

GAME PROFILE: RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

by Steve List

The Russian Civil War is the first of SPI's new "Power Politics" games. It is also the first of the bookcase format games, which makes it different from past SPI products in both design and physical appearance. The cardboard game box has a printed cover and bottom, the mapboard is mounted, and a 20-compartmented tray is provided for counter sorting and storage. The board contains a map of the erstwhile Russian Empire and adjacent lands, plus a number of tables and other play aids. The territory is divided into many provinces which are grouped into larger regions (e.g., Greater Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine). Movement is from province to province or along rail lines.

The counter mix provides four sets of combat units in white, red, green and blue. White and Red units are the contending factions, Greens represent nationalist groups (Ukrainians, Balts, etc.) who want independence, while Blues are the foreign interventionists (France, Germany, US, etc.). There is a hierarchy of hostility. Reds fight everyone; Whites fight Reds and Greens, who fight Reds and Whites; while Blues fight only Reds. In addition to combat units, there are Red and White Leader Counters, Politburo Markers, Assassins, and random events markers. In addition are counters representing the Czar and the imperial horde of gold, plus identification markers for each Player.

There are two kinds of combat. Units in a province with a hostile faction may attack as many stacks of enemy troops in that province as the Player wishes. Odds are based on the ratio of combat factors, and a die is rolled on a fairly conventional CRT. There is also subversion, which can be used only by the Reds against the Blues in an adjacent province. Odds are calculated as before and the same CRT used, but only "Defender Eliminated" results are applied.

There are two other types of conflict, directed at Leader units—Purges and Assassination. Unlike combat, they may be conducted at any point in a Player's move, while Purges can be conducted at any time during the game as well. This allows their use at a crucial moment to supplement an attack or undercut an opponent. Red and White combat units can only move when stacked with a Leader, so an Assassination could leave a large body of troops in limbo. Purges allow a Player to take direct control of another Player's Red Leaders. Thus, judicious use of these weapons is quite powerful. Each Leader unit has a Leadership Value of from one to three, which is also its Combat Strength and the number of combat units it may lead around the board. Assassination is a die rolling procedure depending on the

target's Leadership Value and the number of Assassins employed. Purges are usually a group endeavor; the Central Committee of the Politburo can collectively purge any non-member, and any individual Player can purge another. The more Politburo Markers and aggregate Leadership Value Points the purgers have, the greater the chance of success and the less chance of a counter-purge. Purges are resolved by the roll of two dice on a "Purge Results Table." There are fifteen Politburo Markers in the game, and Players must have at least eight to set themselves up as the Central Committee, so much of the game involves covert and overt jockeying to form such a coalition.

The game can accommodate up to six Players, labeled A-F. At the start, Players are assigned a letter at random, and the first Player to move in a turn is likewise selected at the start of the Turn, allowing a lucky Player to make consecutive moves. After labeling, a cup or similar container is filled with all the Leaders, 13 Politburo Markers and a sprinkling of Assassins. Players each draw one counter in turn until all are selected, with the extra Politburo Markers going to the Players holding Lenin and Trotsky. The Leaders, and all the troop counters, are placed on the board in the provinces assigned them, and play begins.

The first Phase of a Player-Turn is the Random Events Phase. The Player rolls dice, with the result usually being an epidemic in up four provinces. This causes the elimination of the largest unit in each stack in the affected province. Other possible outcomes are the doubling of units launching subversive attacks that Turn, or the Player getting to draw a chit from yet another "Randomizer." After the Movement and Combat Phases, the Player always draws a Randomizer chit. This Randomizer contains the rest of the Assassin Markers, and chits giving the Player control of a portion of the Green or Blue troops. Once he has control of one of these factions, he may move the units without a Leader. There are also chits taking various Blue factions out of play.

After all Players have had a Turn, the Turn Record advances and eliminated non-Blue combat units are replaced on board, subject to certain limits. Leaders, and troops eliminated after Turn Five, are kept by the eliminating Player for Victory Point credit at the end of the game.

The game ends when there are no Red Leaders left on the board outside Siberia, which is a White Victory, or when no White Leaders are left, giving a Red Victory. In the event of a White Victory, Players get Points for White Leaders and troops they control on

board, for Red troops and Leaders they have eliminated, and for possession of the living Czar and his gold, plus a few other things. In a Red Victory, the criteria are reversed, except that the Player gets credit for the Czar dead, and for the gold only if it is still on the board. Since most Players control both Red and White forces through most of the game, there is a certain amount of indecision about what manner of victory to play for. Of course, it is also rare for all Players to decide to go for the same color Victory Conditions in the end, making for a struggle to the end.

