CITYFIGHT

BY PAUL KING

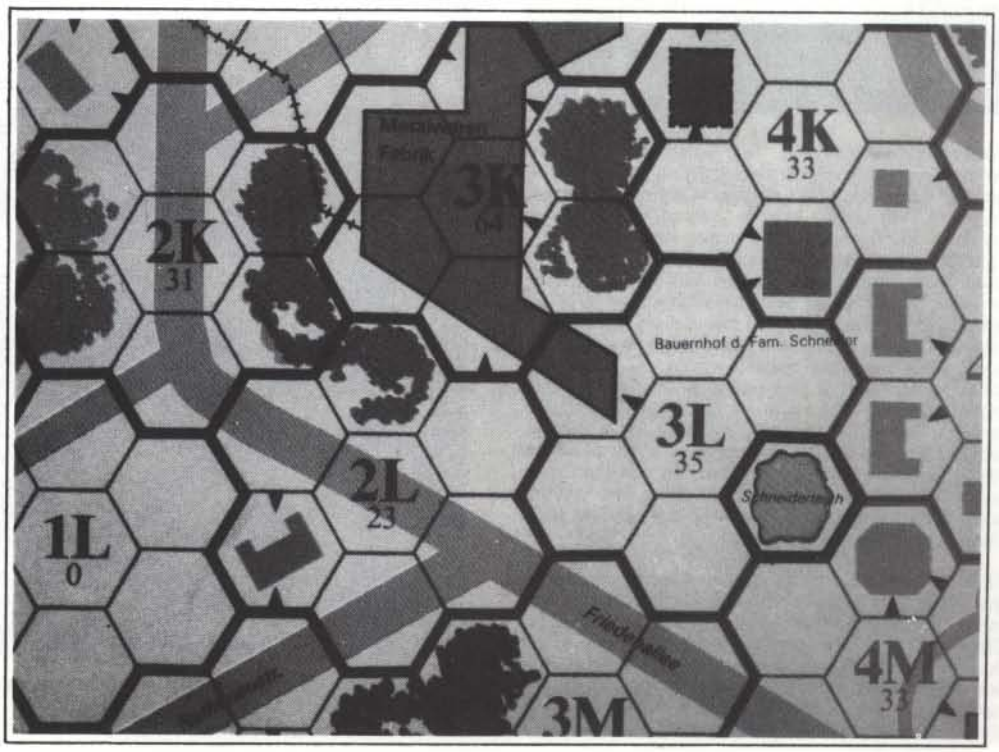
Urban warfare has increased greatly during this century, and S.P.I. gave us **Sniper!** to simulate this with man to man combat set during the Second World War. This used simultaneous movement and order writing, with such additions as panic and preservation. Whilst in itself a good game, certain features caused problems in terms of realism and playability. First of all, all the troops were plainly visible for everyone to see on the map, and players would react to this situation so that the combatants went about the board with precognition. This is fine in a fantasy situation, but not in a game representing street fighting. The answer of course was to use dummy counters and have all the playing pieces inverted – unfortunately this led to players forgetting what was what and misordering units, not to mention the greater increase in playing time. Perhaps the best solution was to have three maps, one each for the players and a master copy for an umpire. Pieces were put on the player's maps as they came into sight – apart from the time factor for writing orders, the umpire checking everything and then moving units, the biggest problem was sighting your opponent. The outcome was in general still unrealistic and required great patience by the participants. Panic proved to be the strongest of all, after writing out orders men would suddenly panic and run off in random directions – nobody runs back towards the enemy where they have placed a satchel charge about to go off, but it has happened in **Sniper!** In panic situations the fact that there was no command structure to relate to did not help either. Preservation proved to be a bugbear, for a player could reach this level (the equivalent of "lets get out here before we get killed") but then force his opponent to reach preservation and still win – rather unusual and very frustrating. So the biggest problems were the concepts of hidden movement, command control (or rather the lack of it), panic and preservation.

SPI have now produced a new urban fighting game, **Cityfight,** which represents post war and modern city fighting. Originally intended as a partner for their modern tactical combat game, **Firefight,** the game has developed into an accurate simulation and is based on an interesting rationale. If you look at any map of Central Europe the most striking feature is the spread of towns and cities into vast urban sprawls, so any Soviet invasion would have to enter these areas and win them over. Think back to World War Two and places such as Stalingrad, Caen and Berlin spring to mind as areas of bitter town fighting, snipers and block by block clearance; could the future hold even more fighting of this nature?

