

## MOVES CANADA *edited by Ian Chadwick*

# THE STREETS OF STALINGRAD

*by Ian Chadwick*

## A HOUSE DIVIDED

*by Stephen Loniewski*

### Streets of Stalingrad

By the time this article sees print one of the most impressive games the industry has ever produced will likely be gone from the stores for good. *Streets of Stalingrad* — both first effort and swan song of the short-lived Phoenix Games — suffered the sad fate of low financing and will not be reprinted.

More's the pity; *Streets of Stalingrad* is a benchmark in the business: a product level to which the other producers should aspire (but which no other has yet attained). It may be the most complete, well researched and documented wargame ever produced. Aficionados of the game can attest to the very high level of accuracy and realism of the components and of the almost errata-less rules. (The errata published in *Fire & Movement* no. 23, is almost insignificant. Most problems arise from interpretations of the rules, not from mistakes in the rules themselves.) The game simply gleams with chrome; the counters not only flaunt the precise shade of uniform color for the armies, but the historical symbols used by the military (not simply the quasi-military symbols we've come to know and love in wargames). The board even boasts an accurate street map of the city!

*Stalingrad*, as the title suggests, is a company level game about the tense, bloody battle for that city from September through November 1942. The game comes with two detailed and colorful maps showing the city and suburbs on a 300 meter to hex scale. There are 2,160 counters, mostly combat units, including leaders, pioneers and engineers, infantry companies, artillery batteries, tank platoons, air support, headquarters and self-propelled guns. Counters show attack and defense fire strength, range, movement, unit or weapon type, and parent formation (battalion regiment or division). There are 12 scenarios ranging from 8 turns (one turn equals one day) to the full 55 turns. Even the shortest scenario requires many hours of play, not to mention two or three hours to just organize the units and set up the board! Each side has a separate sheet delineating forces and establishing victory conditions for that scenario and each scenario has a map outlining set-up requirements for both sides. Victory depends on the number of enemy units eliminated by the end of the game and the number of "built-up" (city and factory) hexes controlled.

The game system is an acknowledged plagiarism of John Hill's *Battle for Hue*. (This isn't surprising; designer Dana Lombardy was editor and graphic artist for *Con-*

*flict* Magazine which published Hill's game, and Lombardy himself was developer for the game.) It's essentially a game of fire combat in which defending units get the opportunity to "first fire" at attacking units, and combat is not resolved on an odds-ratio table but rather on a table which uses strict increments of firepower. On each die roll, a unit is either eliminated or there is no effect; there are no retreats in *Stalingrad*. Combat continues back and forth with defensive and attacking fire until the attacker either fails to eliminate a defending unit or manages to eliminate all defenders in the hex (or quits attacking to forestall other losses due to the defender's fire). Modifications to the die roll come from terrain, leaders, and battalion and regimental integrity. Each side has two successive movement and combat phases in a turn; units move only half their movement allowance in the "exploit" phase and are unable to attack in the second phase if they did so in the first. Also, much of the artillery is unusable in the exploit phase. While turns can thus be rather long, advances can be significant and the game is seldom stagnant.

There are two sets of rules included with the game: basic and advanced. The basic game offers a relatively simple, playable system; in it all units have a range of only one hex and indirect fire units are represented by strength point markers added into combat. Other rules include armour breakthrough, unit integrity, leaders, replacements and reinforcements, stacking (three for the Soviets, three plus one tank for the Germans), dismounted movement and combat. The advanced rules bring in the concept of ranged fire, line of sight, bombardment, forced march, retreats, armour disengagement, supply and isolation, automatic elimination, reserves, retreats and the optional units (snipers, commandoes, observation posts, fortifications and minefields, air support, armoured trains, infiltrators, and even Russian mine dogs). These make for a different game than the basic rules offer, not to mention one considerably longer to play. Aside from the artillery rules, the advanced rules offer little in the way of enhancement and don't alter play radically and I suggest you use them sparingly. You are trading off time for chrome.

The designers claim that they created a "benchmark of research and design" in this game. No argument with that statement; the research, done by Dave Parnham who also did the work for SPI's *Battle for Stalingrad* (a John Hill design), is impeccable and the graphics design superb. An excellent 32-page

historical commentary which accompanies the game includes maps, photos and a brief summary of the activities and achievements of all superior formations (divisions and corps) and their leaders. More, the terrain effects chart is illustrated with photos of representative terrain of each type and each side is given a force sheet with a complete display of unit symbols, description of weapon and unit types, sample units and a thumbnail guide to play. This is also illustrated on the reverse with photos of typical units with an insert of the counter. Very professional. Formations were examined for their performance and the quantifications reflect the research: units aren't blandly similar collections of numbers, but are different from each other as historical hindsight proves.

