

Winter War

THE RUSSO-FINNISH CONFLICT NOVEMBER 1939—MARCH 1940

REVIEW AND OPTIMUM STRATEGY
RICHARD J STEPHENS

When my S&T comes through the post, I immediately look at the ratings chart to check the progress of two, in my opinion, underrated games: one is Battle for Germany and the other is Winter War, the subject of this article. It comes by way of experiment, attempting to bridge the gap between those who want reviews, game strategies and basic game skill.

Winter War is concerned with the Russo-Finnish conflict 1939-40, when the Finns held off their vastly superior foes with only courage and a will to survive. This has to be reflected in the game system, which is fairly simple in itself and which differs slightly for each player. For example, combat is mandatory for the Russians against adjacent Finnish units but is not so for the Finns. Furthermore, the Finns may "retreat-before-combat" their main units (1-1-3's and 0-0-1's), thus preventing them being attacked at the cost of conceding a hex. Whereas the Finns are always supplied in Finland, the Russian units must trace a line to a Headquarters unit within five hexes and that unit must be within ten hexes of a town — and each town can supply a maximum number of attack strength points: 15 for each except Petrozadovak (50) and Leningrad (300). So while the Russians have greater strength, this is balanced by other considerations, as in the real war.

On the other hand, there are problems facing both players. Of these the greatest is the slowness of the units. Since the game lasts 10 game turns an average Russian unit with a movement allowance (MA) of two could cover just over half of Finland North to South (this says something for the size of the map — 47 x 23 hexes).

Another feature of the game is the number of scenarios and special events which may be activated on the roll of a die each turn. These do not intrude to too large a degree on the game but there are a couple which I do not play. One is "German threat" (where the Soviets get no 20-12-2's as reinforcements thus rendering the game slow) and the other is "Cease Fire" (where the Finns can stop the game at any time from turns 5 to 9, making the game unbalanced). It is wise to call these 'no effect' when they occur.

Having discussed how the game works, I shall consider the best strategies to be used by each player.



The Petsamo area of Northern Finland

The Finnish Player

Initially, the Finnish player deploys his units face-down along with five dummy units, to confuse the Russian player. All units are turned face-up when the Russian has deployed. The Finns must, however, place their seven 6-6-2's in their eight fortification hexes. One hex of the Ladoga Line should be left empty, since early loss of the Mannerheim Line is a disaster on three counts:

- (1) the Finns can no longer retreat-before-combat;
- (2) the Russians get 40 victory points;
- (3) the Finns have virtually no chance of stopping the Russian army.

Place also a 1-1-3 with the units on the Mannerheim Line. Without this extra unit, the 6-6-2's, doubled when defending in a fort hex, are worth 12 on defence and the Russian can easily combine a 20-12-2 and a 6-4-2 to get 2-1 odds with a half chance of an exchange (there is no De or Dr result when attacking forts except at 5-1 or 6-1). But a 6-6-2 and a 1-1-3 are worth 14 on defence, thus the Russians will have to combine two 20-12-2's to get 2-1 (as 1-1 is too dangerous with an 'Ae' Result). Some 1-1-3's should be placed to the North of the Ladoga Line to slow the Russians at that point.

The next concentration of units should be in Petsamo: place the 4-4-2 in Petsamo, with two 2-2-3's to the South-West (a mountain hex coming between these two). Even with the most powerful Russian force there, due to supply considerations, it must consist of only two 6-4-2's and 2-1-2. As the Finnish 4-4-2 is doubled defending in a Finnish town, the 6-4-2's will attack it at 1-1. As one of the 2-2-3's is adjacent to the 6-4-2, it must also be attacked by the Russian 2-1-2 at 1-1 (and it should do this first to cut off the possible retreat of the 4-4-2 from Petsamo. 1-1 is poor and the Finns may be able to counter attack and take Murmansk. Spare and dummy units should be used to fill in the gap in the centre of Finland to let the Russian player think that a continuous line has been made. This gap should be made good with the reinforcements from turns 2 and 3 and a Russian attack through here can be repulsed with ease.

Finnish moves once the game has started depend really on how the Russians attack and the Finns should use the railway (they have an extensive network in the South) to move their units where they are most needed but the Mannerheim Line

must be held for as long as possible. When it does fall, just send ahead one or two small units — they and their Zones of Control will stop the Russian advance. Otherwise, the Finns must retreat and snipe at any isolated units — but don't risk anything at low odds or let your units be destroyed.

