

The Third Battle of Jijiga (Climax of the Ogaden War) Ethiopia, 28th February 1978

*By R Mark Davies
(Based on a scenario by Bruce Rea Taylor)*

Historical Background

In September 1974, the long-reigning Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Sellassie, was overthrown by a Soviet-backed communist insurrection led by a faction known as the 'Derg' (also spelled 'Dergue', which translates roughly as 'Committee'). This brought the Horn of Africa totally within the Soviet sphere of influence, as Somalia, under the dictatorship of Siad Barre, was already a firm Soviet client state.

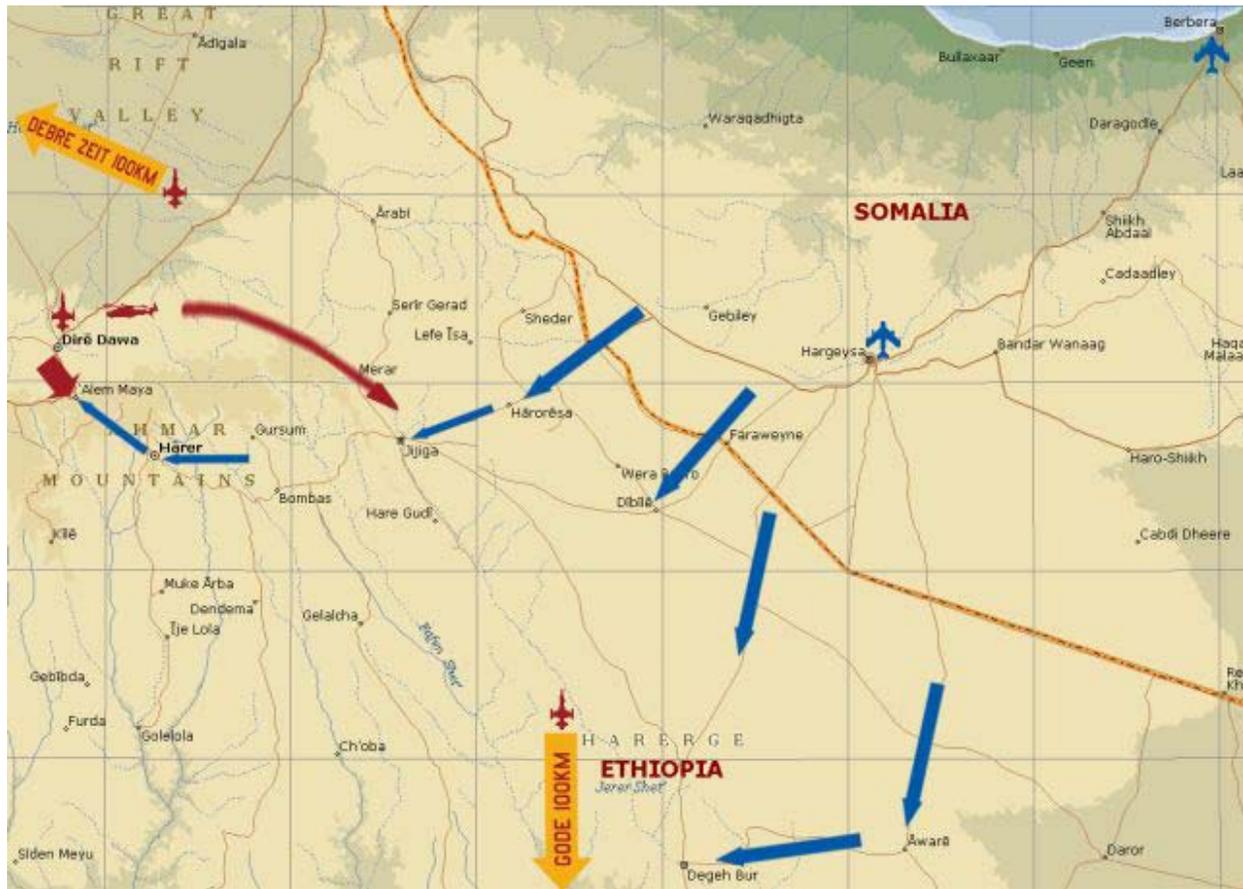
However, the communist euphoria in Ethiopia was short-lived, as vicious internecine strife erupted within the Derg, with various sub-factions vying for control of the leadership. This period of chaos and lack of strong central control from Addis Abbaba emboldened several ethnic independence movements to mount rebellions – mainly within the provinces of Tigray, Eritrea and Ogaden. In the ethnically-Somali Ogaden region, the most highly active of these was the West Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which began an active insurrection against the Derg in 1975. The WSLF started receiving major military aid from Siad Barre's Somalia in 1976.