Players cannot be overwarned of the length of the game or of the time required for set-up. Three of us took six hours initially to separate the units into the small bags provided (formation labels are also provided; another nice touch) and then organize the scenario — one of the situations with a low unit density! But the investment of time is repaid by an exciting, challenging game for both sides. There are no easy victories in *Stalingrad*; like the actual battle, the Germans push forward irresistibly to the gates of the city where they find themselves sucked into a maelstrom of hex-to-hex/block-to-block fighting where the attrition rate is painfully high and the prize of the city seems further away each turn. For the Soviets, the first few turns are demoralizing as units outside the city are swept away before the German advance. But once in the city and with reinforcements shoring up their interior lines, the Soviet player can usually last until the German momentum is spent and then (hopefully) launch his own counterattack.

All turns are crucial for both players, especially once in the city where zones of control don't extend and units can pour through a gap between counters. Units become easily isolated but not easily eliminated, and small pockets of one or two counters characterize the street fighting. A good Soviet player can also take the best advantage of the terrain around the city with its many hills, woods and balkas (gullies). Armour and vehicle units cannot enter a balka hex without a bridge and so can be forced to take the longest, least advantageous route to get into the lines. Both players must take advantage of every hex, of every opportunity and of every die roll modification that could arise. An extra turn of grace or an extra unit or two may prove the deciding factor when the bat-

tle rages in the city and the outcome of the game hangs on a few hexes.

As designed, the game gives a remarkably accurate simulation of the progress of the actual battle. Victory for either side is often decided only on the final turn. Both players must develop the proper use of combined arms for both attack and defence, else pay the penalty. The Soviet must generally act in response to the German moves until the force in the advance is spent. There is little the Soviet can accomplish except on a local scale to stem the German tide, so his role is pretty much one of the defender attempting to make his opponent pay the maximum penalty for his advance. The German, on the other hand, has a lot of options open, depending on terrain and scenario. He may either focus his strength to punch through the line and both surround the Soviets and grab at city hexes, or he can spread his attacks across the broad front and try to eliminate as many Soviet units as possible. However much stronger the German appears initially, defensive fire can whittle away too many units too quickly for him to be careless or sloppy in the allocation of his attacks. There is an enormous frustration in reducing one's opponent to helplessness while reducing oneself to the point where one is unable to take advantage of it.

Amidst the deserved praise for *Streets of Stalingrad*, I must raise a somewhat dissenting opinion over what may be the game's most appealing features. While welcoming any chrome that lends flavour to a game, there is a certain limit as to what detracts from play and what enhances it. Schooled as I was in the use of the simple "Bulge" symbols for military units, I found the almost endless variety of "real" symbols in *Stalingrad* to be bewildering. Both my opponent and I found ourselves referring to the force sheets to decipher the nature of the units. The Soviet infantry symbol looks like a telephone pole on a box, the German armoured car looks like a Volkswagon bug, German pioneers appear to have a tennis racket for a symbol and the Soviet light tank looks like a logo for a cheese company! Then too, the units are not marked with their parent division or corps. This can get very confusing when trying to allocate divisional artillery to a battle, forcing constant references to the set-up sheets. Set-up and organization is very tedious and time-consuming. Despite the well executed charts, the process takes some careful work and I suggest you get issue #23 of *Fire & Movement* for their handy organization chart. Without it, the game can be a nightmare.

The map hexes are slightly too small for the large (5/8-inch) counters, and as a result the lines and positions often get confused when in a clutter of high-density combat. The terrain is confusing in its treatment of balkas. Why can't armoured units simply ride across the top without crossing? Or in the cases where two balkas are shown running parallel in a hex, why can't armoured units simply drive between them (after all, how wide is a tank)? Finally, the combat system only allows for the elimination of a unit, not its reduction. It seems reasonable that an entire company would not get blown away, merely reduced in many cases. If not

step reduction, then the replacement rules should allow units to combine to be returned at a later point.

