

# VARIANTS

## khalkhin-gol

“Why did the Russians deploy their forces so poorly to meet the Japanese attack?” This is the most frequently asked question we receive concerning the game *Khalkhin-Gol*, which was featured with Conflict #5. The initial situation has the Russian forces divided, part of the 9th Mechanized Brigade in the north on the Fui Heights, while the bulk of the Russian and Mongolian units are west of the Halha River or on the east bank opposite the Kawamata bridge.

The bridge at Kawamata was the only link to the east bank forces and was therefore heavily protected. The Russians did not expect so large a Japanese attack force (a reinforced division), and not directly at Fui. The motorized units on the heights in the north were probably placed there to hit the flanks and rear of any Japanese forces that attacked the Kawamata bridge. However, the Japanese attack did not come as expected, and the Fui heights force was nearly annihilated.

Before the game was published, our playtesters seemed to fall into the same trap as the original Japanese commander: crossing the Halha River to clear the west bank, before securing the east bank and eliminating the Kawamata bridge. The small forces at Fui heights are like a magnet that draws the Japanese northwards, and then human nature seems to take over; there's a river, let's cross it. The article on this border war pointed out how this tactic was doomed to failure, yet our playtesters committed the same error.

In spite of this, many people insist that the Japanese cannot lose; our local record favors the Russian player. Too many people quit if the lone Russian engineer unit is eliminated. They forget that the Russian and Mongolian infantry and cavalry units do not need a bridge to cross the Halha River. This type of assault, under the cover of the more numerous and longer-ranged Russian artillery, usually wins the game in the last few turns for the Russian player. The Japanese player, on the other hand, must try to win the game in the first few turns by eliminating as many Russian/Mongolian units as possible. He then tries to hold the east bank against the waves of Russian reinforcements that gradually enter the game. Although he has a great superiority in numbers initially, the Japanese player will later find he cannot guard the entire length of the Halha River if he has suffered even minor losses.

These factors make *Khalkhin-Gol* one of the most enjoyable games we have published. No two games develop exactly the same way, and the 1- to 1½ hours playing time usually means that as soon as one game is finished, the players can try again. But a further year of playtesting has brought up some questions and variants that can be added to make *Khalkhin-Gol* more interesting. These clarifications and recommendations came primarily from our readers. We encourage such feedback on all our games.

### CORRECTED ORDER-OF-BATTLE

The Mongolian 6th Cavalry Division (which does not appear on the chart of page 11 of Conflict) was further north along the Halha River to guard against a crossing. We permitted the Russian player to include it in the game, but you omit it with historical justification. If you do eliminate it from the game, remove two Japanese armor units also. To be precisely accurate historically, the Japanese should only have *one* armor unit per regiment, or two armor units total to be in correct proportion to the Russian armor in the battle. But since we allowed the Mongolian 6th Division in the game, we had to increase the Japanese armor slightly for the sake of playability. If you are a fanatic for historical accuracy, remove two Japanese armor units and the Mongolian 6th Cavalry (3 cavalry regiments).

### SWAMPS HELP?

It may seem strange to give the defender an advantage when sitting on a swamp hex. However, since the Nomonhan area was almost entirely desert with few large dunes or “hills” the swamps provide the only other cover for either side. In addition, the soggy areas tended to dissipate the effect of artillery shelling, so there was an advantage (even though slight) and it is reflected in the combat odds.

### ONE SIDE ALWAYS WINS

If it seems that one side still has too much of an advantage, it is relatively easy to balance the game. If the Soviets have difficulty winning, simply give the Japanese player only 2 points for each Russian unit eliminated. Should the Japanese player find it too hard to achieve victory, reduce the number of points the Russian player receives for having units east of the Halha River (only 1 point per unit).

Other play-balance revisions could be: Eliminate points altogether for either side having units on the opposite side of the river; give points only to units on the opposite bank that can trace a supply line *over a bridge* to their edge of the game map (supply line cannot cross enemy units or enemy zones-of-control); or allow the Russian player to set up his initial forces anywhere he wants, and permit his lone engineer unit to start on a swampy river hex.

One physical problem should be rectified: cut the rules from the game map. It can be quite infuriating to try to refer back to one of the rules and upset the game in the process.

