

KOREA: Analysis and Review

by Omar DeWitt

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Korea is one of the few games that I have played where each side gets an opportunity to lead an all-out offensive and conduct a desperate defense. As the Communist Player's North Koreans open the game, they have 23 units and a Combat Strength of 122 against a spread-out South Korean army of 14 units worth a total Combat Strength of 42. They drive south with a somewhat freewheeling abandon as the ROK forces try to plug up as many holes as they can. Unless the North Koreans are unusually lucky and get through to Pusan within the first five or six turns, the UN arrivals gradually slow down the North Koreans and then start pushing them back. As the UN units reach their peak, it is the North Koreans who must try to plug the holes against the superior Southern forces. Then the Chinese eventually get into the action...

When one side is in desperate retreat, the use of Entrenchments can be quite beneficial; it can also lead to disaster. To understand this fully, one has to be aware of a couple of rules that are special to this game. First, in every turn, each side can move, attack, and move again. In the second Movement Phase, all units can move - not just mechanized units. Second, zones of control do not extend into hexes that are completely rough terrain, which describes most of the map sheet. Third, it takes one stationary Movement Phase to Entrench and one Movement Phase to unEntrench. When a unit is Entrenched, it may use the "Position" Combat Results Table. (There are three CRT: Meeting, Position, and Pursuit. The defender has some choice in which is used for each combat. The Position table does not change the odds of survival much, but it does

increase the attacker's losses when losses are called for.)

So, when one is being pushed back by a superior force, he would rather be attacked while Entrenched than while in the open. However, although units usually Entrench while on roads or road junctions, it is possible for the opposing units to be moved around the Entrenched unit (there is no need or attack when moving adjacent to an enemy unit, and the only movement penalty is one extra Movement Point when *leaving* an enemy zone of control).

The Entrenched unit must then spend one Movement Phase digging out and thus has only one Movement Phase to retreat and regroup (also, in the new position the unit cannot Entrench and must face the next enemy turn while in the open). Possible results of Entrenching, then, are being surrounded and/or blitzkrieged.

Even when the defender has a fair number of units (for instance, when the North Koreans start going on the defensive and can erect a line of entrenchments almost across the entire peninsula), he can still run into disaster if the attacker can eliminate the units on a road hex and push through several units to start enveloping defenders to either side of the breach. Units that start the turn Entrenched can attack only units immediately adjacent, since they cannot move before the Attack Phase; therefore, *they* cannot counterattack the enveloping units for at least another turn, which gives the attacker even longer to develop his breakthrough.

The moral of the story, then, is that Entrenchments are not a panacea for the defender. Which is excellent. It makes the Players exercise judgment, weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. So often in a game, a certain state is always desirable, for example, being in a fortification; and no judgment is needed. In *Korea*, the defender is faced with an interesting little problem.

One other little problem is one not answered in the rules; namely, if one unit is

Entrenched and a friendly unit moves onto the same hex, what is the status of the new unit? Tom Oleson (the worthy opponent with whom I have played all of my *Korea* games) and I assume that both units would then be Entrenched. When Tom queried SPI, however, he was told that the new unit was not immediately Entrenched, and, if attacked, would be attacked separately. This answers one problem, but raises another: Case F under "Combat" states that "Defending units stacked in the same hex must be attacked as a single combined Combat Strength." Well, individuals can resolve the problem to suit themselves, but it is strange that this did not come up in playtesting. [*Both units should be considered Entrenched — Ed.*]