The Derg's internal squabbles finally ended in 1977, when the movement finally crystallised behind the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, who was appointed as Head of State on 11th February of that year. Mengistu immediately grasped the Ogaden problem by the horns, demanding that Somalia cease its direct military backing for the WSLF. Siad Barre, somewhat predictably, flatly denied that the Somali National Army (SNA) had anything to do with the WSLF, though he did concede that 'volunteers' had left the SNA in order to fight with the WSLF.

At this time, the military balance in the Horn of Africa was delicate. Derg forces significantly outnumbered the SNA on paper (47,000 compared to 35,000), but much of it was tied down fighting the various ethnic insurrections and in terms of materiel it was vastly inferior to the SNA, which had been supplied and trained by the USSR since the 1960s. For example, the SNA had three times the tank and artillery strength of the Derg and the Somali Air Force's MiG-21s outnumbered and outclassed the handful of Ethiopian Northrop F-5A 'Freedom Fighters'.

The crisis finally came to a head on 13th July 1977, when Siad Barre gave up his pretence of neutrality. The SNA and SNA-equipped 'regular' WSLF units invaded the Ogaden from Somalia, rapidly overrunning some 60% of the region, including the city of Gode. However, there were some significant reverses for the heavily-mechanised SNA forces – an SNA armoured brigade was badly defeated at Jijiga and another SNA force was repulsed at Dire Dawa with heavy losses. In the skies, the Somali MiG-21s were outclassed by the superbly-handled Ethiopian F5s.

A second assault was launched on Jijiga in September, but this time the Ethiopian regulars retreated precipitately, back through the strategic Marda Pass to the city of Harar. The local militia meanwhile, made a gallant stand at Jijiga, but were soon overrun by the Somali offensive. Buoyed up by their success, the WSLF/SNA forces moved on through the undefended Marda Pass to their goal at Harar.



However, the strategic situation had changed spectacularly in the meantime and the pendulum was swinging back to the Derg...

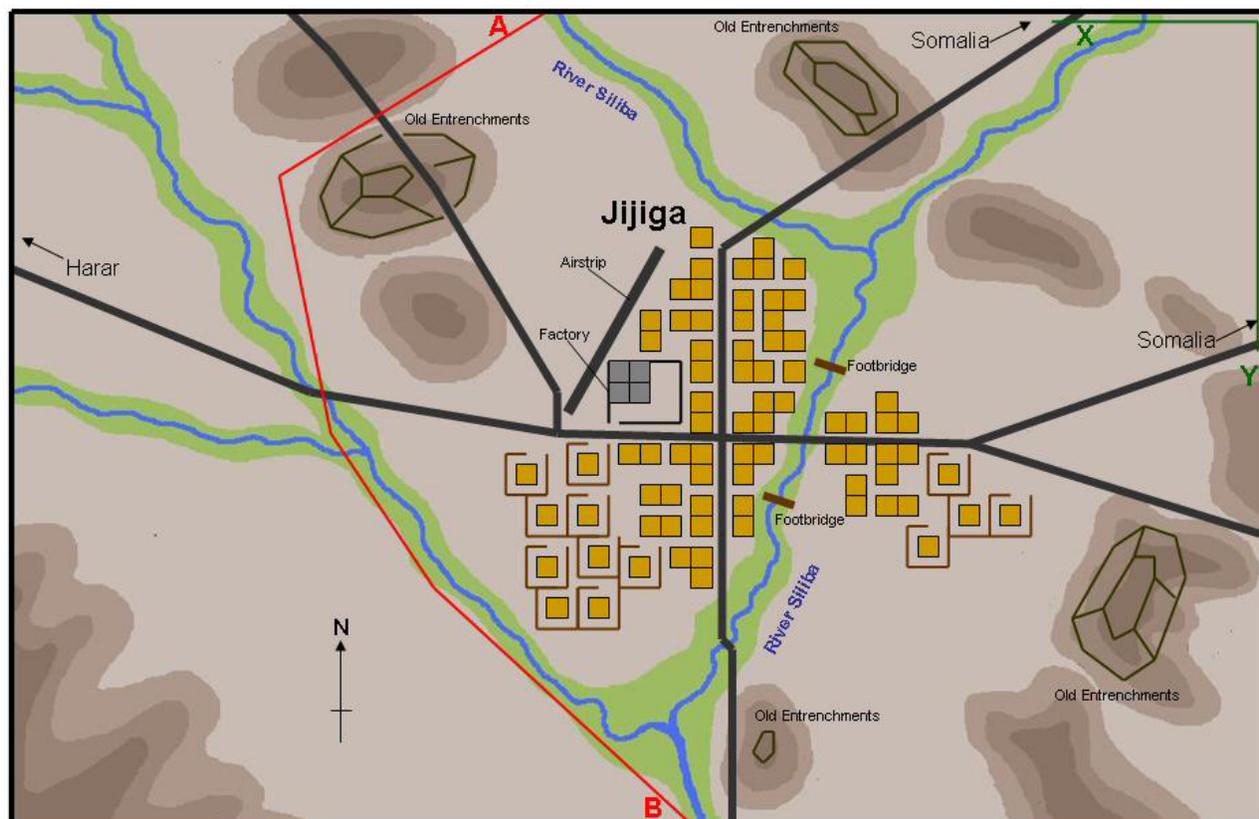
The USSR had found itself suddenly supporting both sides in a major regional war. Initially, the Soviets attempted to broker a ceasefire between their two African allies, but Siad Barre scented victory and was not prepared to compromise. The Soviets also astutely assessed that an alliance with Ethiopia (with its potentially high mineral wealth) had much more to offer the USSR than dirt-poor Somalia. Consequently, the USSR began pouring money, arms and Cuban troops into Ethiopia. Siad Barre responded by expelling Soviet advisors from Somalia and began re-aligning himself with the USA. Within a few short months, the Soviets had considerably re-equipped the Derg and had supplied some 1,500 advisors to lead and train the Derg forces. They also ferried some 18,000 Cuban combat troops to Ethiopia by air, as well as 2,000 South Yemenis. North Korea and East Germany also provided some advisors to the Derg.

