that exits the bottom hexrow (xx17) of the south map and 3 VP for every enemy unit destroyed (or MechWarrior or Pilot killed).

The side with the higher VP totals wins (a tie means a draw). Divide the winning side's VP total by the losing side's VP total to determine the level of victory:

2.0 or greater:	Strategic Victory
1.50 to 1.99:	Operational Victory
1.25 to 1.49	Tactical Victory
1.01 to 1.24:	Marginal Victory

The Mira Campaign

FOG OF WAR

From the minutes of the Court Martial of Brevet-Major Ian Scott Fraser, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment, Northwind Highlanders, May 3028.

"Under the circumstances, we were lucky to get out with what we had. All previous Capellan raids on Mira were centered on the polar regions or in the high uplands; this time we were in the equatorial jungles, and that's a whole order of magnitude worse than anything our Army has had to deal with before.

"Yes, McCarron's Armored Cavalry fought on Mira very successfully a few years ago. Agreed. They pretty much kept to the Mesa Grande, too. I've read accounts of the times they ventured down into the lowlands in search of Davion guerrillas, and I've seen what McCarron and his top officers had to say about it. They agree with what I'm saying—the problems with heat, visibility, terrain...all of them make jungle operations on Mira chancy at best. Throw in all those regiments of Crucis Lancers and the word fiasco doesn't even begin to cover it.

"That doesn't lessen the culpability of the CO, of course. I've spent every waking minute since that day knowing I might have saved those people from disaster. What gets me is the way this operation was mounted; you sent in a battalion to look around, and when the survivors come back with a report you don't want to hear, you just sweep everything, report and survivors all together, under the nearest table! Yes, I'm responsible for those men. But I'm not the only one. We should be going back there in strength to prove my Intel, not sitting here finding reasons why it isn't believable!"

Northwind Highlanders
2nd Kearny Highland Regiment
Provisional 4th Battalion

The scratch unit assembled for the Miran recon mission included 'Mechs drawn from the regular battalions of the regiment, augmented by cadre drafts and mercenary hirelings. A listing of the 'Mechs involved is given below. All Warriors may be considered to have skill levels of Piloting 5 and Gunnery 4.

Battalion Headquarters Lance (Fraser)
- *Vindicator* (Major Ian Fraser)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Jock Armstrong)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Jessica Blake)
- *Stinger* (SubCommander Archibald MacDougall)

First Company (Campbell)
Command Lance (Campbell)
- *Phoenix Hawk* (Captain Colin Campbell)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Pamela Kernighan)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Andrew O'Hara)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Nicholas Black)

Fire Lance A (Dunbar)
- *Blackjack* (Commander William Dunbar)
- *Commando* (SubCommander James Murray)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Robert MacCrimmon)
- *Stinger* (SubCommander Willis Fletcher)

Fire Lance B (Crane)
- *Blackjack* (Commander David Crane)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Lee Marshal)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Thomas Kirk)
- *Commando* (SubCommander Donald Lovat)
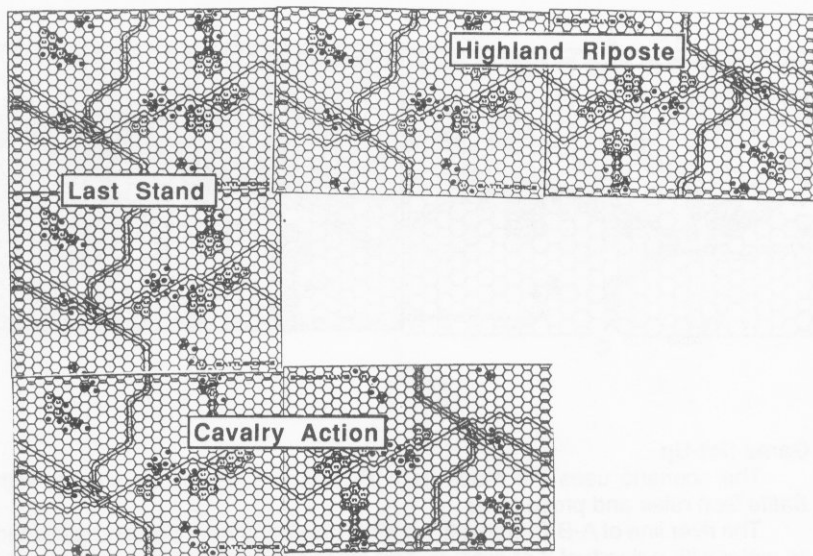
Second Company (Sinclair)
Command Lance (Sinclair)
- *Javelin* (Captain Cassandra Sinclair)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Wu Fong)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Jason Montgomery)
- *Stinger* (SubCommander Lisa Caswell)

Recon Lance A (Lee)
- *Ostscout* (Commander Hsien Lee)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Jennifer Rand)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander John Hamilton)
- *Stinger* (SubCommander Nathan Turner)

Recon Lance B (O'Leary)
- *Javelin* (Commander Martin O'Leary)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Richard Talbott)
- *Wasp* (SubCommander Lutz Richter)
- *Stinger* (SubCommander Maureen Callahan)

Third Company (Voelker)
Command Lance (Voelker)
- *Jenner* (Captain Fritz Voelker)
- *Panther* (SubCommander Mustapha Kemal)
- *Panther* (SubCommander Ellen Running Deer)
- *Vindicator* (SubCommander Mark Willis)

Fire Lance A (Fitzgerald)
- *Javelin* (Commander Edward Fitzgerald)
- *Panther* (SubCommander Marion Hay)
- *Panther* (SubCommander Dolph Keller)
- *Vindicator* (SubCommander Alexandre Deladier)

Fire Lance B (Hernandez)
- *Javelin* (Commander Roberta Hernandez)
- *Panther* (SubCommander Chou Ling)
- *Vindicator* (SubCommander Nikolai Kuragin)
- *Vindicator* (SubCommander Horst von Seisser)

Under orders to scout out and report on Davion activities on Mira, the *ad hoc* "4th Battalion" of the 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment was smuggled onto the planet and deployed in the rugged lowland jungle, 25 kilometers from the reported Federated Suns base. The 4th Battalion lacked cohesion and experience, but not courage; the next several hours would certainly demonstrate that.