One of the things that gets the North Koreans off to a good start is their ability to cut several ROK units off from supply and thereby get better odds against them (at no time is the attacker certain of winning - even at 12-1 a roll of "6" means the attacker loses a regiment). This seems quite clear in the rules, because, although the UN units can be supplied by air (six regiments), the allocation of this air supply is made at the beginning of the UN turn, which is *after* the North Korean Combat Phase of Turn 1. However, when Tom queried SPI on this point, he was told that the ROK units can start the game with air supply. Because of the above, this has to constitute a rule change, one that can change the complexion of the game by a fair amount. I don't like it - perhaps because I have just started a game on the Northern side (and that *does* color a Player's opinion). But even taking bias into consideration, it seems likely that even if "garrison" units would be supplied at the start of a war, the surprise of the invasion should count for something. Therefore, I lobby for leaving the air supply rules as stated and for allowing any ROK unit to be isolated on Turn 1. [*This is fair — Ed.*]

Except perhaps in the upper region of North Korea when the Chinese intervene, the UN units have little problem with supply. Their resources allow them to be supplied quite easily anywhere on the map sheet. The

Communists (North Koreans and Chinese), however, have a fairly acute supply problem. Except on the first turn, they must be within two hexes of a supply unit (they get one per turn) or a railroad line that connects eventually with Pyongyang. When a Communist unit attacks using a supply unit for support, that supply unit is removed from the game. The invading North Koreans have a problem on their left flank (the east coast of Korea) since no railroad on that side connects with Pyongyang. To attack at full strength or move at the full Movement Allowance, a unit must be near a supply unit. The North Koreans also face the same difficulty in the SE (west and NW of Pusan). There is also a problem of waiting for the supply units to catch up on the initial surge south. When they do catch up, the North Koreans have to answer the question of using them or not in attacks or how many to use. It is not a decision to be made lightly. On the "yes" side is the possibility of getting to Pusan and quickly winning the game. On the "no" side, if all supply units are gone, retreat speed is halved, which means some units might get cut off and lost; this need not be a major danger since the UN buildup is gradual. Also on the "no" side is the usefulness of the remaining supply units to prevent breakthroughs when the UN pressure grows. A major threat to the North Koreans on defense is having their line broken and enveloped. The supply units can be used to prevent a puncture while combat units are all used on front-line defense. There are, in sum, no simple rules to follow in the use of the Communist supply units.

Throughout the game, each Player receives replacements, which come from a few units originally set aside and from units eliminated in combat. If no units are in the Replacement Box, the replacements for that turn are lost. Not all eliminated units are put in the Replacement Box, however; if a unit is completely surrounded by enemy zones of control when it is eliminated, it is out of the game. The theory here is, presumably, that not only was the unit destroyed as a fighting force, but also all the troops were taken prisoner and could not be used in reforming new units.

The above, then, points up two things. One is that when a Player is blitzkrieging up or down the peninsula, he has a decision to make quite often: whether to send units on ahead, or to use them to be sure a blocking unit never gets back into the game. The other is that a Player need not hesitate about making low-odds attacks when his supply of units in the Replacement Box is getting low. If there is nothing in the box, the units are as surely lost as in combat, and the chance of success in a battle is also lost.

There is something I really dislike about *Korea*, and that is the rules sheet. I do not mean the rules; I mean the paper sheet they are printed on. Every turn, I have to unfold this monster, turn it over, turn it around, and then try to find a place to lay it down so I can find the replacements for that turn or a

special rule for a scenario. Other SPI games are worse - they have rules printed on two sides, but *Korea* is bad enough with rules on one side and scenario information on the other. The best arrangement for rules is in a booklet; I assume SPI does not use a booklet because it is more expensive. The second best arrangement is one long sheet in an accordion fold. I thought that SPI had settled on that arrangement (*NATO, Spitfire, Lee Moves North*), but recently those giant Exxon up-down, left-left-right-sideways folded Mothers started coming back (*Foxbat, Sniper*). There *has* to be another way to present the rules. If nothing else can be done, may I suggest that they be printed like a signature for a book and let the buyer cut them out and put them in a loose-leaf notebook. When I have my arms spread out trying to find a rule that is in the lower left-hand corner of the reverse side, I am not responsible for my actions. Were I to murder under those circumstances, I would name SPI as codefendant and plead justifiable homicide. No jury would convict me. [*In our newest games, lengthy rules are being bound into booklets to cure the "bedsheet" effect — RAS*]

