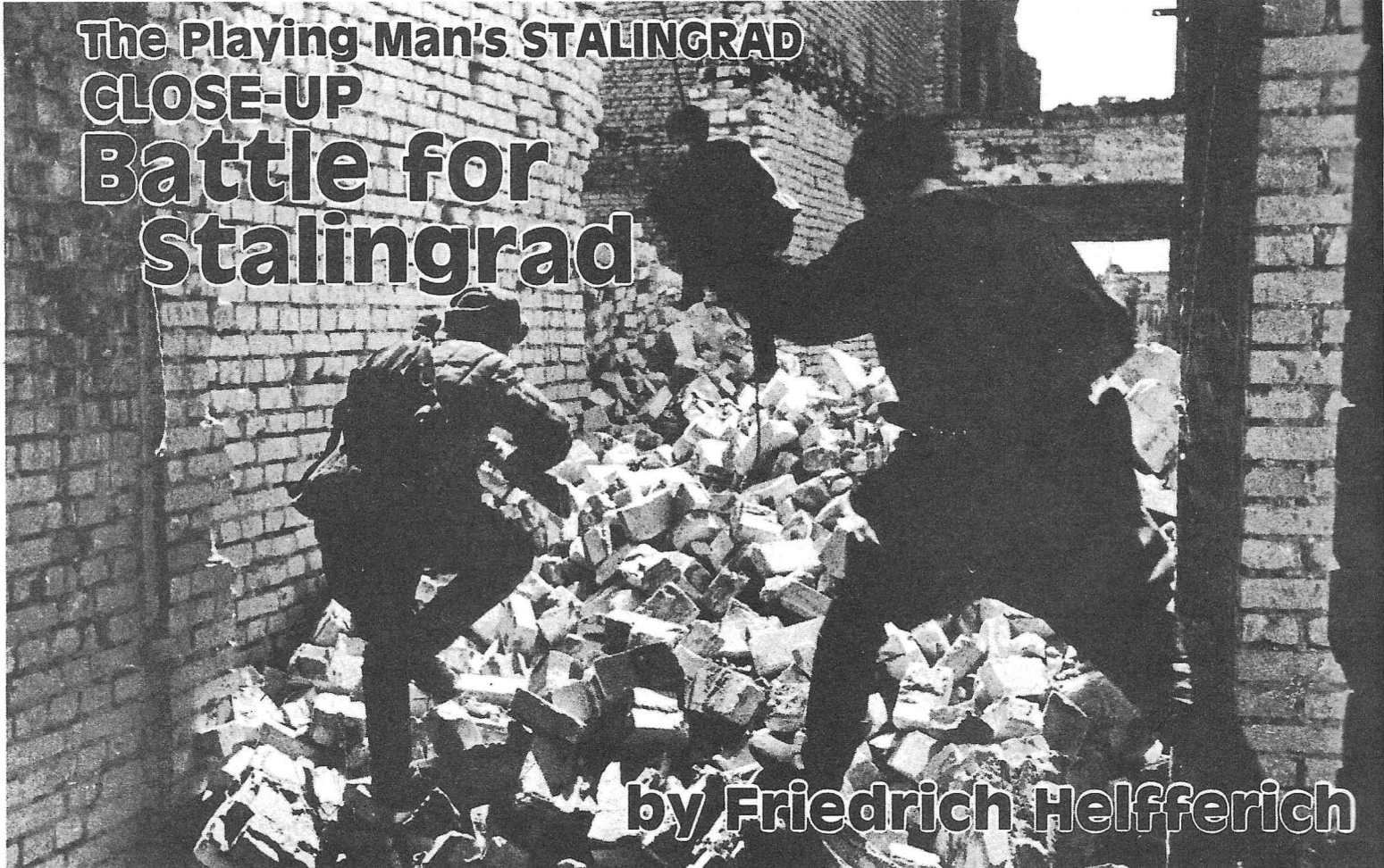


The Playing Man's STALINGRAD CLOSE-UP Battle for Stalingrad



by Friedrich Helfferich

Had it been just another East Front battle like, say, the fall of Kiev or the Korsun pocket, it might have been accurately recorded. But not Stalingrad. That struggle has assumed such colossal proportions in the mythos of the Eastern Front that even the military historians on both sides have come to see it as a cataclysmic event, to speak of it in hyperbole.

To the Russians, it was the turning point, the "resurrection" and "redemption" of the Holy Motherland, with General Chuikov as The Messiah. For the Germans, it has become a *Götterdämmerung*, a last, desperate attempt to thwart the Mongolian hordes. In such an atmosphere, the first victim inevitably is the historical truth.

As an example, the key point of most of the literature on Stalingrad, be it German or Russian, is to prove beyond doubt that "their" side was heavily outnumbered and performed a miracle of courage in accomplishing as much as they did. The Soviets, and the historians sympathetic to them, point to the massive firepower in artillery and aircraft available to the Germans. Claiming that firepower, not bodies, decide the issue in modern war, they declare it incredible that Chuikov was able to hold out instead of being erased under a hail of high explosives. And they are correct.

The Germanic historians, on the other hand, point to the fact that firepower has not much effect in an urban environment, against natural strongpoints as those in Stalingrad. They cite other battles, such as Cassino, to stress their point that "fortress" areas are great diluters of ordnance. They go on to claim that, in such an environment, the infantryman is supreme, and conclude that, against the Russian numerical superiority, the German conquest of almost all of Stalingrad was incredible. And they are correct.

But the Russians then counter that a large proportion of their troops were raw, untrained militia that cannot be compared to the battle-hardened German grenadiers — a valid argument. However, the Germans are quick to point to the exceptionally high percentage of Russian Guards units committed, which were anything but "green." And so it goes on and on...

Where does this leave a game designer in search of reliable, accurate information? Even a fairly routine task, such as compiling an Order of Battle, becomes a major effort. There are wide gaps in the histories, especially the English-language ones. The Germans, fortunately for us, have left their *War Diaries*, which provide a reasonably complete documentation of the units that actually carried the attack, although they are vague on other points, particularly on non-divisional units. The Soviets pose more of a problem in that much of their history seems to have been deliberately clouded to obscure key points. For example, the size and strength of the trans-Volga artillery remains vague in all their literature. In a way, both sides have highlighted their own weaknesses and downplayed their strengths to prove their point.

Fortunately, the task of the designer of a historical game is not so much to unearth all the little facts as to evaluate them, in a manageable form. This is the key: to evaluate the overall historical *lesson*. A game need not count the muskets, it should reflect their effect. In terms of the broad picture of military history, what "lessons" did the Battle for Stalingrad convey? What was the essential *effect* of this clash between two so different military systems?

The main purpose a "game" study, as opposed to a "book" study, can serve is to present the military systems, while the books present the military facts. And there is a difference. Some may argue that the difference is but one of emphasis and accuse me of exaggerating or belaboring a point of semantics. Perhaps, but I think not. In designing *Battle for Stalingrad* I began to view the battle more and more as a clash between "systems" rather than "armies," and I became fascinated with the problem of how to show the fight as something more than a hex-by-hex bloodbath. Had I designed this game four years ago, it probably would have looked much like my *Battle for Hue*; it would have been a good simulation and instructed the gamer nicely on the history of the battle, but would have taught very little about the methodology and workings of the opposing armies. Back then, I modeled battles — now I model armies. And if we are to learn from history, I feel that is much more important.