Conditions in the lowlands turned out to be unexpectedly troublesome to the Liao mission. The Kearny troops were slowed by a combination of jungle terrain, dense mist, and excess heat buildup caused by the high temperatures of Mira's equatorial lowlands. These factors made progress difficult, and effective scouting well-nigh impossible.

Nightfall found the Highlanders several kilometers short of their goal, and the poor visibility forced Brevet-Major Fraser to halt for the night rather than push ahead blindly. Unfortunately, Davion sensor stations had already spotted the Northwind battalion, and the Miran garrison deployed to envelop the Kearny troops.

Contrary to the original Liao intelligence, the Davion force on Mira included more than just the usual 2nd Crucis Lancers in garrison. The entire Crucis Lancers brigade, plus various auxiliary units, had been shifted to Mira as part of the preparations for the annual "Galahad" wargames. Their base, an extensive repair and staging facility, was much larger than anticipated. Even allowing for 'Mechs out of service or held back to guard the base complex proper, the Davion advantage was enormous. Even the Crucis Lancers didn't realized just how badly the Highlanders were outnumbered; they mounted a carefully-prepared three-pronged envelopment, just to be sure of winning the battle. Fraser's position was not merely untenable, it was completely impossible. The 4th Battalion was doomed…the only real question was just how much they'd pay when the butcher's bill was tallied.

Map Layout

The diagram above shows the placement of *BattleForce* maps for use in a campaign covering the entire Mira action. The three Northwind scenarios can be played in succession as a campaign using this map layout.

Special Rules

The following special rules pertain to all three scenarios set on Mira.

Heat: External temperatures are very high in the lowland jungles. As a result, heat sinks are much less effective. It requires two heat sinks to shed one point of heat in a turn; only three points of extra heat per turn (maximum) can be shed by standing in water.

Fires: Mira's richly oxygenated atmosphere and high sea level pressure cause a dangerous oxygen concentration which, among other effects, causes fires to burn quite fiercely. Any use of jump jets or energy weapons in a jungle hex (only) starts a fire on a 2D6 roll of 7+. Jump jets affect all hexes the 'Mech passes through in its move except for the landing hex. Fires spread 1 hex per turn in all directions, there are no prevailing winds in the jungles to push the flames a certain way.

Fog and Mist: At the start of each turn, roll 1D6 to determine the maximum number of hexes through which Line of Sight can be traced. For 'Mechs on higher elevations, multiply the elevation level by the number; the mist on Mira is a ground fog and has much less impact on sighting from higher altitudes.

Jungle Terrain: Units spend 3 MP per hex to enter Jungle Terrain on Mira. They may not attempt to run through jungle hexes at all. Jump movement is normal except for the hazards of fire noted earlier. Jungle hexes block line of sight and have an elevation level-1 for sighting purposes.

Marsh Terrain: Hexes designated as marshes are considered to be water hexes for purposes of heat reduction, land for all other purposes. A 'Mech must roll 1D6 greater than or equal to the number of hexes separating a current marsh hex from the nearest clear terrain or jungle hex in order to *leave* the marsh hex in question. Hovertanks, of course, are free to move over marshes without difficulty.

Special Attacks: Any 'Mech equipped with jump jets and lying prone may launch a special type of physical attack by firing jump jets. The 'Mech in question may "ram" an opponent in an adjacent hex, inflicting a number of damage points to the enemy equal to its tonnage and receiving a number of points of damage equal to the target's tonnage. Allocate damage in 5-point groups, using the Shot From Below hit location table for the target and the Shot From Above location table for the attacker. This devastating tactic is generally a suicide maneuver and is rarely encountered under normal circumstances.

DEVILS IN THE MIST

From the minutes of the Board of Inquiry on the Mira Recon Mission, April, 3028.

The Board: What was your position at this time?

Deladier: All of Third Company was on the southern end of the line. We were near the edge of a marshy area that just sort of merged into the sea a couple hundred meters off.

The Board: And when did you actually realize there were enemy forces in the area?

Deladier: Captain Voelker mustered us in a hurry and said there were sensor rigs in the area. He also said he had blips on his scanner out over the swamp…and about that time my exmike picked up hoverfans. So we knew they were coming.

The Board: And Captain Voelker deployed your forces to meet the attack?

Deladier: He just had us stand by, ready. Major Fraser, he came up a few minutes later with Battalion HQ and directed the fighting. He's the one that ordered us to extend the line and keep the tanks from getting ashore behind us.

The Board: And then the Major…left you to fend for yourselves, eh?

Deladier: Captain said he was called away to another part of the field…

The Board: While you tried to hold an exposed flank against enemy forces that could come and go at will.

Deladier: The way we saw it, we had to keep them from getting 'round behind us. Those devils were lurking out there in the mist, ready to sweep around and block the clear ground at the edge of the marsh. We figured it was going to be our only line of retreat.