When the WSLF/SNA forces arrived at Harar, they found the city to be stuffed full of hardened Cuban troops. The siege of Harar lasted for over four months, but with their logistical tail continually cut by Ethiopian and Cuban air power, the WSLF/SNA were finally forced to break off the siege in January 1978. They fell back to Jijiga and the defensible Marda Pass. However, a Cuban battlegroup had already outflanked the pass and was descending on Jijiga. The scene was set for the final major battle of the Ogaden War...

Scenario Overview

This scenario is based on a scenario by Bruce Rea Taylor. It represents the final defence of the town of Jijiga by the WSLF & SNA, against a Derg column reinforced by heavy Cuban firepower. The WSLF/SNA forces are well-supplied with heavy weapons, but lack training, artillery and air support. The Derg forces, although similar in terms of numbers, are better trained and have considerably more combat power due to the presence of a powerful Cuban tank battalion with attendant air support and artillery.

The Derg/Cuban forces have the first turn and the scenario will finish at the end of the WSLF player's 12th turn.



Terrain Notes

- The table is approximately 6x8 feet.
- The Rivers are only passable by amphibious vehicles and infantry. The road bridges are passable to all units, but the other bridges are foot bridges and are only passable to Troop units.
- The roads and airstrip are Unpaved Roads.
- Only the Kinie factory is of solid, concrete construction, counting as Hard cover. It is also surrounded by a High Wall. All other built-up areas count as soft cover and will often be surrounded by High Hedges (where there is space).
- All hills have steep slopes and are Rocky.
- The river valleys (green areas) are classed as being one level lower than the surrounding terrain. They are Boggy throughout and are also filled with Scrub vegetation.
- All hedges are classed as High Hedges.
- All blank areas on the map are classed as Open terrain, though there might be the odd area of scrub or cultivation (Sparse Concealment & Soft Cover) or farmstead (a single soft BUA, surrounded by High Hedge).
- The Old Entrenchments marked on the map are well-prepared, continuously-linked entrenchments from earlier battles. Any Troop units within these will class as being dug-in, with the added advantage of being able to shift position, while remaining dug-in.

Victory Conditions

- 1 VP for each ME at 25% casualties.
- 2 VP for each ME at 50% casualties.
- 3 VP for each ME at 75% casualties.
- VPs doubled if tank or mechanised infantry ME.
- 1 VP for each old, entrenched defensive position occupied, with no undisordered enemy within 10 inches.
- 2 VPs for occupying southern road bridge, with no undisordered enemy within 10 inches.
- 5 VPs for occupying West Jijiga (including the factory), with no undisordered enemy within 10 inches AND on the western bank of the River Siliba (enemy on the eastern bank do not count, even if they are within 10 inches).
- 10 VPs for occupying East Jijiga, with no undisordered enemy within 10 inches AND on the eastern bank of the River Siliba (enemy on the western bank of the Siliba do not count).
- The player with the higher VP score at the end of turn 12 is the winner.
- The WSLF player can force a draw by withdrawing at least 25 units (i.e. Vehicles, Troops or Gun stands) off the eastern edge of the northern half of the table (i.e. across line X-Y on the map).

