State of the OCS
OCS 30ᵗʰ Anniversary Edition - Spring 2022

By Curtis Baer – Baltimore, Maryland

One score and ten years ago, Dean Essig, our Hall of Fame, award winning designer, published - *Guderian's Blitzkrieg*. Wow, remember that game?! It had a combination of game play that made it unique and a fresh viewpoint on WWII military operations. There was movement, overrun, barrage, combat and then do it again with the reserves in exploitation. The combat units had their historical designations. Dean provided plenty of scenarios. The system included combat unit modes, artillery barrage, enemy reaction, operational airpower, and of course a logistic limitation on operations. I punched out the counters for a short scenario and went to work to learn the system. The design featured a combination of concepts—initiative rolls, combat surprise, and especially the use of supply to limit operations and force a player to make very difficult decisions. However, I struggled on my own to understand how it worked as a whole. Eventually, I moved on to something else. Sound familiar? I broke out the old *GB* again in the mid-nineties when my copy of *DAK* arrived, and again at the turn of the century when I received Burma (now my personal favorite). However, my efforts to learn the system were not successful regardless of the time spent trying. Oh well, had to move on, again. Finally, in 2001 I bought *Guderian's Blitzkrieg II* (first printing) and resolved to figure the system out once and for all. I set up the "Drive on Bryansk" scenario and played it 25 times! Finally, the interactive nature of the sequence of play, layered attacks and use of all the tools at hand started to make sense to me. Thankfully. I have been an enthusiast, and active player ever since.

Montage of OCS game covers, graphic by Gary Mengle

The Operational Combat System has generated 16 more unique games after the original *Guderain's Blitzkrieg* (not counting reprints and second editions). And there are many more in design and development as we describe below. This is quite an impressive body of work, and the

OCS will be a well-deserved legacy for Dean. So, for the entire OCS community I say simply, congratulations Dean. And also, thank you for the great OCS gaming experiences you have provided for thousands of players around the world these past thirty years.
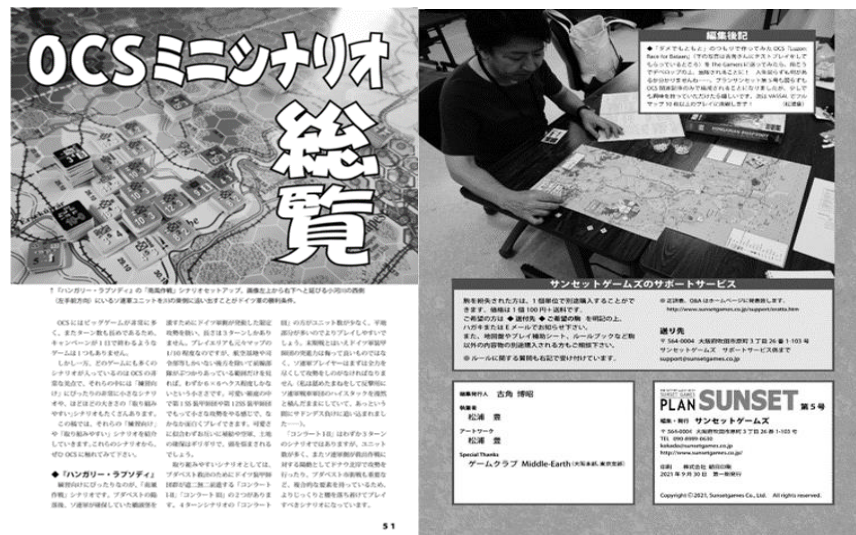
State of the OCS

In this milestone anniversary year, I'm pleased to report again that our game system remains well received and our OCS community is thriving.

I am continually amazed at the reach and talent of the OCS community. In our roles as Honchos, Chip and I find ourselves in conversation with gamers from all parts of the globe (OCS Depot has links to OCS materials in Chinese, Finnish, French, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Swedish). The next issue of "Plan Sunset" (published by Sunset Games in Japan), for example, will be devoted entirely to OCS gaming.
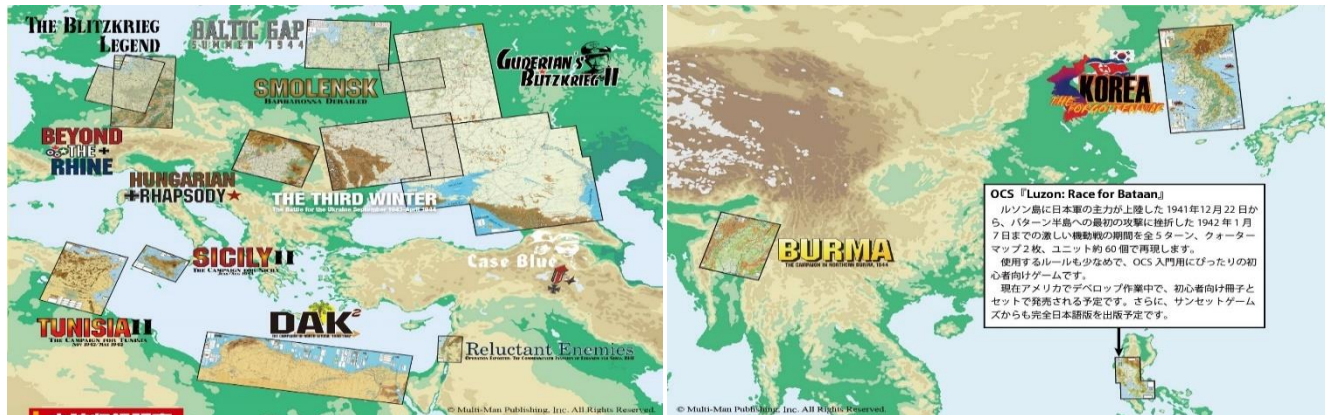
Cover images for upcoming issue of "Plan Sunset" magazine, published in Japan.

*Article page and back cover of "Plan Sunset" magazine.*

There is a continuing lively discussion on all matters OCS on our long-standing posting forum at Consimworld.

However, in the last two years many OCS players have been posting about the OCS on Facebook's OCS Group. The Facebook group now has over 1900 self-identified OCSers as registered members. More than 1500 of these were "active" (meaning they have viewed content within the group during the last month), sometimes over 800 a day. This is quite impressive. The large following here allows me to believe, more than maybe any other reason, that our OCS community is in fact growing and remains active.
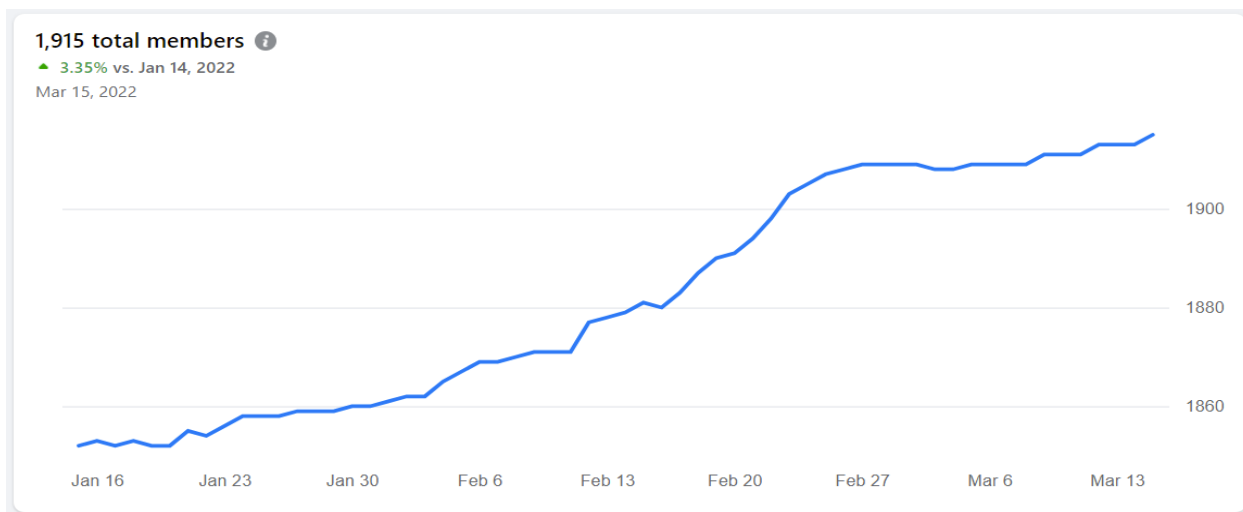
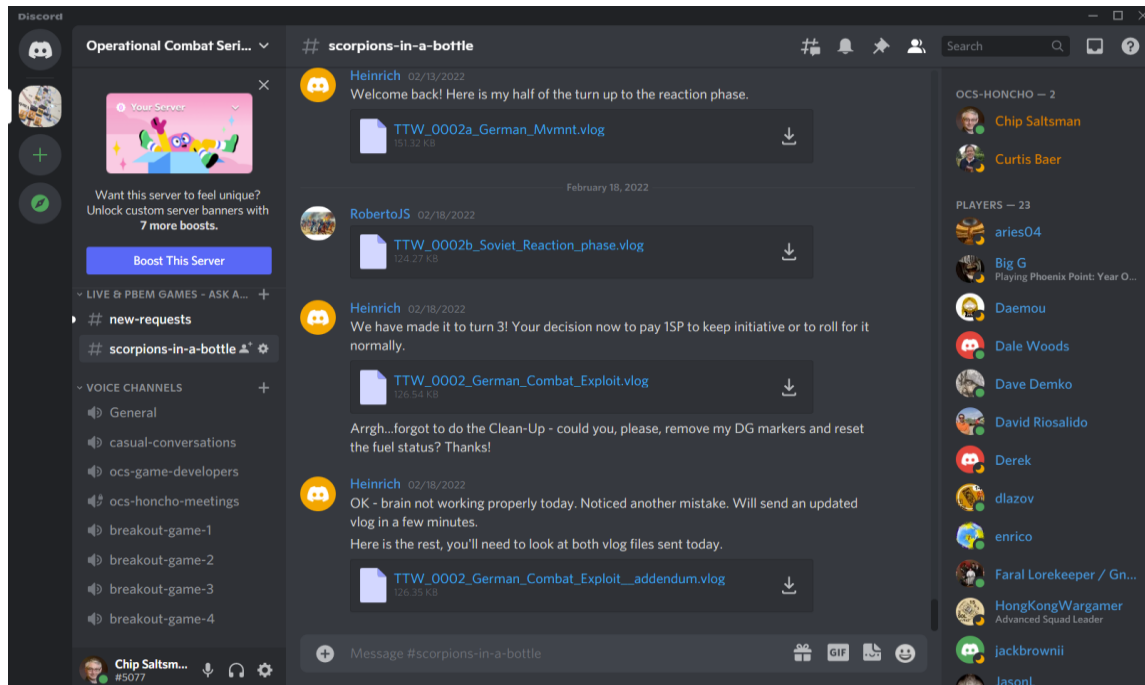*OCS Facebook Group membership, Jan - Mar 2022*