The Board: But in fact your people were ultimately overpowered and outflanked, since Major Fraser never sent you any assistance. Thank you, Sub-Commander…
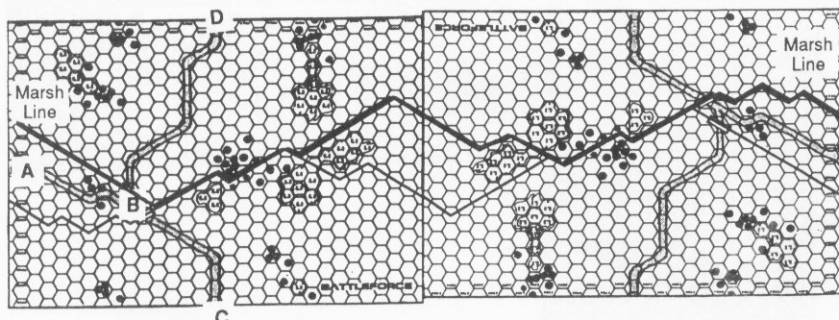
Game Set-Up

The scenario uses the maps from *BattleForce*, set up as shown, with *BattleTech* rules and procedures.

The river line of A-B-C marks the edge of the Equatorial Sea and is treated as water with a depth of 3 or greater. The other rivers are treated normally. All roads and bridges are ignored except as they delimit other terrain. The northernmost line of road hexes indicates the boundary of the swamp. All hexes south of this line (inclusive) are treated as Marsh regardless of terrain types shown. Hexes north of the line remain the terrain type shown.

The Defender sets up first. The Attacker has the initiative.

Defender

The Third Company of the 4th Battalion, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment, Northwind Highlanders, plus the 4th Battalion's Command Lance. (See the Campaign listings on page 51.) All 'Mechs begin in good condition. The defender may set up in any hexes north of the marsh line.

Attacker

Elements of the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment, including the following vehicles:

     1 *Drillson* Heavy Hovertank
     4 *Whirlwind* Heavy Hovertanks
     2 *Harrier* Heavy Hovertanks
     6 *Saracen* Medium Hovertanks
     6 *Scimitar* Medium Hovertanks
     6 *Saladin* Assault Hovertanks

Statistics on the *Harrier* and *Whirlwind* tanks are available in Issue 0202 of BattleTechnology; all other tanks are described in BattleTech Technical Readout 3026.

The Attacker may deploy as many of his available tanks as he desires at the start of any turn and may bring in others at a later time as necessary. However, possible entry hexes are limited early in the game. On Turn 1, tanks may enter any hex on the western edge of the board, or any of the first 6 hexes starting in the southwest corner (through 0617). On the second turn, go to 1217, on the third 1817, and so on until all hexes on the south edge are available. Entry through other sides of the map is prohibited.

Although Fraser had every reason to believe that the ocean and marshes to the southwest would be sufficient to protect his flank, he reckoned without the knowledge of the full Davion strength on Mira. For attached to the 1st Crucis Lancers was the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment, a mercenary unit equipped with medium and heavy hovertanks ideally suited for combat operations in Mira's swamps.

Leading the 6th ACR was Colonel Morgan Graeme, an outspoken proponent of modern cavalry tactics. Graeme recognized the difficulties inherent in his assignment, which was to swing around the rear of the Kearny forces and delay any attempted retreat by the Highlanders across the open plains southeast of the battlefield. This would allow the Davion 'Mechs to arrive in force before the Highlanders could break away. Knowing that tanks were outmatched even by small 'Mechs, and seeing the possibly disastrous consequences of losing too much strength trying to engage the Kearny line in force, Graeme opted for Parthian-style tactics of repeated harassing attacks designed to inflict damage and keep the BattleMechs occupied while other hovertanks moved to the far end of the Kearny line and carried out the primary mission of securing the retreat route. Ultimately Voelker's attempts to block every potential weak point on his front allowed Colonel Graeme the chance to upset Third Company's equilibrium and defeat them in detail.

Contributing to Voelker's failure were problems not only with the heat and the difficult terrain, but most especially with low visibility. While Graeme's tanks maneuvered through the swamps at will, the Highlanders couldn't spot them until they were quite close. And dispersion effects of fog on energy weapons made it difficult to hit targets, a problem further compounded by the fact that Voelker's *Vindicators* and *Panthers* used PPCs, which were of limited value in the kind of close-in fighting that raged around the swamp's edge.

All in all, it is not at all surprising that Graeme's cavalry tactics carried the day.

Victory Conditions

The Attacker scores 10 points for every Kearny 'Mech destroyed, while losing 5 points for each of his own tanks lost. If there are at least 250 tons worth of hovertanks deployed in clear terrain hexes of either board *and* no Kearny 'Mechs are located east of that line of hexes, the Attacker receives an extra 25 points per turn until such time as these conditions no longer hold, or until the game is over. An extra 10 points is scored for each hovertank which exits the north edge of Map A east of the river (only).

The Defender receives 3 points per hovertank destroyed. At the end of each game turn until the end of play, 10 points are added to his score just for continuing to hold his position. An additional 5 points accrue for each Battle-Mech exited off the North or East edges of either map (but not west of the river on Map A).

The game ends on the turn in which no Highlander 'Mechs remain on either map, either through elimination or withdrawal, or when all hovertanks are eliminated. The Attacker may voluntarily end the game by calling off his attacks at any time, in which case the Defender wins automatically no matter what the current VP score may be.

Actually, the Defender is unlikely to "win" the battle in a military sense. However, players can consider that a Defender who scores more VPs than his opponent has handled Third Company magnificently. If the Attacker scores more points, the 6th Armored Cavalry has carried out its assignment in superb fashion.