Let me illustrate my point — “systems” versus “battle” — with a familiar example. My research has convinced me that, in 1940, France fell not so much because of the *Panzer Blitz* through the Ardennes, but because the French military system was inferior to the German — so inferior that *any* German attack would eventually have produced the same catastrophe. The keen move through the Ardennes just ensured that it would happen so much sooner.

Going farther back in history: Alexander succeeded in doing such a hatchet job on the Persians owing not necessarily to his superior generalship, but to the vastly superior military system of the Greeks. And it is to his credit that he understood how to exploit that advantage to the utmost.

That brings us to Stalingrad. The Germans not only had the superior military system, but the opposing 62nd Army inherited by Chuikov was not really an army at all in the sense of administration and command — it was no more than a conglomerate of fragments and left-overs that happened to have been in the Stalingrad area. The German system had the edge, provided it was used with the daring and finesse it was designed for. Unfortunately for the *Wehrmacht*, General Paulus had neither. The German Army was strong in firepower, but short of men, even then. In a sense, they could dish it out, but not take it, at least not for long. Comparing Paulus and Alexander: both commanded the superior military system, but Alexander knew how to exploit that advantage, Paulus did not.

This is not to say that Paulus was incompetent. You did not rise to command in the German Army if you were. He was a good, solid, run-of-the-mill commander who had neither achieved great victories, nor suffered great defeats. He had done a respectable job. In his style, he was a little like Montgomery, or Henry Heth of the American Civil War. He was not unique. His opponent, General Chuikov, was.

Chuikov realized that his instrument was flawed, that his 62nd Army could never hope to fight the Germans on their own terms. Indeed, the disasters of that spring and summer had largely stemmed from attempts to do this. He knew he could not match the Germans in shifting reserves, coordinating fire plans, concentrating power. And compared with the *Luftwaffe*, his airforce, despite impressive numbers, was an instrument of comedy.

Chuikov knew that, to win, he would have to neutralize the German advantage, to blunt their keen edge or, at least, avoid it. With his laughable communications system, he knew he could not really “react” to German attacks by shifting fresh troops to threatened sectors; he would have to anticipate them and have his soldiers already in place. Also, he had to decide quickly where to commit his reinforcements — and better be right about it, since he would be incapable of any major redeployment. He knew his army couldn’t really move, so he instructed his troops to dig in, to turn their buildings or whatever into personal forts. Some of these would become famous: “Pavlov’s House,” the “L-shaped House,” and others. He saw that the Germans, with all their firepower, were quite thin on the ground. He stressed staying close to the Germans, to avoid their air attacks, and his instructions centered

on small-unit tactics: the mini-fort and the ambush, common-sense tactics boiled down to elementary essence. He gave simple orders, but he had a simple army, and his genius realized it. He recognized the deficiencies in his system and the strengths in the Germans’, and worked out a battle plan to play on his few strong points and the German weaknesses.

To be sure, Chuikov did not play a perfect game. He blundered, and more than once his plan almost collapsed, as he counted too much on the Germans’ making mistakes. His choice of headquarters locations let him almost be buried alive at Mamayev Kurgan, then barbequed at the Great Ravine when the oil tanks ignited (he had thought they were empty). And he should not have tried to hold onto the Orlovka salient. His game was not perfect — but no game needs to be: all that matters is to play a better game than the opponent. And that he did.

Paulus, on the other hand, committed a major error of judgment. Since the German *Army* was superior to the Russian, he assumed the German soldier was, too, and could always and in any environment beat the Russian. So, spurred by the *Führer*, he sent his legions into the city and, when things did not work out, kept attacking head-on instead of changing his approach, using the flexibility his forces were capable of. True, he was low on soldiers, and his best division, the 29th Motorized, would be withdrawn — but this should have made even clearer the need to apply finesse. The best troops the Germans had left, five battalions of assault engineers, were flown in, only to feed a battle of attrition. Chuikov, without a lot of heavy weapons, did have the bodies to trade, and as long as the Germans were playing that game, his weak points counted for little.

Paulus’ main strategy became one of hope. Surely, he reasoned, with all the beating the Russians are taking, one more assault, one more battalion, one more massive bombardment, and they *must* collapse. After all, they have been committing an army to fight with its back to a big river, and we all know that such a blunder spells doom — or so he hoped.

And the results of Chuikov’s playing an inferior hand to victory? As he said in his own memoirs, he was the bait. As long as his army held, the Germans could not redeploy to strengthen their weak flanks. And this was the key. Contrary to much popular history, the Germans were well aware of the danger building up on their flanks; they knew quite well that the Rumanians stationed there would fold under a major assault. Intelligence officers actually saw it coming. But the Germans gambled that their 6th Army would surely, by next week, have finished with this city business and be able to redeploy artillery and armor to the flanks, and all would be well. It was a race. Chuikov had to hold long enough for Zhukov to marshal the forces that would crush the Axis’ flanks.

In a nutshell, Chuikov made Paulus join him in a game of Russian Roulette. During the weeks of October, the gun passed back and forth. Finally, on November 19, the chamber went off and the Germans were blown away.

BATTLE FOR STALINGRAD

The Struggle for the City, September-November 1942

Simulations Publications, Inc.

257 Park Avenue South, New York NY 10010

Design: John Hill

Development: John H. Butterfield

Graphics Design: Redmond A. Simonsen

Topic: German assault on Stalingrad

Size: One 22x34-inch map, 600 counters

Scale: Battalion level, ca 600 meters per hex, one week per turn

Game System: Alternating player phases triggered by "reaction" (chit or die roll); each unit or stack attacks immediately after movement, if at all; combat involves offensive and defensive fire, losses determined by firing strength, terrain, and die roll; breakthrough movement, artillery, air support, supply, Soviet command.

Complexity: Moderate

Price: \$15.00 (boxed)

Solitaire Playability: Excellent

Published: April 1980

Suitability for Postal Play: Nil, except with severe modifications of system

A new game on Stalingrad, arguably history's bitterest battle, is always an exciting proposition. That John Hill, of *Conflict Games* and *Squad Leader* fame, would design such a game for SPI made the prospects even more intriguing. What hybrid would spring from the union of the relaxed designer "for effect" with the Manhattan Rules Law School? Would we get a combination of the best of each, or of the worst — high style in loophole-tight casing, or fudge in jargonese?

For some time the grapevine carried disconcerting rumors: that the "game factory" was pressing a fragile design into a pre-set format, was contemplating such unspeakable things as changing from battalion to regiment level to save on counters, etc., ... A good game does not take kindly to such surgery, apt to upset a carefully designed appletart. Avalon Hill discovered that when looking into Battleline's ingenious *Airforce/Dauntless* system. And the SPI development crew recognized it and eventually left John Hill's essential design framework untouched. That is to their credit. Unfortunately, not very much else is.

