

Rod Miller - 06:43am Jul 15, 1999 PST (#15 of 43)
In the old enemy at the gates folder

Hi Guys!

Enemy at the Gates is easily my favorite game. The best of the best! I figure I've played at least 20 campaign games of Enemy, and could add another dozen games that started the campaign game, but ended early (such as play-test games where we reset with new counters, or new rules to try, etc). The point is not that I'm some expert, rather than this game is so good...I'd play it again, but my gaming group now says "anything but Enemy for a while" (I'm sure we'll start another one up sometime). Whenever we think about what to play at the Retreat, a massive 8-10 player game of Enemy always comes up as a possibility!

One of the options I highly recommend is the Stick It rule. I've found that this rule is perfect for making the campaign go much as the real campaign game went, as each side experiences the situation that his historical counterparts faced. Under the historical game framework, the Russian player has little incentive to closing the pocket early. He knows the German can't move his Panzers out of the Stalingrad area (the pocket), since he knows what Hitler is going to order (he can read a rule Book!), so he is free to pursue deep strategies, or concentrated efforts at destroying certain German formations, etc, anything but the desperate, nail-biting effort to lock down that pocket. On the other hand, if the Russian's cost for not closing the pocket is risking allowing pretty much the entire (mobile, at least) German Force out, the Russian absolutely pays some very close attention to locking down that pocket. Under the historical game Framework, the German just doesn't have the incentive to break out, (and pretty much the only incentive for relief is to drive more supply in). If I know the German has little incentive to break-out, why bother garrisoning the pocket, oh right, that 3 RE rule...If the German has a very strong incentive to break out, I'll do whatever I can to prevent it, I have those Panzers bottled up, and I sure don't want them to get loose.

Virtually every game that I've seen without the Stick-It rules sees the German hunker down inside the fortress (maybe driving 1 Pz Division out if a hole exists, but after that initial move to create a defensive arc, just sit there). Occasionally, I've seen a relief effort, but most often, a Chir-Kotelnikovko defensive line is formed, and the pocket is left to fend for itself. Most Russians will form the garrison around the pocket and then move on to forward operations, waiting for the pocket to starve (or employing the 1-barrage, 1-attack strategy). In other words, after the 1st turn, the pocket turns into largely a non-event, save for the air efforts (troops stay close, only due to the lines on the map holding them there, etc).

Each and every game I've seen under the Stick-It rules has seen a breakout attempt (some succeed, others don't), and an accompanying relief effort. Sometimes the breakout is right off the bat, often it is early (within turns 2-4), but I've seen late breakouts, turns 6 and 7!! A German player must carefully weigh the consequences of an effort to escape (balancing the supply needs vs. the need to hold Stalingrad and its Rail-Network), and the Russian carefully consider how much force to leave guarding Stalingrad vs. how much to take on its Westward offensives.

Further benefits are relief from the "cones of silence" :)..the lines on the ground that forces can't cross, less tracking of victory Points. It is much better to have the correct, historical behavior exhibited, and the same fears, concerns experienced as with our historical counterparts, as a result of the situation presented, rather than some behavior shapers in the form of victory Points and "thou shall nots". For me and the folks I've played with, at least, playing with the Stick-It rules provides exactly this!

Especially with players who are running the Russians for the 1st time, it isn't easy to close the pocket on the 1st turn, and the German could then act ahistorically and take all his mobile troops and scoot (and I've seen this happen). And, maybe my feelings are because I play with a super bunch of guys, who'd much rather lose horribly than even stretch an order, or employ some dippy tactic, and so playing with the option carries no undue penalty. Further, we almost always play the game without even looking much at the victory Points and so our orientation is much more to fighting (we'll know who wins, or we feel it is a tie). So we may not be like your group, and you may do things differently. Also, if playing solitaire, these added decisions are not always what you'd like to have, it is sometimes good to have certain decisions enforced via rules and rule sets.

So, read Dean's excellent "how-to" in Operations for some hints on closing the Pocket on the initial turn if you don't know how, or are unsure, and/or set up the map D situation and run through it a time or 2 on your own before embarking on the game with your group. Then, take a stab at the Stick-It rule, it will make a Great Game even better!

Rod