
The Next War

Wein, Basic Scenario #2

Replay by Jorge del Moral

The Next War, 1978

Game background by Russ Gifford



The Next War is a brigade/division level simulation of a Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of central Europe.

Designed by the legendary James Dunnigan, and an early example of by the now equally impressive Mark Herman as developer, **The Next War** is the moment the ball goes up and the Warsaw Pact forces clash with NATO units from Denmark to Italy. Air, land, and naval units are included. It is a realistic comprehensive simulation, with Dunnigan's groundbreaking new system of combined movement and combat.

Maps: 3 (plus 2 small extensions). 1 hex = 14 kilometers
2400 Counters, representing Brigade or Divisional Units with Air Units

Each turn is two days of real time.

Comments:

This game system was revolutionary. **The Next War** has no separate combat phase. Combat is integrated into each unit's movement across the mapboard, and requires the expenditure of movement points to initiate.

Commanders decide how far to push a unit, and run the real life risk of overtaxing the troops to the point where they break. At the same time, completely new and extremely lethal modern weapons are in the hands of opposing troops. Time is a factor neither side has in excess. Next War forces players to completely re-think how they play simulations.

Enjoy this quick introductory replay by Jorge ML, and then dust off your copy of this groundbreaking game, still fresh all these decades later!

---Russ Gifford, Decemeber, 2021

Playing the Next War

By Jorge del Moral

I recently purchased The Next War game from SPI with the purpose of actually playing it. Not easy task when need to balance wargaming hobby with family duties....

After reading the basic rules I reach to a conclusion that the game is actually a very affordable one in terms of complexity (I will deal with air and naval rules in following weeks/months).

There are certain concepts that are familiar to me (combat as part of the movement) but I feel a bit puzzled with the combat rules and CRT. Let me note some particularities:

- Each combat unit (usually a Division or Brigade) moves and attacks on its own, so there is no massed attack from multiple units apart from those supporting units accompanying the combat unit. Very similar to GCACW from Balkoski.
- Every combat unit has 3 steps to being eliminated. This remains true no matter the size of the unit (Regiment to Division) and steps lost doesn't affect the actual attack-defense ratings of the unit, but provides a DRM to the enemy. This makes a WP Division as brittle as a Nato Battalion, which seems a bit odd. As long as this smaller unit can retreat to avoid losses, it can be a real pain in the neck.
- Rules don't clarify if the same unit can keep attacking as long as it hasn't reached the maximum 50 movement points allowance. [Edit – yes, they can. See final line of 7.0 which allows for repeated assaults.]
- Cadre concept: initially, every nation has a rating for its combat units. This difference in rating is used amongst other DRMs. However, once a unit has participated in combat and the final modified DR falls within a certain value span, all participants change to cadre 5. This means even a battered unit can actually be more dangerous (cadre 5) if attacked with a new unit -no matter its size- with usually cadre 3. Quite strange.
- Fatigue is a measure of movement spent. There is no fatigue penalty for losing a combat.
- I will employ the alternate CRT that can be downloaded here at BGG.

I chose the Vienna scenario because it has a very small footprint and a low density of units.

Please note this is the very first time I play this game and don't feel proficient with the rules. Surely errors (both tactical and rules-related) will abound.

As basic rules are used, no air units take place; nevertheless, I will make some assumptions: Czeck airborne brigade can land on any hex not under enemy control. Warsaw Pact units must protect their airports from which their superior air force operates (in an advanced option).

First, it is the WP units that deploy freely. I try to keep units within their natural countries as much as possible, thus keeping Hungarians (HU) in Hungary and Soviet (SU) plus Czeck (CZ) units in Czechoslovakia, trying to maximize their opportunities to circle the Austrians (AUT) in order to cancel their options to retreat after combat.



Rail To/From
Hex C6127 (5 MPs)

10-4-2
18 SU
M/G21

8-5-3
28 SU
M/G21

10-4-2
G2 SU
M/G21

FSH

0-1

The Next War

SOUTHEAST MAP



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OFF-MAP MOVEMENT TRACKS:

Units may move "off map" between the hexes connected by the tracks (and between the hexes indicated by the heavy blue lines). Specific notes printed on the maps). When moving on the tracks each box is the equivalent of a clear terrain hex, and costs one or two Movement Points to enter depending upon the mode of the moving unit. See Case 5.5. Entry/Exit hexes are connected by a heavy bar.

10 West
1D1 S-4509

4 West
2D3 S-4508

West
1D1 S-4512

3
3C3-1 S-4512

7 West
1D1 S-4512

AUSTRIA

HUNGARY

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

St. Polten

Wien

Bratislava

Bratislava

Donau

Wienter-Neustadt

Gyor

Rapa

Neusiedler See

Rules allow for 3 deployment options: Tactical (usual mode when near the front), Strategic (to speed units to arrive to the front) and Hedgehog (defensive mode).

I committed a fatal blunder for the AUT units choosing hedgehog mode, as it cancels their ZOCs and permeates dramatically their front defenses for a mere 2 DRM advantage in combat. **See figure 2, below.**



I will keep posting the scenario with the notes and photos I took while playing it. While the scenario lasts for 5 turns (there are some reinforcements for the NATO units), I advance Wien is doomed in the first WP turn because of my poor NATO deployment and bad rolling dice, as it will be seen in next post.

