

[17.0] DESIGNER'S NOTES (CONTINUED)

The very first thing I tried to make work in **NO RETREAT!** is to simulate as closely as possible, without any artificial rules gimmicks, the historical German capabilities and advance rate in 1941. With a little experience, players will be able, barring extremely bad luck, to achieve historical success with the *Wehrmacht* in the early game. There is even a fair chance of Moscow falling in 1941 if the Axis go all-out, but the flanks of their advance will probably be very tenuous; this is certainly a high risk / high reward strategy.

The Soviet Order of Battle

For a relatively “simple” wargame, a large amount of historical research was involved. I studied the actual performance and locations of all the armies and Fronts of this campaign, and this in two-month steps (one game turn) from 1941 to 1944. Within the 40-counter limitation, a simulation engine of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two sides in presence was created. In the case of Soviets this was doubly difficult because of the gradual upgrade of their forces: most of the time, I was able to use the actual historical names, and timeframes of improvement, for the Fronts, using the early units that were not upgraded (but disappeared) for the making of the Tank Armies. And these Tank counters do represent more than the actual Armies, they also include supporting/attached troops! You should be able to represent most historical situations with a reasonable degree of accuracy using the game pieces included despite the minor “fudging” that had to be done.

The Combat Results Tables

The Combat Result Tables are a bit unusual; as an attacker, even at lower odds, you do not suffer many losses (save for the occasional EX result), but you **could** get a “CA” result, and that has some interesting possibilities. It gives your opponent the option of attacking you back and possibly upsetting your position – thus making it easier for them to charge at you during your opponent’s upcoming Player Turn, or you opponent might simply “pass” the opportunity to counterattack and opt to simply play it safe and stay on the defensive. The Combat Results Tables are also tailored for the “Counterblow” rule. Upon study of the two different CRTs, you will notice subtle differences between them that have a substantial impact on how to play each side.

Counterblows

What does the “Counterblow” rule represent?

We wanted players to have some say in when it is their opponent’s turn and to reward the careful management of precious Event cards. Players need to envision counterblows as local spoiling counter-attacks launched in reaction to the enemy offensives. We did not go as far as to allow an actual attacks by the defender (this is what players should do on their *own* turns), but it’s close. And because your troops are leaving their positions to engage the enemy, they lose their defensive terrain benefits – thus, some risk is involved in launching a counterblow.

It is a good idea to use this rule to wipe out pockets of surrounded enemy units faster, and to allow your units a chance to advance during your opponent’s turn (if a CA result is rolled, and followed up with a successful counterattack of your own). You can also use it to put pressure on unsupported fortified cities, lowering their defensive advantages, or even as an end-run advance. There are myriad possibilities for a well-timed counterblow, but alas all of this fancy footwork has a cost in precious Event Cards, and you never have enough of those...

Event Cards

The very heart of the game is the Event Card “engine;” players simply never know what surprise their opponent can spring upon you with a sneaky card play. Consequently, “perfect planning” of moves or attacks is never entirely possible. For example, can you afford to temporarily leave a hole in your line, or will your adversary be able play a card allowing him to move a unit there during your own turn, thus creating an unexpected breakthrough?

Those cards are an excellent indicator of the resources a side still has at his disposal: if you start your turn with a full hand of 6 cards, and your opponent has none, then things are potentially very good for you! The cards you have in reserve represent energy you can spend: to replace troops, for rail moves, for Counterblows, etc... With a low card count, your options are limited; sure a player can still get by holding only a card or two, but the game **initiative** is probably being held by the opponent who is holding five or six cards!

In the early years, for example, the Soviets can probably replace most of their losses easily, but this will leave them with precious few cards, if any, to react and try to take back control of the on-map situation. In fact, if both sides engage in an orgy of low odds attacks, and bleed themselves to death, they’ll probably have to use so many of their cards to replace losses that few decisive moves will be possible since they will not be many Event Cards left to use for these endeavours. At that point, it’s “Welcome to WWI Trench Warfare” time!

Victory Conditions

Speaking of initiative, you really have to carefully read and make sure that you understand the last page of the rules: How to Win the game. While the scenarios have their own, defined separate victory conditions, the last page of the rules tells you how to win the Campaign Game. There are **three** ways to win the Campaign Game, and they are all important.

The **Objectives** victory is straight forward and works as most traditional wargamers might expect: capture key cities and you win the game. In fact, to play a simpler version of **NO RETREAT!**, use *only* that victory condition. The game will still play just fine and a good time will be had by both sides.

