4. WARFARE IN THE LATE STELLAR AGE

Poised on the brink of a new age, the peoples of the galaxy indulged in the last cataclysm their civilizations would experience. A long period of expansion had created highly trained and capable military forces, which had conquered and kept the peace on a myriad of worlds. As the stellar nations began to clash over their colony worlds their military forces increased in size and became more heavily armed.

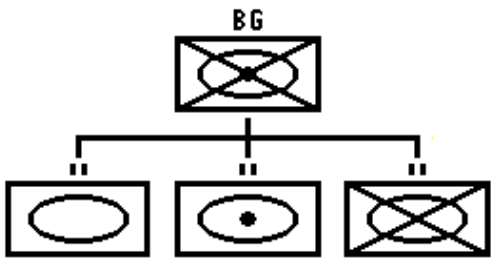
Interstellar warfare reached its peak in the massive conflicts made possible by coalition warfare. Distrusting each other, the huge stellar nations came to form defensive alliances that heightened rather than reduced tensions. By the time the alliances began to form, the stellar nations could field massive armies fully equipped with infantry, armor, artillery and air support. When war ultimately broke out it spread through the alliance network to involve all of the stellar nations.

War in transition

The art of war in the Late Stellar Age was in transition. The massive destructiveness of weaponry had not yet been countered by significant advancements in new defensive measures or technology. The usual recourse to entrenchments and fieldworks was made, but tactical expedients were also required to ensure the survivability of forces in the field. Due to the deadly nature of technological warfare, most combat missions emphasized decentralized small unit actions by subordinate elements of standard infantry, armored and support battalions. Success depended primarily on skilled junior officers and self-reliant soldiers. The battlegroup organization that evolved was another step in the historical trend toward dispersion on the battlefield, and provided both flexibility and survivability to the stellar armies.

Battlegroups

Battlegroups are basically combined arms forces composed of infantry, armor and artillery. Each battlegroup acts much like a roving band. It is responsible for an assigned sector and attempts to control it through firepower and maneuver. When a sector has been cleared of enemy forces, a battlegroup will be ordered to advance and attempt to penetrate a new sector. A line of linked sectors is the closest comparison to the continuous fronts of other eras of warfare.



A battlegroup is composed of two companies of armored vehicles and one company of armored infantry.

One company of armored vehicles usually consists of tanks, while the other is usually equipped with a mix of destroyers, artillery carriages, personnel carriers and other support vehicles. In the major stellar nations, the armored infantry is usually equipped with powered armor.

The companies do not operate independently, but are split into their component platoons and reorganized as combined arms forces for battle.

A battlegroup is generally equivalent to a mechanized battalion. It is usually composed of a company of infantry (roughly one hundred soldiers) supported by two companies of armored vehicles (usually ten vehicles each). The armored vehicles are rarely all of the same type. In fact, great effort is made to field diverse vehicle types so that the battlegroup has a complete combined arms team of antitank, antiaircraft, artillery and automatic weapons. The weapons are mounted on an assortment of tanks, reconnaissance vehicles, armored personnel carriers and self-propelled artillery vehicles.

Long-range artillery support may be provided by the heavy guns located at friendly

bases or by small, mobile batteries that maneuver behind the line of battlegroups. Some battlegroups have helicopters attached to them. Higher headquarters provides heavier air support. It is based in facilities on orbiting platforms or starships, or on the planetary surface in concealed and heavily fortified bases.

Battle

In battle it is rare for more than one-third of a battlegroup to be committed to action. Greater concentration of forces is suicidal in the face of spy satellites and reconnaissance drones which can provide targeting information to orbiting warships armed with massive batteries of energy weapons and missiles. Any concentration of forces also attracts the firepower of conventional artillery, and even nuclear weapons on those planets where their use is not prohibited. Thus, relatively small forces often decide battles and the possession of territory.

Battles are usually meeting engagements. Opposing forces rarely stay in contact for very long or hold positions for prolonged periods when they are not in contact. In addition to considerations of survival, another reason to break contact is to make resupply by shuttles possible without enemy interference.

Armored vehicles

Despite their awesome appearance and fearsome array of weapons, armored vehicles have never been invulnerable. From the earliest period of armored warfare, a determined artillery crew or an individual with a grenade or firebomb could stop a tank. Nevertheless, in the absence of special purpose antitank weapons and tactics, armored vehicles proved to be weapons of decision in land warfare in their first few decades.

The aura of armored vehicles began to fade when portable antitank missiles and guided antitank missiles were introduced, and the situation worsened when infantry began to carry energy weapons such as laser and bolt rifles. Now many of the standard weapons of the infantry were capable of penetrating the armor of a main battle tank.

Improved armors, damage control systems, compartmentalization and the provision of multiple backup systems ensured the survival of tanks and other armored vehicles on the battlefield. However, survival was purchased at the price of size.

The addition of damage control systems and compartmentalization required much more space, as did the provision of multiple backup systems. The larger and more powerful weapons developed to defeat the new types of armor required larger chassis and more massive powerplants to move them. Centuries of engineering culminated in the development of powerplants capable of moving vast armored masses.

All of these factors led to a steady increase in the size of armored vehicles. With the introduction of improved personal armors, the need to make vehicle interiors large enough for armored crewmen to move freely within them also contributed to the massive growth of armored vehicles.

