

VILLE GAGNEE ??

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By mid-day on the second day of the sudden Soviet onslaught on West Berlin the military situation of the Western Allies in the southern district of the city was very bad, although the British were holding well in Spandau and the French, supported by a strong contingent of Berlin's paramilitary police force, were still presenting a continuous though thin front to the 6th Guards Motor Rifle Division. But to the south the US line along the Teltow Canal was in fragments and the Autobahn from Potsdam was wide open to a Soviet drive into the city to link up with the 103rd Guards Airborne Division which had dropped successfully into Charlottenburg and the Grunewald the previous afternoon, less one regiment dropped right onto the lightly-garrisoned Tempelhof Airfield, completely neutralizing it. Although resistance could be continued for another day at least, possibly two days, the Soviet forces had too firm a hold on Berlin's vitals; on orders from Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe, the Western garrison accepted the offer of honours of war made by the Russians at 1200 hrs on D+1.

The great thing about this hobby, folks, is that you can stop the world when things get tough, get off and try an alternative time-segment. Like this:

Dawn broke darkly for the commander of the 20th Guards Army, despite the sunny, windless August morning. Twenty-four hours before, his four motor rifle divisions—6th Guards, 14th Guards and 19th, plus 1st East German under command of 20 Army—had launched their assault. Now the 19th was held by the British in Spandau, the 14th was running into increasingly stiff resistance in the heavily-built-up area west of Tempelhof, the 1st East German had its head in a bag in the southwest, where it had tried to thrust along the Autobahn. To the north, in Reinickensdorf, the 6th had almost completely annihilated the French—but at the cost of almost all its infantry, making it unlikely that the division's remnants would break through the

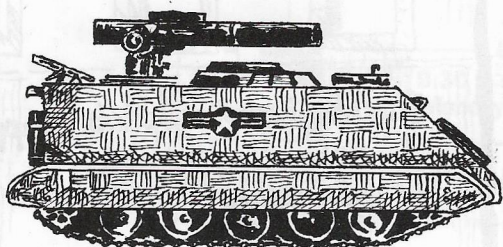
police units which had been hurried to the crisis-point. Worse, apart from a few sites near the city boundaries, his command had taken none of the vital objectives assigned to it. Perhaps he could have called in the paras on D-Day after all... 'Oh God,' he groaned aloud, thus earning still more the unspoken but potent disapproval of General Tonibennski, his friendly neighbourhood commissar...

All of which goes to show that this new game, published in *Strategy & Tactics* No 79, can swing either way dependent on the player's early dispositions and how Fortune's wheel spins for each. *Nerlin '85*, as its name implies, features conflict in West Berlin in the context of a general outbreak of hostilities between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and is an operational game at battalion level, its system that of the *Modern Battles* series but with marked modifications to reflect the nature of fighting in a largely built-up area; designer and developer are Jim Dunnigan and David Ritchie respectively. This profile is aimed at those readers of *The Wargamer* who do not subscribe to S&T but I hope that it may also be of some service to those who do subscribe but who, for one reason or another, have not yet got round to giving much attention to their recent acquisition.

Map scale is 1 kilometre to the hex, the map showing the whole of West Berlin and a belt of the surrounding area; the city is by no means all built-up—it includes open space, a sizeable chunk of forest (the Grunewald) and three airfields as well as suburban, industrial and urban terrain, the whole seamed by rivers, canals and the Havel See, as well as having a scattering of smaller inland waters. Units are mainly battalion-size and, as in *Modern Battles II*, show unit symbols with 'unknown' status on the reverse. Each turn represents the passage of eight hours and turns are sequenced as two day-turns and one night; the game can, in theory, last for sixteen turns—5½ days—but is actually unlikely to last more than six

or seven unless Soviet progress is abysmally poor. Indeed it can—again in theory—last only one turn of the Soviet player takes a big risk and is then very lucky with the dice.

