

Semblance of worth, not substance



'To the Green Fields Beyond'

ANDREW MCGEE



A review of this game as a whole appeared in the last issue, so suffice it for the moment to say that it is fairly complex and impressively detailed. I want to concentrate, however, on one aspect of the rules, which while sharing this air of well-considered detail, is in my view woefully deficient — the Supply Rules.

Supply is divided into two kinds, which I shall distinguish as "General Supply" and "Combat Supply". To be in General Supply a unit "Must be able to trace a supply line to a road hex at the edge of the map which was behind Friendly front lines at the start of the game". Being out of General Supply halves a unit's Movement Allowance, prevents it from attacking and, if not speedily remedied renders a unit liable to surrender. It is clear that this kind of Supply represents day-to-day "housekeeping", so it would seem reasonable that it should be traced at the start of each Game-Turn (on the basis that the delivery of such supplies will take place between the end of fighting on one day and the resumption on the next — before anyone accuses me of treating WWI fighting as if it were a Test Match, let me point out that it was the practice for attacks to be launched in the early morning; often fighting would die out by late afternoon with both sides consolidating the positions they held). In the game General Supply is traced at the start of each Movement Phase (of which there are two in each Player-Turn). The point here — and it is one which will recur later — is that a unit's ability to obey an order to move or fight is not dependent directly on whether it at that moment fulfils an arbitrary definition of being "in supply". The unit is netted into the Corps logistical system, and for practical purposes its supply state is determined by what stocks of supplies it has and how recently it has received supplies. It is not immediately relevant to a unit which was resupplied in the morning that by noon it is cut off.

A second criticism of General Supply is that it is traced to the map-edge directly, whereas Combat Supply is traced first to a depot on the map and thence to the map-edge. Even allowing that Combat Supply is more heavily dependent on stockpiles immediately behind the lines, the same basic network must surely be used for both — any other system would be incredibly wasteful, were it indeed practicable. This point too will recur later.

The Rules concerning Combat Supply are possibly more unsatisfactory still. Combat Supply is required in order that an infantry or cavalry unit may attack or an artillery unit fire a barrage. At such times the unit in question must be able to trace a line of supply to one of the depot units placed on the map, and in attacking expends supply from that depot; but there are two complications; the first is that at the moment of the attack the depot unit must be able to trace a supply line of its own to the edge of the map, even if there are supply points stored in the depot (record of this is kept on a separate off-map chart). The second is that the number of supply points expended in the attack varies with the distance at the moment of attack between the attacking unit and the depot.

It is difficult to know quite where to start criticising this quite remarkable rule. Obviously "Combat Supply" represents ammunition expenditure. What then are the realities and difficulties of supplying ammunition to troops in combat?

Firstly, when they "go over the top" the troops will take ammunition with them; this is reflected in the game in the rule exempting British infantry units from the requirements of Combat Supply on Turn One. At some point, however, resupply is going to be necessary — an infantryman can carry only so much ammunition about his person; there many of the criticisms levelled at the General Supply rules are again applicable: — ammunition resupply is accomplished through the ordinary logistical network. In extreme cases a unit may be resupplied virtually in the front line (although this seems to have been more common in WWII) but the process, like that of providing General Supply, will usually take place during intervals in the fighting. Once again it is certain that a unit will not wait to be ordered to attack, then send a request for ammunition back to Corps HQ; the problem of ammunition resupply arises only after the combat. Two conclusions seem to me to follow from this: first, that it is wrong to require the line of Combat Supply to be traced at the instant of combat (Simple example: a unit is resupplied with ammunition early in the morning; later in the day it is cut off from its depot by developments five miles away; under the supply rules in this game it immediately loses its capacity to attack. — Ridiculous). The second conclusion is that the distance between depot and unit at the instant of combat is of no great importance (of course this problem would disappear if supply were traced at some moment more appropriate than the instant of combat).



Secondly there is the process by which the ammunition is delivered to the troops in the front line. In the game each Corps has one or two depots which are deemed to contain all the Supply Points currently available on that part of the front. This may give the impression of a number of "Aladdin's Caves" each packed with vast quantities of military goodies. The reality is different, and the rules do admit this. Behind the front line is a "complex rear-area network of logistic support". This sounds like some enormous spider's web, but the analogy of an oil pipeline might be more appropriate still. At any given time large quantities of supply are in transit between corps and brigade and regiment and battalion and so on down to the individual infantryman, or stored at the HQ of one or other of these intermediate formations. In the First World War the practice was, reasonably enough, to bring up vast quantities of ammunition to stockpiles just behind the front line in readiness for an

offensive; granted this had not been done on such an extensive scale as usual before Cambrai, but the principle is still the same. In the game this is abstracted to the half-dozen depot units. Admittedly the problems on the regimental level were not the concern of the overall commanders, so the abstraction is fair enough, but the fact remains that at the time of resupply the distance from the supply source is relevant, if at all, only in regard to the immediate source, which is not represented in the game. Consequently, at whatever point supply is to be traced, a unit's distance from Corps HQ is of little importance.