Opening the **Cityfight** box is enough to make all but the strongest heart quail. You are confronted with 1400 counters, over half of which are information chits, a rule book sixty pages long, a forty page book of charts, tables, T.O.E's and an article first seen in Strategy and Tactics. On top of this there are two identical map sections each measuring 17" by 22", containing a mass of colours, buildings and streets. Fortunately the rules are split into three levels of complexity, each level with it's own scenarios. The first level of play includes the move sequence, how to use the command structure at platoon level, searching for your opponents units and actual combat. These basic rules cover infantry actions only. The next level, or intermediate game, can be added into the basic game system, or sections can be selected at the player's discretion. Rules in this level include command control for vehicles, vehicle combat and anti-tank weaponry plus the use of weather, night fighting and new sighting rules. The advanced game introduces height levels (which concerns the kaleidoscope of colours on the map) and off-map fire by artillery plus many optional rules such as tanks driving through buildings which add the final touches of realism to the game.

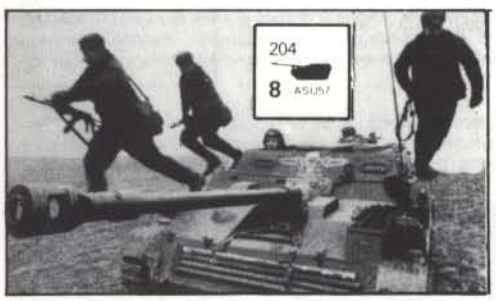
One immediate novelty of the game is that the players sit back to back with their own map and only their own combat units on the board – gone is the old **Sniper!** problem of knowing where your enemy is immediately. The only question is, how do you find him? This is dealt with by units searching, i.e. looking and listening, into the hexes surrounding them. Obviously even on a small map searching each hex is time consuming, and finding someone who is moving would be well nigh impossible. To avert this, hexes are grouped into 'sevens' to give large "megahexes", a unit can search it's own "megahex" or up to two "megahexes" away. Each "megahex" has a different density of buildings, woods, etc., and this is reflected in a search rating number from 0 to 66 printed in each "megahex". By calling out a "megahex" code number, much like the simple game of Battleships played by youngsters everywhere, a player's opponent must state if he has any units in the open (non-building/ woods) hexes of that "megahex". The searching player also rolls two die – one gives tens and the other units – to see if any units are seen in the woods or buildings. This basic dice roll is modified by both players to give a final score which is compared to the rating of the "megahex" under consideration – if high enough all the units are revealed, if not the opponent simply says nothing. This system is unusual and very effective, but depends upon the absolute honesty of both players. It is also a pleasant step forward in the use of dice, having "tens and units". Perhaps we may even see percentage dice used properly one day!

Once spotted, enemy units may come under immediate fire with results ranging from no effect, or suppression to an outright kill. Since a player will



only state "combat unit" or a "non-combat unit" in any particular hex containing infantry the firing player is never really aware of what he has shot at, or what he has destroyed. This adds to the tension of any situation and presents many problems to the players as to what they should do next.

Now let us have a look at command control and panic. Every platoon on the board has a platoon leader and a sergeant, if company level organisation is present in the game, then a company commander counter is also present. Each of these leaders has a leadership rating varying from 1 (poor) to 12 (excellent), and this rating is used throughout a game turn for various reasons. At the beginning of a turn each counter of a platoon may be issued a command which accrues two 'action points' if an infantry unit, or three if a vehicle. Each platoon has these points totalled and the number recorded on an action track. This of course represents the maximum actions a platoon will form — so how do we introduce panic? Panic is not mentioned explicitly in the rules, but implicitly by the inability of a platoon to act. Put another way, there are less action points available to convert into actions, for one action i.e. move, fire or search, requires the expenditure of an action point. So how is the action point total reduced? Obviously a platoon with a leader of poor quality will be more likely to suffer, so loss of points is related to leadership rating. A dice throw (or two if a player lacks advantage in a game) is related to the platoon leader's rating, if the throw is greater, then the difference is correlated with total platoon action points on an Action Point Loss Matrix to give the number of points lost on the action track before play is begun. This is repeated for all the platoons on the board. The net effect is, of course, that all the things a player would like to do in a turn are not done simply because orders are not obeyed. Another very important feature of this system is that players do not spend ages writing down orders, for chits are provided for all the various commands issued, and are placed on the combat units. Once an action is complete the chit may be removed, or a counter inverted, signifying what else the unit may do before the end of the move. This system may appear cumbersome at first, but is in fact very quick and foolproof when compared with writing everything down and ending up very confused as to what has or has not been done by units.



