

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

GREEN FIELDS BEYOND

A WWI Game that Moves

by Christopher R. Perleberg

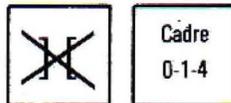
This game appears to be something of a sleeper success: no one expects a World War One title to be a blockbuster — but, while not really a runaway bestseller, *GFB* is attracting an audience beyond the usual Great War diehards. This may be due to the unusual nature of the battle and its treatment in the game. The author suggests that the simple inclusion of *tanks* makes the game more than ordinarily appealing. Golly, if that's the case, maybe we'll put tanks in *every* game! Just think of the titles: Napoleon's Last Panzers, Armor in Gaul, Terrible Swift Tank. Staggering! — RAS

Games on the First World War have never been popular or numerous. From time to time, *S&T* will feedback such titles as *Verdun*, *The Somme* and *Passchendaele*, but none of these games have ever seen the light of day. Small wonder; on a typical operational scale, one day per turn, 1000 yards per hex, *Passchendaele* would require one hundred turns to advance twelve hexes. The Great War games that do exist are a mixed bag. Tactically, there's *Soldiers*, an incredibly brutal demonstration of firepower from the early years of the war, before things got *really* vicious. There's *1918*, deservedly revived in a recent *MOVES* issue, a game that should remind the British player of trying to hold water in a sieve. There's the *First World War Module*, for the unemployed with time on their hands. And there are others — *1914*, *The Marne*, the old *Verdun*, Rand's *Cambrai* — until recently.

SPI is in the process of publishing a record six World War I games in a single year. The first of these and the only West Front entry, *To the Green Fields Beyond*, will not only satisfy Great War buffs, but should also be capable of attracting anyone seriously interested in good game design. Not only is the game system first-rate, the map eye-catching, the rules clear, the situation exciting, the handling of artillery superb, the cameo appearance by von Richthofen appealing — but this game has the one element needed nowadays to guarantee success. Yes, gamers, I'm talking about *tanks*.

To the Green Fields Beyond covers 17 days of the battle of Cambrai where, in November, 1917, the British used massed tanks for the first time in history to achieve a potentially decisive breakthrough. Because of the conflicting notions regarding the objectives of the attack, it bogged down after the initial success, a success that gained more ground in one day than the Passchendaele battle had gained in months. On the 11th day, the Germans counter-attacked with *Stosstruppen*, the special infiltration troops

that would later dominate *1918*. Using ground attack aircraft and a two-pronged attack, the Germans presented the British with a crisis of their own, and only German exhaustion and a desperate British defense prevented a breakthrough. Thus, in *Green Fields* each player has the opportunity to launch a powerful attack, and each player faces a nail-biting defense. A classic situation.



The game has a single map and 400 counters, something of a rarity in these monster game days. The map is colorful, and the counters are dark green for the Germans and a surprising red for the British. (Shouldn't they be Sam Browne brown?) Each counter is backprinted. Several markers for broken-down tanks, unit cadres, artillery effects, interdiction and bridge demolition are also provided. Finally, there is a set of mnemonic counters, used to remind the phasing player which units have participated in combat — a useful deviation from the old cover-'em-with-a-blank-counter/players-should-record-on-separate-sheet trend. All in all, *Green Fields* is a neat package.

The sequence of play is basically barrage-attack-move 2nd barrage-2nd attack-2nd move, the second Movement Phase operating as a kind of "Mech Movement Phase," although any unit may move in either phase. The hitch is that any unit that attacks may not move in the next Movement Phase (thus the need for the "Action Taken" counters), so to maintain a fluid game, a player must keep reserves. Additionally, since combat occurs before movement, a defending player can cut his opponent to only one ground Combat Phase by making sure that none of his units are adjacent to enemy units at the end of his Turn. The use of dual movement phases, even in infantry games, is not new — witness *The Marne* and *1918* — but here the restrictions on movement and the second Combat Phase require careful planning for the attacker and a defense-in-depth by the defender.