The Third Battle of Jijiga – Derg Briefing

Situation

With the aid of our Cuban comrades, we have defeated the Somali assault on Harar and are now in full pursuit of the enemy as they flee for the Somali border. We have outflanked their defensive position at the Marda Pass, but they appear to be attempting to make a last stand at Jijiga (already the scene of two bloody battles in this war).

We must maintain the initiative. Do not allow the enemy to make a stand. Final victory is within our grasp.

Mission

You are to assault the Somali position at Jijiga with the intention of destroying the enemy's ability to further prosecute this war.

Execution

Friendly Forces: You have the forces shown in the appended orbat, consisting mainly of the depleted Derg 3rd Revolutionary Infantry Battalion, reinforced by elements of the Cuban Revolutionary Fraternal Assistance Force. The Cubans bring with them large quantities of tanks, artillery and air support, which will be most welcome.

Enemy Forces: While depleted and demoralised, the Somali forces remain a well-equipped fighting force and should not be underestimated – particularly now that they are at bay, dug-in and fighting for their last toe-hold in the Ogaden. They still have considerable numbers of tanks, armoured vehicles and antiaircraft guns. However, their forces lack cohesion and effective artillery support is non-existent.

Air Situation: Our air forces have driven the Somali jets from the sky and we can most definitely expect some air support during our push into Jijiga. Up to two strikes by rocket-armed Su-17 'Fitter' jets may be ordered.

Artillery Support: You have a battery of Cuban 120mm mortars in Direct Support. They are well-stocked with ammunition and have one round of smoke available. The Cubans also have a battalion of 122mm howitzers in General Support, though ammunition is limited to three rounds of HE and one of smoke. This battalion may be tasked with firing pre-planned barrages on pre-selected targets, or may be held in general support, to be called as required. Use the FAPLA Call-For-Fire Table.

Overview: The total destruction of the enemy fighting units at Jijiga is of paramount importance. The WSLF must not be allowed to escape in significant strength or with its vehicles and heavy equipment. We cannot afford to allow them to escape our grasp, only to have to fight this war again in a few years.

We end the WSLF threat and Somali interference in our affairs here and now!

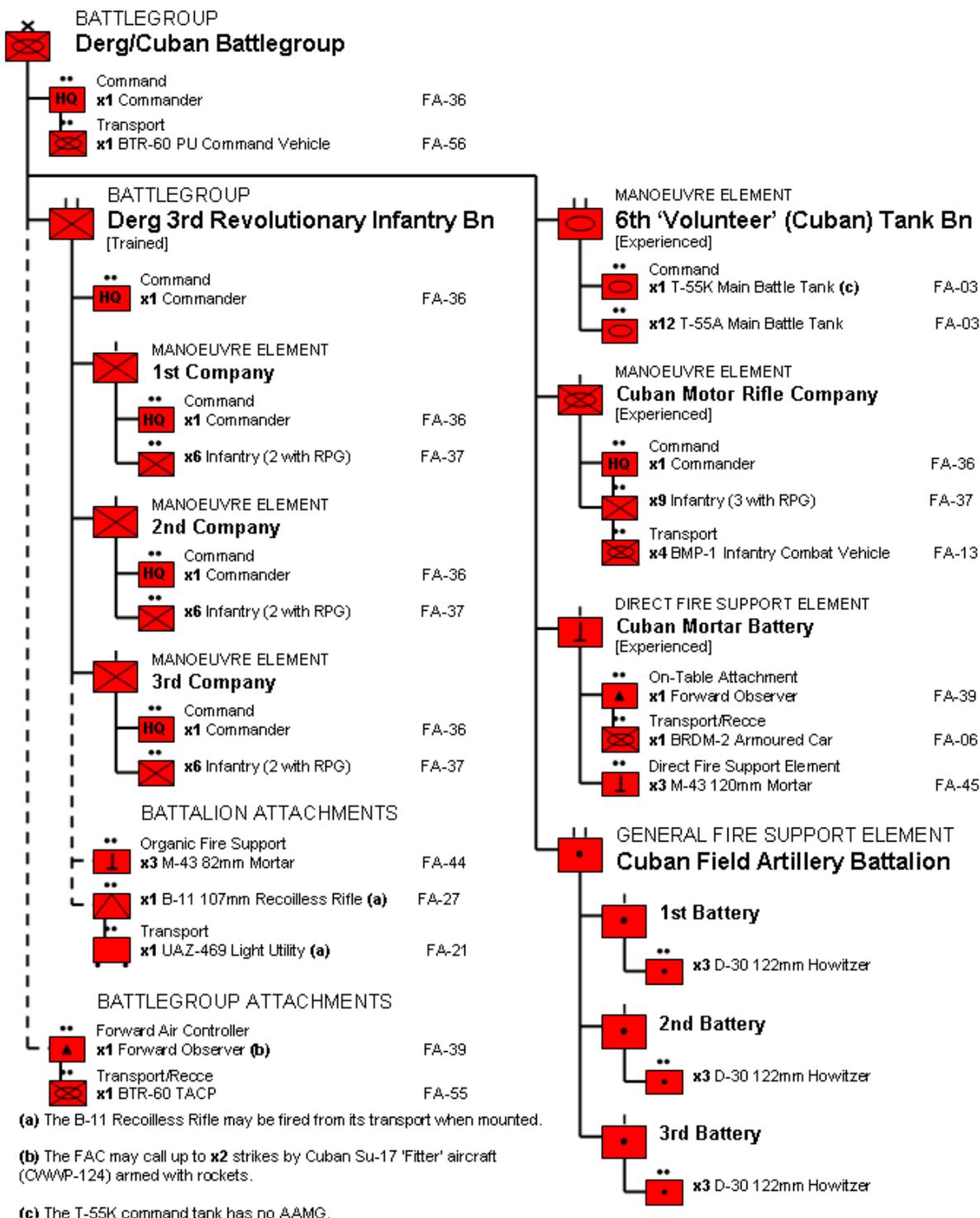
Deployment: Derg and Cuban forces may deploy anywhere west of line A-B and more than 5 inches from it. They may not use hidden deployment and may not start the game hull-down or in improved positions.