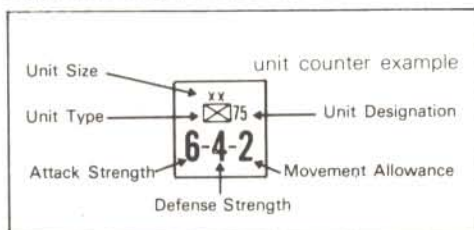
Another ploy is to note the maximum number of hexes the Russian could advance, for example, a force of 2-1-2's on turn 8 could only advance six hexes as the game ends on game-turn 10 and perhaps not reach anywhere important, and so all Finnish units stopping them could be removed and used somewhere else.

The Russian Player

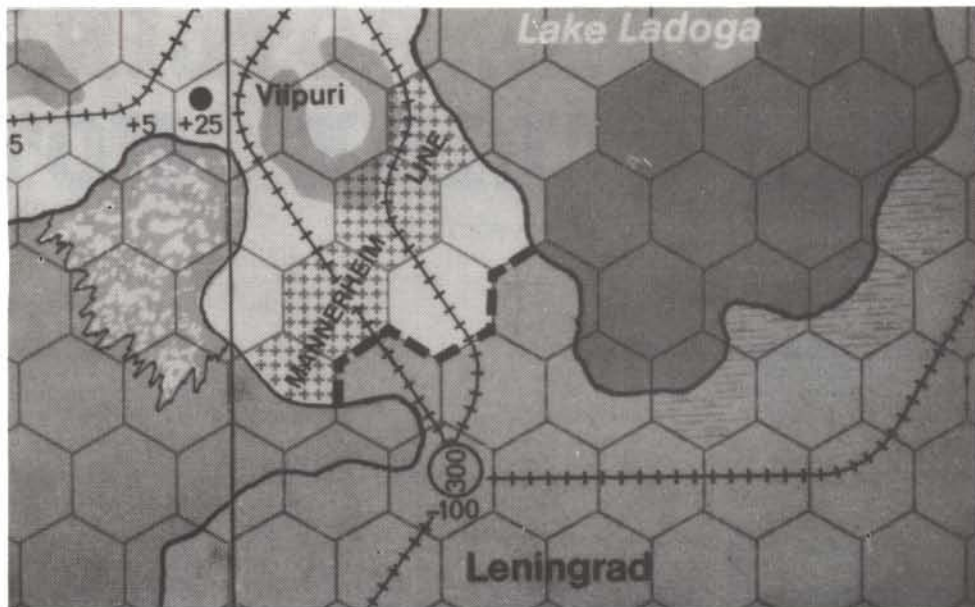
The Russian player must know what his objectives are: the Mannerheim Line (worth 40 victory points); towns, worth 30 VPs (except Viipuri — 25, and Helsinki — 50); the line of eleven hexes West of Viipuri worth 5 VPs each. He must accumulate 61 points for a marginal win, 81 for a substantive win and 101 or more for a decisive win. 31 to 60 means a draw and less than 30 means a Finnish decisive win.

At the start the Russian should react to what the Finns appear to have done. However, he must concentrate on certain points, remembering that his single railway line probably won't allow him to change his basic line of approach. He should attack the two lines of fortifications and must accept losses no matter how high they may be. Be careful not to lose everything in an exchange and then let the Finns rush forward and capture something. Moreover, don't automatically advance into a fort hex if the Finns only have to advance one hex or so to put, say, a 20-12-2, the arch-enemy of Finnish defence lines, out of supply; think ahead to what the situation would be if you did get an exchange. You will find that small units will have to be sacrificed in large numbers to attack Finnish units that are adjacent to attacking 20-12-2s — but don't let this worry you. This technique can be applied to the Ladoga Line as and when further 20-12-2s arrive as reinforcements. As for Petsamo, the Russian must commit his most powerful force and pray but if the worst happens, then have some units down South ready on the railway line to be sent to Murmansk. Be careful about attacking Oulu too soon — as I have said, Finnish reinforcements on turns 2 and 3 can mince this up. Rather launch the attack when the Finns are feeling the pinch in the South — if this is properly timed, it can really hurt the Finns. The Border Guards (1-1-4s which cannot leave the USSR) should be placed to defend Kandalashka: whereas the Russians have nothing to want in Northern Finland apart from Petsamo, Kandalashka lies a tantalising two hexes from the Finnish border.

