

A Time for Trumpets (GMT Games) Review

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This game is actually playable, but you need to invest a lot of time in playing it - particularly during the first three game days (Dec. 16 to 18) where the game is overloaded with special rules! The complexity of the game is not as bad as Campaign for North Africa but there is an alarming fact that the game requires three [SIC!] rulebooks, totaling 178 pages, that the player needs to look in all the time during these first three game days. Due to the complexity of the game, I find it more enjoyable as a game on Vassal than as a real-life tabletop (I have tried both). This particularly relates to keeping track of what Artillery Factors that has been allocated to which combat as well as all the Dec 16th special rules for individual units. In Vassal you can pick a Number marker with the corresponding fire strength and put it on top of each artillery unit, and you can add Comments markers to put on the units that are under certain restrictions. This really simplifies the flow of the game.

There are some features in the game that I find unnecessarily complex and that could have been simplified without any loss of game accuracy.

First, I would like to comment on the game mechanism for calculating the combat odds. This is a very complex process with a lot of calculations that at the end adds little added value to the game in my opinion. As a first step the attacking player calculates the "raw" odd, which is capped at 7-1 (all odds above that are lost). Then the shifts for terrain, fieldworks and weapon types are applied where the 7-1 cap is not applied any more. On top of that, then the players calculate the +/- die modifier for various other effects such as morale, flanking, combined arms, etc. Hence you can start a combat phase with 100-1 against a 1-point company, defending in a fort in a forest in a village behind river. Since the 100-1 odds is capped to 7-1 with all the effects applied afterwards, you end up with final odds of 2-1 with +2 DRM (which is identical to rolling the dice on the 1-1 column). The modifiers are as follow: forest -1 shift (6-1), behind river -2 shifts (4-1), fort -2 shifts (2-1), Village +1 DRM, Efficiency rating from fort +1 DRM. As can be seen from this example, keeping track of calculating the shifts and DRMs is really what this game is all about. The only odds that the +/- DRM deviates from being equal to a shift is the 3-2 and 3-1 odds columns, otherwise DRM mechanism is in essence just the same as combat shifts. Replacing the DRM mechanism with either shifts or a D10 Combat Result Table, if more variance in outcome on certain odds is needed, would have reduced the complexity in the odds calculation process significantly.

Second, the complexity of the weather and movement mechanisms requires the players to keep track the Cost of terrain as it varies significantly between the game turns. There are 12 [SIC!] different Cost of terrain situations and 4 different ways that ZOC may be exerted due to the time of the day and the atmospheric conditions. This does not include all the special rules on movement during the first game turns. As can be easily understood, there is lots of opportunities to make errors here and this bogs down the speed of the game. Hence calculating movement and combat is really time consuming and error prone, while calculating artillery support is fairly simple, aside from checking all artillery units' range all the time.

There are some things that I find odd in the game.

One such example is that, albeit having the flexibility to breakdown and reassemble German Rocket Artillery Brigades, all units of each Rocket Brigade may only fire on the same hex during a Combat phase even though the brigade in real life was assigned to a division and could be used to support other combats of that division.

Another issue I have, relates to the StuG III-bonus as defined on Player Aid Card 4A. This is a very diffuse feature that is not described in the rules – only on the Player Card 4A. As it is written, the StuG III-bonus DRM only applies only to the specific Sturmgeschütz III units. Hence the Sturmgeschütz IV units do not receive this bonus for some odd reason. And what about Jagdpanzer IV or the Hetzer? They had the same gun as the StuG III/IV and where by 1944 tactically employed in the same manner as the StuG. And why should not the Sturm Panzer and Sturm Tiger units receive the same benefit? They were, after all, specifically designed to smash infantry in all sorts of terrain. Yes, I know that the Sturmartillerie was allocated to the Artillery branch by OKH, after an in-fight between Guderian and the artillery generals before the war, but by 1944 this belonging had no relevance at all except for the piping on the uniforms. Hence, this rule really needs to be clarified and added to the rule book.

There are some features in the game that one need to keep in mind while playing since these are counter-intuitive or very different from other war games.

One benefit that should be attributed to this game is that it ignores things like spotting and has simplified the weather effects on artillery to Full effect if clear weather and Half effect if any other weather. Of course, the terrain also

impacts the artillery effect, but in this game the artillery can only be reduced once. Hence, a lot of the calculations can be omitted from the process at the first instance that it is discovered that the artillery effect is halved or quartered. Very simple and very good! Another such feature is that ZOC from Mechanized units do not extend into Marsh and Forest (prohibited terrain except on roads) but do extend across stream and rivers (except Meuse) which Mechanized units are prohibited to cross except on bridges and fords.

There is no mechanism to voluntarily breakdown or rebuild battalions and there are no replacements to be received so losses are permanent, hence attrition on the German AFVs will become a major challenge for the German player as the game progress.

It is also worth mentioning are that units retreating through ZOC, regardless of presence of friendly units, are eliminated no matter how many steps they have. Furthermore, friendly units do not neglect enemy ZOC when tracing supply.

Another nice feature, that is missing in many other games, is that although Advance after combat may be very generous in hexes, the advancing units may not exceed their movement allowance during advance after combat.

Finally, remember that there is a 1 in 6 probability that your fighters will be aborted while conducting strafing. This means that you should be very careful when selecting your targets to strafe. There is a high risk that your mission will be aborted already during the first attack since you must attack the all the AFV units in the hex first and then the other non-HQ units before you can strike at the HQ's. Thus, it is better to use the fighters for pure interdiction mission and wait for the enemy to move into your air ZOC and loose MPs during their turn. The tactical bombers are the ones you should use for strafing since they cannot be hit unless the enemy has AA in or next to the hex.

All in all, and albeit all my seemingly negative comments above, **A Time for Trumpets** is really a good game, particularly when played on Vassal, and the game designer should have credit for this. I can really recommend this game to others.