Before proceeding any further, I think it is worth providing some insight into the rules and scenario conditions:

The scenario starts on turn 1 and lasts 5 turns. As per rules, all WP units are considered supplied for the first three turns of the game and NATO for the first four turns, so no need to worry much about supply in this scenario.

The victory conditions for this scenario are as follows: WP needs to achieve at least 101 victory points to achieve a marginal, 120 for a substantial and >150 for a decisive victory. Anything below 100 vps give NATO different victory levels.

Wien is comprised of three hexes, each worth 50 VPs, so it is a natural objective for the WP. Also, the other two Austrian urban hexes (St. Polten and Wiener-Neustadt) each provide 25 VPs to the WP. So, the maximum WP can get is 200 VPs

As per NATO, they get VPs for no WP occupation of city/urban hexes (20 VPs if at least one of these 5 hexes remain unoccupied by WP units at the end of each turn), 50 VPs if at least a unit (combat or support) survives, 10 VPs for each WP Div step lost or regiment eliminated and 5 VPs for each WP Div on the map by end of scenario.

So, NATO can get up to 150 VPs without damaging any WP unit by simply “staying” in the game and denial of urban/city hexes. WP has 6 Div units, that could provide another 30 VPs to NATO if not exited off the map by turn 5.

Altogether, this victory conditions make for a very interesting and asymmetric approach from each combatant. For WP, their goals should be, in this precise order:

- to occupy as soon as possible all 5 urban/city hexes
- eliminate as much Austrian/Italian units as possible without risking losing Div steps.

Ensuring occupation of the hexes while NATO units still lurk around means only 2 Divisions can leave the battlefield. NATO enjoys 7 more units as reinforcements for none to WP. As each unit requires a 3 step loss before being eliminated, and I have no clue how this can be achieved (usually a D results in 2 steps lost because of a Div attacking a Brigade or equivalent).

Finally, after the gameplay and re-reading rules and scenario, I confirm that occupying St Polten in the very first turn is critical for WP, because otherwise the stream of NATO reinforcements coming out of the road at 0110 that leads to this urban hex will make it very difficult.

WP gets a Front Supply Head (FSH) and “wheel” units (Soviet regimental rail unit).

In order to be supplied in the game, WP units can be 10 MP (movement points) from a rail/road east hex of the map, or 10 MP from its HQ, which in turn must be 10 MPs from a FSH, which must extend an unlimited supply line to a rail/road hex in the east (not through enemy units nor their ZOCs). Thus, FSH units concentrate all end-supply lines.

The turn sequence for the basic game is very simple: alternate WP/NATO land stages, where in their stage, each combatant receives reinforcement/replacements and conducts movement-combat. No chemical nor nuclear pulses in this scenario.

My first WP movement is paratrooping the airborne Czeck brigade (that should start in Bratislava airport) behind NATO lines, to block retreats. As I chose not to use Air optional rules and considering WP has air supremacy, I simply choose a hex not in enemy ZOC, 0411. (See Figure 3, below)



Next, I activate the HU 4th Mechanized Div and position it to assault Wiener-Neustadt, benefiting from the fact that if NATO opts to vacate it, they will only be able to move to 0413 (because of the ZOC of the Czeck Airborne brigade), opening a hole in the south. Being in tactical mode, it spends 10 MPs (2 for clear hex 0613 + 4 for ZOC -a glaring error on my part, as being in hedgehog mode, NATO units don't project ZOC- + 4 MPs for standard assault). The defenders are the 1st East tank battalion and 2nd mechanized regiment, both considered equivalent to brigade units in game terms).



The DMT are as follows:

NATO: +2 (urban) +2 (original cadre rating) + 2 (hedgehog) = +6

WP: +1 (size, a Div attacking a smaller unit get up to +2, reducing this by 1 for each additional unit the defender has, rule 7.61; Nato has 2 brigade-equivalent units in the Wiener-Neustadt) + 3 (original cadre) = +4

The combat ratio is 10:3 (3:1) with +2 for the defender advantage in DMT (6-4).

I'm using the following CRT that can be downloaded here at BGG. Each DMT point equals +/-3 in this CRT.

Dice roll delivers 26 +6 (remember, 2DMT x 3 = 6 added to the result because addition favors defender) = 32, barely falls within D area so NATO player must lose 2 steps (rule 7.64, and hedgehog units can't retreat) +1 additional step for 7.66 (2 brigades in same hex).

AUT player allocate the three steps as desired, keeping both units in play. To eliminate a combat unit, it must lose 3 steps. The casualty markers in these NATO units allow beneficial DMTs to the WP for further attacks.

Below: Figure 4: The Combat Results on the NATO Units.



I didn't push my luck with the HU 4th Mech Div against these same units, and I should have in order to guarantee destruction of NATO units early on.

I will upload the subsequent moves this weekend. Actually, playing the first turn took me just 20 - enjoyable- minutes, but I am taking my time to review my movements after the game with a second reading of the rules to take some learnings from this scenario and share with you in this post.

Chromatically, an appealing game which experience excels with gamers that grew up in the cold war period. The box, map and counters design help creating this atmosphere. The basic system works fine. The team behind the design and development of this game says it all.