The overwhelming arm in this game, as in the whole war, is the artillery, which accounts for about half the units on each side. Artillery can fire five different missions: Rolling barrage, which shifts the odds on the infantry Combat Results Tables during the next combat phase; Drumfire barrage, which

basically grinds the target into mush; S.O.S. barrage, FPF by another name, used to add to the defense strength of attacked units; Interdiction barrage, which slows enemy movement; and Direct Support barrage, which is added directly to the attacking strength of friendly units. Rolling and Drumfire barrages may be fired at Hurricane intensity, which doubles the strength while tripling the supply point expenditure.

In order to successfully play *Green Fields*, each type of barrage must be used effectively. Rolling barrages are needed to insure the success of infantry attacks. Drumfire barrages are useful for counter-battery work and for destroying exposed units. S.O.S. fire protects friendly units directly, while Interdiction fire can protect them indirectly, by blocking key passages to prevent the enemy from closing on the first movement phase, thus preventing an attack during the second combat phase. Direct support can add incredible power to a given attack. The drawback with artillery is found on the Rolling and Drumfire CRT's; there is absolutely no way to insure a successful result on the Drumfire table, and one must mass barrage points to the maximum to insure a result with a Rolling barrage. Nothing is more frustrating than massing Drumfire on a crucial hex, using precious supply points, and rolling a six. Or having an important infantry attack disintegrate when you roll an insignificant "Shift-1" on the Rolling barrage table. This is a nerve-wracking game.

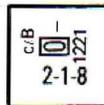
Ground combat follows the pattern of most other games. The attacker adds up his attack strength, adds any Direct Support, and compares this to the defender's strength plus any S.O.S. barrage points. The final ratio may be shifted a number of columns, depending on the result of any Rolling barrages during the Barrage phase. Artillery may fire Direct Support only if within two hexes of the attacked units, something that happens mostly in static situations. There are, however, two CRT's: Standard and Mobile. The Standard CRT is for normal attacks and is full of Bd (Both disrupted/exchange) results. The Mobile CRT is used whenever half the attacking units are tanks or *Stosstruppen* and contains retreat results, as well as being about two columns better. Using the Standard CRT can lead to stalemate, as the attacker wears himself down; there are two Bd results on the maximum attack line. Advance is slow and the defender, sitting in his trench, is favored. The Mobile CRT, on the other hand, contains no Bd, and

attacking at 4-1 or better insures no effect against the attacker. In addition, defending units may be forced to retreat up to two hexes, allowing advance after combat, which makes it hard for the defender to maintain a line. A proper combined arms attack is hard to stop. But not impossible.

Tanks break down, and can be eventually withdrawn from the game on orders of the "High Command." *Stosstruppen* never break down, but they are vulnerable to artillery and they are limited in number. All units come in three steps — intact, disrupted, and cadre. Disruption can be "cured", but only by pulling a unit out of the line. Cadres are reduced to 0-1-4's for the rest of the game. Thus, a player must continually "recycle" his combat units when attacking, because disrupted units, primarily reduced in attack strength, can quickly be further reduced into cadres, resulting in a permanently weakened army. But the biggest limitation on the attacker is supply.

With a few exceptions, every attack requires the expenditure of one supply point for each regiment/brigade attacking. Every artillery unit that fires any mission other than S.O.S. requires the expenditure of one supply point. Supply points originate from supply depot units, and expenditures increase as a unit moves farther from a depot. For instance, an infantry regiment eight movement points away from a depot will expend two supply points per attack, while one 21 movement points away must expend three. Although depots can move, they move slowly; so it is important for the attacker to keep roads clear and his depots forward. Run out of supply points, and you can't attack. The biggest supply point expenditures, however, are for Hurricane barrages, which double barrage strength while tripling supply point expenditure. And Hurricane barrages are no luxury, either. They are vitally necessary, especially in the opening Turns of the British and German attack. The British player starts the game with 320 supply points, and it is not unusual to use 200+ on the first Turn, even though no supply points are required for attacking infantry units!