Commands which can be issued for infantry include search (perform two sighting actions), fire (perform one fire and one search action in a turn), or move. Movement can be one of two types — cautious (perform one hex move and a search) or hold (perform two separate hex moves). Units stop once they enter a woods or building hex, and building hexes may only be entered or left by specific hex sides which are marked on the map by tiny red arrows. Vehicle commands are similar, but involve three actions e.g. a cautious command for a tank means it can perform one search, one move and one fire action. Movement rates for vehicles are twice those of infantry, or a vehicle given a bold move could move a total of eight hexes if on a road. From this it can be seen that continual searching is vital, for units are moving around constantly and may not stay in the spot they were last seen in.

Firing tends to be fairly deadly — being caught in the open by a tripod machinegun crew hidden in a stone building is really tempting fate. However, **Cityfight** also includes ammunition depletion during fire actions. In the combat results table it is possible for a weapon type e.g. automatic rifle, to run out of ammunition. Since a full turn must elapse before attempting to reload, it can lead to great fun as attackers dash across open spaces, hoping to reach their opponents before the firing starts again. Reloading is achieved by a dice roll which is compared to a recovery rating for that scenario. Close assaults (hand to hand fighting, grenades, etc.) will occur when units occupy the same hex, so combat in its various forms is vicious, but true to urban fighting.

Suppression results are also common and represent units diving for cover when under attack. Infantry units in the open are also suppressed when another unit is fired on — common sense really, for units are unlikely to battle on regardless if heavy firing is going on around them. Spotting and fire attacks on suppressed units is reduced to fit into this situation. Recovery from suppression is dependant upon the leader counters — both leaders and sergeants are used here. A dice is rolled and the score modified in various ways e.g. — 3 if leader is stacked with unit. If the result is less than, or equal to, the leadership rating then the suppression is removed. Poorly rated leaders will have difficulty removing suppression, so leader's ratings are again very important.

Preservation rules are also present in **Cityfight** and work along the following lines. Every time a unit is killed or, in the case of a vehicle, damaged, a certain number of preservation points are accrued. Once the preservation level of a platoon is reached it is demoralised and the effects of this unhappy condition are far reaching. Leadership ratings are reduced, search ability is lowered, ammunition recovery is less likely, close assault is impossible, the chances of recovery from suppression are lowered and fire actions cost two action points instead of the normal one. Add to this the fact that units cannot enter a "megahex" in which the enemy has been spotted and you have some very effective "lets get out of here before we get killed" rules. It is still possible for both sides to become demoralised, but the overall effect is very different to that in **Sniper!**

I hope by now you have latched on to most of the game concepts. Obviously to go into other rules such as dismounting from vehicles, the differing effects of some types of building destruction and so on would be the equivalent to giving everyone a rule book. Instead I shall give you a play-through of part of the intermediate game training scenario: Tank Battle at Metalwaren. Why this one? — well it introduces tanks and infantry carrying combat vehicles plus a few additions like grenade launchers, snipers and smoke (which messes up sighting and combat). It does not include anti-tank weaponry as this would make the whole thing too complicated for the play-through. Another reason for choosing this scenario is that it only involves a quarter of the game map and has a reasonable range of building densities and construction materials.

The scenario is a meeting engagement between an American tank platoon with a mechanised rifle platoon and a Soviet motor rifle platoon with two tank platoons. Both have the same objective — to get to the other side of the map without suffering demoralisation. Victory points are given for demoralising the opponent's platoons and getting off the map undemoralised yourself. Neither side has the advantage as the terrain is new to both forces, which means that heavy losses in initial action points can occur. Any game turn ends when either player has run out of action points.

After the initial move with troops loaded up in vehicles we have the disposition of troops as shown in map 1. During each move both players wrote down their initial thoughts and plans for the coming action stage.

Turn 2.

American — "My troops are almost in position, but the biggest problem is unloading and getting them out of sight (which will take all of this move and the next!) The area around 2K is a worry — will the Russian come through here and what with? BMP's are infantry combat vehicles with a Hard Strength of 10 from the turret gun, the same as the tanks, and can fire twice in a turn! North of 4K I can only wait and hope he does not come near me. My biggest ace is the APC (112) in 4J2 — if I can get that into "megahex" 51 (part of the old village and heavily built up) and the troops dismounted I can create havoc from a reasonably unspottable position".