I cannot help wondering why, on the mapsheet for *Korea*, the capital of South Korea is spelled "Soul". Nowhere else, including a supplement on South Korea in a recent copy of the *New York Times*, have I seen it spelled that way. Since both editions of the map have the same spelling, it must have been done deliberately and not be a mere misspelling. It obviously has some deep significance to Marie Frederick. [*No, Jim Dunnigan picked up that spelling while stationed in Korea — Ed.*]

While we are on the subject of the map sheet, there are two points of fogginess. One is inlets. The Terrain Effects Chart explains the situation where the inlet covers the hexside between two hexes. It does not explain the situation where an inlet cuts through a hex. Since nothing is said to the contrary, one might assume that a unit could move through the second hex, and do so with no movement penalty (although it costs one extra Movement Point to enter a hex containing a river). From appearances, these inlets must be at least two miles across, which would entail a fairly complicated transportation job. There are several of these inlet hexes on the board, and it is rather surprising that they were not mentioned in either edition of the game. The only solution to this phenomenon that makes sense is to allow a unit to move onto such a hex, but to forbid movement in any direction that would take it "over" the inlet. Unfortunately, this means that a fair amount must be remembered over, sometimes, several turns. [*Treat them as river hexes, instead — Ed.*]

The other foggy point is roads. Roads are of major importance since movement is much faster along roads. A ROK unit, for instance, can move six hexes along a road or one hex through rough terrain. Therefore, clarity concerning roads is a necessity.

As things turn out, there is an unhappy marriage between reality and playability. There is a spaghetti plate of roads around "Soul", with several roads twisting around in the same hex, roads running parallel through hexes, and different roads terminating in the same hex. This no doubt mirrors reality. The rules are not explicit; so we originally carefully traced the units' movement along roads so as to not move it into a hex on one road and move it out on a different, nonconnecting road. (Road movement is even more crucial with armored units, which cannot move into rough terrain unless on a road.) This procedure is not simple, especially around "Soul".

We are now told by SPI, in answer to a query, that things should be handled more simply - that units can move through hexes on roads whether or not the roads actually connect within the hex.

It bothers me to have to play the game contradictory to the way the mapboard is printed. It makes no sense. I would strongly suggest that if the mapsheet is reprinted that the road network be redone to conform to the way the roads are utilized in play - connect roads that pass through the same hex and eliminate some of the roads that are superfluous. It does not matter that the actual roads are different in *Korea*; if they are a certain way in *Korea*, the mapsheet should depict that.

The victory conditions for the Communists in several instances read, "No enemy unit north of...". Since the UN moves last in any game, and since they have a paratroop unit that can be dropped north of anywhere, I would suggest that the paratroop unit, if dropped, not be considered in evaluating the victory level. [*This is correct — Ed.*]

Playing *Korea* by mail is no problem. Because of the second Movement Phase, an extra mailing is often necessary. The second mailing can be omitted if there is no combat, if the attacker wishes to list alternative moves contingent on combat results, or if the opponents know each other well enough to devise a system whereby a Player can resolve his own combat. AHIKS has a special OOB sheet for *Korea*; AHIKS grid coordinates (originally printed with other coordinates and general information on PBM procedures in *MOVES #5*) are: Letter the horizontal rows from north to south A to XX. Numbers run NW to SE starting in the SW from 1 to 42. Pusan is SS19; Mokp'o is VV3; Iwon is C38.

Although there are items I am not pleased with, in general I like *Korea*. The problems I have raised are not major and can be resolved by agreement between opponents before beginning. The game itself is playable and interesting. I have enjoyed the games I have played and look forward to playing more games in the future. I like that fact that both sides, alternatively, get a try at blitzkrieging and at "arming the cooks". I like the choice between Entrenching or not. And, most important, I like the way the game plays.●●