OCS Facebook Group active members, Jan - Mar 2022
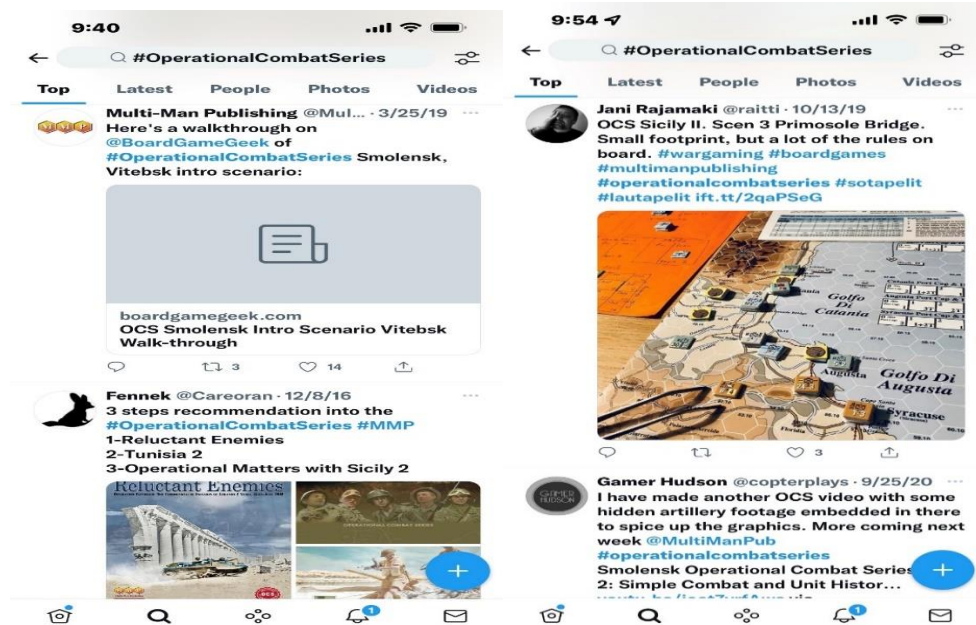
We also now have a presence on Discord:

OCS Discord site

And on Twitter:

OCS on Twitter (#operationalcombatseries, #mmp, #multimanpublishing)

There is a large group of gamers from around the world who tend to gather at the Consimworld Expo each summer in Tempe, AZ (though it was DGed the last two years by the pandemic) in addition to local gatherings. At Tempe our OCS group takes up nearly 25% of the space in the main gaming hall (not surprising actually, we play a lot of big games). Additionally, we usually have the greatest concentration of OCS players at Consim Expo at any one time. In 2019 this was about 45 to 50 OCS players. Really a lot of guys when you think of the relatively small OCS community that is a part of the small universe that is wargaming.

(Some of the OCS gamers at ConsimWorld Expo in Tempe, summer 2019 in front of the Ostfront *playtest layout). Left to right: Chuck Soukup, ??, Gerry Palmer, Perry Andrus, (obscured face) Chip Pharr (just above Perry), Jim Hambacher (hat), ?? (kneeling) Curtis Baer, John Loy, Ric Van Dyke, Tony Birkett (red shirt), Thomas Buettner, Mark Fazakarley, Marcus Randall, Roy Lane (seated), Mark Veerman (seated and waving), Barry Setzer, ??, Dave Mignery, Jason Crawley, Bruno Sinigaglio, Chip Saltsman). (Apologies to the people we can't recognize!)*

It's encouraging seeing OCS players from all parts of the world now discussing OCS issues on these social media platforms to a greater degree than ever. These platforms have been especially beneficial for our group, because we are quite small in numbers and really dispersed geographically.

I believe that we can make even better use of these tools. It seams to me that a centrally designated, specifically known place to go to first receive information about the OCS would of benefit to everyone. The OCS Facebook page may very well be the platform for this idea. I would like to see an area in the header of the page where I could as Honcho, communicate the latest news about the OCS. Chip could have similar area where the latest answers on rules could be found. There should be clearly marked and easily accessed links to all resources for the OCS, starting first with The OCS Depot page, but to include all the other sites and resources referred to above.
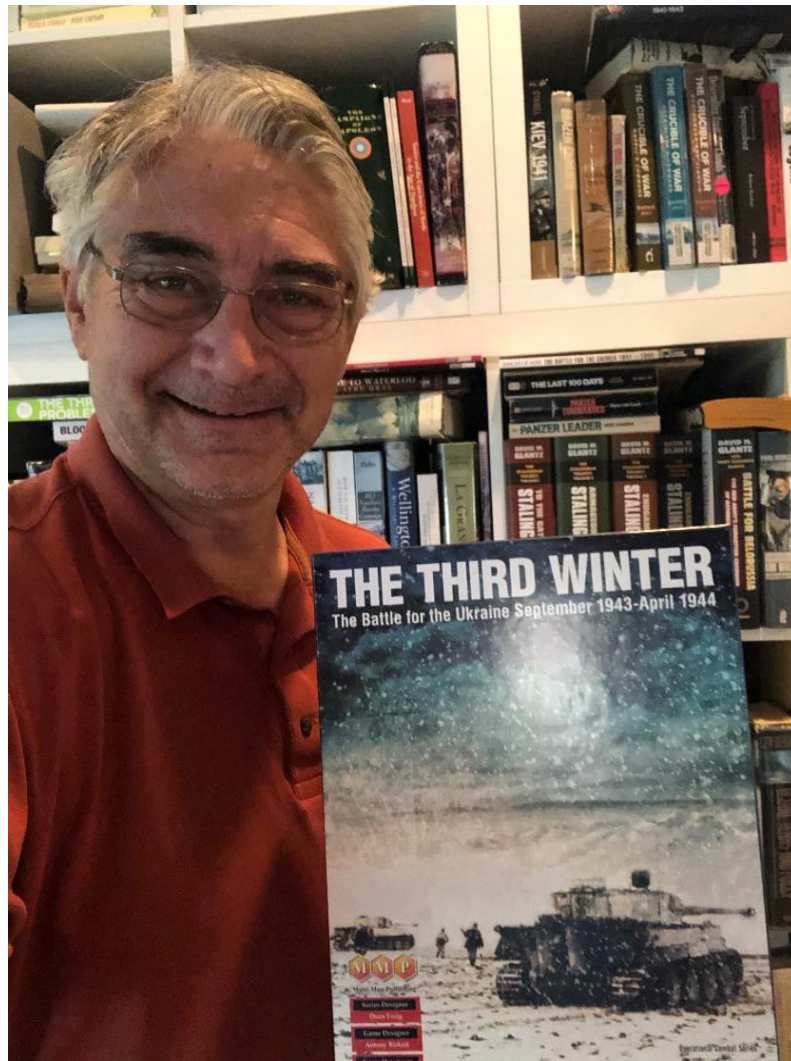
The problem is, I don't have the skills or the OCS time to address this. **I need a volunteer to serve as "OCS Communications Director" and make this happen.** Please contact me directly if you feel you can help in this regard. (Email – next section below.)

What is an OCS Honcho?

I am one of two Honchos actually, along with Assistant Honcho Chip Saltsman. What we do is develop and support OCS games and the OCS game system. We answer questions, playtest games, organize and manage additional teams of playtesters, and promote the continuing evolution and integrity of the OCS system of play. We divide up the work. As Producer, I seek designers and developers of OCS games and to manage these designs to completion for publication by MMP. I am responsible for the integrity and evolution of our game system. I also prepare many of the components for publication, such as draft maps, the countersheets, rules booklets, player aids and displays.

Chip Saltsman - Assistant OCS Honcho

Chip is our rules expert, and he does a great job of timely, fielding your questions. He also manages errata collection/updates, does rules formatting/booklets and runs the OCS Depot support website. In addition he is a developer for OCS games, primarily our east front titles. I'm pleased to say his development of *TTW* has been very well received by players reporting their experiences with that game. He's a busy man, he's dedicated to making the OCS the best it can be and we're lucky to have him.

In short, we are in charge of the OCS Games on Dean's behalf. Dean's current focus is now on new designs. Which is as it should be. We are fortunate to see his design skills continuing in productive use, most recently resulting in his well-received *Battalion Combat Series*. We will continue to support the OCS series

for Dean and the OCS community. We look forward to developing those OCS games in various states of design (more on development later in this report, see below.)