Put all this together and the key to *Green Fields* becomes planning. Every turn a Player must decide how many supply points he will expend, how many artillery units will forego firing to move up to new positions, how many units will be left in reserve to exploit any possible openings, how units will be maneuvered so as to keep the vital roads unjammed, and much more. *Green Fields* is one of those games that allows the player to provide his own command control. How many times have players found their units out of range of friendly artillery? How many times have they been forced to supply attacks from more distant depots because of poor allocation? Or tried to hold a non-trench line? *Green Fields* comes right down to knowing how best to use the variety of unit types provided, to coming up with the best possible, the most successful, interactions. The following are some suggestions and observations.



Tanks

What can I say? These are the game's *raison d'être*. Absolutely essential to the British player, they can overrun cadres on the first turn and use the Mobile CRT. They can stack with anything, so they should be spread out to provide maximum use of Mobile CRT. Tanks have an annoying tendency to break down and block roads returning to supply depots, and they do not benefit from trenches, so they are vulnerable to artillery. They can be removed from play if British fail to achieve certain objectives, and they require type "A" bridges to cross the canal.



Stosstruppen

The German equivalent of the tank, *Stosstruppen* are the most powerful infantry in the game. They can move through enemy ZOC's and overrun cadres on the counter-attack Turn. More useful than tanks, as they don't break down, *Stosstruppen* cannot stack with other infantry units, cutting down on use of Mobile CRT. The 3-2-10 battalions are especially useful, as they can stack. Remember — units stacked in the same hex as an attacker but not participating may still advance after combat — a particularly effective tactic for the 3-2-10. All *Stoss* should be kept out of the line as much as possible to prevent their reduction to cadres.



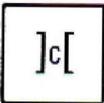
Cavalry

Mobile on roads, these real breakthrough units are poor on attack. Limited by Command Control rules, cavalry should move up slowly when released, staying behind the infantry, ready to exploit. It is essential that British player leave road from Dessart to Lateau Wood clear on the second Movement Phase, Game-Turn One, to facilitate cavalry movement over the trench line. Cavalry battalions are useful but weak. Cavalry can be removed if the British player does not achieve his objectives.



British Mobile Bridges

One of these limited utility units should be used to bridge the dry canal at 0719/0720 to allow broken-down tanks to move from road to repair area. The other should be kept available to bridge the dry canal behind German lines or St. Quentin canal after units cross.



Other Bridges

Only a "C" bridge, and very hard to build in games I have played these are very rare. Note that bridges present during the Counter-Attack Scenario have probably been built illegally — no wonder the Germans did so well.



Reconnaissance Aircraft

Important in the middle stages of game, when supply for Hurricane barrages run out, these vulnerable aircraft generally provide a one-column shift on Drumfire CRT. They help to overcome sighting problems and are useful for Counter-battery fire. They can not be used for Hurricane barrages.

Fighters

The knights of the air should concentrate on Recon aircraft as much as possible. Dogfights are fun, but unless you can win big, they do not affect the ground war. The British have a big opportunity in the first few turns; the Germans have the edge when von Richthofen shows up. During the second Air Phase, put fighters on patrol around key positions. It is probably foolhardy to use fighters extensively for ground support.

Ground Attack Bomber Aircraft

Somewhat useless, these must be committed before Barrage and Combat Phases, requiring a little too much advance planning. Vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire, it is probably best to mass all attack aircraft at one point and hope for the best. A weak point in the game, considering the historical situation.

107th Brandenburg Division

Not really a special unit, but these guys deserve special mention anyway, as they generally save the German player on Game-Turn Two, somewhere around Folie les Valees and Bourlon. Hit with everything the British can muster combat Phase Two, Turn Two, they are the heroes of the game. The town of Perleberg is in Brandenburg. I wonder...