### CLARIFICATIONS

The following are interpretations made over the past year regarding the rules:

Artillery cannot be halved; it is eliminated even if a "-1/2" is rolled on the CRT. Also, one artillery unit firing at enemy units on a swamp hex has *no effect* (must be at least *two* artillery units firing at that hex in order to use column 1 on the AFT).

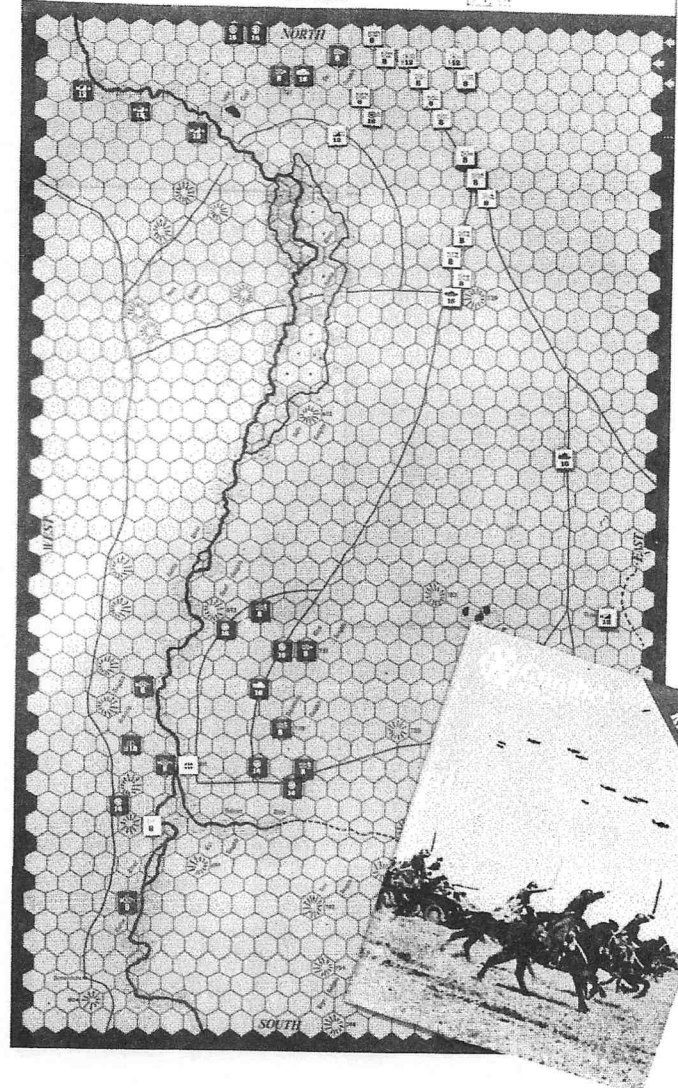
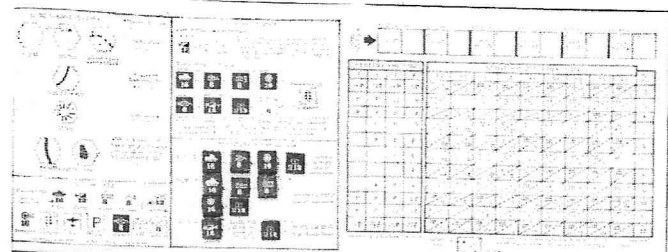
A unit that cannot retreat, for any reason, is *eliminated* instead if a retreat is called for on the CRT. And a retreat means *all* the units in that hex must retreat.

Pinned units that are defending may retreat and defend at their full strength (half- or full-size). Also, rule C22.b) refers to *any attacking unit*, not just armor units.

Engineer units should not be able to build a bridge if they took losses (eliminated or flipped over) while on the river hex the turn before. An engineer unit flipped to half-size on a river hex could not build a bridge on that hex on turn 7.

Air units may only attack *one* enemy hex per air attack turn, and they may not attack enemy units adjacent to friendly units.

Finally, you receive points for *all* units eliminated from the game, whether half- or full-size. (Treated equally for victory conditions.) Also, we recommend that neither side should receive victory points for having units on the "x" hexes.



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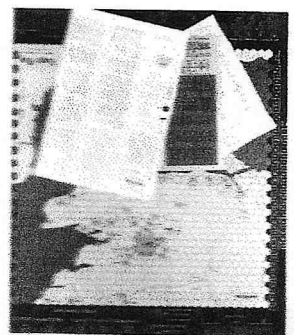
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