You can contact us directly to volunteer your services or we will address any questions, comments or concerns you may have:

Curtis H. Baer – baerstine@gmail.com
**Chip Saltsman -csaltsman0914@gmail.com**

Current OCS Game Release:

The Third Winter.
Design – Tony Birkett   **Developer – Chip Saltsman**

TTW now is in the hands of players, having made its pre-order number in an astounding 10 days due to an important change in marketing, and of course the enthusiasm of our OCS community. This is the first of designer Tony Birkett's quartet of games on the entire east from late September 1943 to mid-April 1944 from the Crimea to Leningrad ("**The *Ost Front* Series – see below**"). A pretty big area of operations. There are four maps, seven countersheets and seven scenarios.
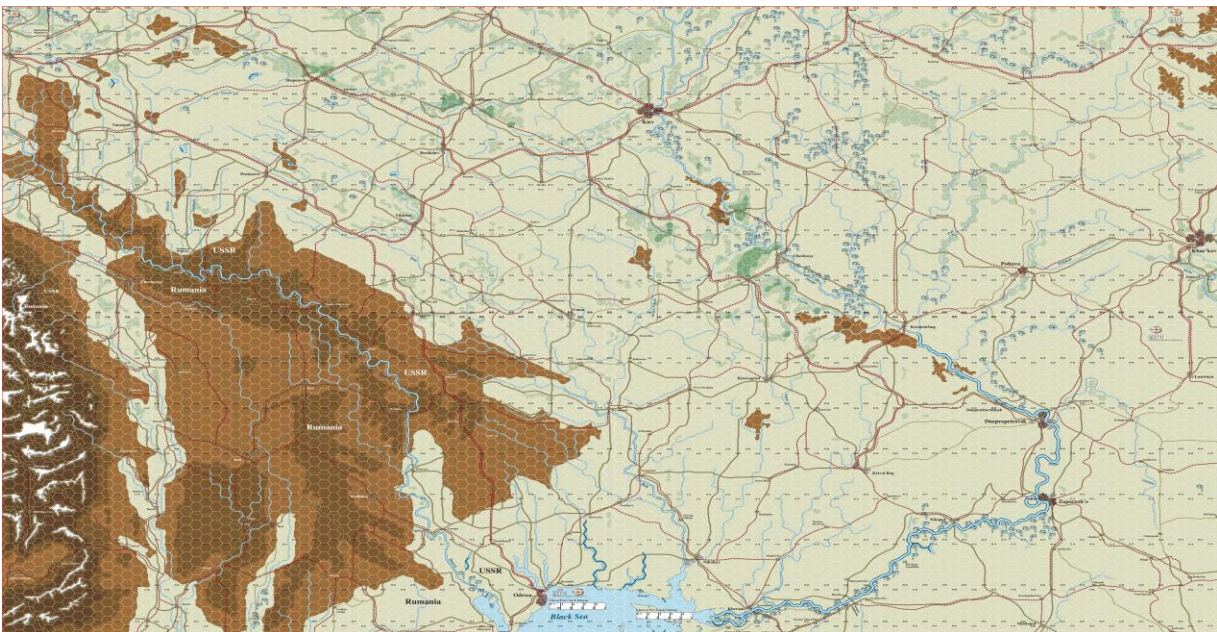
The Third Winter *Mapset*

I had known about the "Race to the Dnepr" after the German's debacle at Kursk in July 1943 but I considered the front as relatively static thereafter. Not so, the German and Soviets were fighting viciously and nearly continuously throughout this period. *TTW* depicts these battles before and in defense of the Dnepr, from Sept. 26, 1943, through the exhaustion of each side and

the shutdown of operations in late March or April 1944 due to the mud of the "Rasputita". Game play in *TTW* can be intense and worrisome for each player, typical OCS fare. In addition, most of the mobile formations fielded by the Axis and Soviets are in action in *TTW*. Players report it is yet another tense, nail biting OCS gaming situation requiring difficult choices for each player nearly every turn.

The OCS is also evolving to now show the important role of higher-level HQs in *TTW*. The Soviet Fronts are particularly important in this game and show how the art of war had evolved for the Red Army. Including the operational effects of higher-level HQs is relatively new to the OCS. In fact, the idea for Soviet Fronts as seen in *Hungarian Rhapsody* came from my experience with Front HQs in playtesting *TTW*.

The significant game play mechanic for these fronts is an assigned "posture", either "Offensive" or "Regrouping". In addition, only two of the four Soviet fronts made be assigned an Offensive Posture at any given time. There are limitations on the supply received and the supply that may used by a Regrouping Front, however, there are significant defensive benefits. We feel this allows a natural "OCS way" of portraying the quiet sectors when a particular front is not active. In contrast an Offensive Front can receive significantly more supply, but the logistics are centered on the Front HQ, which cannot move while in Offensive posture. We feel this mechanic properly portrays how these Fronts prosecuted their operational orders and then simply ran out of steam due to logistical depletion and constraint.

Curtis Baer and Thomas Buettner – Contemplating Positions on the East Front – Feb. 1944.
The Third Winter *in Playtest at ConsimWorld Expo, Tempe, AZ 2018.*

In Playtesting and Development

One of our development principles is to have, to the best of our ability, a pipeline containing both large (multi-map) games and single-map offerings. Here is what is currently in process:

Cross Channel Attack.

Design – Roland LeBlanc.   **Developers – Rod Miller – Curtis H. Baer.**
(Six maps (including a Normandy 125% scale map), 5 countersheets.)

Roland LeBlanc of *Beyond the Rhine* fame has been working on an OCS depiction of the Normandy campaign, June 5 to September 1, 1944. I anticipate that this game will be very well received by the OCS community.

CCA will have six maps, featuring terrain created by taking advantage of detailed online satellite imagery. Our map scale for this game will be 3.5 miles to the hex, same as *BtR* and very close to our other west front game – *Blitzkrieg Legend*. OCS gamer Forest Webb identified online resources to find WWII terrain conditions, and then developed a process to analyze the information to show the predominant terrain features at this OCS western front scale. The results are impressive, yielding very-accurate maps. The eastern part of the *CCA* maps will overlap by about 40% of the *BtR* map area. And to forestall anticipated questions and concerns, yes, we plan for *CCA* to seamlessly fit with an eventual *Beyond the Rhine II*, with regard to mapping, unit scale and game specific rules.

Cross Channel Attack - *Playtest Map*

The logistical challenges faced by both sides will be depicted in *CCA*. The Axis player contends with a wrecked rail network and the necessity to defend against imagined and actual second invasions. The Allies must build their logistics from scratch and then advance across the transportation desert their air superiority created. Roland has cooked up another huge set of Random Events, from the evolution in Allied close air support to additional amphibious landings, De Galle, "the unfrocked Priest", "Black Market", V1 rockets, a French bucket dredge and one titled simply "You Had the Map Upside-Down!"

Cross Channel Attack*, start of "Cobra" scenario, 26 July 1944*

Cross Channel Attack*, Battle of Paris, 26 Aug 1944*

Roland is continuing our emphasis on addressing the operational issues confronting higher-level HQs in *CCA*. The logistics net of the Allies will be tethered to their Army HQs. We have appropriated Dean's Main Supply Route (MSR) supply mechanic from the Battalion Combat Series (BCS). In CCA the Allied army HQs must establish a path of hexes along roads from the HQ back to their supply head, which must be at a port (to include the beach ports, Omaha, Gold, etc., a repaired Cherbourg, or possibly Brest.). The further these HQs find themselves from their supply head, the less SPs they receive (it's variable, there is a roll on the "Supply Attenuation Table"). The German Army HQs are also portrayed in this manner, but with a logistics tail traced over the remnants of the rail net back to Germany. A player does not want to see the enemy on its MSR. Really, really, bad. In fact, in the case of an Allied army it will probably cause a fatal delay for the army to meet is victory objectives. We need to continue to playtest of course, but the playtesting over the last year and half reveals these logistics rules to be very promising.
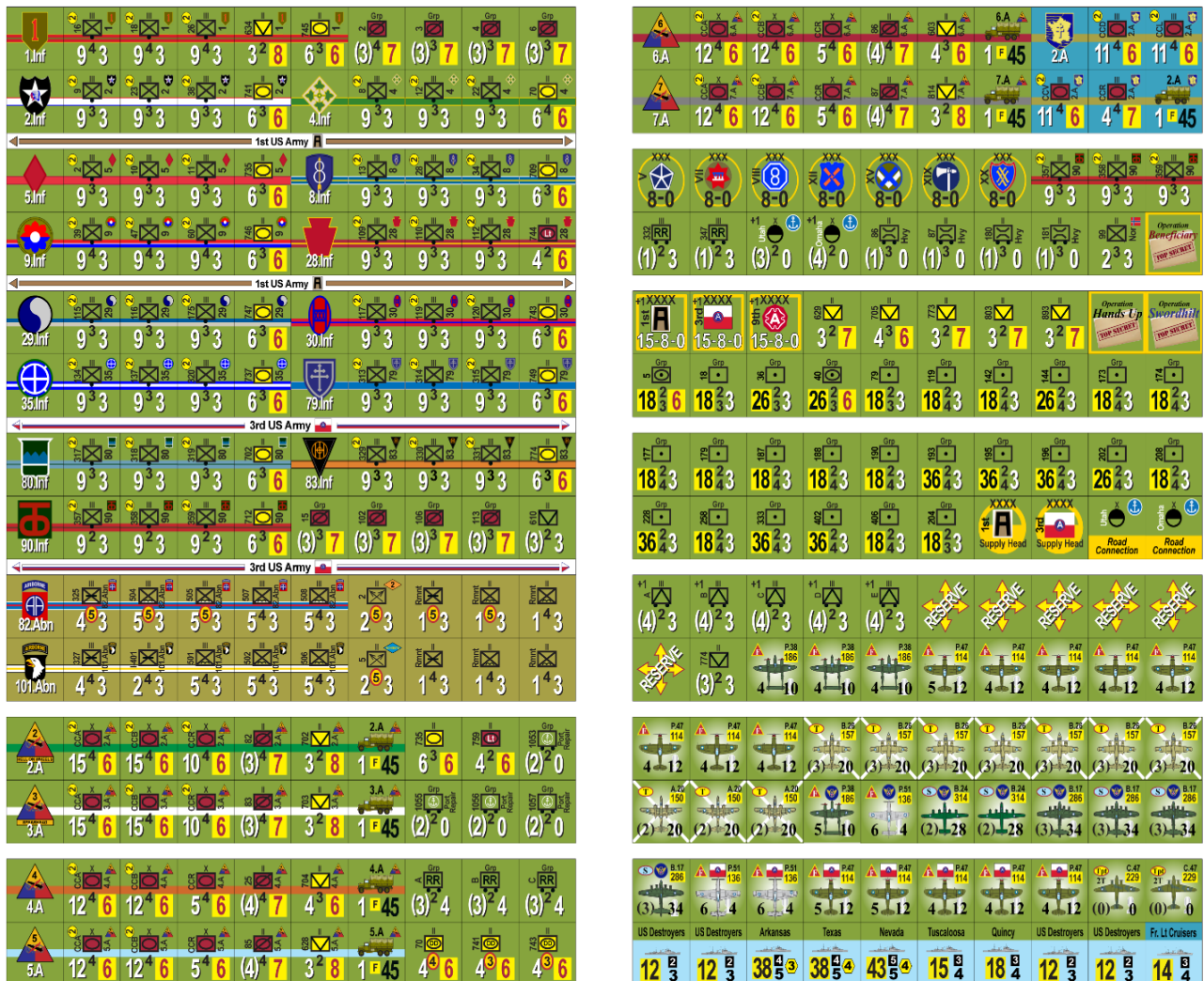
Cross Channel Attack – *U.S. Playtest Counters.*

Roland has decided to portray how the units are depicted in *CCA* in a different manner from *Beyond the Rhine*. Allied armies operated in Regimental/Brigade Combat Teams. An infantry division, for instance, will now be depicted as a Multi-Unit Formation containing these regiment/brigade combat teams and will also include the units providing armor and anti-tank support. The German Infantry divisions are portrayed with their particular regiments as maneuver units and German mobile formations will now be portrayed in the manner they fought, as kampfgruppen. This unit scale fits well with the more granular *CCA* map scale at the western front 3.5 miles to the hex rather than the OCS standard – 5 miles to the hex. *CCA* looks to be five counter-sheets at this point.