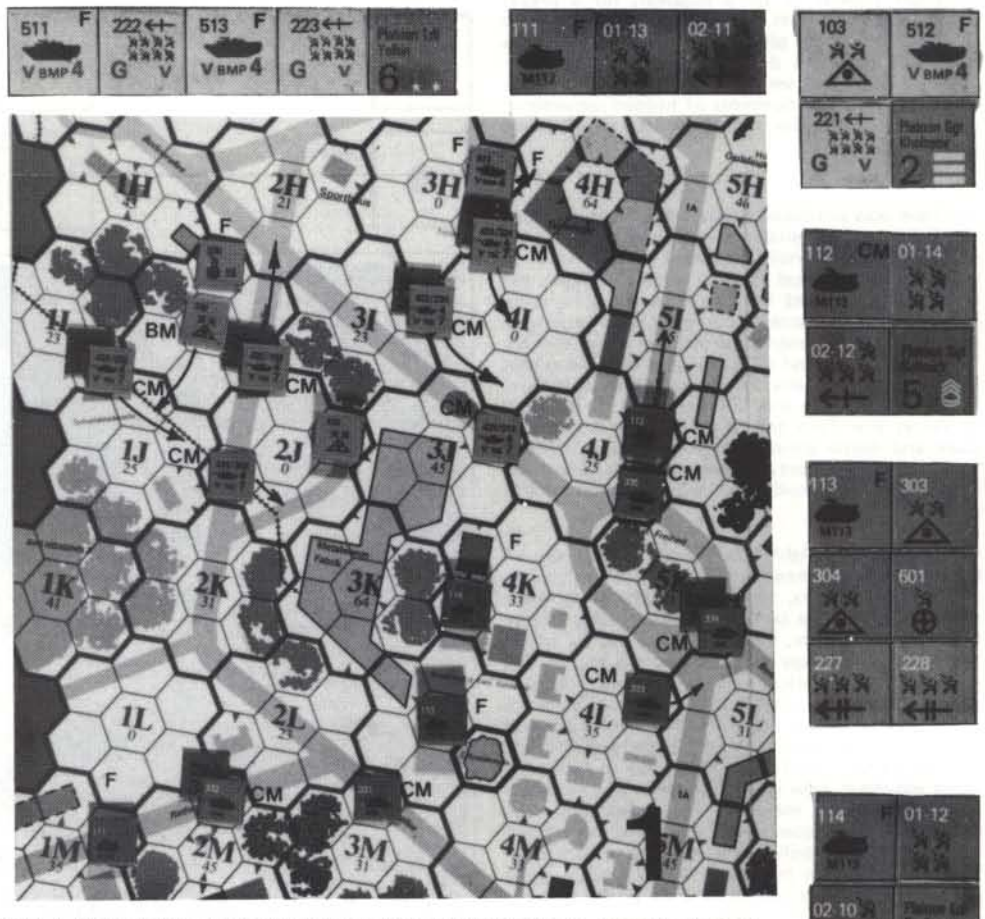


FIG. 1 Start of Turn 2. Stacks shown below and above Figure. Commands given for Turn 2 shown beside unit. Moves arrowed (CM = Cautious Movement; F = Fire; BM = Bold Movement).