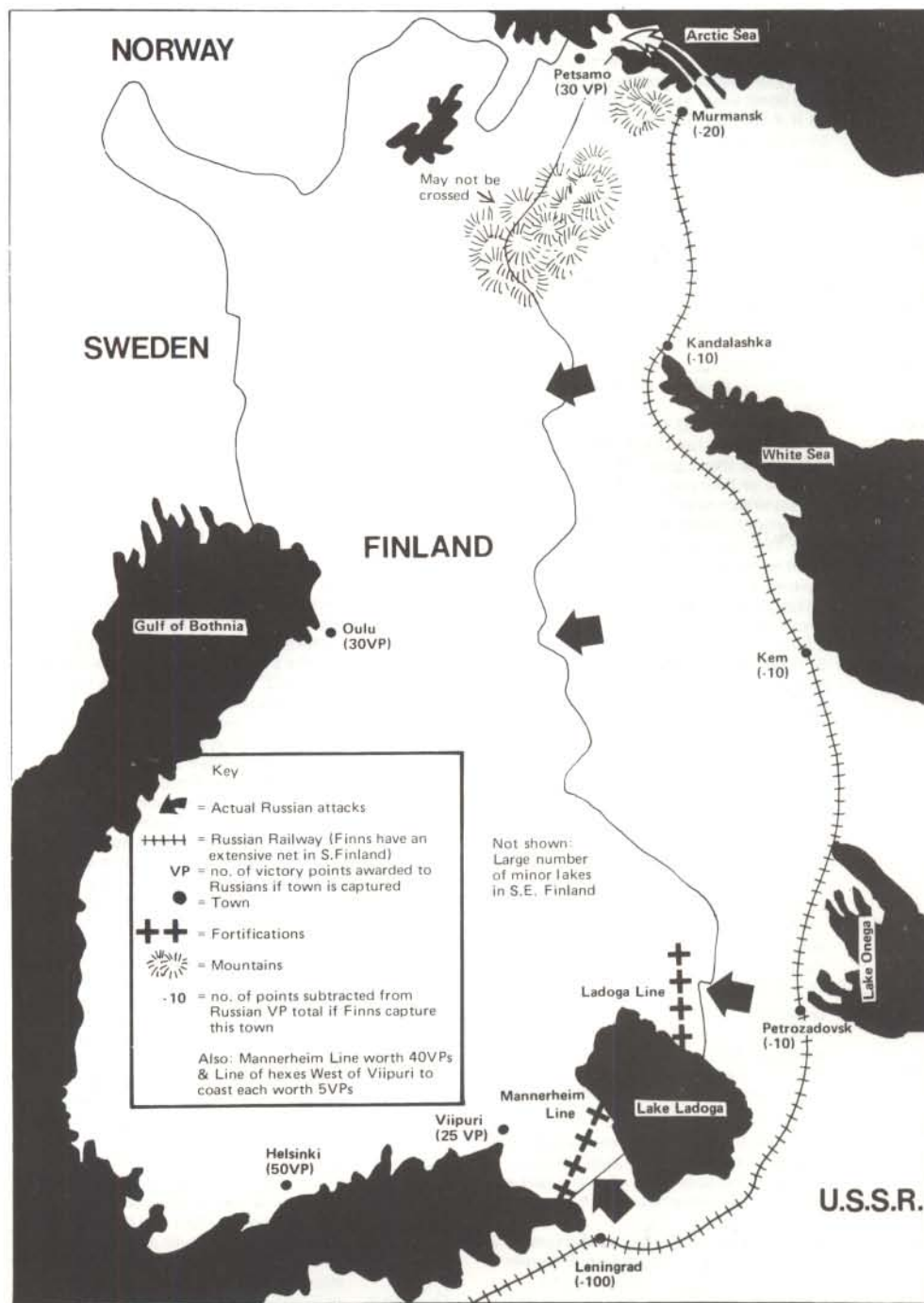
Again, for the Russians, it is a matter of reacting correctly to a given situation. For me, this is the pleasure of the game — both sides have to really think as to what should be sent where, whether to give up such and such a position and so on, thus involving strategic decisions which makes it a very interesting simulation for me.



UNIT TYPES	UNIT SIZES
	corps: XXX
	division: XX
	brigade: X
	regiment: III
	battalion: II
	patrol: ●●



Southern Finland and the area of the Mannerheim Line



Key

- ➡ = Actual Russian attacks
- ++++ = Russian Railway (Finns have an extensive net in S.Finland)
- VP = no. of victory points awarded to Russians if town is captured
- = Town
- +++ = Fortifications
- ☀ = Mountains
- 10 = no. of points subtracted from Russian VP total if Finns capture this town

Also: Mannerheim Line worth 40VPs & Line of hexes West of Viipuri to coast each worth 5VPs