Avalon Hill's
IDF

Published in 1993 · Designed by *James Day*

reviewed by **Lonnie Barnett**

IDF (Israeli Defense Force) is the second game in Avalon Hill's modern warfare series of games. The first in the series is *MBT* (Main Battle Tank). *IDF* concentrates on forces that fought (and may fight again) in the Middle East, between 1967 and the near future. There are similarities to *Squad Leader*, also by Avalon Hill, but this game reminds me more of the *Panzer* series of games, now out of print, by Yaquinto Publications.

First, a few words about the components of the game. Hexes are approximately one hundred meters and turns represent one to five minutes. Counters represent individual weapons or vehicles and squad-sized units. There are four geomorphic map boards (as in *Squad Leader*) with primarily desert terrain, although there are roads, trails, scrub, and the occasional village. The maps tend to be relatively open. The counters themselves contain the unit outline, unit type (i.e. M60-A1), and an identification number. There are lots of information counters, including:

- Spotted,
- Move,
- Fire,
- Wreck and…
- Suppressed.

Another important component of the game are data cards - more about these later. When first opening the game, the rule book, at sixty-four pages, seems rather large. Upon inspection, it is well laid out with the basic rules covered in six pages, advanced rules covering another eleven pages, and optional rules adding another fifteen pages. The remainder of the rule book is organization, scenarios, and a few advertisements.

The rules use a programmed approach similar to *Squad Leader*. The basic rules introduce the sequence of play. This is broken into:

- Initiative Phase
- Command Phase
- Fire Phase
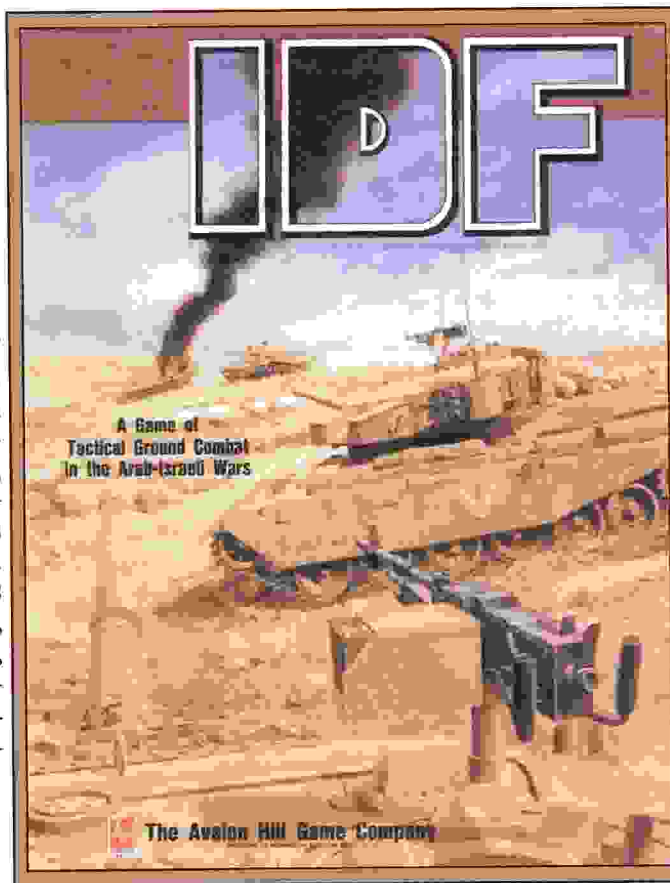- Movement Phase
- Adjustment Phase

During the Initiative Phase, the players determine who performs actions in what order for that turn. It is usually better to do your actions second, after seeing what your opponent is doing. The Command Phase consists of determining which enemy units are spotted and issuing orders to your units. Orders include:

- Fire anti-tank missiles
- Fire
- Fire/Move (fire first then move half movement)
- Move
- Overwatch

Only units that can spot enemy units may be given fire orders of any kind. Overwatch allows fire at moving or firing units (which may trigger fire at the overwatching unit by enemy units with overwatch orders).

During the Fire Phase, direct fire is conducted and anti-tank missiles are launched. All fire during this phase is considered simultaneous.