Cross Channel Attack – *Axis Playtest Counters.*

I'm very pleased to have Rod Miller involved in the development of *CCA*. Rod is an OCS grognard going back to the beginning with Dean in 1992. In addition, he's the designer of *Korea*. His experience with our system has been important to the recent development of *CCA*, allowing him to run multiple Vassal playtest teams for weekly playtests for about a year. This level of playtesting has allowed a compressed time frame for the development of *CCA* but without any diminution playtest value.
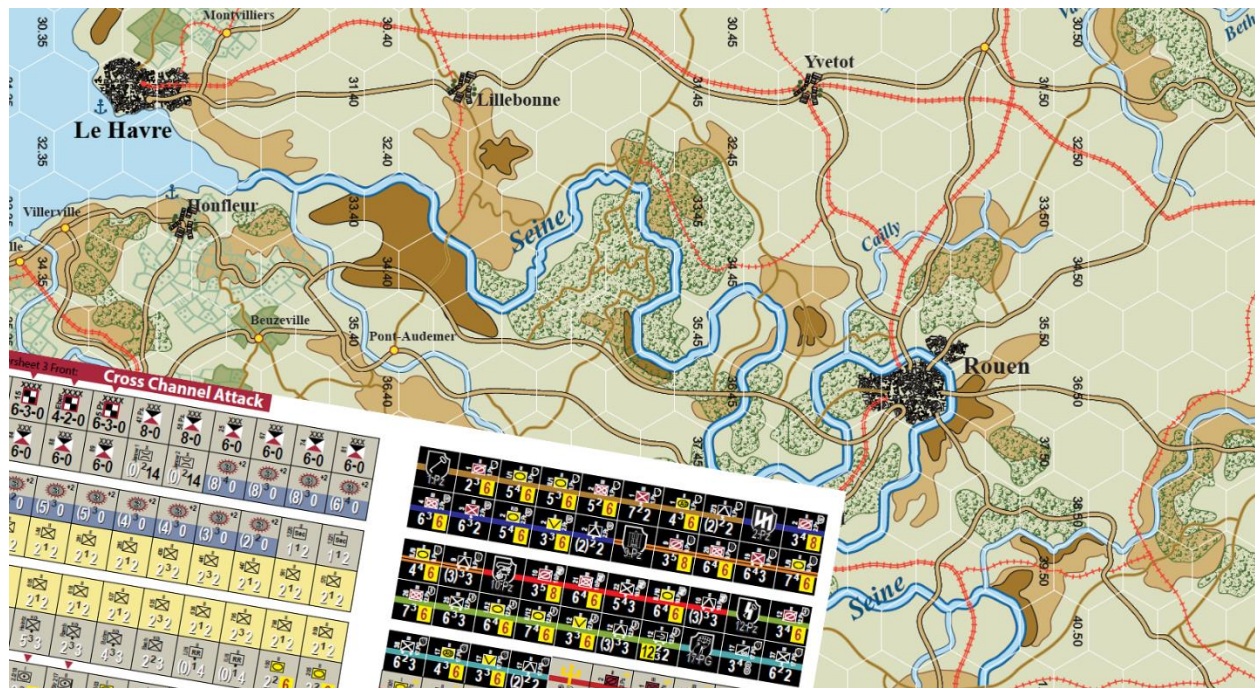
CCA - *Terrain along the Seine River – Le Havre to Rouen.*

The Forgotten Battles.

Design – Tony Birkett. Developer – Chip Saltsman.
(Four maps, four countersheets, scenarios to be determined).

This is a companion game that covers Army Group Center's battles late September 1943 through spring 1944 north of *The Third Winter* maps. It portrays the battles faced by Army Group Center. You might assume it was a "quiet front", but the combatants were going after each other tooth and nail. Playtesting reveals this game to be another knock-down, drag-out affair presenting challenges for both players. I've learned a great deal about this underappreciated part of WWII. Truly, "The Forgotten Battles".