As said, the system is basically that of *Modern Battles*—move-fight sequence in each player-turn, 'differential' CRT (total attack CF and defence CF and subtract lesser from greater to obtain a plus or minus differential), locking ZOC, mandatory combat between adjacent units, terrain effects reflected by pro-defensive shifts on the CRT and, last but not least, artillery able to add CF at a distance to both attack and defence. But now come the additions to bring out some of the flavour of FIBUA (Fighting in Built-Up Areas), a form of warfare whose characteristics include short fields of fire, heavy demands on manpower, increased chances of infiltration between defended areas—and a high casualty rate. Combat shifts for terrain are often considerable, with three- and four-column shifts in favour of units defending in Industrial and Urban hexes respectively: in addition ZOC do not extend into Urban hexes although they extend out, making units in such hexes tough nuts and relieving them of the necessity to attack adjacent enemy units. On the other hand units in concentrations of Urban hexes thus have no ZOC themselves, being sur-



rounded by similar terrain; the negation of ZOC is mutual. This allows infiltration of gapped lines, making continuous defensive positions necessary in heavily built-up areas (heavy demands on manpower, remember, to say nothing of short fields of fire). A nice pitfall digged for the artillery-fiend is contained in the Collateral Damage rule; more than a certain quantity of artillery CF into a hex (including any FPF added to the defence) is increasingly liable to turn that hex into a Ruin—special counter in the affected hex, which now gains an extra column-shift on the CRT and also becomes ZOC-proof like an Urban hex. A generous use of artillery by the attacking Soviets, especially in the more built-up areas, is all too likely to provide the defenders with a set of extra-strong defensive hexes in which they can sit without any obligation to counterattack. Another special rule reflects the difficulty in winking out stubborn defenders: in the event of a Retreat result in combat the defender can announce "They Shall Not Pass!" (those very words) and roll a die. Provided that the roll yields a figure greater than the number of retreat hexes called for on the CRT his unit stays put—although if the result is equal or less then the unit is destroyed.

Now d'you see it? Russian hordes attack in force, bags of artillery to attain +12 differential—attacker in Industrial hex, three shifts down on the CRT—+12 becomes +4,5—die-roll yields D1 result—defender intones "They Shall Not Pass!" and rolls a 2!—defending unit stays put, concentration of artillery CF into an Industrial hex produces a Ruin! (no ill-effects on occupying unit)—no ZOC into hex any more, defender not obliged to counterattack but Russian hordes now pinned and must attack again next turn with the CRT-shift now 4 columns in the defender's favour—Arrrrghski!

Rough on the attacker? Worse is to come, friends. Unlike the *Modern Battles* series, *Berlin '85* has only one CRT and a double-edged one at that. Of the 36 possible results on the plus-differential side 9 are 'Exchange' and 3 are the dread 'Ax' (defender retreat one hex, attacker loses CF at least equal to that of the defender); in other words the attacker stands to lose a unit one attack in three on the average, and when one bears in mind that column-shifts will rarely permit the use of the +12 column his real chance of loss is more like one in two. The CRT is not the attacker's friend and as the Soviet player is the one doing most of the attacking he is going to realise this with a vengeance; to lose a 4-3-12 motor rifle battalion in exchange for a 1-2-8 police unit is not what one would call a good trade; to lose it to an 'Ax' result and then find that the accursed peelers

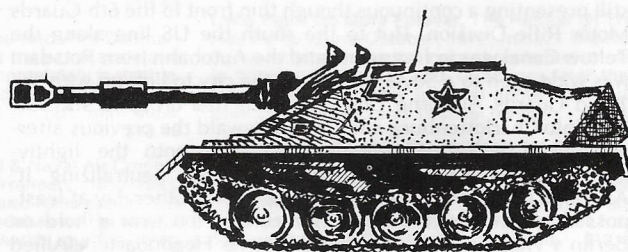
have cried 'TSNPI!' and are still in residence in what is now a less-than-pregnant Ruin hex is indeed to ask for bread and receive a stone.

How, then, can this apocalypse of a game be won? It's all done by Victory Points. When the game ends (of which more anon) the Soviet player receives VPs on the scale of $Y \times$ the number of Warsaw Pact military (not Volkspolizei) units on the map, being a multiplier which decreases as the turns go by; during Turns 1-5 it is 5, in Turns 6-8, 4 and so it declines until in Turn 16 it is $\frac{1}{2}$! The Western player receives 5 VP for each turn in which one of his artillery units has interdicted the east-west rail line bypassing Berlin, 8 for each turn in which one of his units has occupied a hex of that line; he cannot amass a large total but he can badly off-set his opponent's. And to win even a marginal victory the Soviet player must be at least 120 VP to the good.