Not unlike John Dickson Carr's obsession with constructing locked-room mysteries is John Hill's with designing two games in one: of projecting two different styles of military thinking, doctrine, and capabilities in one and the same game and thereby placing its two players into entirely different milieus. The most telling — and most successful — example is his *Yalu*, a confrontation of a modern, hard-hitting, delicate, road- and weather-dependent military machine with a numerically superior, poorly equipped, elusive, resilient, undemanding "People's Army." A confrontation between likewise dissimilar adversaries — of the German fighting machine, powerful but becoming frayed, with Chuikov's "armed mob" — is the central idea of Hill's *Battle for Stalingrad*, as he so well explains in his own notes. If we accept his thesis, we must grant him success in expressing it in his game: the demand on the two players are entirely different and quite in tune with Hill's premises. To have achieved this in a game relatively unburdened with complexities and to have come up with a basic game system that provides both opponents with opportunities to engage the enemy on their own terms is no mean feat and attests to Hill's design talents. However, in producing a *game*, the *tour de force* is not as successful in *Stalingrad* as it was in *Yalu*. The reason is that the burden of initiative, demand on tactical ingenuity, and pressure of time are entirely the German player's — indeed, so much so that if the Soviet player doesn't do well, it's probably because he does too much. More about that after we have taken a look at the game's hardware and software.

Components

With respect to physical quality and visual appearance, *Battle for*

Stalingrad is standard SPI fare. The map is well done in pastel shades of brown, yellow, olive, gray, blue, a little red (mostly for set-up markings), and a little green (for the sparse "forest" circle ringing the city's fringes), creating a mood appropriate to the setting. The 600 red and *feldgrau* counters, back-printed, with standard military symbols but no unit designations, are functional and adequate, if uninspired. The 28-page rules booklet and the large set-up and organization chart with counter reproductions are in SPI's accustomed, immaculate style. Since this is one of SPI's newest games, don't expect it to contain a counter tray; to obtain one, you will have to send in a coupon and an extra dollar.

The only complaint, quite minor, that can be launched is against some skimping with the counters. Late reinforcements in the Campaign Game must be made up from the dead pile; even then, there are only four Soviet Marine battalion counters when five are called for (take any other 3-8 infantry counter, the Marine designation has no effect on play), and an ultra-conservative German player could find himself short of infantry counters for the last turn. Some of this could have been avoided, as the counter sheets contain blanks.

Apart from this petty annoyance, *Battle for Stalingrad* ranks in physical quality and visual appeal with the better of recent SPI games: not as impressive as *Agincourt*, but miles ahead of *Cassino*.

Scope

The game covers the German onslaught on the city, from September 15 to November 7, in seven weekly turns. Thus, the action begins when the Germans were entering the city proper, and breaks off about a week before the Russian counteroffensive, *Operation Uranus*, that isolated and eventually destroyed the German Sixth Army.

It is tempting to speculate that future sister games or expansion kits might extend the coverage to the earlier German advance onto the city and their later stand and annihilation in the pocket. Whether such additions will be forthcoming will depend, of course, on the success of the present game. Also, they would have to be more than just additional scenarios, as the entire nature of the fighting greatly changed with the changing circumstances.

The game is on the battalion level, with a moderate amount of differentiation between unit types (infantry, armor, artillery, etc.). The system, although novel, is easy to learn, and the game flows quite well — although it often leaves the Soviet player with little more to do than sit frozen in terror like the rabbit under the stare of the snake. This is especially true for the one-turn "Introductory Scenario" (September 15-21), which can be completed in an afternoon and, incidentally, is excellently suited for solitaire play. The Campaign Game, usually finished ahead of its allotted seven turns, requires about a weekend's playing time and offers the Soviet player more room for initiative and action.

The players are definitely cast in the roles of the supreme commanders. While effective tactics are essential, they are quickly grasped and soon shaken down to doctrine. What decides the course of the game and its eventual outcome is the commanders' decisions and the priorities they establish: where to strike and in which sequence, where and when to allocate support and throw in reserves and reinforcements, whether to counterattack, stand, or yield. Indeed, the campaign game is usually won or lost (more often the latter) for the Russians through their commander's ability to keep parrying threats from new directions as they develop. In this respect, the game has a refreshing unity of style in that it concentrates on a single decision-making level instead of attempting to be a tactical, operational, and strategic simulation all in one, as seems to become a trend in recent larger games.

Game System

How does John Hill pull off his trick? Imaginative as usual, he has come up with an entirely new game system. At its heart is a novel sequence of play. After an opening round of air raids and artillery bombardments by both sides, the German player starts moving his units. He must attack immediately with units or stacks he has moved, if he wished them to attack at all in the current turn. He keeps moving and attacking until a chit, drawn for each

combat, terminates his phase and lets the initiative pass over to the Russian player. The latter now moves and (much more rarely) attacks until he either rolls a "six" in an attack or has moved or attacked with all units in command control. In this fashion, the initiative passes back and forth unpredictably. Any unit may move and immediately attack, or do either, only once per game turn, and is flipped over to indicate it has done so. The new turn starts with all counters on their reverse sides (the print is black on one side, white on the other).

This sequence of play is great for letting carefully laid plans go awry and introduces an appropriate amount of frustration. You may just have broken into the defense line when the enemy gains the initiative and plugs the gap — or, worse, cuts off and smashes your spearhead. Or you may barely have managed to shore up one hole when you lose the initiative and a new threat from another direction finds you short of troops to counter it. To some extent, this sequence is a substitute for "fog of war": while you do know the enemy's disposition, you cannot predict what he will be capable of.

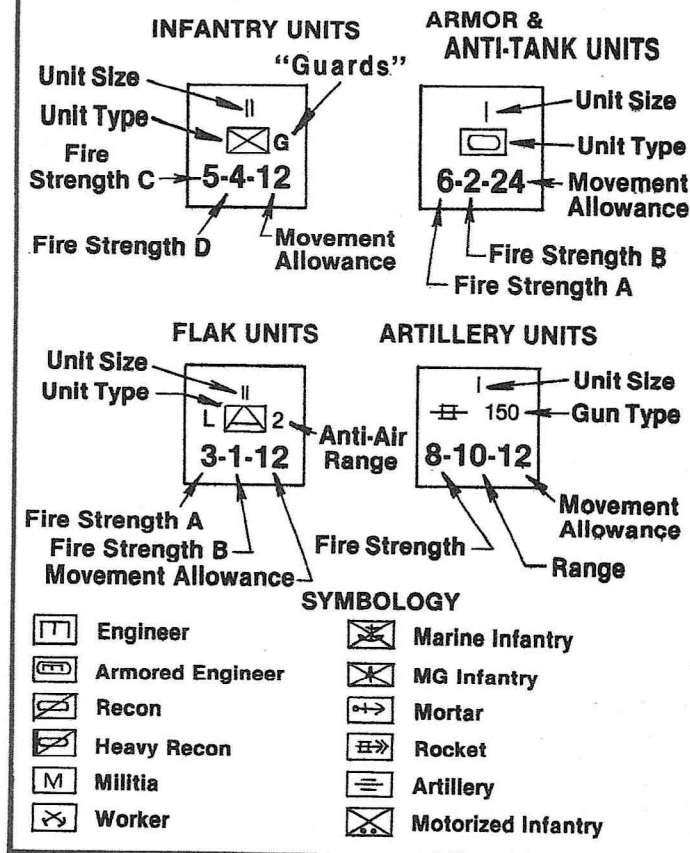
However ingenious and devilishly effective in frustrating the players' plans, the sequence of play does only a small part of the job Hill had set himself, and contributes little to the two-games-in-one trick. It is interesting to see how he introduces the asymmetry of forces while still keeping the game in balance. He gives the German player the *illusion* of a "splendid fighting machine" by providing him with excellent units, far superior in combat and movement ratings to anything the Russians can field, and by giving him the benefit of all kinds of rules reflecting better organization. German motorized units can stage "overruns" (although this tactic is much less profitable than one might think at first), the Russians cannot; German supporting artillery is free of restrictions hampering the Russian; German shock troops advancing and attacking in "breakthrough" may be joined by new forces and supported by artillery, the Russians' may not; the Germans have ample air support, the Russians have almost none; the Germans have complete command control, the Russians' is minimal. Yet, a devious system sees to it that this splendid machine achieves relatively little.

