

BY: Larry L. Bost

THE SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR

THE SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR is available from Strife Games Company, 3447 N. Pacific Avenue, Chicago, Ill, 60634...for the low price of \$6.00, post-paid.

TSOPA is a two-player, operational level game designed by Roger Hotz and John Truty. The basic idea is that a strong Japanese force tries to smash its way to victory against the heavily fortified defenses of the Russian Army in and around the Port Arthur area on the lower tip of the Kwangtung Peninsula.

THE SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR covers a period in history that has been sadly neglected in wargaming and that has been rather neglected by historians. Strife's game covers the land battle portion of the famous campaign of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905...and what's more...they do it very well. It was a desperately needed game in the sense that it was the first to cover the topic and I was very glad to see it. THE SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR (TSOPA) has proven to be a very interesting game and a unique one.

Perhaps the most outstanding single feature of the game is the rule book. You might say that it is almost non-existent since there are only 8 pages in the booklet...6 of which are devoted to actual rules. Miraculously, there are only 27 rules to the entire game with 2 optional rules. Don't let that discourage you, however. The fact that there are so few rules is a blessing. You can actually read the rules and still have time to play the game in the same evening (unlike some other games on the market today). The rules are printed clearly, they are easily understood, and they more than recreate the realism of infantry combat of the period. One of the pages in the rear of the booklet is devoted to examples of play...a nice and helpful touch that I haven't seen very much in the last 13 years. Some of the rules cover such topics as: initiative, engineers, trenches and fieldworks, killing zones, mechanics of artillery fire, counter-battery fire, artillery blocking fire, gas attacks, artillery interdiction fire, Russian ineptness, Japanese tenacity, Russian Naval gunfire, and Japanese siege guns. The two optional rules cover morale and tunneling operations.

The rule for morale is not exactly fair to the Japanese player because the Russian gets a morale boost when he loses 6 battalions in a single turn. He does not get any morale boost when

the Russian loses troops. But fairness is not one of the great principles of war...the fact that the Japanese lost troops heavily is well documented.

The victory conditions in the game are completely variable and are only determined for each game by the selection of two random numbers that are cross-referenced to obtain the objectives of the Japanese player. The objectives change with every game so there is no risk of the game becoming stale and there can be no "perfect plans" for opening moves. The objectives will always decide the victory conditions, unlike other games where victory may be based on troop losses. With this game victory is based on capturing concrete objects such as; East Pan Lung, West Pan Lung, Fort Chi Kuan, Chi Kuan Battery, and Naval Ridge. They are solidly researched, historically accurate, objectives.

THE SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR is a very unusual game in that it is very simple on the surface...but underneath it is quite a challenge...requiring careful advanced planning by both players to achieve their desired victory. The Japanese player is constantly working under the burden of attack. He must attack and achieve his objectives but he can't afford to expend his time and troops unless it is toward those ends. The Russian, on the other hand, must make the best of his limited situation. He must defend everything because he does not know what the Japanese objectives will be. Interestingly enough, it is one of the few games found where one side is totally offense oriented while the other side is totally defensive...quite unique.

The physical quality of the game is better than average and really leaves nothing to be desired. There are 102 Japanese counters and 83 Russian pieces done in 2 colors and excellently die cut. The map is done in light blue, black, and gray on a heavy stock sand colored sheet of 17 X 22". The map is highly durable and will last a lot longer than most of the sheets published these days.

THE SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR is really one of those games that comes along once in a while and you should definitely pick up on it. The game is simple, accurate, a mind-tester, and fun. What more can you ask of a wargame? Try TSOPA and I'm sure you won't be sorry. □

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