



MECH TAU

MECHANISED TAU TACTICA

"Mech Tau is a Hunter Cadre that can be dropped from a Manta."

That's it! Any units that can't infiltrate need to be equipped with jet packs or have gravitic capabilities like Devilfish APC's and Hammerhead Gunships.

The word Mech comes from it being a Mechanised army, but that doesn't necessarily mean that mechanised troops (foot soldiers in transports/APC's) need make up the bulk of the cadre. Mech Tau also has connotations of Mech & Mecha (large robot fighting suits) so it also appeals to players who prefer to use more Battlesuits. These one Tau fighting suit/vehicles are also a type of mechanised unit, being one man IFV's (Infantry Fighting Vehicles).

The army list consists of Crisis and Stealth Suits, Firewarriors in Devilfish, Pathfinders in Devilfish, Drones and Hammerheads. Additionally, Kroot can be used as "pre-positioned ground assets" in addition to any available air support.

Against stand back and shoot armies Mech Tau armies can play more aggressively right out of the gate. People don't expect a Tau army to come zipping up and unload on their doorstep.

It's like an assault army in that you can pick your weak spot and concentrate ALL of your army on a smaller, weaker flank and push for a breakthrough.

Against aggressive armies, Mech Tau cadres tend to give ground, either depth or laterally whilst using Battlesuits and Hammerheads to disable and destroy enemy mobile elements, simultaneously protecting their own soft forces, the Shas'la, before pouncing back on the stragglers to clean up.

Why Mech Tau?

How many of you also play in heavy terrain environments against a plethora of assault based armies? Hammered by multiple Whirlwind batteries and charged down by ravenous aliens and jump pack equipped, Chainsword wielding fanatics?

All of the fantastic advantages of the Tau list including heavy hitting Broadsides and Firewarriors with their fantastic basic armament lose a great deal of their shiny-ness when they can't be used to full effect. The 30" range of Pulse Rifles was and is meaningless where I play, where I'm lucky to get an 18" shot off.

When reading through the Tau Codex, the image of a very well equipped Combined Arms Force formed in my imagination. Honestly, the idea of "hording up" on Firewarriors never occurred to me, and I thought the Codex was pretty clear about that. I very much wanted to put together and learn how to play with an "ultra-mobile" Tau army that "consisted of an extremely well-equipped mechanised infantry formation with armored support".

To support this idea, I would like you to consider some excerpts from the Tau Codex:

Pg 2:

"Their main strength lies in the different Battlesuit equipped warriors"

Pg 14:

Unlike The Imperium, the Tau Empire cannot draw on limitless manpower, so the strategy of attrition is unknown to them"

Pg 15:

"Each Manta carries a full Hunter Cadre of between fifty and 100 Tau. All the troops carried will either be mounted in gravitic vehicles or equipped with jet packs and, can deploy from the Manta Missile Destroyer at altitude."

Pg 58:

The Damocles Crusade, "The Tau response was swift, and consisted of an extremely well-equipped mechanised infantry formation with armoured support."

Pg 60:

"As the assault continued, it was countered by ultra-mobile Tau units deployed from the ubiquitous Manta Missile Destroyers"

So by what I must admit is selective reading of the Tau Codex, you can see that in a number of instances, the fluff does make direct mention of the type of Tau Hunter Cadre that we have come to call a Mech Tau Cadre.

The biggest reason to play a Mechanised Tau army however, is that is just so darned much fun! With all of this strategizing and debate, it's very easy to forget why we all started playing 40k in the first place - it's fun! Sure, we're all trying to build effective armies, and we're all trying to win games... but sometimes we get so caught up in the numbers that we forget the flavor and interest that dragged us into the hobby in the first place.

There is no best. There never will be. What's best for stats may be boring to run and boring to paint for you - and if that's the case, don't do it! If I like Stealths and you like Crisis Suits, or if I like Krootox and you like Broadsides, run with it. Are we talking about a core strategy and a way of doing things that lends itself to certain units? Sure. But do what makes the game fun for you. I play Mech Tau because I love the fluff - the idea of tanks humming over the battlefield and Firewarriors hot dropping into an LZ under fire. I love the lightning-quick raids of Stealth Suits and the nearly-impenetrable armor (and massive guns!) of the tanks. On the rules side, I love the restrictions the army places on me and the creative thinking it takes to win battles; having both a master battle plan and a fluid tactical situation suits me well.

The Principles of Mech Tau

1. Enemy assault troops that do not have jump packs or transports are very nearly zero-threat to any fully Mechanised Tau force. We simply outmaneuver them to such an extreme that they will never get into assault and, as such, cannot do more than vaguely deny us tiny areas of the table.

This implies that when enemy transports are destroyed, any assault troops they contain might as well have been destroyed for our purposes, magnifying the utility of destroying transports early.

2. Enemy artillery is exceptionally dangerous to static armies but markedly less so to Mech Tau. The most dangerous weapons have a significant minimum range and are vulnerable to Deep Strike (which we have in abundance) and Railgun fire. The ones that don't necessarily fit that profile (like the Whirlwind) are useless against our armor, for the most part.

This implies, to me, that any enemy artillery is a minimal threat at best, easily countered by the native strengths of our army.

3. By fielding so many vehicles, we are suddenly dangerously exposed to enemy heavy weapons, as those weapons grow less useful when fired on troop concentrations (a-la the Las Cannon - killing a tank is worth it. Killing a Firewarrior isn't). However, we effectively negate most enemy anti-infantry heavy weapons with one fell swoop, as their strength is too low to hurt the tanks.