It is in any case questionable whether distance as such is relevant at all. It is of course true that enemy activity is more likely to interfere with a supply line, the longer it is, but it is in any case impossible to trace supply through a vacant enemy-controlled hex. The only explanation for this rule is that the "Supply Points" in some way represents the means of transporting supply, but this would seem to be inconsistent with the "pipeline" system already discussed.

Thirdly, and arising from the second point, there is the rule that depots which are themselves unsupplied cannot be used to support attacks. This question too revolves around the pipeline. In the game, units in the front line would be prevented from attacking the moment the depot is cut off. Yet the pipeline and the stockpiles, even if not very large, mean that the supply would not run out for an indeterminate period dependent on the volume of attacks.

Two other points remain to be dealt with on the score of realism. The first is that tank units never expend supply in attacking, which seems very curious. Granted, they are able to carry a larger quantity of ammunition than an ordinary infantryman, but resupply will still be necessary. From the playability point of view the problem is perhaps that there would have to be a disproportionate expenditure of supply points by the tanks (which are represented at company level) but it cannot be right to ignore them entirely.

The second problem is the mobility of the depot units, which are able to wander merrily round the battlefield without impairment to their supply function. If all supply points were regarded as actually being stored there, this would be ridiculous. Even when it is realised that their task is at most co-ordination, it would seem that this is under some disruption when the depot moves.

The foregoing clearly suggests that the present rules cannot be defended on the score of detailed realism. Do they, then, succeed in presenting the players, through their abstraction, with the same problems as faced their historical counterparts, Byng and Von Bayern?

In the first place, I think that we have to treat the claim to put players in the situation of the historical commanders with some scepticism. The Player must manoeuvre units at the brigade level

and decide just which friendly units shall attack which enemy units, whereas the overall commanders were further removed from the fighting. Similarly, in deciding whether a unit shall attack they can take account of the supply position all along the front, which brigade and divisional commanders could not. It seems that the Players must represent a large number of commanders at once. Nothing about this "perfect knowledge" problem is unique to "Green Fields Beyond", of course, but it does need to be borne in mind.

Allowing for this, what are the problems confronting the Strategic Commanders (or, more likely, their hard-worked staffs) in dealing with supply?

Firstly, they must keep in mind the need to resupply units at regular intervals with both General and Combat Supply. Consequently a battle plan requiring units to operate behind enemy lines or in isolated positions for any length of time will cause problems. Secondly they must ensure that such supplies as are allocated to them by the High Command are optimally distributed among the various Corps of their army. The present rules are neither necessary nor sufficient for this purpose; the distinction between Combat and General Supply is useful only in the sense that it would be unduly bureaucratic to require players to record expenditure of the latter. However, the fact that units are a long way from their depot even cut off at the instant of Combat is not in itself a problem, nor is the temporary isolation of depot units. Similarly the immunity of tanks from resupply requirements and the mobility of depot units are advantages which would doubtless have been most welcome to the commanders, had they existed.

I think this makes clear my objections to the original rules, and, not being one to indulge in purely destructive criticism, I propose to offer a complete alternative set of supply rules. Some sections of the existing rules will be unaffected, and if a case is not mentioned in the following, this means that the existing rule stands.



SUBSTITUTE SUPPLY MODULE FOR "TO THE GREEN FIELDS BEYOND"

(11.0) Supply.
General Rule.
Supply is divided into two kinds, General Supply and Combat Supply, and the tracing of each is subject to slightly different rules. General Supply governs a unit's ability to move and fight, Combat Supply relates only to a unit's ability to attack.

Procedure.
All supply is determined at the start of the GAME-TURN (N.B. NOT PLAYER-TURN). So long as a unit is in General Supply at the start of the game-turn it has its maximum movement allowance for the whole game-turn. So long as it is in Combat Supply at the start of the game-turn it may attack in both Combat phases of the coming friendly player-turn, subject to the availability of supply points in the depots.

(11.1) Supply Sources.
There are two kinds of supply source; depot units,

and hexes which formed part of the friendly front line at the start of the game.
(11.11) In order to be in General Supply a unit must at the start of the game-turn be able to trace a line of supply to a friendly depot.
(11.12) In order to be in Combat Supply a unit must at the start of the game-turn be able to trace a line of supply to a friendly depot, or to a hex which formed part of the friendly front line at the start of the game.

(11.2) Tracing a Supply Line.
(11.21) A Supply Line is always traced through a path of contiguous hexes from the unit requiring supply to the supply source.
(11.22) The length of a Supply Line is irrelevant.
(11.23) Delete "Counting it as one Movement Point to cross".
(11.24) A unit may voluntarily lengthen its Supply Line by any amount or may put itself out of supply (of course, if it is not back in supply by the start of the next game-turn, it will pay the penalties).

(11.3) Supply Depots.
(11.33) Delete last sentence; an unsupplied depot may be used to support an attack as long as it contains sufficient Supply Points.