My first experience with the game was highly entertaining and probably typical in terms of general outline, if not of fine detail. There were five Players (which seems to be the optimum, though four should be alright, too), and I was last to move in the First Turn. Except for that, I was in good shape; I had Lenin and Trotsky, the strongest Red Leaders (three Leader Points each) who each started stacked with an 8-Point combat unit (the largest size). I had many minor White Leaders as well, one of which controlled the Don Cossacks, the only 8-Point White unit. I had four Politburo Markers and the only two Assassins in the game so far as well. All this strength was tempered by moving last. Most of the unattached combat units were taken by the time my turn came.

After a few Game-Turns, action had reduced the Reds to three Leaders and a single combat unit, which I consolidated into a single stack for protection, and moved to Siberia where the Whites holding the Czar were similarly weakened, allowing me to capture him. I then drew a chit giving me control of the Japanese Blue troops in Vladivostok, to go with my Whites and US forces already there. These could march westward in a bloc, sweeping my Red rivals before them.

Then disaster struck. At the start of my next Turn, my own dice roll caused an epidemic in Siberia which robbed me of my last Red unit. All three Leaders and the Czar would be vulnerable to any roving enemies unless I could pick up some troops, and precious few were to be had. Red Leader Frunze was in Archangel with 12 Combat Strength Points, and was controlled by one of my rivals. He was too strong to Purge, so my only chance was to move to his province and attempt an Assassination. The gunsels failed, leading me to fall back on my alternative. I sent the Czar overseas to safety and moved my Red Leaders down to Cossack country where my own Whites killed Trotsky. Lack of White strength at this point forced me to leave the others for another Player to pick off. I was further frustrated to realize I had neglected to move my powerful Blues out of Vladivostok. This delay was especially galling

because later, just as they were about to get into combat, I drew the randomizer chit taking them out of play.

The liquidation of my own Red forces was paradoxical on the surface, as I was the most powerful member of the Central Committee at the time. But by eliminating Lenin and Trotsky, no Red troop replacements would come on for two consecutive Turns, practically guaranteeing a White Victory. Which is what happened. Unfortunately, I didn't win. Another Player, who always got to move before me was thus able to grab the bulk of the White replacements and roll up Points in the end game. His margin of victory was exactly equal to his superiority over me in White units on board.

The game has much to offer—diplomacy for the honest, skulduggery for the treacherous, and schizophrenia for the undecided. Military strategy must be properly employed to deal effectively with military strength, but political strategy is required as well. Aside from the joys of purging your favorite enemy, the chief attraction of this game is in the problem of defining your enemy and moving against him while getting him to waste his effort on someone else.

D/O Strategy *[continued from page 9]*

The last sector is Arrow Four. This area is a rather quiet area. One should continue to use the Disengagement Attacks to keep one's center intact. Counterattacks can be used also. The main point to keep in mind is to secure one's center with just enough units to keep it intact. Any spare units should be sent to Arrow Two if they are strong or if they are artillery units, or units should be sent to Arrow Three if they are exceptionally fast.

In conclusion, O Strategy is able to use simple, but effective basic tactical skills. No new fancy footwork had to be devised. The strength of O Strategy lies in the proper application of basic tactics with a sound sense of direction when undertaking the offense. One final word on O Strategy and that is timing.

In order to use O Strategy most effectively, one must attack both of the enemy's flanks simultaneously. The enemy will have considerably more difficulty with his position if he faces a simultaneous double threat on both of his flanks rather than one threat at a time on either flank. He may be able to parry one threat at a time, but a double threat is twice as hard to counter. Simultaneous attacking is an important element of O Strategy.

All in all, D/O Strategy represents the key stone to the present series of Basic Tactics. Hopefully, a new gamer could have started from just a rudimentary knowledge of any QuadriGame rules and with the help of these articles could have gained sufficient wargaming skills to give one's best wargaming friend a "bloody nose."

Your Moves

What follows are excerpts from some of the letters I've received in the past few months. You may have your mind boggled by the thought, but I read every letter addressed to me (and a lot that are not). If you're in the mood, I invite you to write directly to this column. Those letters that are most likely to see print are those that comment on topics of general interest to the readership in a thoughtful, well-reasoned manner. I particularly encourage letters of constructive criticism about MOVES and SPI products in general (after all, you are the biggest consulting group that I have access to).