Special Rules

Withdrawal: The Defender may withdraw from the mapboards off of any clear terrain hex on the north or east sides of the map. Withdrawing units successfully scores VPs for the Defender and may also provide extra 'Mechs for use in later scenarios in this campaign. However, it also may weaken the line and permit a Davion breakthrough. Exited units can be brought back into play, but at a penalty of 10 VP per re-entered unit.

Pursuit: The Attacker may move units off the north edge of Map A (east of the river) to score extra VPs. However, no unit may be exited in this fashion if doing so would leave a greater tonnage of Kearny 'Mechs than there is hovercraft tonnage in play. The Attacker may not bring exited units back from here. Davion units may also be exited freely from the south or west map edges and brought back at any later time. There are neither VP bonuses nor penalties to such movement.

Kearny Headquarters Lance: At the start of each turn, the Kearny player should roll 1D6. If the result is a 6, Major Fraser is needed elsewhere. Each turn that Battalion Headquarters remains in play thereafter costs 5 VP, assessed at the start of the turn. The Battalion HQ Lance must be withdrawn off the North Edge of the board east of the river on Map A and may not be returned to play once it has exited.

Last Stand of the Kearny Highlanders

HOWL OF THE NORTH WIND

Excerpted from a statement by SubCommander David MacNeil, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment, April, 3028.

"The plains beyond that river must have held a regiment or more of 'Mechs. At least that's what our detectors showed. Between the jungle and the fog, there might have been twice as many we just couldn't pick up. But I'd say a regiment's a good, safe guess.

"Those guys didn't take any chances. It wasn't enough that they outnumbered us 9 or 10 to 1...no, they decided to drop some artillery in just to make sure we wouldn't be a problem. Captain Campbell went down first, and Commander Dunbar right after him...I don't know if [Commander] Crane could have held it all together after that. I'm glad the Major sent in Captain Sinclair to take over—and not because it was me she relieved.

"We nailed the spotters who were dropping in the arty fire, and after that it wasn't so bad. Captain Campbell'd found us some real nice spots down in the river where we could take cover and get some extra cooling too. Then they started sending 'Mechs in to dig us out, and things got hot in more ways than one, I'll tell you. There were so damned many of them...and they mostly outweighed those little *Commandos* we were holding on with. That was one bad sit.

"But don't get me wrong. We'd been talking it over ever since Captain Campbell bought it, and we knew the scan. There was no way we were going to escape from all those 'Mechs, not with Voelker's boys already out of it and the one stretch of clear ground out of there blocked by those malfing hovertanks. We also knew the rest of the battalion might still have a shot at getting to the DropShip if they weren't waiting around for us. Captain Sinclair's the one who finally laid it all out for us. If we could put up a good enough fight, we'd make 'em think they'd caught everybody in their trap, and the Major could get out with the Intel. I volunteered to stay just like the rest of them.

"I don't know why the Captain chose me to trade 'Mechs. Luck of the chip, I s'pose. She wasn't going to waste her *Javelin*, not when it might help the Major. It had jump jets, it could get out...you know? So she picked me, we changed places, I joined the rest and we got the hell off that ball of clay. I won't say I'm sorry to be alive...but I wish I could've stayed and seen it through with my mates, 'stead of having to come back here and see the families and friends of the ones who didn't make it.

"We've got to go back there and show those Davions what happens when they hurt the Northwind...the Kearny. We've just got to. If HighComm doesn't do something, I tell you there'll be trouble. The Highlanders take care of their own!"
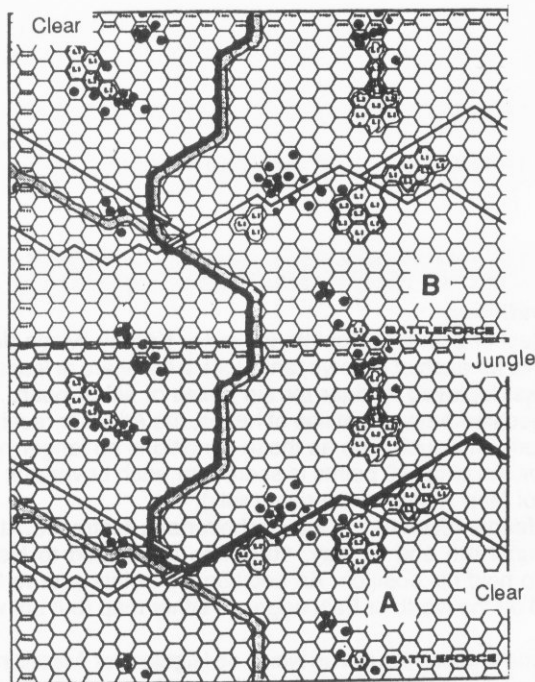
Game Set-Up

The scenario uses the *BattleForce* maps, set up as shown. *BattleTech* rules and procedures are used to play the game.

Rivers are treated normally, but the roads and bridges shown do not exist. All clear terrain hexes east of the river line and north of the Map A road line are considered to be jungle. Those south of the Map A road line are clear terrain. Other terrain types are treated as usual.

The Defender sets up first. The Attacker has the initiative.

Defender

The First Company of the 4th Battalion, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment. Additional reinforcements from other elements of the Battalion may appear as well. See the Campaign listing on page 51 for 'Mech types. All 'Mechs are in good condition except as noted later. The Defender deploys in any hexes on or east of the river.