Forgotten Battles will link with *TTW*, including at least two campaign scenarios with the same start dates. There will also be smaller, one-map scenarios featuring fighting around key locations such as the desperate battles near Vitebsk. The Soviet Front command structure from *TTW* appears here as well, and also includes partisan battles which cause behind-the-lines problems for the Axis, further developed cavalry corps, Heinrici defense units, Soviet penal battalions, Nashhorns, and effects of the Pripet Marsh. The play area approximates the borders of present-day Belarus.
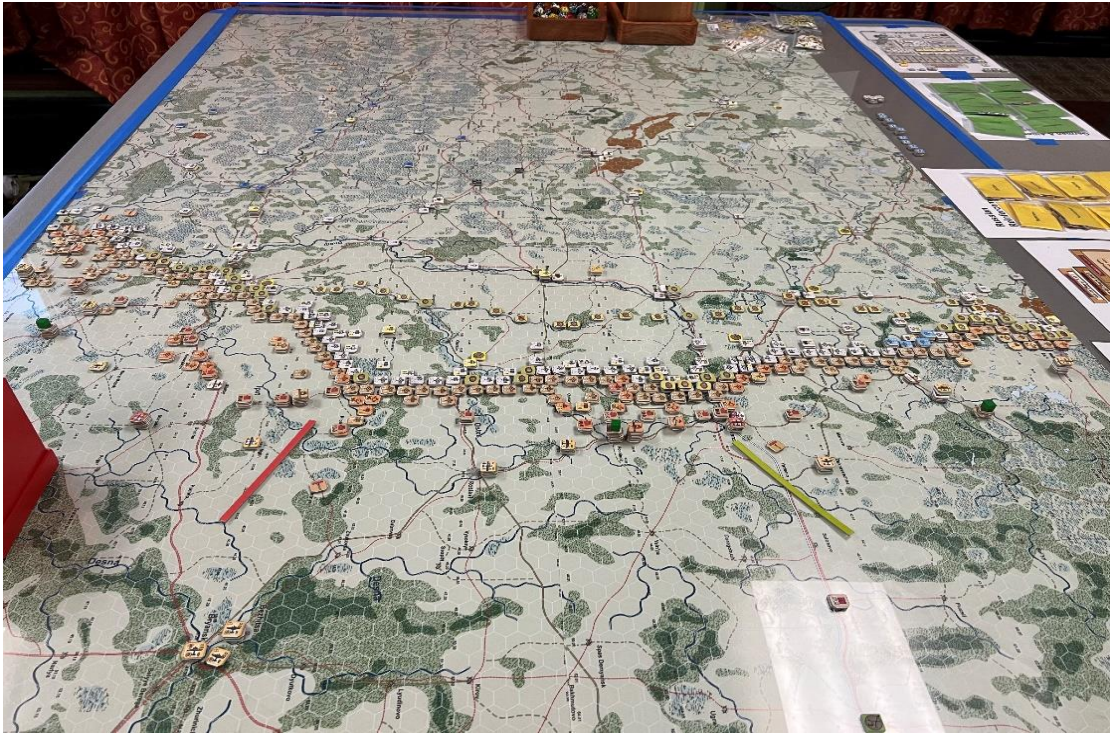
The Forgotten Battles, *26 Sept 1943 Campaign Start*
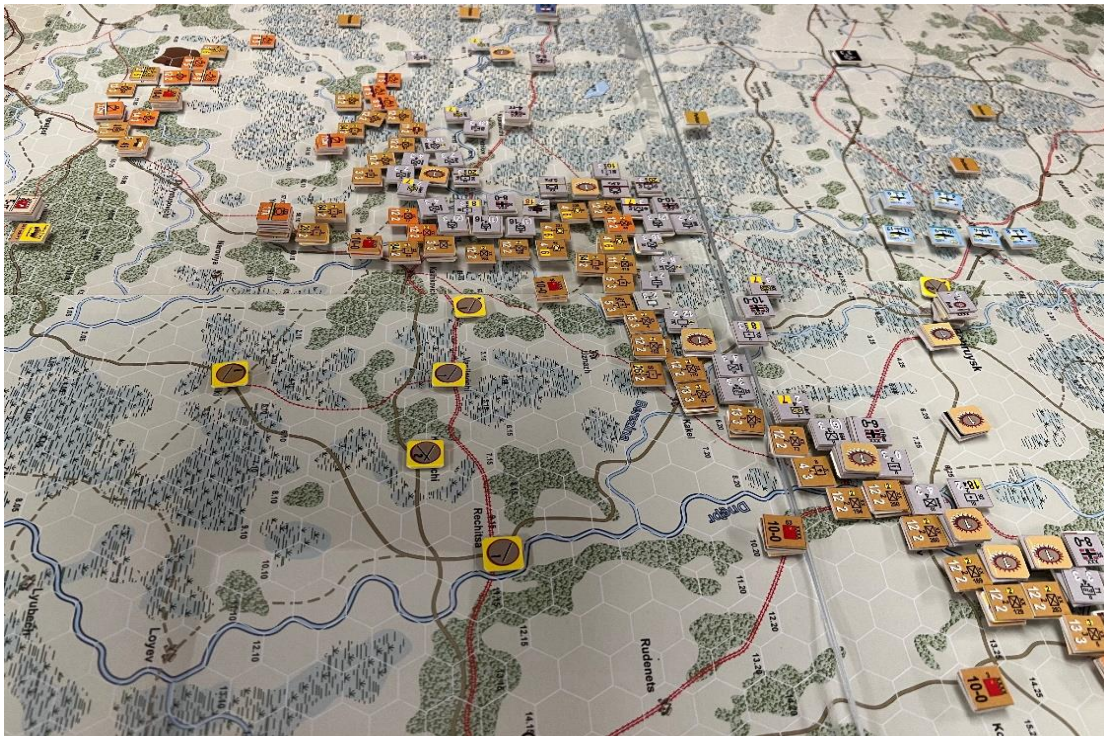
The Forgotten Battles, *26 Jan 1944. By this point, the Soviets had punched an enormous hole in the lines to advance south of the Pripet Marshes.*
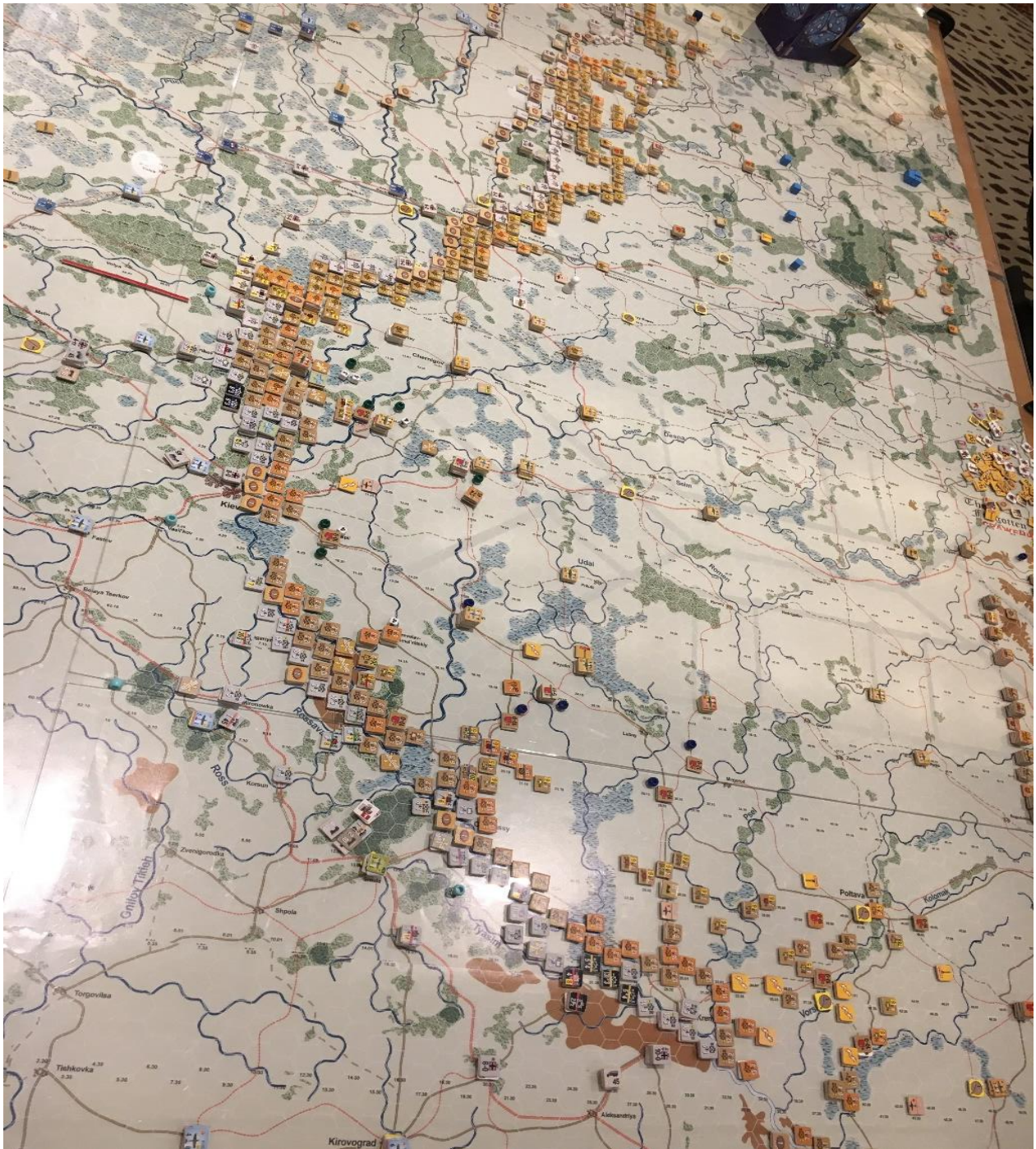
Combined The Forgotten Battles *and* The Third Winter *maps in playtest (game time is mid-October 1943). The map set dividing line is the red counter sprue on the left side. Action in* TFB *can significantly affect the battles around Kiev, and the advancing Soviet forces in* TTW *unhinge the southern portion of the Axis lines in* TFB.

Luzon.

Design – Matsuura Yutaka   Developer – Chip Saltsman
(One Half-map, One half counter-sheet, Five turns.)

First-time designer Matsuura Yutaka has created a gem of an introductory game in *Luzon*, which depicts the Japanese conquest of the Philippines in December 1941 to January 1942. There is quite a bit of challenge in this relatively small package of a half-map, half countersheet, and five turns. The Japanese player has a small, elite army that must move rapidly against a numerous-but-outclassed U.S.-Philippine force. With a total of nine attack-capable units and a lot of ground to cover, even an Ao1/Do1 is a problem for the Japanese player. The Japanese must capture Manila and get a unit across the Japanese victory line to win. Many of the playtest games have come down to the final attack in the last turn's Exploit Phase. *Luzon* can be played to completion in just a few hours, and its size makes it an ideal introductory OCS game. Current plan is to publish this as a magazine game, with articles and play aids focused on learning OCS.
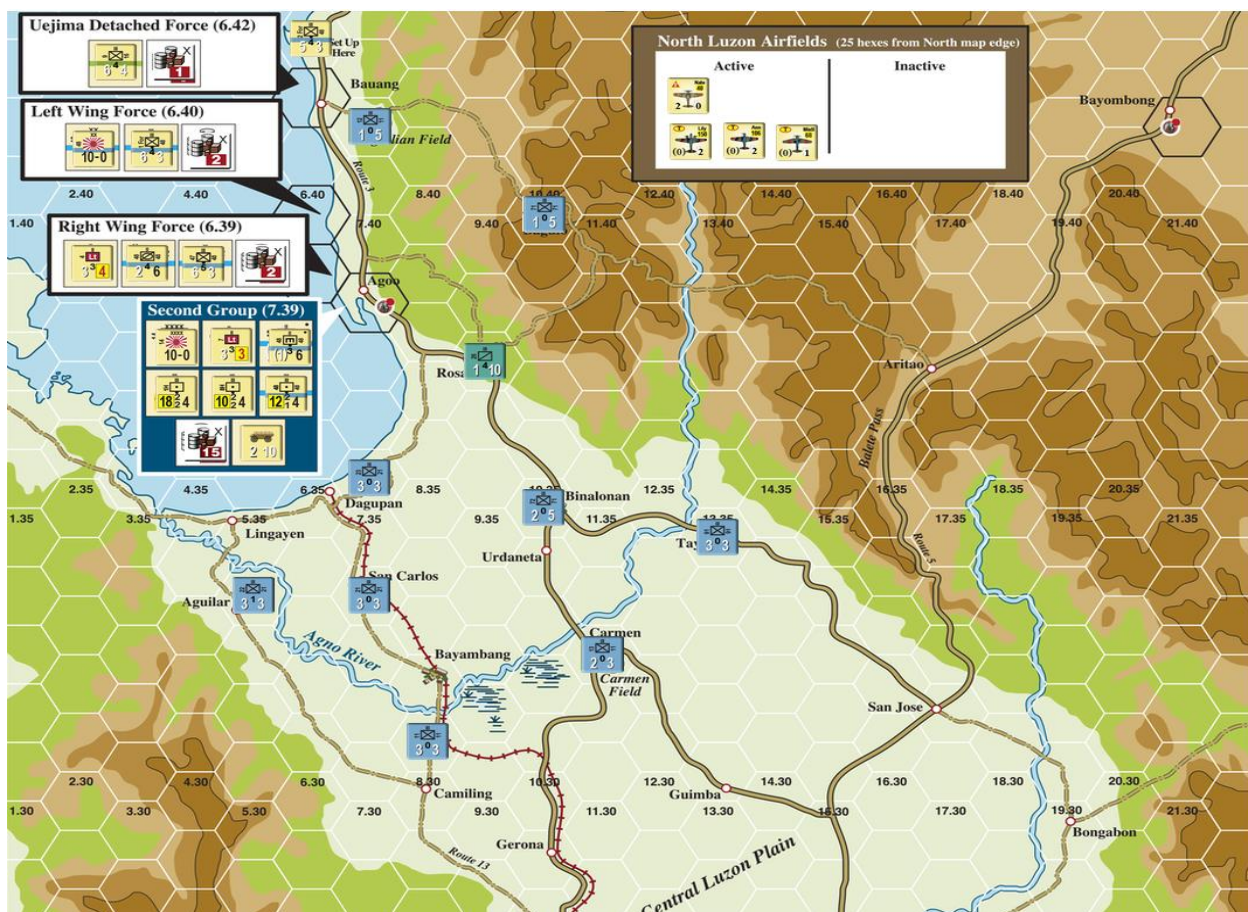
Luzon setup near Lingayen Gulf. The Japanese must capture Manila and get a unit across a Bataan Peninsula victory line to win. The U.S.-Philippine player can win by holding their own Bataan Peninsula victory line to win.

Luzon, *Draft Counters*

<u>Crimea.</u>

Design – Guy Wilde (1941/1942)   Tony Birkett (1943-1944)
Developer (Both) – Chip Saltsman
(One Common Map depicting all of Crimea and the Taman peninsula, two counter-sheets.)