These however are minor points, even nitpicking in the light of the otherwise high quality of the game. It's not a game for beginners, despite what the designers say about the ease of play. It's too large and perplexing for all but the dedicated gamer with ample time on his or her hands. There is sufficient choice in scenarios to allow gamers to play enough games to suit their needs; figure about an hour per turn average for the larger scenarios, 30 to 45 minutes for the smaller. The campaign game may take...well, as long as the actual battle, so play the shorter scenarios to get a feel for the game (two or three players to a side is also recommended for campaign or larger scenario play). This game is really unique in the wargaming field, so I'd suggest that you buy it now if you can still find it. Even if you're not up to playing it yet, store it away until you are ready. It won't age in the meantime; it's already destined to be a "good" classic and worthy of much more play than shelf-sitting time. The game is worth the price for the research and photographs alone; Dave Parnham must be applauded for his unexcelled work in this area.

If you can't find a copy of *Streets of Stalingrad* in a local store, write to Ed Snarski, RD 2, Box 137 Swanson Rd., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702. Ed was a major financier in the game and took stock in lieu of return when the company went under. He is selling the game for \$35 post paid, if he still has any left.

Ian Chadwick

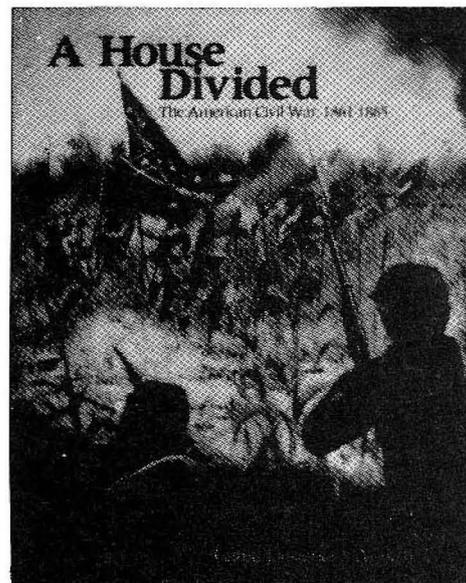
### A House Divided

*A House Divided* is one of the few games in what is, to this reviewer, a decidedly undercrowded field of wargaming: strategic level American Civil War games. In fact, I can think of only two other examples, both from SPI: *American Civil War* and *War Between the States*.

The present game should prove an interesting addition to the ACW buff's library of games as it fills a void felt by those who don't have the time (or the inclination) to deal with *War Between the States*' massiveness or *American Civil War*'s arbitrary command control rules, etc.

GDW has borrowed a couple of concepts from previous game designs by a now defunct Canadian game company, (Gamma Two) and used them at the core of this game. It makes for a clean, interesting and playable system that can put a little fun back into evenings previously spent smashing the Sixth Army at Stalingrad (for the umpteenth time).

The components consist of a 17" x 22" map, 160 die-cut counters and rules (5 pages). The map is a representation of the major cities and towns involved in the war, all connected by communication lines (roads, rails and rivers) — from New York, Cleveland and Chicago in the North to New Orleans, Mobile and Jacksonville in the South and as far west as St. Joe, Mo. The pieces represent infantry and cavalry armies and information markers. Both sides begin with a light sprinkling of pieces on the map, the greatest concentrations being around the capitals, more or less the way the war actually started in 1861. From that point on the player gets to



conduct the entire strategy for his side for both major theatres of war.

The Union player, due to his naval and river ability, has the capability of striking the South at virtually any point along their mutual border. The Confederate player must exploit his interior lines and defensive tactics in order to keep his system of supply/recruitment cities as intact as possible, or if possible, capture Washington (which automatically wins the game for him). Essentially the burden of attack, as it was historically, is on the Union — the South must be invaded and literally gutted so that she cannot support her armies.

The movement system, giving the advantage of mobility to the Union player, requires pieces to be moved from town to town along the communications arteries (cavalry and infantry moving at different rates and cavalry able to perform a sort of scouting/screening role by means of "jump" moves). Combat occurs when opposing units occupy the same town, at which point they are removed from the board, lined up off to the side facing each other and throw dice at each other until one side is destroyed or flees. Needless to say, certain troops have better statistical chances of knocking out their opponents than others.

Other rules include the use of naval invasions (Union only), army experience, rail-line disruption, Union draft and recruitment of new units for both sides.

Although rated introductory by the designer, *A House Divided* is still a fun, absorbing game of strategical options and risk taking. Instead of becoming Meade at Gettysburg or Bragg at Chickamauga, the player is cast in the role of a Lincoln or Davis, having to direct the war at both ends of his country at once, always keeping the overall strategic goal in mind.

The latest entry in the Civil War field is one game that will be pulled out of my library fairly often, especially when I'm not seeking a major investment of time and energy. It's probably worth the inflated price of admission.

Stephen Loniewski