Terrain: See main Terrain Notes above.

Victory Conditions: See main Victory Conditions notes above.



The Third Battle of Jijiga Ogaden, 28th February 1978 Ethiopian 'Derg' Forces (& Friends)



The Third Battle of Jijiga – WSLF Briefing

Situation

The situation could hardly be more grim.

Following the defeat by Cuban troops at Harar, the shattered remnants of the WSLF fell back to defensive positions at the Marda Pass. However, the Derg forces, exploiting the advantage of Cuban mobility and air power, managed to outflank the position, forcing the WSLF to fall back once again to Jijiga.

Jijiga has already been the scene of two bloody battles in this war and the landscape is littered with rusting and burnt-out tank wrecks. Fortunately, the town is already fortified and your forces can make use of trenches and prepared hull-down positions.

There is little doubt that the WSLF has been defeated in this campaign. The best you can hope for now is to inflict a last bloody nose on the Derg before escaping over the border into Somalia. If you can inflict a defeat, or at least heavy losses on the enemy, the WSLF may be able to regain some of its lost honour and might even be able to win a propaganda victory.

Mission

You are to hold the defensive positions at Jijiga against all attacks, with the intention of inflicting a reverse on the Derg and of allowing time for WSLF/SNA forces to escape over the border

Execution

Friendly Forces: Your forces are detailed in the appended order of battle. Essentially your command consists of your own battalion, reinforced by heavy WSLF elements and a company of SNA tanks. All troops and heavy weapons are dug-in, while tanks and armoured vehicles are in hull-down positions.

Enemy Forces: Information is sketchy, but it would appear that a brigade-sized Derg force has moved into the western hills. Cuban forces have been identified and it is a safe bet that the artillery that has begun hitting us so effectively is also Cuban – Russian-made 122mm howitzers by the sound of them.

Air Situation: The Ethiopians won air superiority in the early days of the campaign. Now that they have been reinforced by Cuban jets, they have absolute air supremacy and are dominating our lines of communication. However, the garrison of Jijiga is well-supplied with light and medium antiaircraft weapons, so we should be able to make a Cuban pilot think twice before pressing home an attack.

Artillery Support: Put simply, we have none. Our artillery positions have been mercilessly hammered from the air and communications have totally broken down. The only indirect fire weapons in our possession are the infantry's 60mm mortars. Use the FAPLA Call-For-Fire Table.

Overview: It is imperative that our escape route is held open. While we have been ordered to make a stand at Jijiga, it is imperative that a sizeable proportion of our force escapes to Somalia to fight another day.

Deployment: All WSLF/SNA forces must deploy (hidden) east of line A-B. All Troops and Guns may be Dug-In, while all Armoured Vehicles may be Hull-Down. Deploy dummy unit markers for each ME, as per the rulebook.

Terrain: See main Terrain Notes above.

Victory Conditions: See main Victory Conditions notes above.



The Third Battle of Jijiga Ogaden, 28th February 1978 WSLF Forces (& Friends)