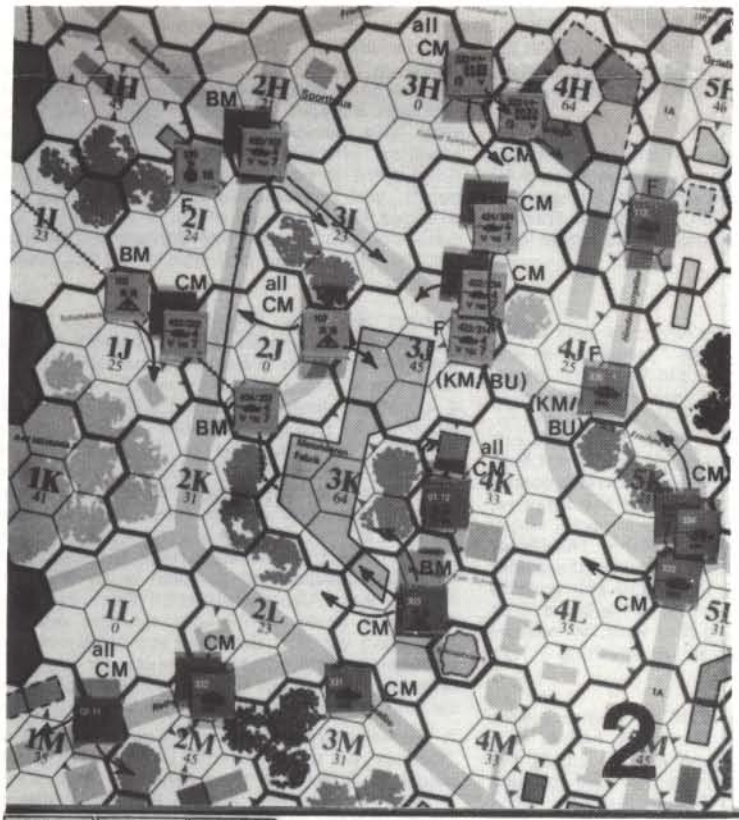
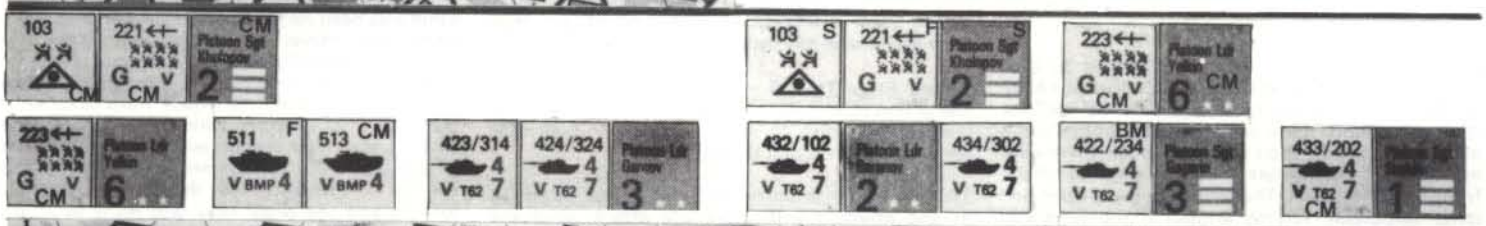
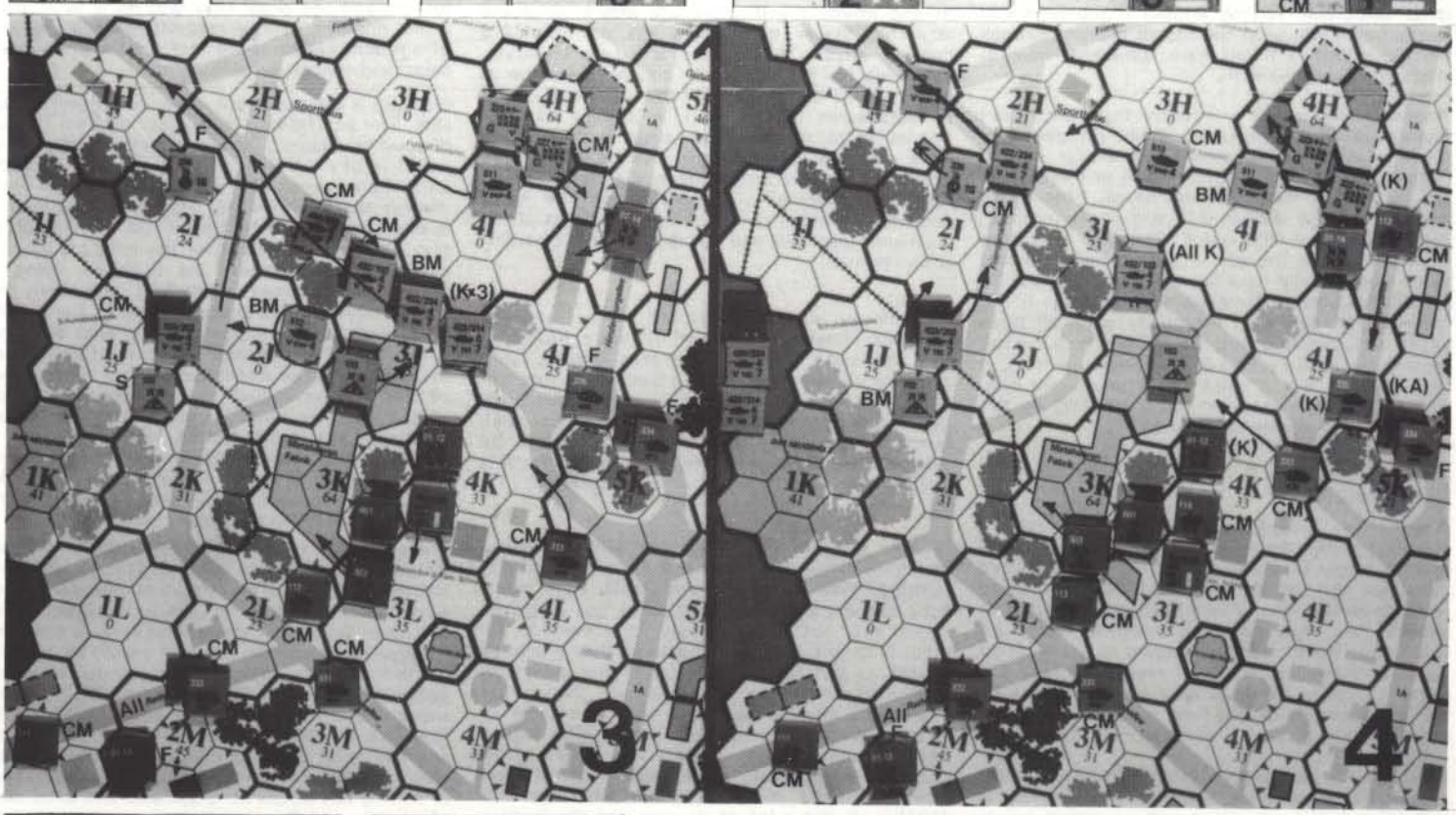