Attacker

Mixed elements of the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Crucis Lancer regiments, including the following basic mix of 'Mechs:

- 4 *Crusaders*
- 6 *Thunderbolts*
- 6 *Shadow Hawks*
- 2 *Archers*
- 3 *Commandos*
- 3 *Locusts*

This is the maximum number and mix of Davion 'Mechs which may be present on the board at any one time. However, each time a Lancer 'Mech is lost, it is set aside and "brought back into play" (replaced by a similar BattleMech) 1D6 turns later.

Attacking 'Mechs may enter the map on the west edge of the board on any turn at least 2D6 turns after the Attacker declares his intention to launch a 'Mech attack. All 'Mechs enter play in good condition. See also the special rules for the scenario.

Victory Conditions

The Defender receives 10 points per turn of play, plus points equal to the tonnage of all enemy 'Mechs destroyed. An additional 25 points is awarded for each jump-capable 'Mech which exits the eastern edge of either mapboard before the end of the game. This includes 'Mechs which appear as reinforcements, but only if they spend at least one turn in or adjacent to a river hex without moving before they retire.

The Attacker receives 5 points for each defending BattleMech eliminated, plus points equal to the tonnage of all attacking 'Mechs located east of the river at the end of play.

As before, the game ends when no Kearny 'Mechs are left in play. While the last stand of the Highlanders offers little chance of true Kearny "victory," the side with the highest VP total is considered to have performed better tactically.

Special Rules

Kearny Reinforcements: All 'Mechs of the Recon Company (Second Company) plus some from Third Company and Battalion Headquarters will be eligible to be brought in as reinforcements. If this scenario is played as part of a campaign in sequence after "Cavalry Action," any 'Mech which withdrew from the north edge of the board may be brought in, still suffering whatever damage was inflicted in the previous game, as part of the reinforcements.

If no prior game was played, add all four Battalion HQ 'Mechs (undamaged). 'Mechs of Third Company are rolled for randomly; on a 2D6 roll of 10+ the 'Mech will appear. Another 2D6 roll is made to determine the number of points of damage suffered, which are inflicted like LRM hits.

All eligible Third Company 'Mechs *must* be brought in as reinforcements during the course of play. Others are optional. However, if Captain Campbell's 'Mech is destroyed, either Captain Sinclair *or* Major Fraser must be brought in as a reinforcement in the next game turn. That officer's 'Mech must spend one turn in or adjacent to the river (and the officer must be transferred to another 'Mech) before it may depart. If a replacement officer dies, no further replacement is needed. Beyond this, entry of reinforcements may be staggered as desired.

Withdrawal: The Defender's BattleMechs with intact jump jets may exit the map during the course of play, using the east edge (only). This may earn extra VPs, but only if the 'Mech has spent a turn immobile in or next to the river. A 'Mech which has been withdrawn can be used as a later reinforcement if desired, but VPs for successful exit are only awarded once—for the *last* time the 'Mech actually leaves the board and does not return. Attackers may exit the west edge of the map freely, reappearing on that edge as and when desired. They may not exit the east edge, nor do they ever earn VPs for moving off-map.

Prepared Positions: The steep river banks are ideal defensive positions for small 'Mechs. An *extra* DM-2 over and above all To-Hit modifiers is applied to attacks against Kearny 'Mechs in any river hex. The Davion Attackers never receive this bonus.

Off-Map Artillery and Artillery Spotting: The Davion units are supported by a Long Tom cannon located off the map. Beginning on turn 1, spotters located near the Kearny positions can attempt to call in artillery strikes on specific coordinates. Before the Kearny troops deploy at the start of the game, the Davion player should secretly select six hexes on the map as potential spotter posts. Each turn, a 1D6 roll is used to locate spotters randomly at one of those positions. Spotters may direct the fire of the Long Tom against any one target within LOS of the spotting hex. The random shifts made each turn reflect the movement of the spotters during the course of the battle.

Artillery fire may be resolved using the rules in *The Rules of Warfare*; alternatively, treat any artillery attack as totally destroying the target 'Mech on a 2D6 roll of 8+. No terrain bonuses or other modifiers are applied to this roll.

If (and *only* if) artillery has fired, spotters may be eliminated on any turn in which a Defender BattleMech ends the turn in or adjacent to the hex currently occupied by the spotters. Once the spotters are eliminated, artillery fire may not be called in again.

The only real error in the Davion response was the decision to approach the battle cautiously in case the Liao recon was strong enough to hold the Crucis Lancers. A swift attack by fast, jump-capable 'Mechs would have sufficed to break the Kearny defences and overrun the entire line, but that was precisely the kind of attack that would have failed miserably if the Liao troops had landed in force. The slow developing of pincers movements around both flanks took longer to mount, and the Davion center was largely wasted. By the time they did attack, they faced no more than a stubborn handful of Warriors set on holding to the bitter end.

The Davion center was a hodgepodge of 'Mechs from different units, organization and deployment based more on availability than tactical plans. Their assaults were, on the whole, poorly coordinated; without reliable forward observation, their artillery support proved very poor indeed. It seems likely that the Highlanders might have given the Davion force a run for its money if they had only had a trio of regiments instead of three poorly-trained companies. The defenders at the river line were some of the best Warriors in the Kearny unit, and the account their *Commandos* gave against *Thunderbolts*, *Shadow Hawks*, and other medium and heavy 'Mechs was quite impressive.