The first compensation is in the terrain effects, which hamper Russian movement less than German and give the Russians better protection in combat in the built-up areas. For example, a Russian defender's fire strength is doubled in "heavy structures" (most of the inner city), and tripled in "fortresses" (the grain elevators, factories, railway stations, department stores, Volga bank cliffs, etc.); a German defender has no such advantage. Add to this the rule that a Soviet defender in a fortress is never out of supply, and the conquest of the strategic strongholds in the city becomes an appropriately bloody affair indeed.

But this is not all. The key role is played by the combat system, a typical John Hill construction. Attacks are not resolved on the basis of strength ratios or differences; rather, first the defender and then the attacker are given the opportunity to shoot. Losses are in terms of number of units eliminated, irrespective of their strengths. In this system, a large superiority allows the attacker to make sure of a kill, but does nothing to protect him from losses. A single, lowly Russian 2-8 infantry battalion in good defense terrain has an excellent chance of eliminating one or two attacking units all by itself — even a 1-4 militia is apt to take out an attacker — and the "splendid" German 5-4-12 battalions die as easily and quickly as their much weaker Russian counterparts. So an attack on a Russian position is likely to cost the Germans more casualties in combat factors, maybe even in numbers of units lost, than they inflict on the defenders. Yet, when on the defensive themselves — a much rarer event — they do not enjoy a comparable advantage. This is as it should be.

Two additional elements make the outcome of attacks even more unpredictable and increase the risk of losses or failure. The first is a preliminary die roll which determines whether the attack achieves surprise, is normal, or runs into an ambush, all with appropriately different resolution procedures. The second is the defender's ability to call in supporting fire from artillery within range. Since the burden of initiative is the Germans', the effects work mainly against them.

Battle for Stalingrad Counter Information



The Russians are not forgotten when John Hill makes life miserable for players. Their principal handicap is almost total lack of command control. In each of their initiative phases they may move all units received as reinforcements (entering at the ferry hexes), but beyond these only as many units as the roll of a single die indicates, plus any units within two hexes of the Chuikov counter. Theirs is truly a shoestring operation!

Still, even with this Russian impediment and their own superiority in fire power, the Germans, whom an unforgiving time table set by the victory conditions forces to attack relentlessly and almost regardless of losses, would be facing a hopeless task, were it not for three more elements lopsidedly in their favor. These are "breakthrough," resurrection, and the *Luftwaffe*. Let us look at each in turn.

"Breakthrough" is earned in combat, almost invariably by the attacker. If his score on the combat results table is greater than the number of enemy units fired at, and thus eliminated, he gains the difference in form of points which he may use to move an attacking unit or stack (one point per hex) and to initiate new attacks against defenders elsewhere (one point per new round). In this way, the German player can get a whole string instead of only a single attack out of almost any unit of his in one turn, and is often able to "unzipper" a Russian defense line. The Russian player, while not forbidden to use breakthrough, will have little opportunity to practice it. The reason is that he, in contrast to the German, may not support an ongoing breakthrough with fresh, previously uninvolved troops or with artillery — quite apart from the fact that he will rarely enjoy high enough a concentration of fire power to earn breakthrough points in the first place.

The resurrection rule (called "German Replacements") places destroyed German units into a pool from which they may be reactivated at the start of the next turn by a favorable die roll. The chance of revival varies with unit type and is one in two for infantry, motorized infantry, and armored engineers, one in three for Panzers, and as low as one in six for some other units. Once a unit flunks its resurrection die roll, it is permanently eliminated.

The *Luftwaffe*, finally, has even more leverage than breakthrough and resurrection. The German player is given an ace in the hole in the form of a generous allowance of *Stuka* and level bomber points for support in each turn. Especially the *Stukas* are invaluable in that they can knock out with relative ease enemy artillery units even in "fortresses," against which artillery and level bombers are effective only in very high concentration. Without the *Stukas*, the fortresses, if equipped with high-factor artillery, could only be stormed at prohibitive cost. And apart from enjoying a great superiority, the *Luftwaffe* and German artillery also benefit from the sequence of play: The air raid and bombardment phase, at the start of the new turn, is immediately followed by the first German initiative phase; in consequence, the Russian player is unable to reinforce the battered key positions before the German infantry makes short shrift of the survivors or simply occupies the lifeless ruins.

In my opinion, the game overstates the role of the *Luftwaffe*. But here, tinkering would be difficult: too large a cut in German air points would deprive the *Wehrmacht* of their only chance to take the city.

This has been but a sampling of essentials. There are many more facets to the game system: immediate counterattacks and strategic withdrawals, Russian trans-Volga artillery (odiously called TVA) and *Kontrpodgotovka* (artillery counterstroke), pontoons and a river flotilla, worker brigades and militia, assault engineers and survivors, anti-aircraft batteries, ferries, burning oil tanks, supply, isolation, Russian collapse, and the ubiquitous General Chuikov. We shall leave to the delighted gamer to discover all this for himself.

Unfortunately, the rules have not received the development they deserve. Some, especially the crucial "breakthrough" provisions, are ambiguous (see Question Box), and there is a lack of clear organization. (Two examples for the latter: the rules for defensive artillery support fail to explain terrain effects, which finally are clarified in a much later, tagged-on section (14.3); and General Chuikov strangely appears under *Initiative and Reaction*, although most of his functions are in quite different categories.) However, these are flaws in the presentation, not in the system itself, and should be easy to correct.

Game and History

John Hill's games are designed not as detailed models of an era or event, but to capture what the designer perceives as the ultimate driving force or rationale behind the event, the historical "lesson," and they should be judged accordingly. That is not to say that Hill and his emulators have license to play fast and loose with details, to create a history as it might or should have happened, but that accuracy of detail takes second place to overall representation.