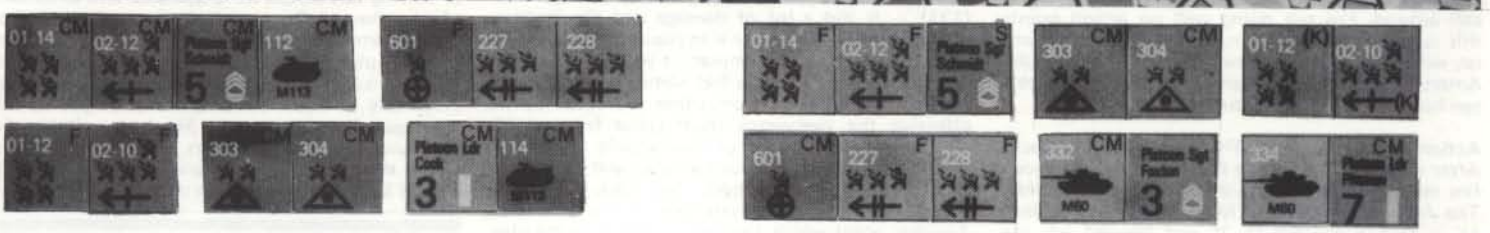
FIG. 2. Start of Turn 3
Status incurred for turn 2 shown as ( ). Stacks as figure 1 but for Russian units 511 & 513 and American 111, 113 & 114 that have unloaded. Russian unit 222 unloads into adjacent hex due to crowding of hex. Commands and moves for turn 3 shown (KM = Killed Movement; BU = Buttoned up).

FIG. 3. Situation at the end of Turn 3's movement and showing final unit status, turn 4 moves and commands — the latter either being shown on the stack diagram or beside the unit on the map. (N.B. Russian unit 512 misplaced, should be at 2J6).
(S = Search).

FIG. 4. Situation at end of moves in turn 4. Some units were then lost before the end of turn 4. (marked with a K).
Commands and moves for turn 5 also given.







Russian – "My main infantry thrust will come through 4H and into 5I, here I will have to move slowly in the buildings but can cause a few kills from grenade attacks. Most of my armour is held back waiting for the American to expose himself, but I have put a couple of tanks forward in 2J and 3J for a quick look round. Hopefully this turn I will position most of my troops and locate a few of his units."

Action Stage/Turn 2 – during the turn the Russian T62 at 3J2 spots the vehicles in 4J; he fires at the M60 tank, but only achieves a KM (disabled, no movement) result and due to an unfortunate dice throw is out of ammunition for his own main gun. The M60 returns the fire but misses, fortunately the M60 at 4L2 fires with a KM result, he then moves off himself to "megahex" 5L. Everyone's troops dismount with the exception of those in APC (112), megahex 5I. Due to stacking restrictions the Soviet must displace a unit from 3H2, naturally moving a squad into 4H helps him.

Turn 3.

American – "My disabled tank in 4J can only sight that "megahex" due to being 'buttoned up' by fire; plugging the gap at the north of the Metalwaren factory is a problem which should not have arisen, let's hope I can hold things up there. That Russian tank running out of ammunition was an incredible piece of luck. By now his infantry will (possibly?) be entering Metalwaren and the woods of IK. Spotting around 2K proved uneventful, but he might appear around there with tanks at any time. Getting my troops under cover is incredibly slow so I must take care this turn as to where and when I move and search. I seem to be fortunate in terms of action points – reasonable leaders are helping here."