On the other hand, it is also interesting to speculate as to what the Davions might have done with better organization and more determination in their assault. Would the Highlanders have escaped at all if a line of 'Mechs had charged the river just as Colin Campbell was killed by Long Tom fire?
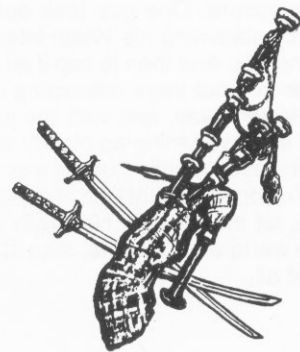
Highland Riposte

JUNGLE STRIKE

Excerpt from a BattleTechnology interview by Special Combat Correspondent Douglas Warden with Lt. Travis Hunt of the 1st Crucis Lancers.

"You want to know what it's like fighting in the jungle? It ain't like any other kind of MechWar, I'll tell you. No speed, no LOS, no way to tell where the bad guys are or how many of the malfing bastards are out there waiting for you. Jungles make city fighting look like a stroll on the beach with a good-looking sheila!

"Some Liao sneaks were checking up on our garrison on Mira, trying to stir things up before Galahad could get rolling. We got called out to take care of them. Outnumbered 'em 10 to 1 or better, and they *still* gave us a bloody nose. Nah, the battle was never in doubt, nothing like that. But when you've got *Archers* and *Crusaders* against little 45-tonners, you don't expect to lose any 'Mechs. But we did. We surely did.

"There we were, strung out in column, trying to push through the trees and all that undergrowth, when *bang!* our lead *Archer*—Kilgore's, it was—gets hit by a dozen or so of the little malfers. He stumbles back, falls down with a hole through the cockpit, and the bad guys go jumping off into the trees. We lose 'em before we can get a target lock. Meanwhile we've got fires dancing all around where their jump jets started firestorms, and nobody knows what to do next. Chaos, y'know?

"So we start beating the bushes and they hit us again. And then a third time for good measure. One guy took out a *Crusader* by slamming his *Wasp* into it under full jump jets. And then to cap it all off, they left one guy out there distracting us while the rest got away, and with the jungle so dense and everything so bloody confused we didn't even realize it until it was too late.

"You don't get that kind of mess in most places, let me tell you. Not even in cities. Jungle warfare ain't for me, man. It ain't my thing at all…"
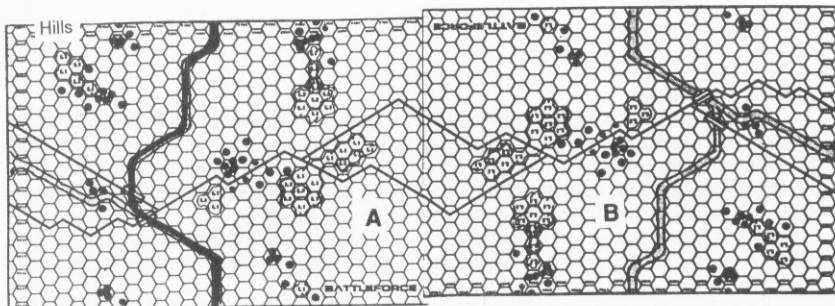
Game Set-Up

The scenario uses the *BattleForce* maps, set up as shown, with the standard *BattleTech* rules and procedures.

All hexes between the edge of the board and the river line are treated as hills; hexrows 1-4 are level-1, hexrows 5-7 level-2, and hexrows 8 and beyond level-1 once again. Jungle terrain is also present in all of these hill hexes.

Ignore all river and road hexes. Other terrain types are as given, except that Jungle is present in all hexes in addition to normal terrain types shown.

The Attacker sets up first; the Defender has the initiative.

Attacker

Mixed elements of the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Crucis Lancers, including the following:

    4 *Crusaders*
    8 *Archers*

All are in good condition. These units enter the map on the first game-turn. Before the Defender sets up, the Attacker must designate a single hex on the north side of Map A as his intended entry hex; this is revealed to the Defender.

Defender

Rearguard elements of the 4th Battalion, 2nd Kearny Highland Regiment. The Defender deploys anywhere on either map; see the Special Rules for the option of deploying secretly.

If this scenario is played as part of a campaign including the other Northwind scenarios, the Defender may select up to 10 jump-capable 'Mechs from among all the survivors of the previous fights. These enter with whatever damage they had sustained in those earlier encounters.

If this scenario is played as a stand-alone situation, deploy these forces, all in good condition:

    1 *Vindicator* (Major Fraser)
    1 *Javelin* (SubCommander MacNeil, ex-Sinclair)
    1 *Panther* (SubCommander Ling)
    2 *Wasps* (SubCommanders Armstrong and Blake)
    2 *Stingers* (SubCommanders MacDougall and Lovat)

Victory Conditions

The Defender gets points equal to the tonnage of all attacking 'Mechs destroyed in combat, plus 10 points per turn of play.

The Attacker gets points equal to twice the tonnage of destroyed Kearny 'Mechs, plus points equal to the tonnage of his own 'Mechs exited from the east edge of Map B prior to the end of the game.

Play ends 10 turns after any turn on which the Defender announces a desire to end the fight (the 10 turns represent the time between ordering the DropShip to leave and its actual departure). All Defender 'Mechs still on either mapboard at the end of that 10-turn period are considered destroyed for Victory Point purposes.

If the Defender has a higher point total, his DropShip and all escaped 'Mechs are successful in leaving Mira. If the Attacker has the higher total, the DropShip is caught during departure and destroyed, and none of the Kearny Highlanders escape. The Davion victory in this case would be overwhelming.

Special Rules

Attacker Movement Restrictions: The Attacker must bring all units onto the board in a single column, moving directly down the chosen hexrow until either a) they are fired on, or b) all 12 'Mechs are on the map. Thereafter they may maneuver freely.