In *Battle for Stalingrad*, more detail is served than we have come to expect from John Hill, and in greater accuracy. No doubt much of the credit for this is owed to Dave Parham, who did the research work for *Streets of Stalingrad* and also contributed to Hill's game. The map, while not aspiring to reproduce the exact layout of city blocks as does that of *Streets of Stalingrad*, is entirely adequate on the level of detail demanded by the game system. The orders of battle are correct on the division and brigade level — and even here, the importance of strict accuracy begins to fade as there are no unit integrity rules and no historical designations on the counters, so that on both sides the forces soon blend into an armed mob. If we dig deeper, we soon exceed what design and development have attempted to cover. For example, some German divisions enter with nine instead of only six infantry battalions, and the make-up of most of the Soviet divisions and brigades is purely fictitious. But so what? To criticize such points in this game seems almost like faulting a Feiffer cartoon for too protruding a Nixon nose or too big a set of Carter teeth. You cannot take this game, put your own carefully researched regiment and battalion numbers on the counters, and use it as a detailed model — but John Hill never intended it to be played in this way.

There are a few other details with which one could argue. Artillery units have high combat factors compared with infantry,

and no rule prevents their use — or misuse — in front-line assaults. (John Hill comments, not without justification, that artillery was used at least occasionally to reduce strongpoints with fire over open sights, and that the scale of one week per turn allows enough time for artillery to be brought forward for such tasks. Still, here is a point where I am not entirely happy with the "effect" and "feel" and would have preferred added, restrictive rules.)

Another such minor point is that no unit exerts a zone of control within the built-up areas, with the result that the Germans can a little too freely run amuck behind the Russian lines once they have broken through somewhere. (The Russians, for lack of command control, will have few opportunities to do likewise.)

But more important than any such detail is how well the game manages to capture the essence of the struggle and to express John Hill's view of it as a "splendid German fighting machine" being stopped in its tracks by Chuikov's "armed mob." This it does very well indeed. It excels in recreating the atmosphere, the frustrations of the grinding fight through a city, the going to waste of superior fire power, the mounting losses, and, on the other side, the desperate hanging on, the defense of strongpoints to the last man, the inability to exercise adequate command control, the all-importance of anticipating the enemy's next moves. Especially the raging battles for the focal points, the "fortress" strongholds, come as close to reality as a few cardboard pieces on a sheet of paper can at all recreate the blood, sweat, tears, dust, and pain of such a battle. And the armed mob extracts a fearful toll from the fighting machine, although it usually cannot stop it.

There is still the question, however, to what extent John Hill's thesis is correct. He might have got carried away a little with his vision. Not only Jack Radey will take issue with the depiction of Chuikov's 62nd Army as a more or less leaderless rabble, stoically prepared to die where they stood, but capable of little else. After all, mixed with the broken remnants of previous commands there were crack Siberian troops and Guards in Stalingrad, well trained and well equipped — apart from the fact that the Soviet soldier excelled in combat-wise ingenuity and generally was good at small-group action, qualities of great value in that house-to-house, room-to-room slugfest. And while it is true that Chuikov received only the minimum reinforcements needed to help him keep his tenuous footholds in the city, it is also true that his men were fully capable of striking back in offensive actions, much more so than are the outclassed Russians in the game. Here we have *Battle for Stalingrad's* greatest weakness as a historical statement — and as a game, for a greater Soviet ability to bite back would have made the contest much more interesting.

But then, we might be looking once again at a Nixon nose or Carter teeth. A John Hill game is a cartoon more than a photograph, and we should accept his exaggerating in order to convey what *he* sees as the essence of the event.

Regarding the historical "lessons" the game can teach, the first seems to be the obvious and generally accepted one that a fine, strong, but delicate instrument of war was wasted by being forced to operate under terms for which it was unsuited. On this level, however, the game cannot point to a better alternative — but then, neither can the historian. On the operational level, the lesson is more specific. Here, it is interesting to note that both Hill's and Lombardy's games teach that an early, concentrated thrust in the center, west to east across the Mamayev Kurgan to the Volga, might well have decided the issue in the German's favor where the actual assault, largely south to north and along instead of across the stretched-out city, proved too halting and slow. That this lesson comes out so clearly is probably in part due to a preconceived notion shared by both designers — who may have looked over one another's shoulders — and evident, in Hill's game more than in Lombardy's, in the exceptional advantages accorded to the occupant of the Mamayev Kurgan, a commanding but perhaps not so all-important height overlooking the city's center. But there may well be truth in the thesis, and surely the possibility to toy with it in these games, in however imperfect a manner, should be a theoretician's delight.

Play

In essence, the game confronts the German player with the task to penetrate into the city and seize objectives for which victory points are accorded: the factories, railway stations, ferry landings, and grain elevators and the Mamayev Kurgan. The Russian player, of course, must seek to prevent this, but has much less freedom of action.

As a yardstick for how well he is doing as the German player, the gamer will be looking to the "Introductory Scenario," which covers just the first turn (September 15-21) and specifies 8 points as required for German victory. When first trying your hand, don't be disappointed if you score no points at all (unless you had read this article before and absorbed its lessons). The game system is new and takes getting used to, and inexperience works against the German player, who is burdened with the initiative, much more than against the Russian. Even as an expert player, you can be proud if you score more than 5 points against a competent opponent — and will have done better than Paulus, who managed only 4. To garner the 8 points needed for victory is practically impossible, except against a grossly incompetent or excessively unlucky Russian player. So, don't let the unrealistic victory conditions deter you: just disregard them.

The seven-turn Campaign Game is a different matter. Here, 12 points are required for victory (but the ferries and Mamayev Kurgan no longer count double). Once the German player has learned to handle the system, he should reach that score most of the time. Moreover, if he were to manage to collect 8 points (for the Introductory Scenario) in Turn 1, he would have the Russian so off balance that he is practically assured of Campaign Game victory by Turn 3. So one might recommend to the German player to practice with the Campaign Game until he wins it consistently, and then try as a crowning achievement the almost impossible feat of winning the "Introductory" Scenario!

There is only one strategy that can give the German player any hope of achieving a high score in the Introductory Scenario: to open with the central thrust over the Mamayev Kurgan to the Volga and throw in whatever can reach this focal point. The Russians receive ample reinforcements in their first two initiative phases and can use them to build additional protective lines shielding any threatened objectives. Therefore, the German thrust must be swift. As long as the Russians hold the Kurgan, their chance of acquiring the initiative from the Germans is twice as high (they then draw *two* chits at each combat), so the Kurgan has to be seized as early as possible. But the Kurgan lies five hexes behind the Russian line, halfway to the Volga, and attacks through the defenses in front of it are likely to trigger the first Russian reaction. The only saving grace is that the German player can use his ample air and artillery power to clear, or at least ease, the way to the Kurgan and weaken its defenders.