To be sure of winning the Soviet player must end the game in as few turns as possible in order to obtain a good multiplier and to avoid losing too many units in long-drawn-out combat; this he can do by inducing the Allied garrison to surrender, either on its own decision or on orders from SHAPE. By capturing various objectives (all clearly marked) and by eliminating enemy units he amasses Surrender Points (and the Allies can abate his score by destroying Soviet units and by retaking captured objectives); at the beginning of any turn he can offer Honours of War and a die-roll compared with a table (column dictated by the SP level) determines whether or not the Allies surrender. Snag—any result other than a surrender gives the Allies another 20 VPs! Ergo, have a fair total of SP before offering Honours of War.

Berlin '85 plays well, interestingly, and quite realistically, given its fairly simple system; the *Modern Battles* format, although I consider that it does not portray the fluidity of mechanised warfare, lends itself very well to a form of combat which is more of a slug-fest. The developer has added some good ideas further to bring out something of the 'feel' of FIBUA; true, only a detailed tactical game can portray the details but *Berlin* will certainly make both attacker and defender realize that *Wurzburg* and the *Chinese Farm* were never like this.

The No 1 scenario, 'Op Unity' postulates a sudden Soviet attack, the Western allies having only a couple of hours' warning. The Allies are deployed near their various barracks in West Berlin: USA—the three battalions of the 6th Infantry Regiment, a battery of artillery and a mixture of smaller units (military police, an ad hoc battlegroup, etc): France—the 46th Infantry Regiment, the 11th Chasseurs a Cheval (armour) a recce unit and another battery: Britain—1st Bn The Welsh Guards, 2nd Bn The Royal Anglian Regiment, 1st Bn The

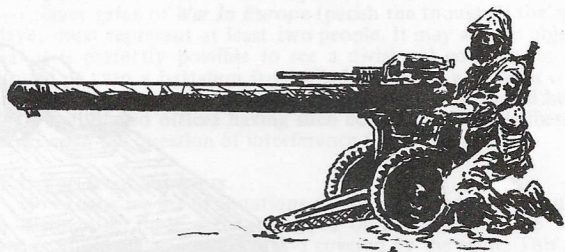


Green Howards (Princess Alexandra of Wales' Own Yorkshire Regiment) (There! I just couldn't resist rolling out the 19th Foot's full title), 2nd Bn The Parachute Regiment (who held the bridge at Arnhem forty-one years earlier), a squadron of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards in a recce role, and two batteries of artillery. In addition a large force of West Berlin police units can be deployed fairly freely as the base hexes in which they must be set up are more in number than the units.

Outside the hosts of Midian they prowl and prowl around; four motor rifle divisions, each of nine battalions plus divisional artillery. (As regards this last the player who knows *Modern Battles* will look in vain for the 122mm howitzer regiments; only the rocket-launcher battalions appear as the guns are deemed to be deployed in an assault role, firing over open sights, and have been factored into the rifle battalions' CF. David Ritchie did this partly to simulate Soviet doctrine and partly to avoid too great a clutter of ranged-artillery units on the map.) An airborne division is also available to be parachuted or airdropped on any day turn and the roll of military units is completed by the 34th Guards Artillery Division, eight ranged-artillery units, each with a pretty heavy punch. Finally

there are eight Volkspolizei units in East Berlin, useful for holding gains but for little else.

The Soviet player can have a tough time slogging his way into the city, for the more he slogs the more he stands to lose. Given some lucky die-rolls, an eye for the weak points in the defence, and deployment of the airborne division at the right time (and no serious losses during the drop) he can force a breach and start moving through into the objective-rich centre—this happened in the game described in the battle-picture with which this article opens. But if the Allies can group their rather scattered national contingents to counter the main thrusts as they develop, if too many attacks produce an 'Ex' or 'Ax' result, if gaps can be blocked as they occur, then the attackers can find that they are losing units, are moving too slowly, and that time runs on, runs on . . . This was the situation



behind the second battle-picture.

On his side the Allied player will find that he cannot hope to cover the city perimeter adequately and that his three contingents will be fighting their own separate battles, aided by the police (good in defence but not really intended for the offensive; their low attack CF and their inability voluntarily to enter enemy ZOC reflect this). He will have to improvise constantly as he attempts to identify, contain and then halt the converging enemy thrusts; as the CRT is so bloody he will find it advisable not to attack except *in extremis*, instead conducting his defence through a combination of mutual support and choice of advantageous terrain, pinning enemy units from Urban and Ruin hexes and forcing poor-differential attacks—preferably on police units! Further uncertainty, affecting both sides, is caused by the deployment of all units other than artillery with 'unknown' side up until the moment of first combat, as in the *Modern Battles II* series.

