

WAR IN EUROPE MODULE 1:

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

August 1914-
November 1918

by Mark Saha

If SPI's *War in Europe* monster game is known for its fast, clean, playable game system, then the pleasant surprise about the *First World War Module* (played on the same mapsheets) is that it is even more simple, clean, and playable. Moreover, it is an entirely new game, available separately from SPI with or without mapsheets.

The game includes four identical 400-unit countersheets of combat units representing armies of the participating countries, plus another 400-unit countersheet with the Supreme Headquarters, supply depots, and fleets of participating nations, plus trench and fortification counters. Then there is a Turn Record sheet (three turns per month = 36 turns per year); all charts and tables neatly arranged upon both sides of an 11-in. x 11-in. card; and flow charts for the Central Powers and Entente Powers to keep track of Morale, National Resource Points (primarily a measure of combat supply), Demoralization Points accumulated, and Fleet composition. Finally, a twenty page — 1/2-in. x 11-in. rules book includes instructions for boundary and name changes on the *WEu* mapsheet and a generous assortment of scenarios covering each year of the war and even separate fronts. The game rules themselves are clearly and simply explained in about eight pages.

CONVERTING THE MAPSHEETS...

Only four mapsheets of the *WEu* mapsheets are necessary to play the game, although all nine *WEu* maps are included in the map version. Specifically, *First World War* is played on *WEu* maps C, D, G, and H (See *F&M* #6, page 29 for a breakdown of this map system). It is illegal in this game to violate Sweden's or Finland's neutrality (even if legal, it would be a logistical nightmare), so Map F is out; nobody can invade Great Britain because only the French fleet (oddly enough) has amphibious capability, so Britain's Map B is out; and Map A of Spain and Algeria also have little bearing here. Map J may be included with an optional rule to include the Turkey/Russia Caucasian front and the Palestine front. And the possibility of the French amphibious landing striking elsewhere than the Dardenelles justifies an optional inclusion of Map E (Egypt). This means six mapsheets are useful at most, although only four are essential and a less interesting Western Front variant can be played on only two (C and D).

Two full pages of the rules book are devoted to listing tediously, hex by hex, the political boundaries of Europe in 1914. All these changes are on maps C, D, G, H. There are also some name



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changes and new permanent forts while later developments such as Maginot, etc., must be deleted or simply ignored. Personally, I would suggest those who really like this game obtain extra copies of these four maps so they can be permanently marked.

BASIC RULES

The land combat rules are among the simplest SPI has ever produced, and are basically a Movement-Combat-Aftermove sequence. 'Aftermove' may seem odd in a non-armor game, but it works here because the Basic Movement Allowance is only three movement points. Zones of Control are semi-active; you have to stop when you enter, but combat is never required. Stacking is limited to 15 divisions per hex (units are corps; this averages about two to four units maximum per hex). Combat resolution is unique, building on an idea Dunnigan introduced in AH's 1914 and SPI's World War I folio game, and recently refined further in *Fulda Gap*. The CRT is basically an attrition table; for example, a 9-1 attack that rolled a six yields a '3/4' result, meaning the attacker must lose three steps and the defender four steps. But here's the wrinkle: if the defender is in supply, he may elect to retreat instead of lose steps, or any mix of retreat/loss (e.g., he could lose one step and retreat three hexes). The attacker has no such option. Thus, a defender might not want to suffer total elimination since this gives the attacker a breakthrough during Aftermove. But if the defender has something valuable in his immediate rear (say, a supply depot), he will want to calculate carefully between retreat and fierce resistance-in-place.

LOGISTICS

The heart of *First World War* are its strategic and tactical logistics systems. Attacking is always voluntary because an attack consumes Resource Points — actually, supply points — equal to the factors attacking (e.g., attack by 8 combat factors consumes 8 Resource Points). These Resource Points must be drawn from the nearest supply depot. Ideally, the supply depot must be within three movement points of the combat units. Beyond this range, morale penalties which modify the CRT die roll quickly become severe.