The problem is that the need to take the Kurgan is as obvious to the Russians as it is to the Germans. A competent Russian player will place enough units — including tanks, against which artillery is much less effective — in front of the height to soak up most of the German first-turn air and artillery power. Even under an all-out bombardment, a few defenders may survive and give combat, and it is not unusual that the first Russian reaction is triggered when, or even before, the Kurgan itself is attacked. With that, German ambitions come to grief. If the Russians use their reinforcements wisely, to protect victory-point objectives instead of frittering them away in ultimately futile counterattacks, the Germans will make little further headway. They will probably be able to penetrate to either the central or southern ferry landing (via the Lazur Works or the Department Store), taking the path of lesser resistance, but against the strengthened opposition they are unlikely to manage both, simply for lack of a sufficient number of units which can even get that far from their starting positions.

The Germans can attempt to gain additional points by seizing closer objectives at the other fronts. In the north, their artillery can easily shoot a hole into the thin Russian line, preparing the way for the 16th *Panzer* and 60th Motorized Divisions to attack the Tractor or Barrikady Factories. But such a gap is just as easily



plugged by the Russians in the first initiative phase — unless the Germans foolishly forego to attack toward and beyond the Kurgan first. In the south, the Russian defense is denser, but the Germans are much stronger. The Germans may well be able to break in and storm the Railroad Station No. 2, particularly if they had managed to seize the southern ferry landing and thereby cut the defenders in the south off from supply. But to carry the attack still farther, to take the grain elevators, is usually well beyond their capabilities.

The Campaign Game is a much more close-run thing. The Germans will have to find a fine balance between aggressive and conservative play, attacking with enough vigor to meet his timetable, yet with caution lest attrition rob him of victory. The Russian's problem is different, more difficult, and often decisive; he must at all times gauge correctly from where a new threat can develop, and shore up his defenses before the danger materializes. Early in the game he can, and should, trade space for time. But the moment for counterattacks will come, to relieve or recapture a vital objective or where the Germans have been weakened by attrition. The timing of such counterattacks can be decisive — but more often than not they remain without avail. Despite fearful losses and the withdrawal of their most powerful division in Turn 3, reinforcements, replacements, and *Stuka* support usually keep the *Wehrmacht* going. And while the Russians remain a formidable opponent, there is one tactic against which they are powerless: Just as in the first turn in preparation for the attack on the Kurgan, the Germans can anytime use concentrated air power and artillery fire to blast a clear path to an objective and then seize it before the defenders can be reinforced. So the "fortresses" are doomed to fall one by one. Paulus would be envious and wish he'd had John Hill.

Fortunately, the deficiencies in the game's balance do not stem from the basic system, which is quite sound and appropriate. Therefore, to "tune" the game should be possible — and would make it even more interesting besides. With such tuning, **Battle for Stalingrad** could rank among the best recent games.

Hints

A John Hill design always offers ample opportunities for ingenious tactics and ploys. Most of these the gamer will have to discover for himself, but a few "do's" and "don'ts" might help to speed him on his way.

As the German player, use your *Stukas* to take out artillery, especially in "fortresses" (only *Stuka* attacks avoid the latter's adverse die roll modifications) and break up clusters of artillery on adjacent hexes (to preclude enemy fire concentrations). It is usually a good idea to knock out protecting flak first. When attacking with your infantry, make your assaults strong enough to earn the breakthrough points you need to continue; however, as you advance in breakthrough, peel off a unit here or there to protect your flanks; an isolated spearhead is vulnerable! When starting a new drive, first bring any artillery from the rear forward and "deploy" it where it can support attacks and, more importantly, discourage or break up Russian counterattacks. Start your infantry drive with the units farthest away, to have the nearer ones at hand later for deeper penetrations. Stack infantry with engineers (and Panzers with both) to avoid adverse die roll modifications in attacks; have an engineer battalion in each stack, if possible, so that at least one will survive even an "ambush." Your artillery can't be resurrected, so keep it out of harm's way and protect it with flak. In the Campaign Game, when taking losses, take them in units most likely to be resurrected (infantry, motorized infantry, etc.) except, as may happen after Turn 4, if you have a surplus of engineers.

As the Russian player, stack your tanks and anti-tank guns with infantry to increase their fire power and to make the infantry less vulnerable to artillery fire. Use new militia units to stack with any unaccompanied tanks or anti-tank guns in the city. When retreating, consider leaving militia behind as a screen; if they are lost, you get them back as replacements at the end of the turn. Set your artillery up in concentrations (stacked or on adjacent hexes) and protect it with anti-aircraft guns; don't use it in dribbles: concentrated artillery fire is the best, and often the only, way of breaking a chain of German breakthroughs at a critical spot. Hoard your engineers, they are priceless for counterattacks!

One final advice to the Russian player: Think twice before you counterattack. With ample reinforcements coming in, you will often be tempted to use them offensively against an exposed German spearhead. Indeed, you might easily manage an even trade in units and a favorable one in combat factors if you attack. But to shield the objective hexes against future German attacks must take precedence, and units so placed are likely to extract a much higher toll from the Germans. Also, remember that destroyed German units may reappear, yours never do (except for militia and worker brigades). Being too aggressive, you'll find yourself too weak when it really counts. A bold player will find it hard to adapt to such a passive attitude, but he must learn it — or not play the Russian side. Of course, in certain situations you should by all means attack, say, if you have a good chance of recapturing an important objective such as a ferry landing, or in a desperate attempt to reestablish a supply line. If you attack, try to isolate the defenders first; not only will that weaken their fire power, but they will lose their chance of resurrection.

Confrontation

What about that "confrontation" predicted in our 1979 Firing Line? That two major games on an identical topic and appearing but a month apart will be compared is inevitable, even if that amounts to comparing apples and oranges (no lemon in this bunch, thank God). Apart from their obvious differences in size, scale, and graphic splendor, there is a deeper one of style and design philosophy: Lombardy's game is the detailed model, Hill's is the artist's conception — photograph versus cartoon, or, as Hill puts it, simulation of *armies* versus simulation of military *systems*. And another difference: Lombardy's game, despite relatively uncomplicated rules, is more for the theoretician and military history aficionado to toy with, while Hill's is definitely designed for play. I love having them both!

These differences notwithstanding, the two games are in many

respects remarkably alike, and not only in that they cover the identical time period and terrain. The maps and orders of battle show definite signs of springing from the same research. The combat systems, central to both games, share the concept of defensive and offensive fire and live-or-die results so well suited to a grinding battle of attrition at close quarters — and both are by John Hill! With so much in common, it is perhaps not surprising that both games teach the same operational lesson (that the Germans should have attacked westward across the Mamayev Kurgan), and that both seem seriously to underrate the Russian potential for local counterattack. In the picture of history they project, there is no "confrontation," only agreement.

We have long wished for a definitive game on history's bitterest battle, one we also can play. Our wish has been granted, although in two games rather than one.



Battle for Stalingrad Rules Questions & Answers

Question: In Breakthrough (Rule [10.7]), if *one* point is expended for a stack of attacking units, may the units of this stack move into *different* adjacent hexes? Or must one point be expended for every hex entered, even if the units are from the same stack?

Answer: No, *each box* entered costs one breakthrough point. Each unit (or stack) that is moved from one hex to another during breakthrough expends one point.

Question: May Breakthrough points earned in *one* combat be used to initiate *more than one* additional combat?

Answer: No, only *one* combat may be initiated with a single "set" of breakthrough points accrued from one combat (see also second sentence, Case 10.77).