The Crimea experienced fighting throughout the Eastern Front war. Neither side could ignore the strategic peninsula, but rarely had the resources to commit more forces than "whatever is available" to the area. Crimea covers all the action that took place here in a one-map, two countersheet game. It is the work of two designers: Guy Wilde has been working for years on a design that covered Manstein's operations in the Crimea from September 1941 to the spring of 1942, and Tony Birkett created a module for the Soviet reconquest from September 1943 through May 1944 which connects to *The Third Winter*. Chip Saltsman is the developer.

There are seven scenarios being playtested:
- "Rite of Passage" (Sept 41 to Dec 41) covering the Axis invasion and initial attempts to capture Sevastopol.
- "Tiger by the Tail" (Dec 41 to March 42) where the Soviet naval landings surprise and disrupt Manstein's planned Sevastopol assault.
- "Eviction Notice" (May 42), a mini-scenario covering Operation Trappenjagd, where the Soviet lodgment is destroyed.
- "Where the Iron Crosses Grow" (June 42 to July 42), a mini-scenario of Manstein's successful capture of Sevastopol. It's more of a game than you would expect, as Manstein is under time pressure. Either side can call for additional forces, but that changes the date by which Sevastopol must be captured.
- "Cross of Iron" (Sept 43 to Apr 44) covering the Soviet destruction of the Kuban Bridgehead and creating their own bridgehead in the Crimea (ties in to *TTW* Campaign Scenario 1).
- "The Last Bridgehead" (Jan 44 to Apr 44) where the Soviets attempt to enlarge their bridgehead (ties in to *TTW* Campaign Scenario 2).
- "The Liberation Offensive" (Apr 44 to May 44) when the Soviet 4th Ukrainian Front bursts through the Axis defenses and reconquers the Crimea.

The scenarios in 1943-44 connect to *The Third Winter* and can be played as a larger game. The only real overlap with *Case Blue* is the GBII 5 June 42 scenario, aside from possible Soviet Naval landings. Because of the limited forces sent to the Crimea, both sides will be managing a thin pipeline of supply. This has the effect of causing periodic battles interspersed with planning/building up activity and focus on several geographic choke points. There was a wide variety of units present at various points in the campaign: landing craft, torpedo bombers, siege guns (including Dora), minor allies and a Soviet battleship.

Offensive operations in the terrain around Sevastopol during 1941-42 requires attacking Level 4 Hedgehogs placed in Hills (Close) and Rough (Very Close), which is exceedingly difficult.

The strategic Kerch Straits. These can freeze in the winter, or the Soviet player may launch amphibious landings.

Current Design Activity:

Italy.

Design – Tony Zbaraschuk   Developer – Curtis H. Baer.

(Three to five maps depicting all of Italy and possibly Sicily at the western front scale of 3.5 miles to the hex, two, maybe three counter-sheets.)

Tony has been designing a game on the Italian Campaign. The scale he's working on at this time is 3.5 miles to the hex, and the play area is planned to cover from Parma and Mantua in the Po River valley in the north to Napoli and Foggia in the south. It appears we may need to extend the map area in the south to encompass the Salerno landings. If possible, we may consider extending the map to include all of the boot of Italy and possibly Sicily. We'll see. At this scale it is about 36 hexes from Anzio directly east to Pescara on the Adriatic coast.

It looks like three (possibly four) counter-sheets at this time. Tony plans to start the campaign in January 1944 and end sometime in September 1944. He has done this to avoid the stalemate during the fall and early winter of 1943 which is probably not be the best situation for a wargame.

I am planning on getting a Vassal Module made, so that playtesting may begin as soon as possible. In this regard, with enough experienced playtesters volunteering we could compress the development time frame considerably, the same as *CCA*. I have asked Tony to present an order of battle that is consistent with CCA in portraying the maneuver units as regiment/brigade combat teams and kampfgruppen. In addition, I have asked for his consideration to include the operational role of higher-level HQs into his design which is now the manner we are primarily portraying logistics for the OCS.

Substantial progress has been made on this game in the past two years after a long hiatus. Yes, Italy can be thought of as a static military situation, but many players loved Avalon Hill's *Anzio* (and still do). Our OCS system is quite dynamic. Campaigns from the deserts of north Africa, the jungles of Burma, the frozen wastes of north Korea, and many parts of the eastern front he been successfully portrayed. I see no reason that this campaign as an OCS topic can't be just as interesting. I'm really looking forward to playtesting this title.
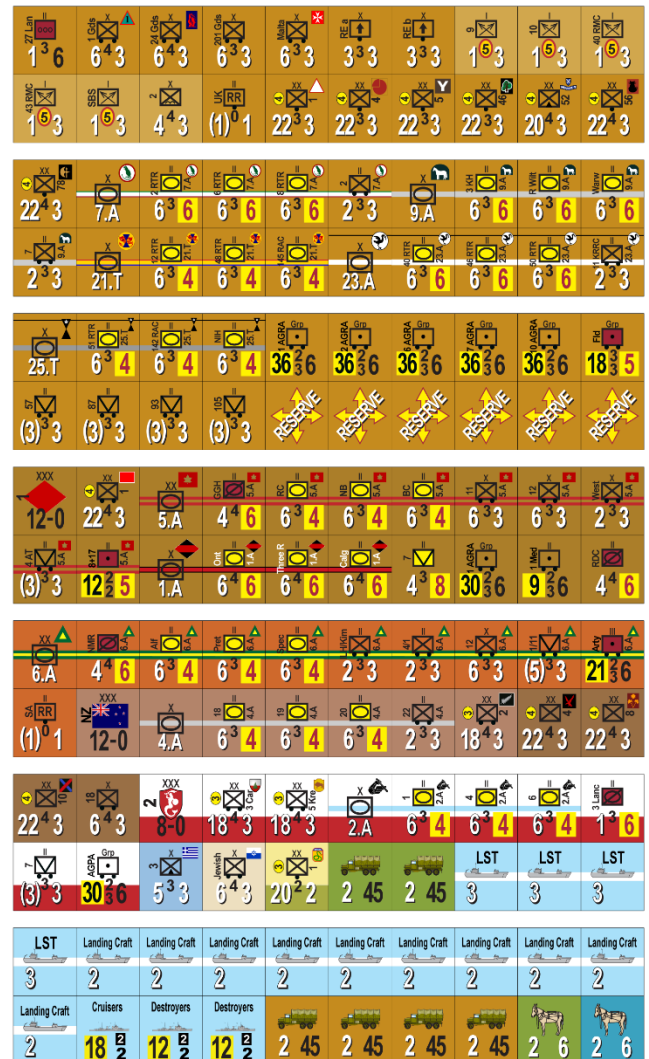
Italy – *Draft Allied Counters*

Please note these counters are from a previous draft of Tony Z's counter manifest. At the time he contemplated following Roland's work in *BtR* for depiction of the divisions primarily as divisional units (with regiment breakdown counters). As stated above, I have asked him to create an Order of Battle, by Regiment, Brigade and Kampfgruppe in the same manner as Roland's OoB in *CCA*. Tony is working on this revised OoB at this time.

Italy – *Draft Axis Counters*

The Hero City.

Design – Tony Birkett   **Developer – Chip Saltsman**

(Well, he's not been formally assigned as Developer yet, but I plan to ask him, and trust he will accept. He and Tony have made a great team.)

(Four maps, 5 miles to hex east front scale, probably five or six counter-sheets)

The last of Tony Birkett's *Ost Front* games, *Hero City* covers the Soviet efforts to break the siege of Leningrad and force the Axis back into the Baltic States. The terrain around Leningrad is difficult, but there is more open ground to the south. In playtests so far, the opposing players tend to fight over every hex of in what amount to a more chess-like positional advantage game.

 The Hero City *action near Leningrad. The Axis forces have launched an operation to retake the Soviet bridgehead near Kronstadt, while slowly giving ground to the relentless Russian advance.*

The Hero City *map set looking from the north, with* Forgotten Battles *and* Third Winter *to the south.*

Tony Birkett's Ost Front Series of Games.

As you may know from the previous State of the OCS report, Tony has designed these east front games as a comprehensive operational look at the conflict from Sep 26, 1943, through "the mud" of Spring, 1944 (variable ending, usually mid-Aril 1944). This *Ost Front* series of games encompass the recently published, *The Third Winter*, the current title which has been in playtesting, *The Forgotten Battles*, *The Hero City*, planned for playtesting soon, and finally the one map, *Crimea* which has finish playtesting and is nearly finished development. As you can see it's a big project. And not for the faint of heart.
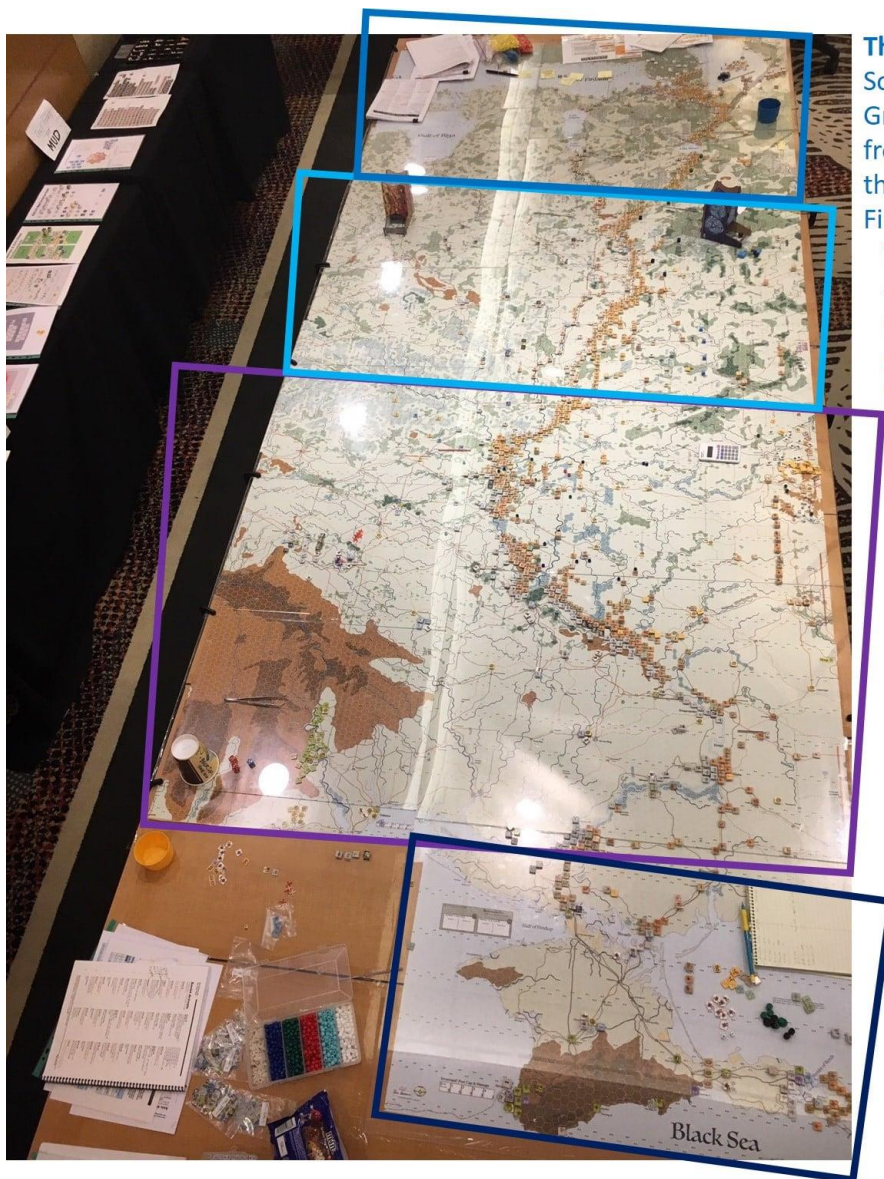
The Hero City – The Soviets force Army Group North back from Leningrad. Yes, those white units are Finns.

