Hello there all, personally I thoroughly enjoyed issue 2 of Firepower but there was one thing in it which sparked something of an…..erm…debate between myself and Warwick.

Smoke rules

Oh yes, you probably couldn't guess it but smoke rules are a subject of great passion for me, mainly because they annoy me endlessly. I think I can trace my antipathy to smoke back to the old Adeptus Titanicus days when I ran into a player who used large numbers of smoke missiles to hide his entire force and then sallied out with a single Titan which proceeded to use the Relay upgrade to direct a swarm of Vortex missiles onto my guys. I won't go into the fact he didn't even bother having arms on his Titans ("why bother, they cost points"), the thing that really galled me was that despite my Titans being covered in sensors, augurs, active and passive ranging and all the rest of it, a few square metres of particulate matter was apparently as impenetrable to them as a solid concrete wall.

Zip forward to 2nd edition 40K, blind grenades et al. Players habitually used these not to cover a storming attacks across open ground, but to create a little bunker on their side of the table with all their units hiding behind it on overwatch. The first unit foolish enough to move through the blind clouds gets blasted. Similar tactic, same problem. In both cases the enemies' tactic involved not superior skill or strategy but basically boring you to death until you get impatient enough to charge onto their guns.

You'll note that every game system I've had a hand in since has been singularly lacking any rules for smoke, blind or anything similar. Now this isn't because I deny the existence of such things but because I know such things don't get used in any sort of realistic fashion. This is usually because the games designer (yes I mean me too) hasn't recreated what their effects truly are, usually going for the cop-out approach of it blocking line of fire, maybe with some vague rules about it drifting around.

Utter rubbish, smoke may block line of sight, briefly and unpredictably, but it sure as hell doesn't stop the enemy firing through it. I'm also led to understand that in military circles the presence of smoke is usually taken as a sign of enemy activity and so artillery rounds and heavy weapons fire are actually directed into it to prevent such naughtiness. Add to this the ability of most decently equipped troops to see (at least partially) through smoke and it starts to look a lot less of an ultimate weapon and more of an invitation to a kicking. To summarise my hatred of smoke I have not one but two reasons:

1] It is generally treated in an unrealistically effective fashion.
2] Its use tends to make for boring, static games.

So what about a solution then? Well the most straightforward approach is to not use it at all (my personal favourite). No smoke, no problem. However, for those sticklers that insist on it I think its vital not to overrate it. In Epic terms firing through smoke should give you a right column shift, in 40k terms a cover save and so forth, charge points for its use and potentially include rules for running out the damned stuff (possibly even limit to a one-use per battle approach), history is littered with times when smoke barrages failed due to high winds or lacks of smoke-shells.

Well that's all folks, Andy-rant over and out. Enjoy issue 3 of Firepower.

AndyC