But there's more to it than this. Germany, for example, has about eighteen supply depots. Two unit counters are provided for each of these numbered depots; one counter is deployed on the map, and the other placed on the Central Powers Resource Points track to indicate the number of Resource Points available in that specific depot. All players receive additional Resource Points during each Strategic Phase calculated as a product of Morale times a National Production multiple (e.g., at game start Germany has a National Morale of 3 and production multiple of 50, so she gets $3 \times 50 = 150$ Resource Points every three months). These reinforcements all arrive at the Supreme Headquarters Supply Depot — which, presumably, is safely tucked away in a central location in the homeland. From here, RPs are shipped by rail up to 30 hexes to local depots — which means you must construct a 'net' of depots 30 hexes apart along railroads which deliver supplies to (ideally) a depot within three movement points of the front line. Moreover, this rail delivery counts against national rail capacity and thus limits how much troop movement can be done by rail each turn.

Although the system sounds complex, it is in fact very clean and simple. When you make an attack, you subtract the required supplies from the appropriate depot on the National Resource track (the defender may also expend RPs to support the morale of defending units). When new RPs arrive by rail, you adjust the appropriate depot upward on the Resource Track. If a depot is overrun by the enemy, it's eliminated and you lose everything (he gets to keep 15% of the captured RPs). SPI suggests that if players are honest, they should refrain from looking at each other's Resource Tracks. This makes sense. If an Allied player glances at the Central Powers Resource Track and happens to notice that all Eastern Front depots are loaded,

while the Western Front is provided only with bare minimum for defense, it's not hard to guess what's up. Moreover, this logistical approach makes it realistically impossible, say, for Germany to open a campaign year with a Western push, then suddenly decide to switch everything to the east. German rail capacity is 15 divisions per turn, and every six RPs moved by rail count as a division. A major shift of men and supplies from west to east or vice versa is, therefore, a major undertaking that will require several months game time.

NATIONAL MORALE & DEMORALIZATION

In addition to the logistical system, the game is dominated, both tactically and strategically, by concepts of National Morale Level and Demoralization. Each nation starts the game with an initial National Morale (Britain 3, Russia 2, France 2, Italy 1; Austria-Hungary 1; Germany 3), and a Demoralization Level (for example, Germany 300 — which means Germany's National Morale will drop one Level every time it accumulates 300 Demoralization Points on its Demoralization Track).

The National Morale Level of any country is always somewhere along the sequence 0, 1, 2, 3. Its current level is important on the tactical level because it can modify die rolls in combat. For example, Germany starts the game with a National Morale of 3, Russia of 2. This means when German units attack Russians, the Germans get a +1 die roll modification reflecting superior morale. When Russians attack Germans, the Russians are penalized with a -1 die roll modification. If Germany's morale subsequently drops to 2, and Russia's holds at 2, neither will have a morale advantage. If Germany's drops to 1, and Russia's still holds at 2, the tactical combat advantage between Russians/Germans in neutral terrain goes to the Russians.

Strategically, National Morale is important because Players get Resource Point reinforcements equal to their Morale Level times their Production Multiple. If/when Germany's Morale drops from 3 to 2, she would receive only 100 rather than 150 RPs per Strategic Turn.

Demoralization Points are accumulated for such things as land combat strength point losses (on a 1:1 basis), 10 DPs for each ship lost in naval battle, 10 DPs for loss of a friendly fort; and such political blockbusters as 25 DPs against Britain if Germany has Sea Supremacy during Strategic Phase, 100 DPs if enemy units occupy your capital during Strategic Turn, and 50 DPs to all German allies anytime German National Morale drops. Demoralization Points accumulate against all players through the course of a game. They are permanent, and can never be erased. Thus, National Morale of all belligerents can only deteriorate as the war drags on. This makes itself felt at the front through shortage of Resource Points (supply), poor tactical combat Morale, and most importantly Reserve units stripped of Aftermove capability (see below).

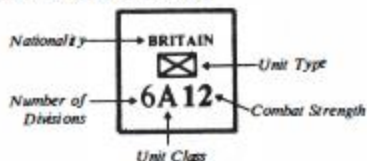
ARMS AND MEN

All combat units are corps-sized. A simple notational system indicates at a glance how many divisions each corp unit contain, its combat strength, and the unit type. For example, a '2A4' counter contains two divisions, is an Active (as opposed to Reserve) unit, and has a combat strength (attack/defense) of four strength points. '4C4' denotes a cavalry corps of four divisions, combat strength of four; and '4R4' a Reserve Corps of the same composition. (The number of divisions is important for stacking and rail transport purposes.)