(11.4) Expenditure of Supply Points.
(11.41) Add: Tanks also expend Supply Points in the same way as other units. When supply is traced to a friendly front line hex, the Supply Points expended are deducted from the nearest depot.
(11.42) Delete exception a.
(11.43) Delete. Each attacking unit expends one Supply Point.

(11.6) Effects of being out of General Supply.
(11.62) Delete last sentence. Unsupplied Depots may support attacks provided they contain sufficient Supply Points.

(11.9) Optional Supply Rule Simplification.
Delete whole case.

"FOR POOR EYES ONLY"

RIFLEMAN DODD

SPI have continually assured us that they are devoting a great deal of time and effort to R&D... Research they *do* seem to be doing. Apart from the battles and the history that they research they also look into such valuable things as 'Killer Penguins' and the like.

On the other hand the 'D' part of things does seem to be falling a little short of target at the moment. Let's leave aside the appalling shambles of the **Highway To The Reich** rules. Let's even leave aside the fact that a new game has arrived in S&T with two full pages of errata *already* printed and inserted in the magazine or the fact that there have been eight foolscap pages of queries and errata submitted to New York on **Atlantic Wall**. Let's leave those aside for nobody else seems to be making a fuss so why should I? What I really do resent is that while all this development is not happening terribly well some of the resources of SPI are being devoted to a piece of trimming for the magazine which, although it may 'Feedback' well enough, has no real or direct relevance to any but a small segment of the people who play wargames. Not only this but the information is such that it can, for the most part, be gleaned by all but the most myopic from the pages of the specialised magazines which deal with those subjects.

I refer to "For Your Eyes Only" which appears to me to be a farrago of clippings, digests from specialist mags and extended tables of information which is out of date even as it's published. To be sure it's only four pages of copy but how much time which ought to be devoted to getting things *right* is being spent on making things pretty with this type of idea. Come on, gentlemen. Before you start doing the arabesque get the basics right. Now, the left foot goes forward, you transfer your weight from the right to the left and then you bring the right foot forward and put it down in front of the left and you'll go on doing that until you get it right!!

Starforce - A Solitaire Scenario

JOHN GARRETT

I feel that the major drawback of the Starforce game is that there is only the one solitaire scenario (Rescue Mission 38.0) even though the basic game utilises a simple CRT. Therefore, the following scenario came into being.
(42.0) The colonisation war.

(42.1) Introduction

In 2227, before the advent of the Solar Homogeny and the L'Chal-dah, Rame starships had explored and colonised many of the surrounding star systems. However, there was a great deal of dissent against the home-orientated government (C.B.R.) and in 2229, incensed by the high level of taxation on mineral exploration, a committee of a new colonial rights council (C.R.C.) was established on HR 7703. Terrified at the unity this group had achieved, the C.B.R. asked for a delegation to be sent to discuss terms. The C.R.C. however unwittingly sent all their major leaders to the conference in a single starship as an act of good faith and the perfidious C.B.R. destroyed the ship and, taking advantage of the C.R.C.'s momentary disunity, attacked at once and in a short campaign ruthlessly subdued the revolt. However, the loss of so many telesthenics was a severe setback to colonisation plans, the government itself being overthrown in the people's war the following year.

(42.2) Orders of battle and deployment:

Star systems and stargates	Starforces	I.D. code
C.B.R. player		
2036/+1 (70 Ophiuchi)	4	(1)
1734/+14 (BD + 45)	2	
1636/-8 (36 Ophiuchi)	2	(4)
1637/-8 (CD - 26)	0	(3)
1938/-7 (CD - 21)	0	(2)

C.R.C. forces		
2833/-11 (HR 7703)	5	(B)
2734/+2 (Altair)	3	(C)
2537/+2 (BD + 4)	2	(E)
2433/-14 (Luyten 347-14)	0	(D)
2832/-14 (CD-45)	0	(A)

(42.3) Special rules

Only the Strategic CRT is used. The C.B.R. player moves all of his units first and then rolls for each C.R.C. starforce individually and moves them all before combat is resolved.

(42.4) Victory conditions

The C.B.R. player must neutralise all the C.R.C. stargates by game-turn 6 or he automatically loses the game. The C.B.R. player also loses if any of his stargates are neutralised.

(42.5) C.R.C. movement table

Start point	Chit drawn									
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
CD-45 (A)	A	B	D	E	C	D	B	C	E	D
HR 7703 (B)	E	2	A	D	B	2	A	D	B	C
Altair (C)	B	E	1	C	A	1	C	E	1	D
Luyten 347(D)	A	2	D	4	B	E	A	3	C	B
BD + 4 (E)	D	1	A	1	C	E	B	C	E	1

Explanation

For every starforce a chit is drawn individually and is cross referenced on the table with its starting point to find the I.D. code of its new position. The chit is then replaced and another one drawn for the next starforce. If the stargate at the point of destination has been neutralised the starforce stays put.

(42.6) Rationale

This game was devised to be played quickly and simply yet still provide a challenge to a more experienced player. It is also intended to present a position not unlike standard 2-D with a few diversified strategies.