

The Refused Flank

Oftentimes in tactics discussions, the concept of the Refused Flank is mentioned. It is one of the more common and basic tactics in 40k and in Warhammer, and many people figure it out on their own. Still, there are some fine points and variations which may not immediately be obvious, and it never hurts to cover the basics while we're at it. This article is written with 40k specifically in mind, but the basic concepts apply to any game with similar deployment, including, of course, Warhammer. This article was originally written during 3rd edition, as a response to a thread in the Dakka Dakka tactics forum which started after a Portent tactics article, in which the author touched on the Refused Flank, referring to it as Uneven Deployment.

The basic idea of the Refused Flank is to sucker your opponent into deploying spread out over a wide front, while deploying most of your own forces concentrated on one side of the table (one flank of his force), thus "refusing" the other side.

While your opponent's farther units are being forced to move to a position where they can reach your army, your entire force is concentrated locally in one area. Thus you are able to outfight the immediately-available enemy with superior force. If done well, the overwhelmed flank of the enemy usually is not able to do excessive damage to your army, leaving it in good shape to take on the rest of his army piecemeal as it comes into reach.

There are several tools available to the cunning player to aid in achieving this effect.

1. Delayed commitment

When starting to deploy, place your first unit (or couple of units) centrally. Watch for your opponent to place a unit on one flank. Again, place centrally. If your opponent places multiple units to the same flank, deploy your next unit to the opposite flank. Do not allow your one unit on a given flank to face several of your opponent's, unless it is a deliberate sacrifice (see 2, below). Ideally, when your opponent sees you begin to commit to the opposite flank, he will place some of his units there as well. You respond by placing ALL of your units on your chosen flank, except perhaps for a couple of cheap and/or fast ones (see below).

2. Cheap unit fake-out

If your opponent places a large Devastator squad on one flank, and you deploy a Whirlwind opposite it, you have both deployed the same number of units, but your opponent has committed more points. If you continue by placing the rest of your army towards the other end of the table, even if he deploys the rest of his army at that other end, you will out-point him locally. Your (for example) 1425pt force (1500 minus the Whirlwind) will be fighting his 1300pt force (1500 minus the Devastators). This can be continued with multiple units that are relatively inexpensive, such as a single-weapon Eldar Support Battery or Tau Broadside, or a small Marine Scout squad which is not infiltrating, for additional effect. In many cases the cheap units you deploy here are going to die badly, heroically sacrificed for the cause. Still, if you can deploy them in such a fashion that they can take one move and hide completely, they may not die. Whirlwinds, Griffons, and other barrage weapons are particularly nice for this, as your opponent already expects to see them deployed hidden behind terrain, and they may have sufficient range to affect the "real" battle on the flank without moving far (or at all).

3. Fast unit fake-out

Vehicles, as a rule, are faster than foot troops. Some vehicles (Fast ones, of course) are MUCH faster. If the units you deploy initially are faster than the units your opponent has deployed opposite them, you can choose to move them laterally in the first turn or two, avoiding the enemy rather than engaging them, and moving them to join up with the main body of your force faster than your opponent's units can do so. I particularly like such units as Falcons and Ravagers for this. Expensive, deadly tanks, your opponent feels good about placing similarly expensive and deadly units to oppose them. Especially when you go ahead and put a nasty squad like Fire Dragons in the Falcon. On turn 1 these units then zip 24" towards the flank where the majority of your force already is, leaving the enemy units in their dust and out of position.

4. Terrain read

Sometimes it's obvious that a given piece of terrain is well-suited for a given unit of your opponent's. Maybe it's a building, hill, or bunker that makes a good firing position for a shooty squad. Maybe it's a fortification like GW makes that's specifically sized to fit a Leman Russ in. If a piece of terrain like this can be found on one side of the board, you have a good idea where your opponent is likely to deploy the matching unit. If you win the roll to choose table edge, and both edges have such terrain, but one of them has it centrally located and the other has it on a flank, naturally make sure your opponent has the side with the flank position.

5. Many-unit army list

The simplest way to try to ensure that you get to "out deploy" your opponent in this fashion is simply to have more units to deploy than he does, thus being able to place some of your units after his entire army is down. If you take three Heavy Support choices and six Troop choices, you will very likely see where every Rhino in your opponent's Space Wolf army is going before you even get around to deploying your Elites. Some armies are obviously better-suited for this than others. Cheap units make the difference.

All of these techniques, naturally, can and should be combined. And of course, they're not foolproof. Sometimes a canny opponent will realize what your intentions are and mirror your deployment move for move, thus resulting in one of three situations:

A. Concentrated forces

If you place most or all of your army on one half of the table, and your opponent places his on the same half, the game will be a bloody one. This can be a good situation if you have an assault army, or a bad one if you have a shooty army. It's certainly not an impossible situation for a shooty army to win in, but it does require some nerve and possibly a willingness to retreat units down the length of the board a bit.

B. Double Refused Flank

Sometimes you both will refuse opposite flanks, thus winding up with armies that are far away from each other. This can be a nightmare for an assaulty army, as a more shooty opponent will try to turn the axis of the game so that it is played down the length of the table instead of across its width, thus giving him more time to shoot. These can be very amusing games when played between two shooty or mixed armies, especially in missions requiring movement, like Recon, Cleanse, or Across Enemy Lines. The two armies tend to move in a Yin-Yang swirling motion towards each other's deployment zones, with faster elements (especially tank-busting ones) darting into striking range in hopes of blasting an expensive tank or critical transport so as to do some useful damage.

C. Even spread

Sometimes you come to an understanding with your opponent during deployment that you are both going to try to prevent the other getting the Refused Flank, but that neither of you wants to play scenarios A or B above. Thus you start deploying outward in a more traditional battle-line formation. Still, with Fast or Cheap units (see 2 and 3 above) on one flank, you may be able to pull out some semblance of a Refused Flank even in what looks like a relatively even deployment. Especially if combined with 5, above.

Anyway, I hope this summary is useful. Any questions can reach me most directly via private message on the Dakka Dakka forums, where I moderate under the handle of Mannahnin. Or you can always start a tactics thread.

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