Giganticism

The result was a trend toward giganticism, with tanks reaching unprecedented sizes. One heavy tank, the **Behemoth** of the Zokar Hegemony, was 50 feet long, 28 feet wide, 23 feet high and weighed 870 tons. This size was by no means unusual. Even larger vehicles were developed to perform assault landings on hostile planets. Despite the costs of developing and fielding these huge mechanical monsters, no stellar nation could fail to produce and deploy them in its armies.

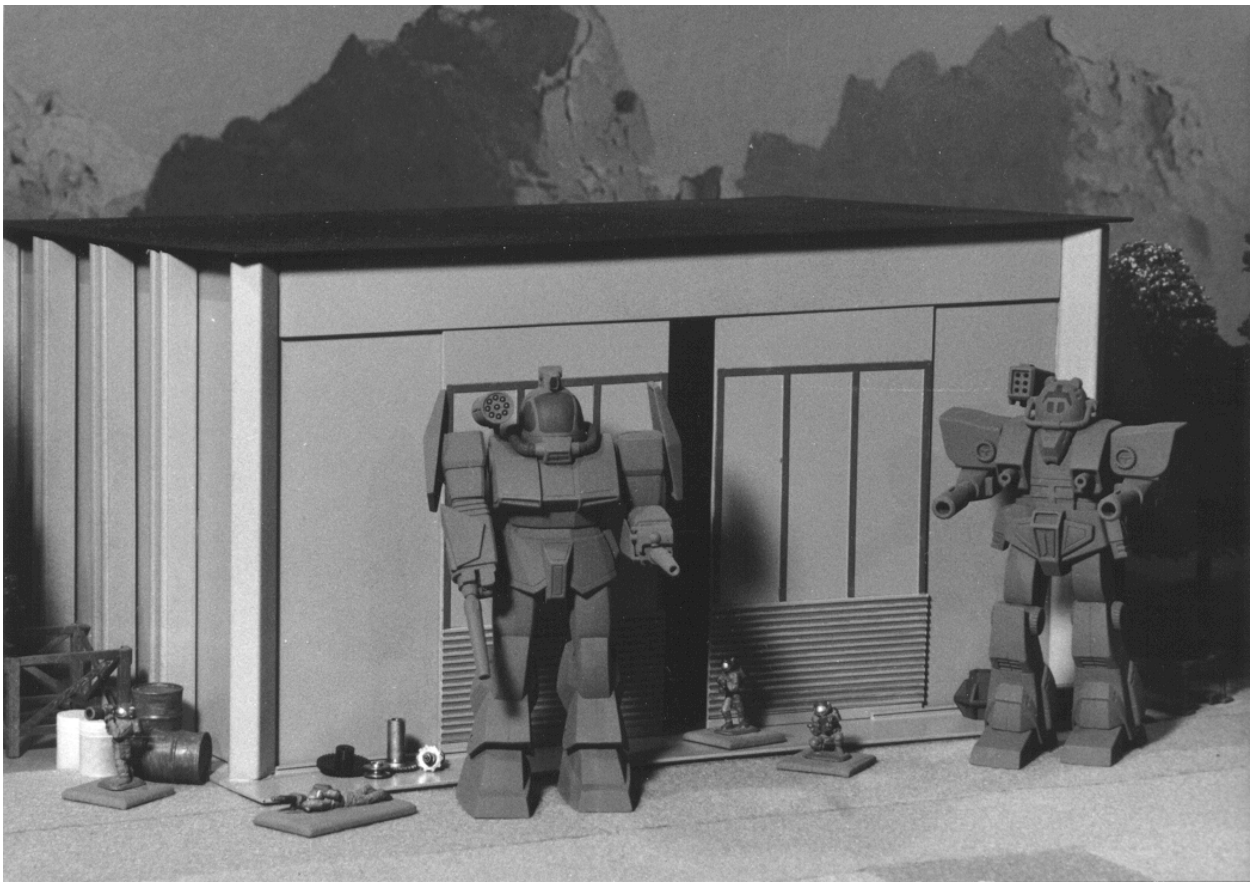
Warbirds

While land vehicles were expanding in size, many aircraft types, particularly short-range fighters and interceptors, were becoming smaller. This was due mainly to the installation of small grav devices in aircraft. This technology

significantly enhanced lift and reduced the size of the engines needed in aircraft. The reduced need for wing area to provide lift allowed many aircraft to be designed with smaller wings making them more maneuverable.

The refinement of variable-load grav devices also significantly impacted on aircraft design by removing the G-forces that had historically reduced pilot performance and efficiency. By countering the G-force effects of high speed turns, the variable-load grav devices created a pilot environment with very little physical stress. At the same time the increased use of remote-controlled and pilotless aircraft resulted in vehicles that completely did away with the need for crew space.

The result of all these changes was the creation of small and highly maneuverable jet fighters and interceptors. Ground attack aircraft still tended to be more robust because of their need to serve as platforms for heavy payloads of bombs and missiles.



Imperator G-59 heavy battledrone and *Liberator* G-82 medium battledrone of the Gavilan Coalition supported by Rangers of the 37th Paralthan Composite Regiment.