This implies that eliminating enemy anti-tank weaponry early is a priority, one that takes a great deal of precedence over just about anything else... except, perhaps, dealing with transports.

4. Our low model count makes us exceptionally susceptible to morale issues. However, the Mech Tau doctrine, when utilized correctly, minimizes model loss and generally makes it hard to hurt us, effectively negating huge swaths of enemy points invested in weapons and halving (or worse) effective enemy troop values.

This implies that if we concentrate firepower on smaller areas, so as to whittle down those already wounded points scores, we'll ultimately end up eroding individual units into uselessness, negating their value.

5. Our emphasis on mobility and flexibility allows us to better position ourselves for the taking of mission objectives. In the heat of combat, it's easy to forget what you're trying to do! If you're playing a rescue mission, it doesn't matter if your opponent destroys 2/3 of your army, as long as you've got that token! You can use that mobility to lure your opponent into that trap. By using several highly mobile units in a diversionary role, you present your opponent with the choice to either delay his assault of the objective and deal with your flanking troops, or press on towards the mission objective and suffer the consequences... neither of which is really a good choice.

6. A healthy amount of caution should be exercised when deciding which targets to engage. In a perfect world we would only ever engage targets that we were sure of destroying in one round of shooting and would attack from an angle that denied LOS to every other unit on the board thereby negating any chance of return fire.

While this situation is highly unlikely, there are often situations where terrain can be used to restrict LOS and therefore minimize return fire. In missions that use Victory Points, a common misconception is that units must "make their points back." In reality, the only time a unit must "make its points back" is if it dies! If 3/4 of your army stays buttoned up behind a huge forest doing nothing the entire game and your two Hammerheads kill 7 marines over the course of 6 turns, you win! Any time you stick your nose out (or deploy your Firewarriors), you risk taking casualties whose points must be "made back." Therefore, if we are careful about when and where we pick our fights, we can be sure to always take more Victory Points than we give up.

In short, AV12 fast-moving skimmers (with Decoy Launchers) are good at minimizing casualties, and a minimum number of casualties means less Victory Points for our opponent, and less Victory Points for our opponent means less Victory Points that we need to collect to win the game. This is the principle of Victory Point Preservation.

Summarising, Mech Tau uses speed, mobility, and armor to win games through the following:

Selective Destruction of Enemy Assets through Concentration of Firepower and Mobility

It is impossible to win with Mech against an enemy whom you insist on engaging equally - in order to succeed, you must pursue and utilize moments of local fire superiority. Attacking half of his army with all of yours means victory, even if you lose a fifth in the fighting.

Accomplishing Mission Objectives

Mech Tau is one of the best armies around for accomplishing mission objectives. It can bombard the enemy from afar, run circles around them during the first 4 turns, and then when turn 5 hits, everything left on the table rushes out to claim objectives, tokens, and loot counters.

Denial of Victory Points to the enemy

With AV 12 fast moving skimmers and Battlesuits that can Jump-Shoot-Jump, a Mech Tau army is very durable and hard to pin down. Half our army will be out of sight with our assault moves, and the other half is AV 12 or greater and can only be destroyed on a glancing 6.

Conclusion

In order to win a game of Warhammer you necessarily need to dominate certain phases. Some army lists are geared to completely dominate one phase, without any attention given to the others. They use their extreme advantage in that one phase to overwhelm their opponent thereby minimizing their disadvantages in the other phases. Fully static Tau with maximum firewarriors is one example of this. In this case you aim to dominate the shooting phase at the exclusion of movement and close combat.

Alternatively, a more balanced army could try to be dominant in one phase while being competent enough in the others so as to not be completely overwhelmed. A Dark Eldar Raider-Wyche army is this type of list. They dominate the movement phase, while still being competent in both close combat and shooting. While they might not hold up against a dedicated close combat list, they can certainly minimize their losses in that phase through some of their special abilities.

When designing an army, a general has the opportunity to choose which phases he/she wants to dominate. In general, the points are not available to design a list that dominates all phases of the game. Compromises must be made. If we consider the 3 primary phases to be movement, shooting and close combat, then it is clear that Mech Tau is aimed at dominating the movement phase with shooting being a close second.

And now to my point. The novice Mech Tau player will now be asking himself, "Why would any intelligent general choose to put points into dominating a phase that doesn't kill anything?!" This is true, the killing happens during the other two phases of the game. However, the reason dominating the movement phase is so effective, is that movement is the only phase of the game that doesn't depend on chance. Any Black Templar player can roll a command squad up to a line of Firewarriors and whiff with all 83 attacks. True, it's not very likely, but it can happen. A Devilfish that moves 12" in the movement phase always moves 12" in the movement phase, no matter how poorly you roll. Therefore, by choosing to invest points in mobility, an intelligent general will get their points worth 100% of the time. That is the advantage of dominating the movement phase, and that is the advantage of Mech Tau.

Mech Tau is not a strategy. It's not a tactic. Mech Tau is a style of play; it's a way of making war. Someone who thinks they can 'give Mech a try' by proxying a Devilfish or two and challenging their buddy to a game will likely be sorely disappointed. Without a major paradigm shift accompanied by an entirely new set of tactics and strategies, Mech Tau will seem silly and pointless.

Members of the Mech Tau Tactica forum have put together The Guide to Mech Tau as a compilation of tactics and strategies that we have found work well for us. However be cautioned that memorizing the strategies outlined within are not sufficient to win games. Mech Tau truly requires a different mindset that can only be acquired by playing games and trying things out for yourself. Once you've done that though, we promise you won't be disappointed.

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