Resource Points, besides supplying combat, are used during Strategic Turns to build new combat units or rebuild step-reduced units. This is the other side of the strategic picture — deciding upon the allotment of resources between offensive/defensive operations at the front, and maintaining your army in what you consider an adequately 'healthy' state vis-a-vis your opponent. Then there is the question of 'what' to build. Active (A) divisions are probably the most valuable, overall, in the game because they usually have a full aftermove.

Unfortunately, Active units represent standing professional armies at the outbreak of hostilities. They are deployed at game's start, and can never be replaced when lost. Reserve (R) units, presumably drafted nonprofessional volunteers can and are 'built' to fill the gap, but their aftermove is always 'one less than your current National Morale.' This means a maximum Reserve aftermove of two movement points, more often one or none. Since trenches and forts can also be constructed with Resource Points, the Western Front trend of a First World War campaign game is clear: initially, a mobile fluid battle for territory as the Active and Cavalry divisions mix it up. Then, as they were worn down by bloody attrition (built into the CRT), Reserves with little or no aftermove take over and the defender has breathing space to stop the onslaught with trenches. The attacker also builds trenches to hold his gains...creating the inevitable historical bloody stalemate.

TYPICAL INFANTRY CORPS



Stalemate disintegrates in 1917 and 1918, when Germany and the Allies start building Shock Troops. These were in fact



completely different types of units in Germany and France/Britain. German Shock Troops were elite *Stosstruppen*, trained to infiltrate enemy lines and knock out key machine gun nests prior to a major conventional assault. Allied Shock Troops were, of course, the first combat tanks backed (hopefully) by infantry. But armor and *Stosstruppen* were each a specific solution to the problem of trench warfare; in the game, German and Allied Shock Troops function identically.

There are also a host of Optional Rules, all quite simple, designed to include those historical niceties most of us demand in a game this size if only for completeness. Gas warfare for example, is simply represented by an 'early' Shock Troops unit. There is only this initial 'surprise' advantage of gas, after which all combatants are considered fully prepared, so if you use it be sure you have troops/supplies available to exploit the breakthrough. The wasteful WWI tactic of several days' artillery bombardment prior to a ground assault is called an

'Oversupplies Attack': (It has some advantage, but slavishly consumes Resource Points.) Players executing a withdrawal to shorten their front — as when the Germans pulled back to the Hindenburg line in 1918 — can leave behind vast areas of 'devasted hexes' to confound the enemy. (Incidentally, SPI's 1918: *Operation Michel* game is an interesting study both of German *Stosstruppen* infiltration tactics, and the problems of launching a major offensive into a Devasted Zone).

NEW BOATS & DREADNOUGHTS

The naval rules were designed by Mark Herman. Since the land game obviously dominated, he chose to make the naval operations as simple as possible. In fact, they are far simpler than AH's *War at Sea*. Fleet chits are placed at various ports on the mapsheet, with a corresponding chit for each fleet on the National Resource Track to indicate the number of ships present. During Strategic Turns fleets may sortie (sometimes to prevent being hit with Demoralization Points for staying in port) and an enemy fleet in range must attempt interception or take a penalty in Demoralization Points.

U-Boat warfare is a little more significant, and handled similarly to *War in Europe*. It's not nearly so effective here, however. The Germans really cannot do the English much harm unless they engage on the 'Unrestricted Submarine Warfare' CRT, which hastens U.S. entry into the conflict.

CONCLUSIONS...

Overall, *First World War Module* seems an unusually clear and playable simulation for those interested in World War I. Designer Frank Davis says in the Designer's Notes, 'Above all else, *First World War* is an exercise in logistics planning.. the management of Resource Points and Supply Depots on the map is the player's primary responsibility; the movement and engagement of combat units is merely a secondary chore... Whether or not Players will accept and enjoy the logistical theme of *First World War Module* remains to be seen.' Personally, I find the logistical theme and the problems it generates to be extremely fascinating. ●●

GAME CREDITS:

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