No Crucis Lancer BattleMech may move to Map B while enemies remain on Map A. No Lancer 'Mech may leave Map B to earn VPs while enemies remain on Map B. If conditions change after 'Mechs have started to cross one of these boundary lines (Kearny 'Mechs return to Map A after Davion units are already on Map B, for instance) penalties to Attacker movement are not re-imposed.

Starting Positions: Kearny 'Mechs may treat the *first* hexes in which they are deployed as water hexes for purposes of heat (only). In the battle, they chose marshy spots for their initial deployment. Once they leave the original deployment hexes, they lose this benefit, even if they subsequently re-enter the hex.

Withdrawal: Kearny 'Mechs may exit the east edge of the map at any time, but cannot later re-enter. They are considered to be boarding the DropShip *Sun Tzu*.

Hidden Deployment/Movement (Optional): If the players agree, Kearny 'Mechs can be initially deployed in secret hexes. When a Davion 'Mech moves adjacent, the Kearny unit is revealed. Moving out of sight (generally, in the jungle, 2+ hexes away) allows the Kearny 'Mech to hide once more. All hidden movement is performed with notations of positions on a piece of scratch paper.

The third Davion force attempting to snare Fraser's unit faced the worst terrain of all, but ironically was in the best position to foil the Kearny withdrawal. Several company-sized columns of *Archers*, *Crusaders*, and other large 'Mechs were dispatched to circle through the dense jungle of the northern sector and set up in Fraser's rear, with LRM racks ready to hammer refugees into submission. They didn't realize that they were moving towards the evac site chosen by Fraser...or that the last Kearny stragglers, including the Battalion Commander himself, were waiting to slow down their columns and give the rest of the fugitives time to board their DropShip.

Fraser's attack on the Davion column may have been rash, but it demonstrated a brilliant grasp of the possibilities of 'Mech operation in guerrilla-style jungle warfare. Though the action cost the Highlanders 'Mechs and time they could ill afford, it also threw the Davion forces into enough confusion to allow Fraser to embark. The DropShip escaped.

Out of a full battalion, Fraser had suffered 60% losses to obtain information the Liao High Command later chose to disregard. It had been one of the most disastrous raids in the history of warfare on the Liao frontier. Through it all, though, the Northwind Highlanders had shown their mettle, facing their fate with bravery, determination, and fighting skill.
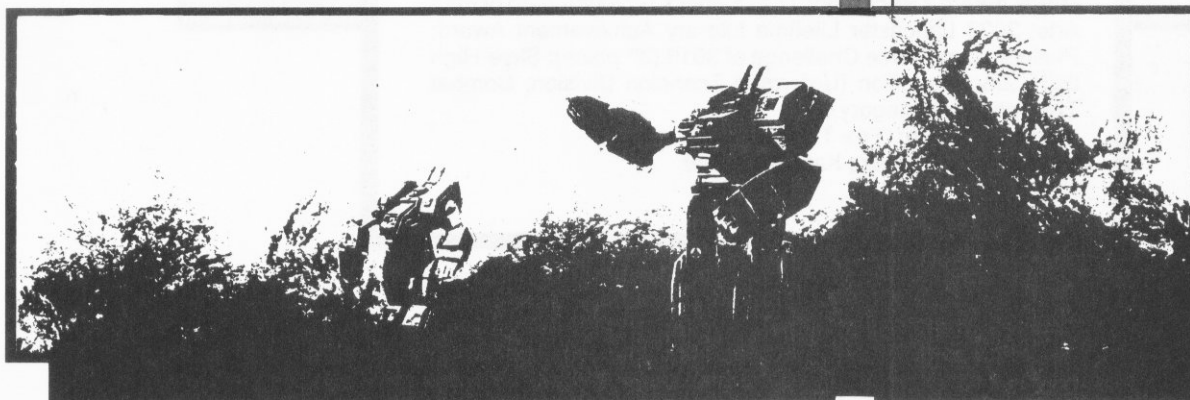
More Than Warriors

Fox-Twilight-Fire
by Alexander Conorrbin

peering through the twilight highlights
a low backdrop sun glistening through
scorching tears of liquified plasma
the *Foxfire* gushes forth a stream of heat
and all before it turns to steam and smoke
fire and flame   inferno and ash

"Another mission complete," he radios in
"Good job, *Foxfire*-2," she answers promptly
anonymous voices that dance back and forth
while the flames lick at the foot of the forest

the light from the fired salvo intensifies as
the light from the sun fades from view

he returns home confident he can go back tomorrow
and pick up where he left off
if anything should remain

Warrior-Poet in Profile

Name: Alexander Conorrbin
Rank: MechWarrior
Unit: 3rd Lyran Guard Regiment, House Steiner
Assignment: Court Duty, Tharkad, The Lyran Commonwealth
BattleMech: FXR-4R *Foxfire, The Will-'o-the-Whisper*
Nickname: "Laureate of Lancaster"
Favorite Poetic Forms and Styles: villanelles; free verse
Major Awards Received: The Duchess Steiner Award of Fine Arts; 3023 Lancaster Lifetime Literary Achievement Award; Platinum Lyre Verse Challenge of 3019 (3rd place); Skye-High 3011 Zinc Medallion (Unformed Scansion Division, Combat Thematic Subcategory).
Featured Poem: "Fox-Twilight-Fire"
Dedication: Duchess Katrina Steiner

The Kearny Lament

by David MacNeil

I've heard the groaning, sob - bing and moaning,

People here moaning through night and through day;