The Forgotten Battles – Army Group Center squares off against supply constrained Soviets.

The Third Winter – Massive effort to force the Dnepr river and evict Army Group South from "right-bank Ukraine" where many of both armies concentrated their mobile formations.

Crimea – A very difficult nut to crack, even when defended by a scratch force.

This entire east front game, comprised of all four titles, has been successfully playtested several times now, including most recently at Winterfest in Sandusky, Ohio this past February. I've been a player in each of these playtests and I'm happy to report there is good news - it plays really well. In February, we set up Tony's January 26, 1944 start date. The Axis and the Soviets each had a team of four players. This allowed us to complete 13 or 14 turns during the week. Not bad for a convention. We ended with historically plausible positions and Tony was very pleased with these results and the progress he sees in this design.

While we do have certain number of OCS guys who are crazy enough to actually play a game this big, we don't expect to see such as a regular occurrence. However, I can see where this comprehensive approach to the design of *Os tfront* has shown some advantages for the design and development of the component games, all of which we expect will get substantial game play when published. Tony has been able to focus his research on the entire theater with good effect for each of the games in this series.

Ost Front covers the entire east front so, there is necessarily a strategic element of play involved, which is understandable, given the scope of this huge game. Tony has to date managed these strategic concerns, giving the teams of players certain decisions to be made periodically, mainly concerning the strategic movement of supply and troops. He is also considering the changes that may be warranted to portray the continuing evolvement of Stavka's war machine. The operational capabilities of the Soviet Fronts in the summer of 1944 were apparently much greater than in 1943. Witness the "Destruction of Army Group Center". So, I'm looking forward to what treatment of the Fronts, (as well as the German Armies) Tony decides upon as he moves his design forward.

A Season in Hell.

Design – Stephane Acquaviva   **Developer – Curtis H.Baer**
(Four, maybe six maps (East front scale – 5 miles to the hex), five, maybe six counter-sheets)

Hungarian Rhapsody designer Stéphane Acquaviva is working on a game depicting the Summer 1943 campaign in Russia. The map at this time covers from Tula in the north to Tagnarog on the Black Sea in the south. Several scenarios have been laid out and playtesting is just getting underway - including a historical July start scenario, a June start, Operation Kutuzov, smaller scenarios and ideas for a free setup so players can set objectives other than Kursk or play the Soviet counterstrokes.
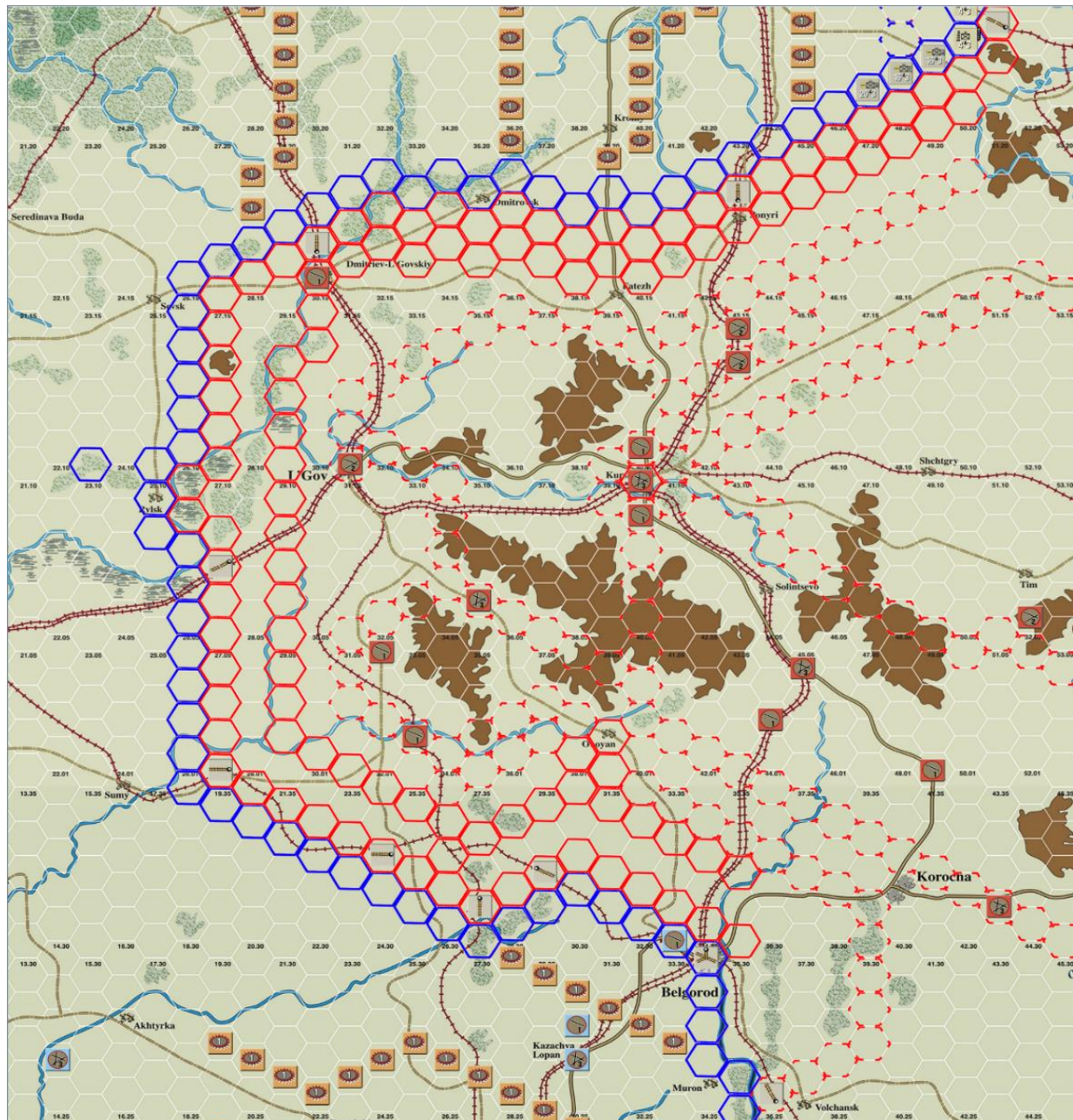
A Season in Hell *(Kursk) Fortification lines from the historical scenario (screen shot of the Vassal module). The solid-outline hexes represent defensive works similar in effect to the West Wall in* Beyond the Rhine. *The dashed-outline hexes are slightly less formidable. Attacking into these lines is a grim prospect.*
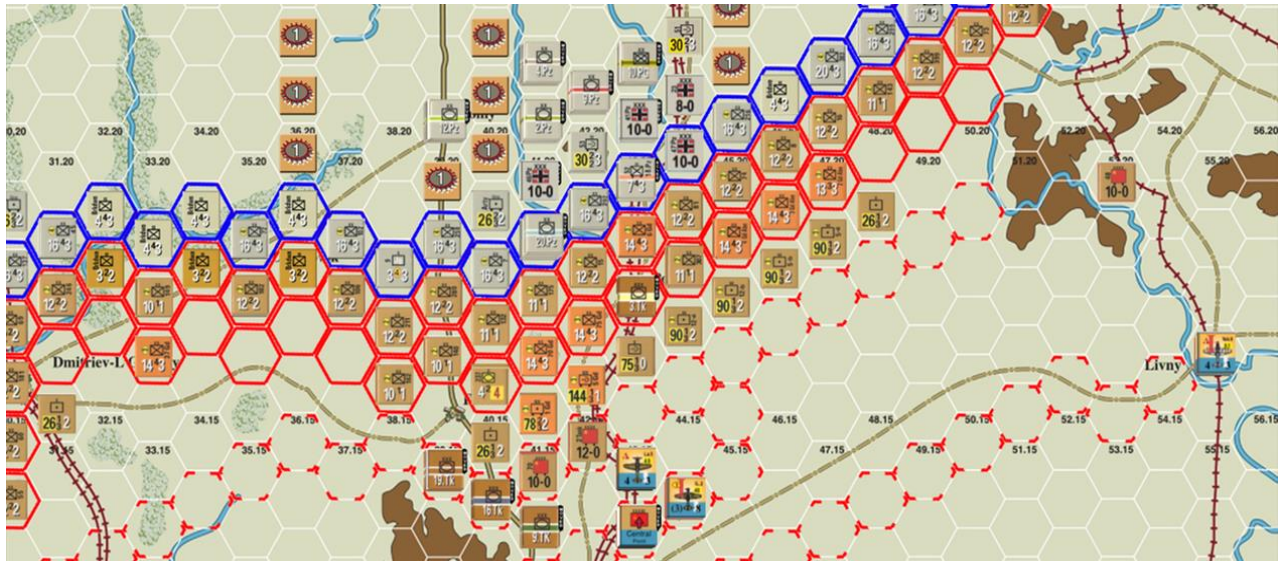
A Season in Hell *(Kursk) historical setup for the two Axis pincers (Vassal screen shot).*