Question: Rule [15.4] states that Soviet reinforcements "must be moved immediately (if at all)." What exactly does "immediately" mean? More specifically: May some reinforcements move *and attack* before others move (and possibly attack)? Or must reinforcement movement be completed before the first attack is declared?

Answer: Once a Soviet reinforcement unit (or stack) is placed on a ferry hex, the Soviet player must carry out that unit's movement and attacks (if any) before moving another unit. A reinforcement may, however, be placed on a ferry hex *at any time* during a Soviet Reaction Phase (see also Case 15.44).

Question: According to Rule [11.4], a die roll of "6" in a ground attack ends a Soviet Reaction Phase. Does this refer only to combat resolution die rolls, or does it include preliminary die rolls for surprise, normal, or ambush attacks?

Answer: This refers only to actual combat resolution die rolls.

Question: On the basis of experience since publication, would you recommend the victory conditions for the Introductory Scenario to be revised?

Answer: Extensive playtesting at SPI showed the victory conditions to be valid. However, the rest of wargamedom assembled seems to disagree. Perhaps an unseen strategy eluded us for those many months. Anyway, I suggest a German victory level of 6 points if the German player is inexperienced; and 7, if he is a better player than his opponent.



Battle Report Battle for Stalingrad by Friedrich Helfferich

John Butterfield, SPI's chief developer, kindly put us in touch with one of the playtesters of **Battle for Stalingrad**, who suggested what he felt was a good strategy for German victory in the Introductory Scenario. Two groups of experienced players put this strategy to a test in a game which is reported here. It was agreed beforehand that, barring a German victory in the Introductory Scenario (Turn 1 only), the match would be continued as a Campaign Game.

Turn 1, September 15-21. The Russian set-up predictably takes good care to shield the Mamayev Kurgan. Well forward, the hills (Hexes 1322 and 1224) are held by anti-tank guns. The forest belt in front of the Kurgan is manned by infantry stacked with tanks, and additional tanks are placed in the open between forest and Kurgan. The strong Kurgan garrison includes anti-aircraft guns. Artillery concentrations are placed in the vicinity of the central ferry landing and at Railroad Station 1 and the grain elevators, protected by anti-aircraft guns. In the north and south the defense is spread out, except for the artillery, and units with zones of control are placed to block any gaps in the forward lines.

Initiating the assault, *Stukas* go hunting for artillery but, because of very effective anti-aircraft fire and not so lucky die rolls, knock out only two units (versus the playtester's projection of four) and one anti-aircraft battery. The level bombers effectively reduce the Kurgan garrison, but prove incapable of completely clearing the forest belt on the approach to the height. The artillery easily takes care of the anti-tank guns on the hills, but uses up almost all its ammunition to knock out the remaining tanks in the forest belt (indirect artillery fire is much less effective against tanks!). Not enough guns are left to fire at the tanks in the open in front of the Kurgan. All in all, the preparatory bombardment has remained less successful than projected: the way to the Kurgan should have been cleared completely, and a number of additional targets be fired at.

In previous games, the German team had used the mobile units of the 16th *Panzer* and 60th Motorized Divisions on the extreme north of the front to participate in the assault on positions in the

Kurgan area. In the present game, following the playtester's strategy, they remain in place northeast of Orlovka, poised to attack into the northern part of the city and against the factories. In preparation, their artillery shoots a hole into the Russian front to provide access to the unprotected Orlovka-Stalingrad road.

The 389th Infantry Division, pulled over from opposite Orlovka, leads the assault on the Kurgan position. The tanks in the open are brushed aside without even a chance to fire back (zero combat factor when firing into woods), and despite artillery defense support from the Volga shore the weakened Kurgan falls to the division's infantry and engineers. But, drawing their fifth and sixth chits, the Russians acquire the initiative. (They have one chance out of five to do so with every drawing, so this outcome is normal.)

The Russians now immediately block the Orlovka-Stalingrad roads and strengthen their defenses between the Kurgan and the Volga. They also slip a few tanks back into the forest belt west of the Kurgan to isolate the 389th Division. The division, out of supply, makes a tempting target for a counterattack, but the Russians wisely refrain, dissuaded by 24 German artillery factors deployed for support near the Hospital.

The Russian tanks in the rear of the 389th are no serious problem, but the German attack is now hopelessly behind schedule. According to the playtester's projection, the Tennis Racket yards, Lazur Works, oil refinery, and central ferry landing should all have been captured before the first Russian reaction was triggered.

Facing very strong opposition in the Tennis Racket yards, the Germans now decide to swing south instead of continuing toward the Volga. The 71st Infantry Division first clears the tanks out of the forest and then joins the 295th in a powerful drive toward the Department Store. As luck will have it, that strongpoint falls to a surprise attack. But the adjacent Railroad Station 1, with two 8-factor artillery units and one militia, is too hard a nut to crack for the forces that can be brought to bear. Instead, the infantry begins to clear a path to the southern ferry landing. No Russian reaction yet.

When the infantry runs out of steam, the Germans play their ace: The mobile units (with 24 movement points) of the 24th *Panzer* Division race to the scene from way up at the Tsaritsa and capture the area around the Red Square and the ferry landing! All the Russians in the southern part of the city are now cut off from supply. And, after eight attacks, still no Russian reaction.

The German 94th Infantry Division now cuts through the defenders in the southern outskirts (their fire power is halved for lack of supply) and clears a way almost to Railroad Station 2. After fourteen attacks, Russian reaction is finally triggered.

The Russians use their reinforcements to shore up their battered front between Tennis Racket and southern ferry landing. A local counterattack at Red Square, supported by artillery, reestablishes a tenuous supply corridor to the south and, more importantly, cuts the supply line of the *Panzers* at the ferry landing. However, the follow-up attack on the trapped spearhead is too weak to be successful.

The German team is not seriously worried about their *Panzer* spearhead, but has lost hope for victory in the Introductory Scenario. According to the playtester's projection, they should now hold most or all of the objectives south of the Kurgan and central ferry landing; they do hold three out of eight.

Taking over the initiative again, the Germans attack with the slower elements of the 24th *Panzer* Division between Tsaritsa and Railroad Station 2, but immediately trigger another reaction. The Russians use the opportunity to renew their attack at Red Square against the isolated *Panzers*, but fail again.

The Germans now conduct a massive assault with the 29th Motorized Division against the southern part of the city. The division reaches Railroad Station 2, risks heavy casualties and failure in an assault on that strongly defended bastion — and takes it in a surprise attack!

The last German units to move are the 16th and 60th Divisions in



the north, which fail to break into the city, but at least isolate and neutralize the Russian troops in the Orlovka salient. The Russians use their final phase to strengthen their defenses where they can.

The score: 5 points (for Kurgan, southern ferry landing, and Station 2), 3 short of victory. The attack fell behind schedule from the start; it accelerated in the long period of grace before the Russian second reaction was triggered, but even the luck of achieving surprise against the Department Store and Station 2 did not bring it anywhere near to victory.

