ART OF COMMAND™
TACTICAL DECISION GAME 1
Chosen Ground vs. Maintain Momentum
Print-and-Play Card Packet

Introduction
TDG 1 is a compact, two-player command exercise built around simultaneous decision-making. Each player assumes the role of an opposing commander, assesses an uncertain situation and selects one of three possible actions. Neither player knows what the other will choose. The interaction of those decisions determines the resulting conditions and provides a starting point for discussion.
The identity of the historical battle is deliberately masked on the front of the cards. Players encounter the command problem before learning what actually happened. The historical setting and outcome should be revealed only after both commanders have committed to their decisions.

Packet Contents
Page 1: Instructions
Pages 2–11: 5×7-inch format for facilitated play and discussion
Pages 12–21: Standard trading-card format for portable play
Page 22: Legal and use notice
Each format includes five double-sided cards. Each card number is printed at the bottom of the card. Card 1A is for one commander. Card 1B is for the other commander. The other three cards (1C, 1D, 1E) contain the results matrix/instructions and additional information.
Both formats contain the same material, with trading-card text edited to fit the smaller size.
Print only the format you intend to use.

Printing and Preparation
Select either pages **2–11** or pages **12–21**.
Print at **Actual Size** or **100% scale**. Do not select "Fit to Page."
The trading-card files include bleed around the standard 2.5 × 3.5-inch finished card size. Trim to the intended card edges after printing.
Cardstock is recommended. Standard paper may also be used with card sleeves or a heavier backing.
Cut the cards along their outer edges.
Keep the two commander cards (1A and 1B) on their front sides until the commanders make their decisions.
The historical reveal appears within the card sequence (cards 1A and 1B backsides). For a fully blind experience, a facilitator or non-player should print and prepare the cards. Players should not examine later cards or reverse sides until directed.

Playing the TDG
Give one player card 1A and the other player card 1B. Instruct both players not to examine the reverse side. Each commander reads the situation, considers the three available options and commits to a decision without revealing it. The players then reveal their choices simultaneously and follow the cards to determine the interaction, discuss the result and compare their decisions with history.

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Commander's Dilemma
The Chosen Ground

SITUATION

You are in command of a smaller force engaged in a battle against a larger enemy force. Morning fighting favored the enemy, but the outcome remains uncertain.



The broken terrain you selected restricts movement and the ability of either side to fully mass against the other.

A temporary lull has settled over the battlefield. Enemy pressure is expected to resume, and your reserve force remains uncommitted. Your warriors look to you for leadership. *You must decide when and how to personally commit your reserve to the battle.*

DECISION

A. Commit your reserve immediately to halt the enemy's momentum and seize the initiative

B. Delay the commitment until the enemy presses deeper into the broken terrain, then launch a counterattack

C. Hold your reserve while preserving cohesion and allow the situation to develop

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

You face a situation similar to the Battle of Moku‘ōhai (1782), where Kamehameha confronted a larger force under Kīwala‘ō on Hawai‘i. The fighting developed across broken lava terrain that disrupted movement and cohesion.

Neither side could easily mass its strength. During a lull in the fighting, reserve commitment carried significant risk and opportunity.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

A. Immediate Commitment
Slows enemy momentum and restores initiative, but risks losing flexibility before enemy intentions become clear.

B. Delayed Counterattack
Creates an opportunity for a counterattack against a disordered force, but risks ceding control of the battle.

C. Continued Patience
Hesitation could allow enemy pressure and morale effects to accumulate.

COMMAND INSIGHT

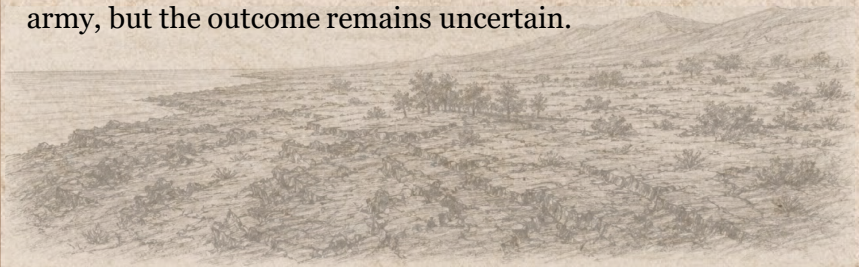
Terrain does not win battles by itself. Its value depends on the commander’s ability to recognize the right moment to commit combat power. A reserve is more than additional strength. It preserves freedom of action. The commander who commits too early risks loss of flexibility; the commander who commits too late risks losing the initiative entirely.