The Course of the Game

Turn 1. British: Run rampant. 108/54, 10R, 282/20LW and 14 artillery should be hit with maximum Hurricane Drumfire. 90R/54 and 84/54 should get the same treatment. 386/20L, 27R/54, 6R/9R and 19R/9R should be hit with Hurricane rolling. Don't worry about supply expenditure — that's what it's there for. If 19R/9R is reduced, don't attack from hex 1425, as these units will then block road during Movement Phase. Otherwise, attack all along the line. During first Movement Phase, you should be able to move adjacent to 108/54 and 84/54. Clobber them on next Barrage and Combat Phases. Move strong infantry forward together with some divisional guns. Overrun all cadres. Be careful with the cavalry — you may need it later. The British should have at least Siegfried III by the end of the Turn. There is a slight chance that the unit in hex 1921 will be destroyed, in which case, cross the canal, although you probably won't have movement points to enter trench line.

German: Low ebb. The German will probably have lost 6 units by the German Player-Turn. 76/111 (0805) should sprint to Bourlon City, while 107th division takes up positions in any free trench line between

British and canal. 183rd division should shift across Esnes river, while 79th division will fill in gaps — the canal is an extremely strong position. Units on right fall back to Hughes Support trench. Do not end turn adjacent to enemy or outside of a trench, to prevent being reduced to cadre by artillery barrage. Use the few supplies available to attack the largest stacks of British units with ordinary Drumfire. Sacrifice a few recon aircraft. Remember tanks do not benefit in any way from trenches.

Turn 2. British: This is the most crucial Game-Turn for the British. You have to take either Bourlon City or Cambrai to keep up the attack. The first Combat Phase depends on the location of enemy units and friendly artillery. You will probably have out-run most of the guns, as well as your supply depots. Move up artillery, but don't stack unless in an emplacement. This is probably the last Turn you can attack in two different areas with maximum effort. Try crossing the canal to 1921 — the German will probably have pulled back to the trench line. If you can clear hexes 2020 and 2021, 1821/1921 is a good place for a mech bridge — it will put tanks across the river and outflank Rumilly/Masnieres. The second attack should be directed into weak point between Bourlon and the canal. Send cavalry through any gaps, but avoid narrow salients — they aren't worth it and can be easily cut off when the Germans reinforcements arrive. Spend points! The chance will never come again.

Germans: Pray. If you can hold this Turn, you probably can prevent a breakthrough. Depending on counter-battery fire, you may be able to use 10R and 14 for six points of S.O.S. barrage. Use supplies to disrupt stacks in the clear. Don't Hurricane. Use reinforcements to plug gaps.

Turn 3. British: Last chance. Next turn, you begin rolling for command control, and by now you should begin feeling the supply point pinch. Keep hammering at Bourlon Wood and Wotan III. Something has to give.

Germans: Either the crisis or the battle is over. With a little luck and competent play, you should still hold Bourlon City and Siegfried II. Might consider a *Stosstruppen* attack this Turn. If break-out imminent, garrison Wotan II and Fafner Reigel. The British may break-out, but it will be a vulnerable, narrow front. Hit tank stacks!

Turn 4 (British Withdrawal). British: Everything depends on the High Command (General Die Roll I). Tank break-down rate, and German gunnery. At some point, you will run out of tanks. Attacks should now be carried out with massive direct support. Counter-battery fire will lose effectiveness due to increasing German artillery. Begin to withdraw disrupted units.

Germans: Hold the line, save points, and make small counter-attacks. Remember, you can infiltrate twice before declaring Counter-attack — use it. Also, must be sure

that you don't destroy four British brigades, or recall will never occur.

Withdrawal to German Counter-Attack. British: Attrition. One or two attacks per Turn, maybe. Front should stabilize along canal. Never Hurricane. You need to save the points, and you'll have enough spare artillery anyway. Use guns only with recon planes to enhance attacks.