The Campaign Game. As agreed, the battle was continued. The Germans made headway slowly, but inexorably. Using *Stukas* to clear out artillery and then attacking in their first impulse, the Germans took Railroad Station 1 in Turn 2, the grain elevators in Turn 3. Their level bombers and artillery repeatedly cleared a way to the Krasny Oktabr Works in the northern part of the city, but luck with early reaction chits enabled the Russians to close the gaps — until Turn 4, when part of the factory fell. Their counterattacks against this salient remained unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, at and around the southern ferry landing and Red Square, the spearhead of the 24th *Panzers* suffered much under artillery fire from across the Volga and repeatedly had their communications out. The ferry landing itself changed hands twice, in Turns 2 and 3, but then remained firmly in German hands. Also, in Turn 2, the 29th Division broke through to the Volga near the oil tanks, so that the Russian defenders in the south profited little from the temporary recapture of the ferry.

In the Kurgan sector the Russians valiantly held their ground, even counterattacked out of the Tennis Racket in Turn 3, if without notable success. By Turn 4, they had to yield the Tennis Racket yards, which were coming under withering artillery fire.

The German Drive, almost out of steam in Turns 3 and 4 because of the withdrawal of the 29th Motorized Division, gained momentum again with the massive reinforcements in Turn 5. The first assault, however, through the Lazur Works against the central ferry landing, stalled in the oil refinery; a most inopportune Soviet reaction chit left so many German units in the hexes

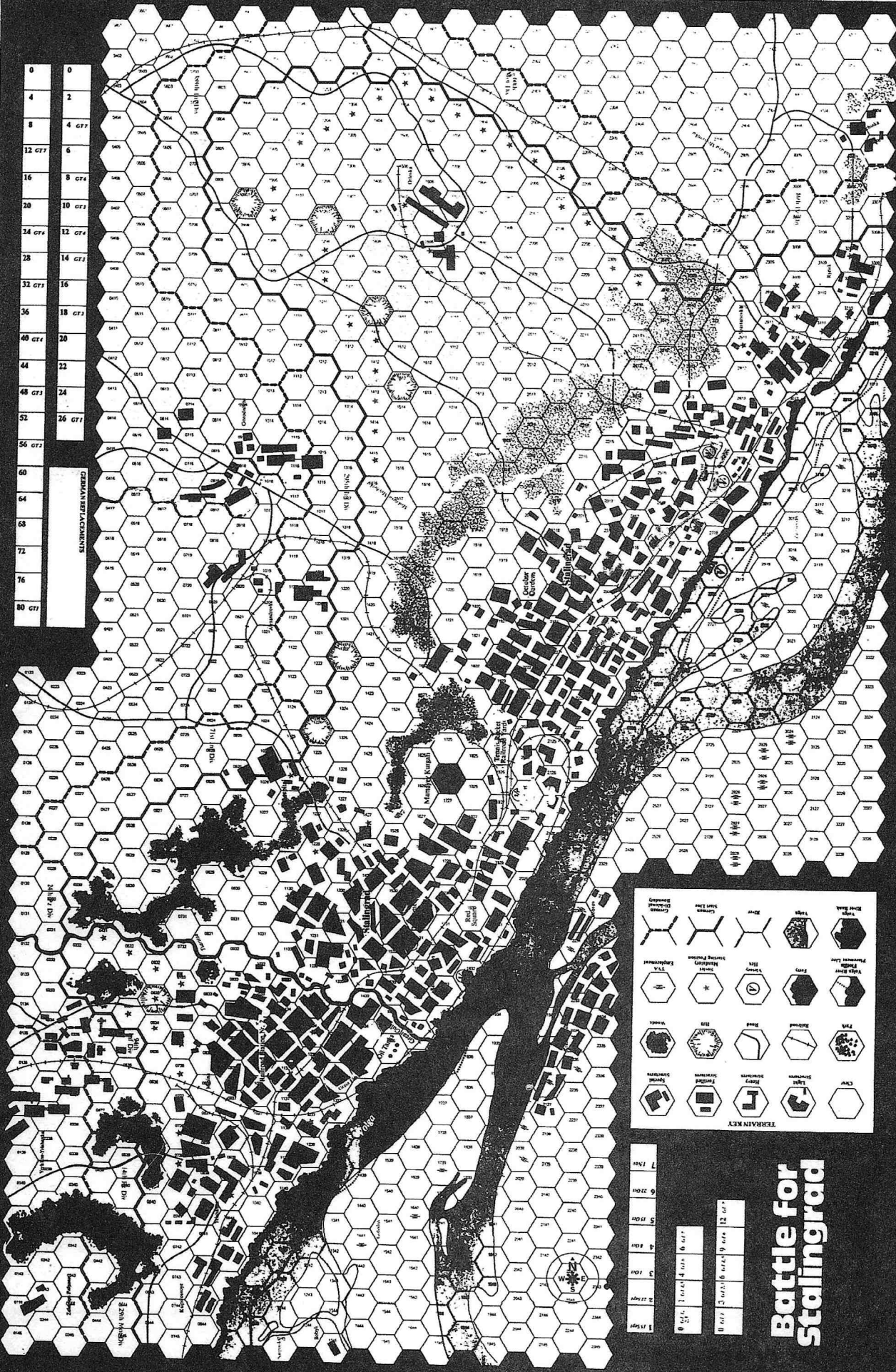
adjacent to the landing that not enough troops could be placed to resume the attack. To make up for this setback, the German forces farther north cleared the rest of the Oktabr Works and then, favored by a lack of Soviet reaction, sliced through to the northern ferry landing and captured it. The Russians were now in poor shape, unable to reinforce their remaining strongholds in the north. One of them, the Barrikady Factory, fell to the last German attacks of the turn, seemingly assuring the *Wehrmacht* of the 12 points needed for victory. But... one fatal oversight: in the south, a few Russian units had used strategic withdrawal to slip through to the river bank, where they were in supply again, and in the final phase of Turn 5 they ganged up on the hapless German anti-tank company guarding one of the grain elevators, recapturing that objective and thereby staving off a German victory.

But this feat could only delay the inevitable. In Turn 6 the Germans easily recaptured the grain elevator and then overwhelmed the defenders of the Tractor Factory, commanded by Chuikov himself, and killed the brave general in the process. The Russians thereupon conceded.

Evaluation. Could the Germans have won the Introductory Scenario if, in view of the strong defense in front of the Kurgan, they had attacked elsewhere? Both teams answered, "no." South of the Tsaritsa there are not enough victory points to be gained, and in the north the farthest objectives can be reached only by the most mobile units and therefore are easily protected by the Russians, who, holding the Kurgan, will receive their reinforcements early; and a simultaneous attack north and south would leave both prongs too weak.

This game, one of many, was typical for our testing. Against a competent Russian set-up and reactions, and barring unbelievably lucky die rolls, the Germans have no chance to win the Introductory Scenario. Its victory score should be reduced to 5 (for the inexperienced) or 6 (for experts). On the other hand, more often than not, German victory in the Campaign game comes with the massive reinforcements in Turn 5 — or earlier if the first turn was very successful. A *slight* reduction of German air support points might improve the balance.





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Battle for Stalingrad