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Commander's Dilemma
Maintain Momentum

SITUATION

You are in command of a larger force engaged in a battle against a smaller enemy force. Morning fighting favored your army, but the outcome remains uncertain.



The broken terrain the enemy selected restricts movement and your ability to mass your force against the enemy.

Some of your leaders urge immediate action to maintain the momentum, while others caution you against pressing the attack. Your warriors look to you for leadership. *You must decide whether to maintain pressure immediately or pause to consolidate your force before resuming the battle.*

DECISION

A. Press the attack immediately to maintain the momentum before enemy resistance can recover

B. Consolidate your force, restore cohesion and resume the attack the following day

C. Continue limited pressure on the enemy while avoiding full commitment until the situation becomes clearer

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

You face a situation similar to the Battle of Mokuʻōhai (1782), where Kīwalaʻō confronted a smaller force under Kamehameha on Hawaiʻi. The fighting developed across broken lava terrain that disrupted movement and cohesion.

Neither side could easily mass its strength. During a lull in the fighting, pressing the attack to maintain momentum carried significant risk and opportunity.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

A. Press the Attack
Maintains momentum, but risks growing disorder and loss of control in broken terrain.

B. Consolidate Before Resuming the Attack
Improves control before continued fighting, but delay risks surrendering initiative and allowing the enemy to recover.

C. Continue with a Limited Attack
Could maintain contact without overcommitment, but might fail to achieve decisive momentum or consolidation.

COMMAND INSIGHT

Momentum can create opportunity or disorder. Commanders must balance exploiting success against preserving cohesion and freedom of action. An advancing force that presses too aggressively risks culminating; a force that pauses too long risks losing initiative. Judgment lies in recognizing when momentum remains strength and when it becomes vulnerability.

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Decision Matrix

Chosen Ground vs. Maintain Momentum

Chosen Ground (1A) ➡ Momentum (1B) ⬇	**A** Commit Reserve Immediately	**B** Delay and Counterattack	**C** Hold Reserve
A **Press Attack**	Both sides commit aggressively. Battle intensifies as either side could still achieve victory	Kīwalaʻō presses aggressively as Kamehameha delays reserve commitment and counterattacks decisively	Kīwalaʻō presses aggressively while Kamehameha preserves flexibility. Pressure builds without a decision
B **Attack Later**	Kīwalaʻō pauses while Kamehameha commits immediately. Initiative shifts in favor of Kamehameha	Both sides pause, then Kamehameha commits his reserve into a sudden and decisive counterattack	Both sides pause for the day and regroup. Kīwalaʻō prepares to renew the attack the next day
C **Develop Situation**	Kīwalaʻō develops the situation cautiously while Kamehameha commits early. Momentum shifts indecisively	Kīwalaʻō applies cautious pressure while Kamehameha delays commitment. No decisive engagement.	Kīwalaʻō develops the situation while Kamehameha holds his reserve; the battle remains unresolved

How to Use This TDG

1. SET THE SCENE

- Players read Chosen Ground (TDG 1A) or Maintain Momentum (TDG 1B).
- Each selects Decision A, B or C within a set time (e.g., 30 seconds).

2. COMMIT TO A DECISION

- Choices are revealed simultaneously.
- No changes after commitment.

3. RESOLVE

- Use the Decision Matrix (TDG 1C) to identify the outcome.
- Read the corresponding result aloud.

4. REFLECT

- Review Command Insight (TDG 1D)
- Discuss:
  - What drove your decision?
  - What did you expect the enemy to do?
  - What risks did you accept?