Russian – "Curse the dice, that T62 in 3J is as good as dead and being buttoned up does not help; good job I have a few tanks available. By the look of things I think there are only a few troops south of 2K, but rather than punch through there with my tanks, I had better move to stop his attack from the 4J/4K area. The ground is fairly open and quite favourable for my armour if the American comes out. I will keep the squads moving through the old village, I might have something here to shock the American with."

Action Stage/Turn 3 – infantry from both sides manage to get under cover, a fair smattering of spotting around 2K proves uneventful and is dogged by low dice throws. North of Metalwaren the rumble of T62s can be heard. First of all another tank is put in 3J2 and spots into 4L, searching for the M60 which previously fired from there (American thought – panic, where did that come from? Could have been 3J, or even worse 2L or 4J! I'm pleased I moved that M60 out of 4L earlier). The American eventually spots all three hexes and discovers *two* fresh T62s in 3J. After moving the M60 back to 4L and having the tank at 5K1 disabled also, a quick fire results in the destruction of both tanks in 3J2. The T62 at 3J1 fails to hit the disabled M60 in 4J.

Game Turn 4.

American – "I have barely held on to those fire attacks between the tanks, unfortunately my tank platoon leader is in that disabled tank in 5K, I had better get him out. All the infantry are set up, and ready to destroy any vehicle they come across with grenade fire. Metalwaren (3K) could be dangerous this turn as the tripod machineguns can only set up this turn and cannot fire – if necessary I hope the sniper comes in handy. I have a nasty feeling he will break out of 2K this turn, thats the only place I can figure an attack can come from."

Russian – "I have as good as lost one tank platoon – leader and all, yeuk. Good job the sergeant is still around. I'm not doing well on action points this turn, mostly due to rubbish leaders. I'll carry on with the infantry move and try to draw the American out by some careful searching. I hope I can hold off any attacks coming through 2K."

Action Stage/Turn 4 – The Russian fights back! After searching 4K from a BMP in 4I the American fire teams in the store building of 4K6 are killed. The American retaliates! Moving an M60 up into 4K a T62 is spotted in 3I and brewed up, the platoon leader is burnt to death. Again the Russian fights back! Another T62 moves up to 3I3 and kills the disabled tank in 4J. Finally the M60 in 5K makes an unspotted attack (which means a lowered Hard Fire Strength) against this and against all the odds, kills it!

Meanwhile in the old village a Russian squad moves into 5I and successfully spots the American APC and infantry. The American replies by self-spotting "megahex" 5I with the APC, finds the Russian squad and kills it in an immediate fire action with the APC's machinegun.

Turn 5.

American – "Wow, that was hairy, the tank shoot-out was bad enough, but when "megahex" 5I was spotted I was rattled! How did he do it? Firing those BMP's was my only clue, it was possible (just) that he had moved through 4H and into 5I, taking a gamble I got him – dead! Things are certainly going better than expected here; that B.M.P. fire gave me a lot of information, but it was costly. With a preservation level of 12 for the infantry, losing 8 points in one fell swoop is nasty. Hopefully I can get a crack at those BMP's. The Metalwaren factory (3K/3J) is disappointing, there does not seem to be anything there. I'm still worried about troops bursting out at 2K, he has some more infantry and a few tanks to play with, by now he could be desperate enough to try anything – let's see if anything shows."

Russian – "Ugh, and I mean it! Both my tank platoons are demoralised, they have had it. It is pointless carrying on through 4K, he knows I'm there now, and the infantry are half way to being demoralised. I think it is time to pull out, but I should get that M60 in 4K with a bit of luck, that must demoralise his tank platoon at least."

Action Stage/Turn 5 – both sides suffered from low action points this turn; the Russian for obvious reasons, the American due to throwing high dice for a big loss in action points.

The American infantry in 5I spot the BMP in 4I and smash it with a grenade attack, since the attacking player never gives the position of a grenade attack, the Russian is totally confused. Searching for the M60 in 4K proves ineffective as it has moved to 3J3. Later in the turn the Russians in Metalwaren (3J7) find it. A grenade attack is impossible as the minimum range is 2 hexes, so since the tank is in an open posture – the tank crew have hatches open while looking for enemy in other "megahexes" – an automatic fire result achieves a 'button-up' result only. The rest of the Russians move back and use up all of the remaining action points.

So ends our scenario – almost. In the following turn the Russian infantry in 4H are confused to find that nasty M60 in 3J has gone – to 4K7 so it can pick up the tank platoon leader who meets it there. The Americans in 5I then find the Russians in 4H before they have time to move – a quick burst of machinegun/rifle fire wipes them out. By this time the Russian is totally demoralised and is fleeing from 1H/2H, and that really is the end of it all.