Heard them all cry – ing, mourning and sigh – ing, For

men o' the Kearny who've fought their last fray.
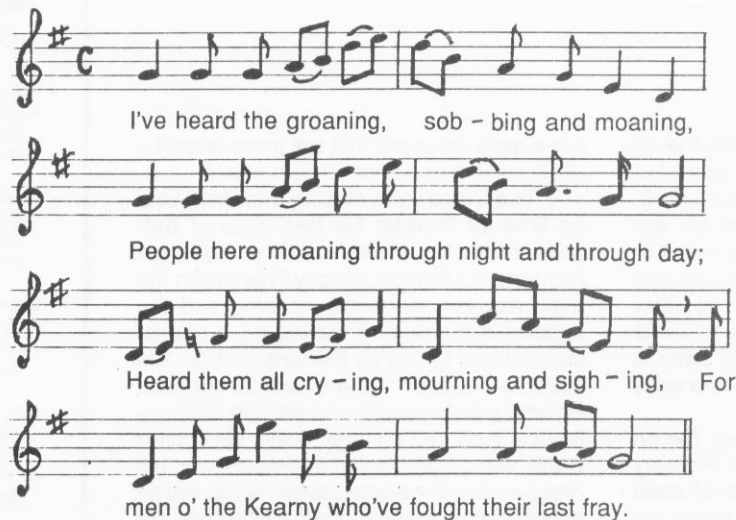
In DropShips ringing with Kearny singing,
To Mira singing they journeyed away;
With bagpipes playing, none there was saying,
That men o' the Kearny would fight their last fray.

To jungles steaming, with lush life teeming,
In swamps a-teeming they dropped on on that day;
BattleMechs striding, skulking and hiding,
The men o' the Kearny crept through the soft clay.

High Command doubting, ordered the scouting,
Sent them in scouting for foes on the way;
Commandos stalking, listening, walking,
The men o' the Kearny moved out to obey.

But foes were keeping watch o'er their creeping,
Kearny troops creeping through mud and soft clay;
Davions striking, 'Mechs all were firing,
On men o' the Kearny from ambush that day.

Under that mauling the Northwind was howling,
Highlanders howling as Death ruled the day;
Lasers came flashing, explosions crashing,
As men o' the Kearny stood fast in the fray.

DropShips came landing, rearguard was standing,
BattleMechs standing to hold foes at bay;
Kearny men fleeing, all of them seeing,
The men o' the Kearny could not win that day.

Two companies holding, as battle unfolding,
Pincers unfolding in savage array;
The time they were buying while DropShips went flying,
Won some o' the Kearny their lives on that day.

Kearnys' last fighting, flame and bright lightning,
Warriors' lightning flashed through the last fray;
'Mechs fell there smoking, pilots all choking,
But men o' the Kearny stood fast to obey.

After their scouting, Generals doubting,
Held to their doubting and thus threw away,
Hopes of the dying, so many lying,
Lost men o' the Kearny who fell on that day.

Now hear the groaning, sobbing and moaning,
Highlanders moaning through night and through day;
Join in the crying, mourning and sighing,
For men o' the Kearny who've fought their last fray.

One of a handful of survivors of the ill-fated Miran Recon Expedition, MechWarrior David MacNeil, put his feelings of anguish over the wasted lives and lost opportunities of the disastrous mission into a bitter song. Using the tune of the mournful Scots ballad, "The Flowers of the Forest," MacNeil's "The Kearny Lament" reflects the depth of feeling one Warrior could reveal for the needless deaths of others.

Letters to the Editor

Dear BattleTechnology:

I am a MechTech serving with the 3rd Lyran Guard stationed on Baxter as part of the Commonwealth's Thor maneuvers. Baxter, you understand, is right on the Kurita frontier, well within spitting range of the Draco strongholds of New Wessex and Vega. While our maneuvers can't possibly be considered a threat to the snakes, it was inevitable, I suppose, that they'd send a sneak force in to scope out what were up to on Baxter.

The Dracs set down a heavy Recon Force a day's march from our Primary Deployment Area under a storm of chaff and electronic jamming. Our CO threw out scouts towards the enemy with a QRT [Ed.—Quick Response Team] of heavies to back them up. We stopped them, though it was a near thing for a while. My own number one 'Mech is a *Commando*, piloted by MechWarrior Ronnie Frank, and he found out the hard way that it's not wise for a 25-ton COM-2D to tangle with a *Dragon*. He made it back to base, all right, but his left leg prime actuators were shot to hell, and his hydraulic suspension had been pounded into scrap by a near-miss from an Imperator-A. Those could be replaced from stores fast enough, of course. The real problem was the floating V3-D gasket support in the primary knee support rod interface. An AC shell had pulverized Ronnie's V3-D, and

our supply sergeant told me there wasn't a V3-D to be had within 10 light years.

The Dracs were closing and there was no time for finesse. My last issue of BattleTechnology was close at hand. Folding it in quarters, I found it exactly fit between the main actuator assembly housing and the support rod interface, acting as a gasket support and taking up the tension from the Number 2 support rod. Inside of 20 minutes, Ronnie's *Commando* was back in action—limping a bit, but combat ready. He scored 2 kills and an assist that afternoon, and his charge against a Kurita *Javelin* scattered an enemy recon lance and forced the Dracs to hesitate at a critical moment. "For want of a nail, the battle was lost" runs the old saying. Well, it's entirely possible that the Battle of Tyson's Ridge was won because of your magazine.

Many thanks,

Vernon C. Spanger, MechTech Sgt./1st

PS—Could you please send me another copy of BattleTechnology Issue 0202? My original copy is now somewhat the worse for wear.

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5201

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