5. HISTORICAL OUTCOME

- Review TDG 1E.
- Compare your decisions to the historical battle and discuss how uncertainty shaped events.

6. EXPLORE VARIATION (OPTIONAL)

- Replay with different choices.
- Compare outcomes and reasoning.

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Keep decisions time-constrained
- Focus discussion on reasoning, not just the outcome
- There is no single correct answer
- Emphasize uncertainty and trade-offs
- Add decision cycles for indecisive results

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Command Insight
The Decisive Moment

SITUATIONAL SYNTHESIS

At Mokuʻōhai, both commanders face the same reality from different positions.

Uncertainty increases in restrictive terrain and when the enemy's intentions remain unclear.

One must decide when to commit reserves. The other must decide when to resume the attack.

CORE INSIGHT

The decisive moment is not when the enemy appears weakest.

It is when freedom of action begins to disappear.

EXPANDED INSIGHT

Momentum, terrain, uncertainty and cohesion interact continuously during battle.

A commander who commits too early risks culmination and loss of flexibility; a commander who waits too long risks surrendering initiative to the enemy.

The commander's challenge is to recognize the decisive point and act before the opportunity disappears.

REFLECT

- What did you believe was happening on the battlefield?
- What assumptions drove your decision?
- When did you think the decisive moment would be?
- What risk were you most willing to accept?

DISCUSS

- How did your decision compare to your opponent's?
- What did you expect them to do?
- How did momentum influence your thinking?
- Where did your perception and reality converge or diverge?

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Keep discussion focused on why, not just the outcome
- Highlight differences in perception and timing
- Reinforce uncertainty as the central condition
- There is no single correct answer

COMMAND PRINCIPLE

Command decisions are often shaped less by certainty than by fear of losing opportunity

The commander who best preserves freedom of action retains the ability to shape events

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Historical Outcome
The Turning Point

HISTORICAL OUTCOME

At Mokuʻōhai, Kīwalaʻō chose to continue pressing the attack to maintain momentum, despite the difficult terrain and uncertainty of Kamehameha's intentions. During the renewed fighting, Kīwalaʻō was killed, although the full effect of his death was not immediately felt.

Kamehameha preserved flexibility long enough to personally commit his reserve forces at the decisive moment as enemy cohesion began to weaken. Momentum shifted rapidly, and Kamehameha emerged from the battle with increased legitimacy on Hawaiʻi Island.

BATTLEFIELD CONSEQUENCES

The outcome did not end resistance to Kamehameha, but it altered the balance of power across the island.

The battle demonstrated how momentum, terrain, timing and cohesion could shape outcomes before either side fully understood the consequences unfolding around them.

Decisions made during moments of uncertainty carried effects far beyond the battlefield itself.

CAMPAIGN SIGNIFICANCE

Mokuʻōhai marked an important step in Kamehameha's rise during the struggle for control of Hawaiʻi Island and the later unification of the Hawaiian Islands.

The campaign would continue for years, but the command decisions made at Mokuʻōhai helped shape both the military and political momentum that followed.

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

• How closely did your decisions resemble the historical commanders?
• Did you overestimate momentum or underestimate uncertainty?
• When did freedom of action begin to disappear?
• Which battlefield pressures most influenced your judgment?

CONTINUING QUESTIONS

• Could Kīwalaʻō have preserved initiative by delaying the attack?
• Did terrain favor patience more than aggression?
• Was the decisive moment recognizable while the battle was unfolding?
• How did battlefield perception shape later consequences?

ENDURING INSIGHT

The decisive moment is rarely obvious while it is occurring.

Command judgment lies in recognizing when opportunities are narrowing and acting before freedom of action disappears.

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Commander's Dilemma
The Chosen Ground

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

You face a situation similar to the Battle of Mokuʻōhai (1782), where Kamehameha confronted a larger force under Kīwalaʻō on Hawaiʻi. The fighting developed across broken lava terrain that disrupted movement and cohesion.

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- Highlight changing perceptions during battle.
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