Of course 'victory' for the Allies cannot be true military victory; the Soviets will, in most games, eventually control more of the city than do they. Rather is it measured by the extent to which Soviet victory is made Pyrrhic ('If this be a victory, comrade General, let me never see such another.')

The Soviet player must win quickly but he will have to take a chance, probably more than once, to do so; probably his worst let-down will be a Cease-Fire in response to his offer of Honours of War—skip the turn, 20 VPs lost, and begin again next turn; eight hours gone, bringing a lower VP multiplier that bit nearer, and perhaps the Allied VP total now too great to outreach sufficiently. When I first played the game I thought it interesting but predictable—Soviet victory: when I played it next I thought it interesting but predictable—Soviet victory, no way! Now, after more playings and the nuances more fully understood I have no hesitation in calling it interesting and unpredictable. "War is the province of uncertainty," says Clausewitz—and the city of Berlin lies within that province.

Yes, this is a worthwhile game, reflecting credit on designer and developer alike, a game which should prove to be in the upper bracket of S&T issue games. The rules, moreover, are complete, clear and free of ambiguities; the only silly which I can cite is the rule which allows *all* units to move by the city Underground—how do you get a 155mm gun down an escalator?—which I prefer to modify by restricting this mode of movement to 'leg' units. It is interesting, tricky, fun to play (the Soviet player's attacks of apoplexy would do credit to John Cleese) and, last but not least, the Soviet ability to terminate play by a successful offer of Honours of War leads to a game easily playable in an afternoon or longish evening.

Note 1. "Ville gallee!" was the old Norman battle-cry on setting foot within a city under assault; vide Alfred Duggan: *Knight with Armour*.

Note 2. The British brigade looks a little unreal; it is many years since I served in Berlin but I have my contacts. There should be three infantry battalions, not four, and none of these are mechanised although all are mobile and contain a mechanised element. Moreover the RSDG squadron is armoured, not recce; after all, the cover picture of S&T 79 distinctly shows the Berlin flash on the Chieftain tanks it features. But don't let that spoil the fun; play on!



CARDBOARD BATTLEFRONT

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tions. In most games, broadly excepting naval games, the players both have either perfect information across the board or at least perfect knowledge of the opponent's disposition if not his strength. Efforts to build limited intelligence into the games have had indifferent success because accuracy in this respect is inevitably accompanied by a significant increase in playing time, resulting in a typical design compromise that minimizes limited intelligence provisions even when they are included.

Of course surprise is still possible in the board game. The player may use maneuver during his turn to concentrate forces from widely separated points on the game map for a decisive attack on some sector that the opponent does not expect. This is facilitated by the relative ease of maneuver on a game map as opposed to real terrain. Surprise in the commitment of defensive forces is also possible in games that include reserve rules. On the whole games, especially naval and air designs, do permit the operation of this principle of war.

Then there is the question of economy of force, which again is closely related to both maneuver and to surprise. Here the situation is quite the opposite. In reality a true economy of force is very difficult to achieve because, on the one hand, maneuver is quite constricted while, on the other, the adversaries have vague notions of each others' strengths and dispo-

sitions under "fog of war" conditions. Usually the best that can be accomplished is to assign strong forces an axis of advance which, according to intelligence reports, will bring them into contact with a weaker enemy. The difficulty of achieving true "economy" is readily apparent.

In the game these difficulties are wholly absent. Economy of force is one of the easiest things to pay attention to in the game. The player is aware of his own strength, of the strength of the enemy, and of the adversary's positions, the effect of defensive terrain on the Combat Results Table, and the movement point costs of reinforcing his attacks with given numbers of additional forces. All these variables are manageable. The player may reference the CRT, find the optimum odds column for an attack, and bring up the precise number of strength factors to achieve that odds ratio and leave himself with the maximum of residual forces for other uses on the mapboard. The ease of maneuver and the perfect knowledge of the adversary make management of forces on the board extremely simple. Moreover, the absence of detailed logistics rules and restrictions make the available forces perfectly usable. Most gamers are entirely familiar with the phenomenon of an opponent who even uses a pencil and paper to add his combat factors and calculate the best attacks during his turn. Thus wargamers are in fact very good at illustrating the principle of economy of force in war.