Without a doubt the scenario certainly proved to be exciting, but what does it show in terms of city fighting? Well it is plain that tanks alone stand little chance; admittedly the tanks had a straight shoot out, but with infantry in a position for grenade or anti-tank rocket attacks they would be ripped to shreds very quickly. If the game had continued, then the American still had a fair chance of success as there was a mixture of infantry/tanks covering both roads. The second point to come up is simple – if you are in the open, *keep moving,* preferably to a different "megahex". As an example think of that M60 (333) – it did a lot of damage and the Russian was forever searching for it in places it should have been, but wasn't. Of course it would have been blown up if the Russian had some form of "overwatch" fire available from other platoons. To be effective the overwatch must come from a different hex with similar or overlapping fire zones. The American had this for his tanks and even some protection from the woods, but look what happened when the Russian put tanks in the same hex! Another point which became apparent during play was the value of leaders and their ratings. The fact that poor leaders gave fewer available points to use became clear and important. Also putting leaders "up-front" meant that they were highly vulnerable, and losing a low rated leader may help a better endowed sergeant to organise things, but throws away five demoralisation points. Reaching preservation effectively stopped the Russian from firing since it costs so much in terms of action points, and this would have meant leaving units stranded to be picked off in a very short time. Both sides could have had demoralised platoons, but the game would still flow along in a realistic manner.

Perhaps the most important point is that of sighting opposing units. If both players had used the same map they would have, naturally, fired at tanks containing leaders. At one point in game turn 4 a Russian tank at 3I3 had a choice of hitting either of the two disabled M60s – if he had known the one in 5K1 contained the tank leader he would not have killed the one in 4J3, but risked a half strength shot at the other one. Neither player had a clue that the other was interested in the old village (4H/5I), but on a single map this would have been seen and never provided a tense situation as the American guessed and gambled as to where the Russian was. Also the situation revolving around 2K would never have arisen; the fact that both sides were wary of the other and totally unaware of "what lay beyond" created much gut-wrenching, especially when both failed to achieve high enough die rolls to spot into the wood and building hexes.

A favourite expression lately has been the phrase "state of the art". In terms of this **Cityfight** is a huge step forward in the area of the "fog of war" – another well used phrase. When you play this game you need *very* strong nerves, there were times when my nerves were extremely frayed and screaming inwardly was very common. Okay, you make a plan and stick to it, but there are always questions. Where will he attack from next? Will he spot my troops before I hide? Why can I not see all his units? You end up asking yourself hundreds of questions, the answers are few and far between. On top of this you must decide what your units will do and the order they will do it in – all in a few minutes, or even seconds – and all because of a superb hidden movement system and a clever command control situation.

Cityfight is enjoyable, but, more importantly, playable. The box lid calls it "A super-detailed Tactical Simulation Game", and detailed it certainly is, which is why the rules are sixty pages long and the data charts almost fill a book forty pages long. Almost every eventuality you could think of is covered somewhere by one of the three levels of play. Yet at the same time the rules are easy to understand and locate, the build up being so logical. My opponent in **Cityfight** once joked that "Three levels of complexity meant 'hard', 'difficult' and 'bloody impossible'!" – with this game it is not so. Certainly the rules cannot be digested in one gulp, but by slowly building up the sequence of play it is easy. Mind you, a thorough awareness of the rules by both players is vital, for if one player uses a game feature incorrectly then it becomes very unbalanced. In one game a player forgot the line of sight rule for spotting up to two hexes away, spotted illegally (but unwittingly) and discovered all of his opponents units!

There are one or two irritating points mind you. Only one set of Charts and Tables is provided – a nuisance when both players are at opposite ends of a room and one wants to look at the Charts while the other fellow has them! Also there is only one counter tray provided. I know I should be thankful for this as least – imagine 1400 counters all in one polygrip bag – but it would make life so much easier if two trays had been provided, one for the N.A.T.O. counters plus half the informational chits, and the other with the Warsaw Pact counters and chits in it. Why? – convenience really, so as to help in sorting out pieces for a scenario and to let both players have a fair number of counters at their disposal immediately at any point during the game. In the rules SPI state that they hope to make "update kits" if there is enough player interest. Personally, I hope there is, for **Cityfight** has the makings of a great game. Mind you, further inexpensive kits with counters, charts, etc., for the World War Two town scenarios might prove to be a good idea as well – we can only wait and see.