Germans: Set up two groups of *Stosstruppen* behind the lines. Prepare a two-pronged attack, but forget Cannae-like pincers, as they are probably beyond your capability. Try to cross the canal around Lateau Wood. This will block road and provide a good jumping-off point. Watch for British fatigue.

German Counter-Attack-End. Germans: Hard to describe, as Attack location should vary. By now, you should have a lot of supply and your depots should be in position, or at least in a better position than you get in the scenario. It's your turn to use Hurricane barrages. Use of 3-2-10 *Stosstruppen* battalions can be crucial, as they can stack with ordinary infantry. Overruns with 6-6-8's unbeatable. Move as far forward as possible during movement, but try to stay in trenches. Try to get close to supply depots so that ZOCs will increase movement point costs of supply lines.

British: Hit the *Stoss* with artillery. The only way to stop them is to reduce them to cadres. It's your turn to cry. A good counter-attack should destroy six to eight of your units and leave ZOCs all over the place. You're going to have to work hard and use the Standard CRT a lot, but do it. Maintain solid lines in the *Stosstruppen's* vicinity.

After the End. Both: Halt, re-supply, dig in and wait for 1918.

Final Notes

Green Fields is a winner. A good mix of old and new, the game shows a great deal of work and thought by designer Isby. How he managed to straighten out his head after *Air War* is beyond me. On the other hand, *Green Fields* was 3½ months late (Ah, but I'm being bitter). It was worth it. I do have, of course, some suggestions for rule changes.

Fatigue. In the campaign game, this rule is absolutely essential, especially given the fact that the British player can generally see where the attack is going to come from. I suggest that rather than let the owning player decide which units become fatigued, he should draw from a cup. This will prevent the British player from disrupting units exclusively in quiet zones.

Artillery CRT. As it stands now, the die is rolled once for each stack of units by Drumfire. Since the British are usually stacked three or four high, either the whole stack is reduced or the whole stack emerges unscathed. Seems a bit unrealistic, given the first principle of defending against artillery — don't mass. Roll separately, for each unit.

Rolling Barrages. Since these represent barrages in coordination with ground attacks, it would not seem unreasonable to re-

quire that units which have been attacked by a Rolling barrage must be attacked in the subsequent combat phase. Currently, the attacker can call off an attack if the die roll is unsuccessful. The attack requirement would simulate the results of a typically unsuccessful barrage.

British Withdrawal and British Losses. Change [17.31] to read: "...have been reduced to Cadre strength or eliminated by German action..." Currently, it may be to the British player's benefit to make an outlandishly outnumbered attack so that he can get his tanks back.

Combat and Bridges. Any unit may attack across any bridge, but a unit may only advance over a bridge it can move across. Additionally, the Mobile CRT is never used when the eligible units are attacking exclusively through any bridge hexside. ■■

Gamma World [continued from page 12]

There are also a wide variety of "standard" plant, animal and robot types which can be met with during an adventure, including members of a number of secret societies such as "The Friends of Entropy" or the "Ranks of the Fit." Depending on circumstances, such encounters can be quite useful or quite deadly.

Another interesting feature is the investigation of artifacts. Players might find something which to us is commonplace, but utterly mysterious to a child of Gamma World. So the player literally plays around with a thing until something happens. To model this, there are three flowsheets (the one used depends on the complexity of the object). The player starts at the beginning and moves along the chart according to die rolls. He may reach the end, which indicates he has discovered what the object is for and how it works; he may be returned to the start, to try again. Or he may arrive at a skull and crossbones symbol that means a variety of things. If, for example, the object is a functioning hand grenade...

Gamma World is not a game for those who take their science fiction, science, or technology seriously, but it is a good set of rules for role-playing, provided an energetic referee can be found to run the show. It is a very good set or rules for those who are just beginning to play this sort of thing, without being artificially simplistic. ■■

Gamma World is available for \$9.98 from TSR Hobbies, Inc., Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

