

226. Old Trooper

We have reached the semi-finals of a regional knockout, and I hold in first position:

♠ A 6 3 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ A 5 ♣ A J 10 8 3

Playing a strong club, we conduct this auction to six clubs:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♦	Dbf	3♥
4♣	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠	Pass	5♠	Pass
6♣	All Pass		

The bidding requires some explanation. West's one diamond overcall was alerted as showing length in both red suits; North's double and cuebid showed general strength. His five spades offered an alternative slam.

West leads the king of diamonds and partner presents a serviceable dummy:

♠ K Q 5 4
♥ —
♦ 10 8 7 6 4 3
♣ K Q 6

♦K led

♠ A 6 3
♥ A 5 3
♦ A 5
♣ A J 10 8 3

On the opening lead, East discards the eight of spades, and I win the ♦A.

Initial evaluation: I have ten top tricks and can take two heart ruffs in dummy, but the first trick presents several cautions. East's decision not to ruff the opening lead probably suggests a meaningful trump holding. His play of the eight of spades may also be significant. If it is a true card, it may indicate short spades. If West has four spades, he may have short trumps, perhaps none.

I have one outside entry to my hand, so I think it is right to keep the trump suit fluid by ruffing high in dummy. I ruff a heart with the ♣Q, return to my hand with the ♠A (East following with the *ten*) and ruff another heart with the ♣K. Now I lead the ♣6 from dummy and back my

earlier judgment about East's trumps by inserting the ♣8. When West discards a diamond, his partner holds his cards closer to his chest.

The 5-0 break leaves me with a trump loser and my projected trick count has dipped to eleven. I think I am still all right because West will come under pressure. I cash my three top trumps. This is the position before the fifth round:

<p>♠ J x x ♥ — ♦ Q J ♣ —</p>	<p>♠ K Q 5 ♥ — ♦ 10 8 ♣ —</p> <p>♠ 6 3 ♥ A ♦ 5 ♣ 3</p>
<p>♠ — ♥ K J x x ♦ — ♣ 9</p>	

I play the last club to East's nine, and he is forced to return a heart to my ace. On these tricks, West has to make two discards. He can comfortably throw the ♦J on the first trick but on the second, he has no safe discard. Like an old trooper, he collapses his hand and gives up.

The full deal:

<p>♠ K Q 5 4 ♥ — ♦ 10 8 7 6 4 3 ♣ K Q 6</p> <p>♠ J 9 7 2 ♥ Q 10 4 2 ♦ K Q J 9 2 ♣ —</p> <p>♠ A 6 3 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ A 5 ♣ A J 10 8 3</p>	<p>♠ 10 8 ♥ K J 9 8 7 6 ♦ — ♣ 9 7 5 4 2</p>
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Points of interest:

- Had East ruffed the opening lead and returned a trump, declarer's entry problems to his

hand would have limited him to one ruff in dummy before pulling trumps and relying on the same ending.

- The discard of the high spade implied short spades, but even if his spot card had been lower, there was a reasonable inference of short spades. It is too much to expect that a good defender will set up an extra trick in dummy's suit by discarding a useful card.