I very much liked and learned from "Seminar/ Game Rules," but felt it was limited to a designers' perspective and mentality. I'm sorry, but GDW's *Port Arthur* cannot be played given the rules-as-written. Both players have infinite supply in their home countries, but supply units have no combat factor—and strategic movement capacity is in terms of combat factors—so you can either move an infinite amount of supply—or none! We choose arbitrarily to count a supply unit as "one" CF; but that allowed you to move 20 supply counters per turn! We next tried "two CF's per supply counter." Marc Miller responded that "5" is correct. They also omitted stacking rules for supply. Miller first said "three supply units per hex in addition to combat units," then changed his mind and said, "infinite stacking of supply."

AH's *Chancellorsville* cannot be played given the rules. Two different concepts of road movement are given; one hints at strategic movement a la *Anzio*; another speaks of "road bonus." This was crucial in determining whether a unit could use a road bonus at all during a turn in which it crossed a pontoon bridge. One interpretation said yes; the other, no. The problem is that the game opens with three free Union movement phases; so the two different interpretations give the game two completely different opening complexions. Sorry, but games take up a lot of time; we preferred to shelve both the above games until we got the rules cleared up.

Am also fascinated by last issue's Opening MOVES and this issue's Countermoves. The discussion is worth a lot more space than it got, and I look forward to throwing a few cents into it when my time restrictions loosen up. (I'm still busy earning a living at the moment.)

Really liked MOVES #27; getting back to why I subscribed in the first place—namely, for "conflict simulation theory and technique." Good, solid reading. First rate. —Mark Saha

Mark Saha is a well-known wargamer and contributor to MOVES Magazine. —RAS

In MOVES 27, there seems to be a difference of opinion in the area of rules. It is my personal opinion that the present style of writing is the best I have seen, and that there is not much room for innovation. Rules must present, in readable prose, the way in which the game pieces can act. It should be precise and loop-hole free, because that will satisfy those who demand absolute law, while still allowing "free-thinkers" to follow their own light. Of the almost one-hundred sets of rules which I

have read, I think that the game which comes closest to these limitations is *Patrol!* Not only is the game presented clearly, the rules were fun to read. On the basis of this, I would suggest that you retain the present structure, but make the rules longer by increasing the descriptive content of the individual sections. —Carl Chandler Fristrom

We are planning to do just that. Whether or not game rules can actually be fun is another question. —RAS

First, let me express my appreciation for your cover article in the latest MOVES (#27). Mr. Hinsley's analysis of *Mech War '77* is the best treatment of such a subject that I've ever seen in your magazine. Granted that Mr. Hinsley's effort was complemented by the quality of your game, nonetheless, the narrative was lucid and as interesting as the game itself. Please pass on my compliments and continue to make efforts toward this, in my opinion, remarkable success.

Secondly, let me address myself toward your latest controversy about game rules. It seems to me that the best possible method would be a simple narrative of either the actual history and/or a game played during playtesting. If you take a lesson from the interest displayed in the game as history articles published in MOVES, I think that you might discover that the game rules could be treated similarly.

The decimal system that you use to number your rules could still be applied to this narrative style in two ways. First, in an outline similar to the one that you now have for your rules, but more like an index. Secondly, the numbers could be displayed in the margin of the narrative where specific rules are explained in order to facilitate reference when examining the index. —Daniel J. McClure

One of my fond hopes is that Avalon Hill and other game publishers would be influenced enough by SPI's successful format to the point where all widely distributed wargames share a common structure and language. I think that such commonality would have a beneficial effect on the growth of the hobby (since we'd all be speaking the same tongue). —RAS

One thing I've noticed over the past few years is that there are a lot more of us (gamers)... for the first time in my gaming experience, I actually have more opponents than is practical (from my wife's point of view). This may be just luck, but it seems to be the case on most of the East Coast... and I think that you have had a lot to do with it. There are two publishers that every opponent I've met is familiar with: SPI and Avalon Hill. Generally, they got started on Avalon Hill and now play SPI games almost exclusively. A good example was a recent convert who was a *Panzer Leader* addict until he encountered my copy of *Panzer '44*. The last I saw of him, he was converting *Panzer Leader* scenarios to *Panzer '44* units! I suppose that you must have some idea of the effect that your standards of excellence have on "other people's" players, but if you don't, the impact is considerable.

Another aspect that you dominate the field in is range of subjects. This is nothing new to you, but it sure helps to get a novice started when you can whip out a game that matches his interest in terms of period, scale, environment, etc., etc. This is something the other guys just don't offer.

Your rules format is unquestionably the best in the sport and this has a great deal to do with the attraction you have for new and old players. It is one of the most critical factors in whether a game

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