During the Movement Phase, all movement is conducted and at the end of the phase anti-tank missile hits are resolved. Of course this leads to the realistic tactic of moving into hiding when a missile has
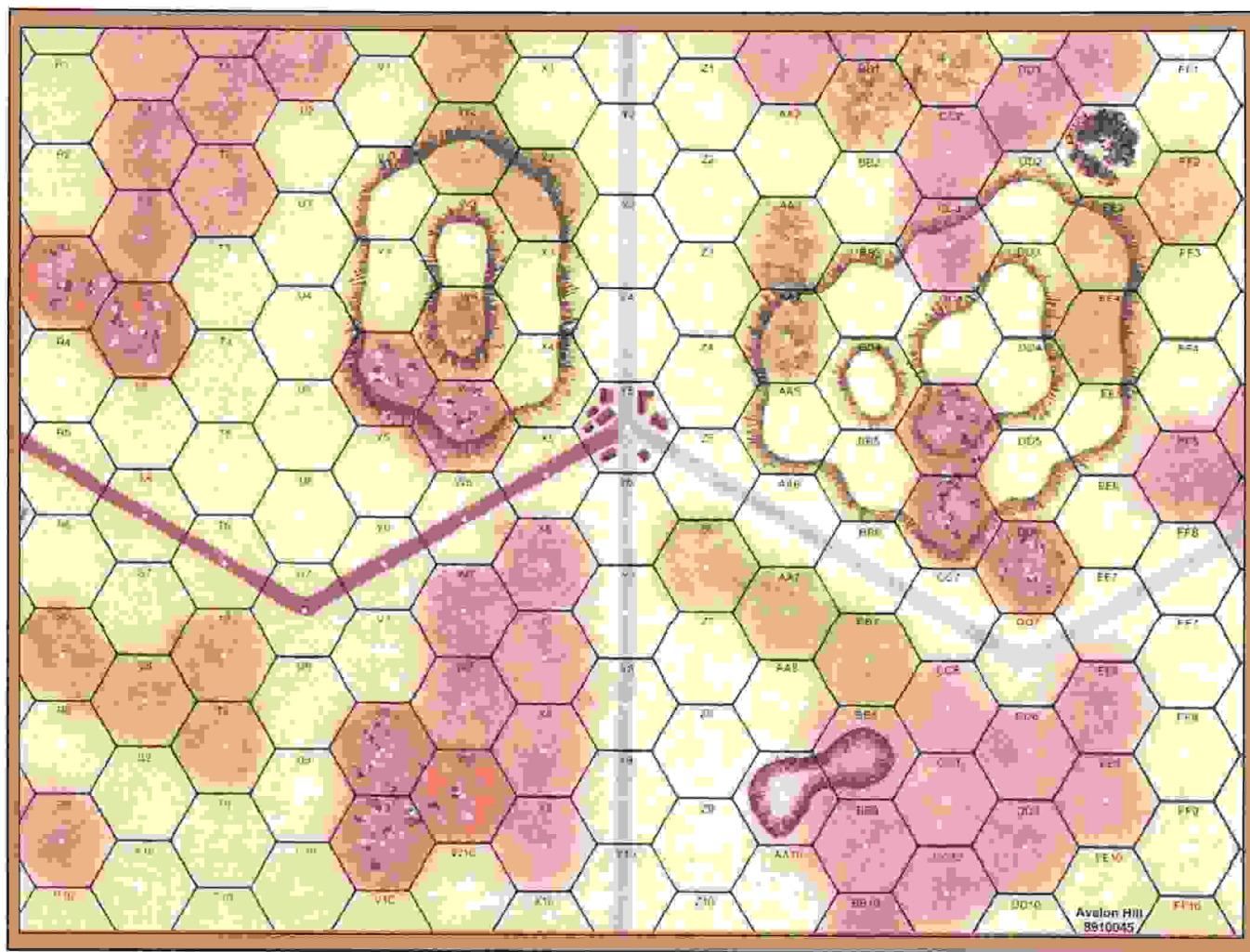
been fired at you, assuming Move orders.

During the Adjustment Phase, many information counters are updated, and units are allowed to pivot or change turret facings. The basic game is limited to vehicles.

The most critical game components are the data cards, which exist for each type of unit. They contain hit probabilities for all weapons available to the unit, movement rates and terrain movement costs, and armor values for various angles of hits. This is where the game gets its similarity to *Panzer* - it uses exactly the same system. The typical fire sequence consists of attempting to spot the units (seldom is spotting guaranteed), firing at a specific unit (rolling to hit), then rolling to determine the penetration of the armor of the target. While a lot of fun for detail hounds, it can subject a player, with so much to track, to information overload.

Another problem I see with the system is the large number of informational counters that begin to clutter the map. There seem to be counters for every conceivable action a unit takes. This is not a large

problem, since the counter density for the scenarios tend to be very low. For the basic game each side has only three vehicles. But larger scenarios can be time consuming.

The outstanding point of the game is its attention to detail. The advanced rules add leg units, missile weapons, differentiating armor piercing and general purpose fire effects, terrain defensive values (modifiers to hit or penetrate depending on terrain and target unit), smoke, close assault, hand-to-hand combat, and transport. Needless to say, this is not a comprehensive list. The optional rules add artillery and area effect weapons (including napalm and cluster bombs), aircraft (ranging from fighter-bombers to helicopters), and command and control.

The game does give a feel for modern combat. As a former cavalry scout, I can attest to the how *IDF* upholds the validity of the cavalry scout laws. For those not familiar with them, they are:

- What can be seen, can be hit;
- What can be hit, can be killed;

IDF Counters   Sheet One   Front   8910027/28

- Don't be seen.

The basic game forces close attention to giving your unit appropriate orders. As soon as the enemy has been engaged, some of your units must be given overwatch orders or you may find yourself unable to fire as his units spot and destroy your units quickly. As you move on to the advanced game, you get a feel for the vulnerability of vehicles to legged units, with their attendant light anti-tank weapons. And with the optional rules you add the king of the modern battle field: Air support.

As for recommending this game, if you are looking for a quick look at modern warfare you should look somewhere else - possibly Game Designers' Workshop's *First Battle* series. But if you are seeking an in-depth, small-unit approach to the modern battlefield, *IDF* may be what you are looking for.