The **Sudden Death** victory condition is very intriguing and keeps player paying attention to the current Victory Point (VP) score. Here is how it works: every three Game Turns, this victory condition is checked against a sum of VPs that the Initiative Player (the Axis during the first half of the game, the Soviets during the latter half; and *both* sides on Game Turn 11) has. If the Initiative player has sufficient VPs at that moment, the game is over and that player wins outright.

A sufficient sum of VPs are not that easy to get, but not impossibly hard to obtain either. This fact will stop your opponent from becoming complacent (i.e., from “knowing” in advance what the historical outcome of the war was; e.g., “Bah, I can just withdraw and lose Kiev without a fight! The Axis never got farther than Stalingrad anyway and I’ll get tons of new units in 1944.”). Also, because only the side with the Initiative can win by Sudden Death, neither side can afford do loose too much ground too quickly, even if this is tactically a good idea on the map, hence the game title: **NO RETREAT!**

If you want a very short game, try to get a lot of your units killed while being Out of Supply, never do the same to your opponent, and never fulfill the Hitler/Stalin Orders Attack Event Cards played by your opponent; that is a sure road to ruin!

Finally, there is the **End Game** Victory Condition. If things go far without an Objectives or Sudden Death winner, then the more territory the Axis Player has captured by Game Turn 11 (i.e., when they place their High Tide marker on the Victory Point Track), the better the Axis’ chances of salvaging an End Game Victory out of a likely bad situation. If the Axis Player was timid and didn’t advance boldly into Russia, chances are he will lose via the End Game Victory Condition. Or perhaps not, if the Soviet Player is equally timid. One thing is certain: the Axis player as to keep as many German units in Russia as possible for a cautious advance approach toward winning to work. The tricky part is that the entire Axis front can crumble surprisingly fast in 1944!

Note that the End Game Victory Condition will not be used in **NA BERLIN!** Expansion Kit for this game (which takes the action into central Europe in 1945). There, you will indeed be able to fight it out right to Hitler’s doorstep.

Some players asked me about rationales of a few concepts in the game, explanations follow:

Finland

What’s the deal with the strange way Finland is treated?

Given that Finland pretty much kept to its own agenda for the duration of the war (the conquest of lost Finnish territory only) and never made any serious penetrations into Russia after this was achieved, I decided to represent them by a simple Fort unit – it doesn’t move or attack by itself, and it has no ZOC to influence Soviet units beyond the Finnish border.

The Fort counter also represents the easy defensible and rugged Finnish country and the fierce fighting qualities of their Army when attacked by the Russians. So, the Russians will have to fight to earn the 1 VP that Finland is worth, but Axis do not get that 1 VP at start of the game either. The Axis do not really “control” Finland at the outset (the Finnish are following their own national policies). To earn the 1 VP for Finland, the Axis player must move a German unit into it. This represents both a higher level of political cooperation on Finland’s part, plus German resources sent to the far north in quantities sufficient to seriously threaten the capture Murmansk and Archangel; *that* is worth giving them the Axis Player 1 VP.

Axis Allies

Why are there no restrictions on the placement of the other Axis Minor Ally nationalities?

Besides not being able to move into Finland (the Finns wouldn't be too keen on that), I decided not to add an extra rule limiting the use of the Rumanians, Hungarians and Italians to the southern part of the map (as about half the larger size wargames on this subject do). I found no solid historical reason to do so other than the fact that they didn't do so in the real war. In addition, I wanted to keep the game as simple as possible to fit in the small format rules. I mean, there were Spanish (and others) troops operating in the Leningrad area, and if Hitler had asked, I don't see why those nationalities would not have been move up north. If this bothers you, then by all means create your own House Rule artificially restricting Axis Minor Ally units from entering the upper half of the map.

Zones of Control

Why are you allowed to move through one Enemy Zone of Control, and then stop if the destination hex contains a friendly unit? Not every wargame allows that.

This one is easy to answer. Given the very large scale of the map (100km per hex), the Zones of Control mainly represent a unit taking up some space in adjacent hexes, and not actual firepower controlling that adjoining hex. A bit of "reaction movement" is also being simulated by this rule – that is, where you displace some sub-units there to stop an enemy from advancing. All these occurrences are partially negated by the presence of a friendly unit that is helping you getting out of trouble, keeping open a path of retreat.

Conclusion

I hope you have fun playing **NO RETREAT!** and that this intense little game gives you some insight on what went on in during this cataclysmic and tragic campaign. Following these notes are some more basic tips for both players. Also, I am looking forward for your comments, suggestions and replays on the game's discussion folder at www.consimworld.com.

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