      I have asked Stephane to seriously consider expanding the scope of his design to include the fighting in the early part of 1943 and the utterly vicious fight around Kharkov after the Germans retreated from their strategic blunder at Kursk. The battle of Kursk should be portrayed, especially the different plausible start points for that battle, but we realize this may not present the best gaming situation due to its one-sided nature. So, if the map area where extended north to include Rzhev, Kalinin and Moscow then the full scope of possibilities for this campaign during the spring and summer of 1943 could be explored. The OCS excels at depicting these large operational campaigns.
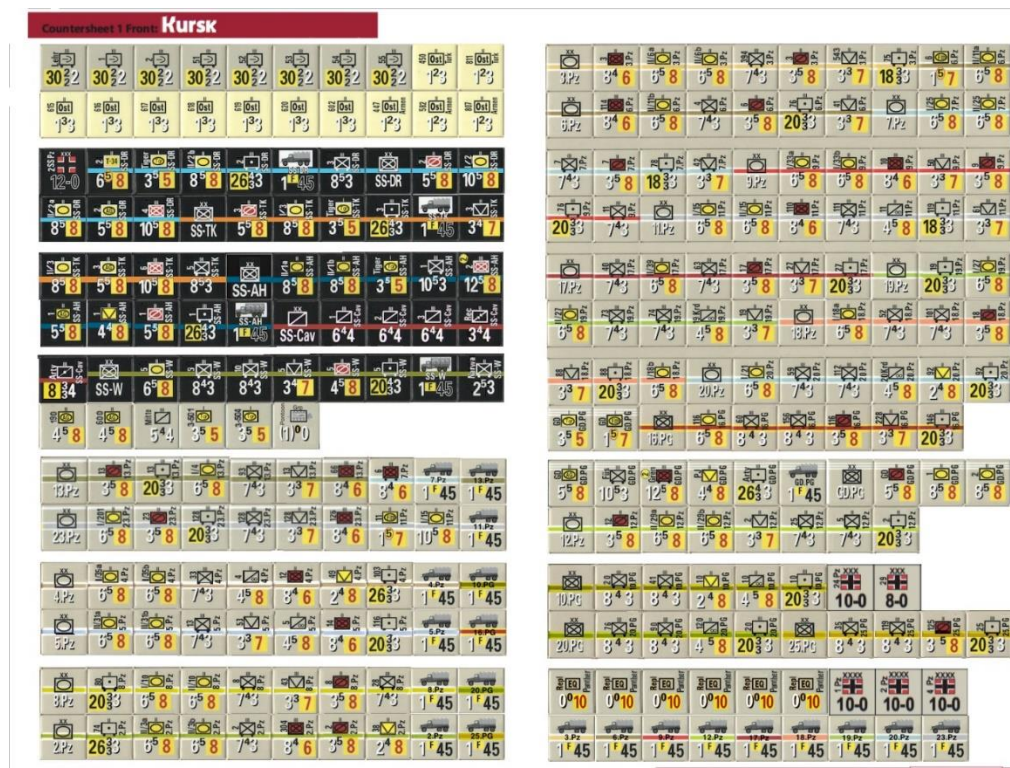
A Season in Hell, *Draft Axis Counters*

A Season in Hell, *Draft Soviet Counters*

Bagration

Design – Kurt Gilles   Developer – ???
(Four maps (East front scale – 5 miles to the hex), six counter-sheets)

   Operation Bagration depicts the massive Soviet effort undertaken during the summer of 1944 to destroy the German Army Group Center and separate it from its neighbor Army Group North. Next to the Soviet successes during the Stalingrad campaign, no other Soviet offensive resulted in a greater destruction of Axis armed forces on the eastern front within such a very short period. Indeed, the German Army at the time considered it the worst defeat in its entire history, although comparatively, the German losses during the Normandy campaign and in southern France during that same summer resulted in a similar catastrophe on the western front.
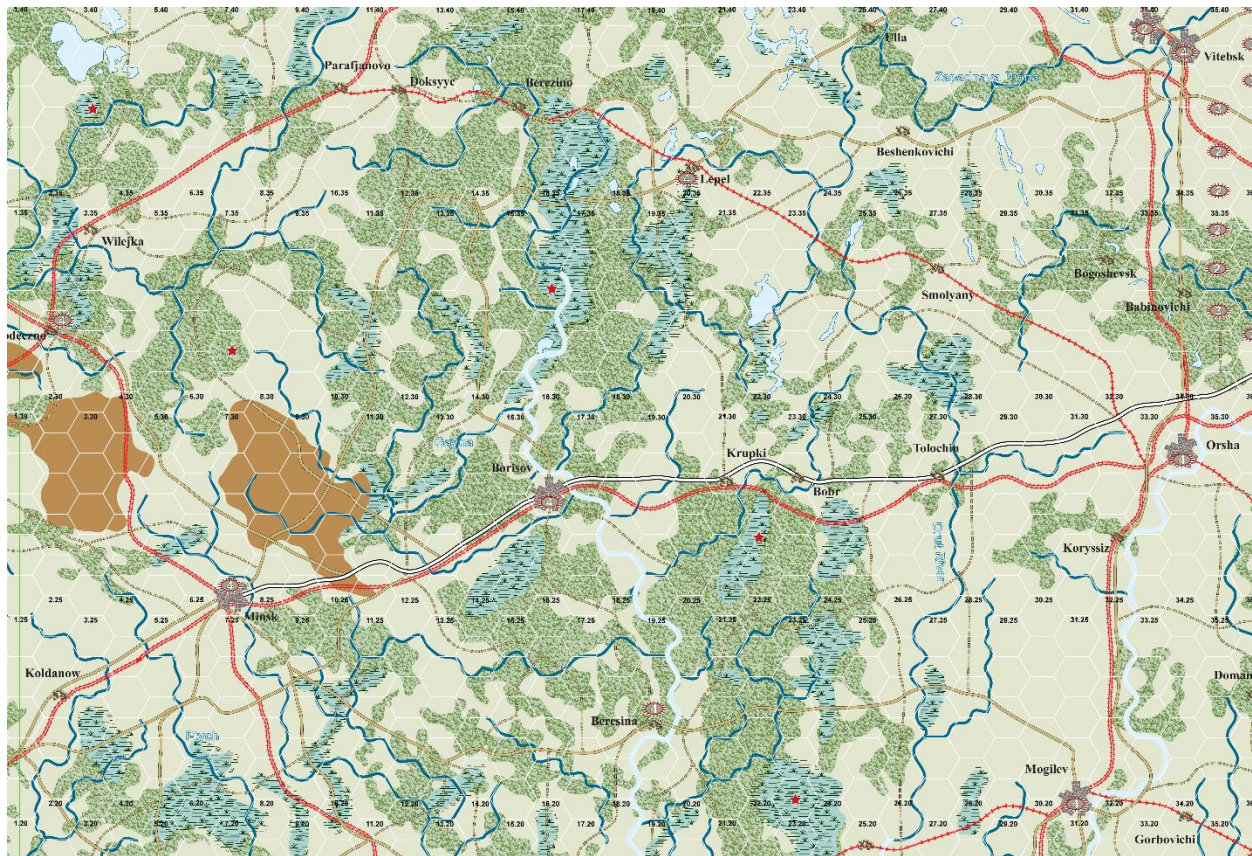
Operation Bagration – Playtest Map Sample

   Designer Kurt Gilles finally previewed his game with a playtest at the 2019 Monstercon in Tempe, AZ. It's a big game, on a big campaign. That playtest in Tempe revealed some additional development may be required (not unusually, that's what playtesting and development is all about.)

I have been in touch with Kurt recently and his is committed to the further work required to get his game to point where we can hopefully find a developer to complete his game.

The historical campaign game begins on June 22, 1944 and ends on September 23, 1944, providing players 27 turns to explore this huge campaign from its original perspective. A second campaign scenario depicts one hypothetical option, whereby the Axis player starts the game from an improved defensive posture. Under this option, the Soviet player will also gain the advantage of an offensive start-line farther to the west than what occurred historically. The campaign games can be enjoyed by up to five players.

Bagration, *Draft Axis Counters*

Bagration, *Draft Soviet Counters*

Case Green - Czechoslovakia 1938

Design – David Barsness   **Developer – ???**

(Three Maps – proposed at 3.1 miles to the hex, a bit less than OCS west scale mapping (3.5 miles)), Countersheets – TBD)

Colonel Barsness asked me a few years back whether the military situation presented by the Czechoslovakia Crisis in 1938 might make a good OCS game. I had to say two things; 1.) I don't know and 2.) MMP has expressed concerns about publishing hypothetical campaigns. This response did not dampen his interest on this topic and as such, he forged ahead and has completed three of the big four components a designer must prepare before development of an OCS game can begin:

An Order of Battle (unit specifications for the counters)
Game Specific Rules, and,
Charts & Tables

The fourth component, the Mapping is still in the design and contemplation stage. I have discussed the map area proposed by David which includes a sketch map of Czechoslovakia, mostly the western and central portions of the country.

I have made a conscious decision, after conferring with Dean, to bifurcate the map scales for OCS games. As mentioned above, consistent with *Beyond the Rhine* and also to large extent *Blitzkrieg Legend*, there is a west map scale at 3.5 miles to the hex, which scale is being used for the *CCA* Normandy campaign. The "West" will include England, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy and Germany west of about the Elbe River. Everything else has is planned to be "East Scale" at the traditional OCS 5 miles to the hex. I need to think carefully about making an exception for scale for *Case Green* and will address this further with David.
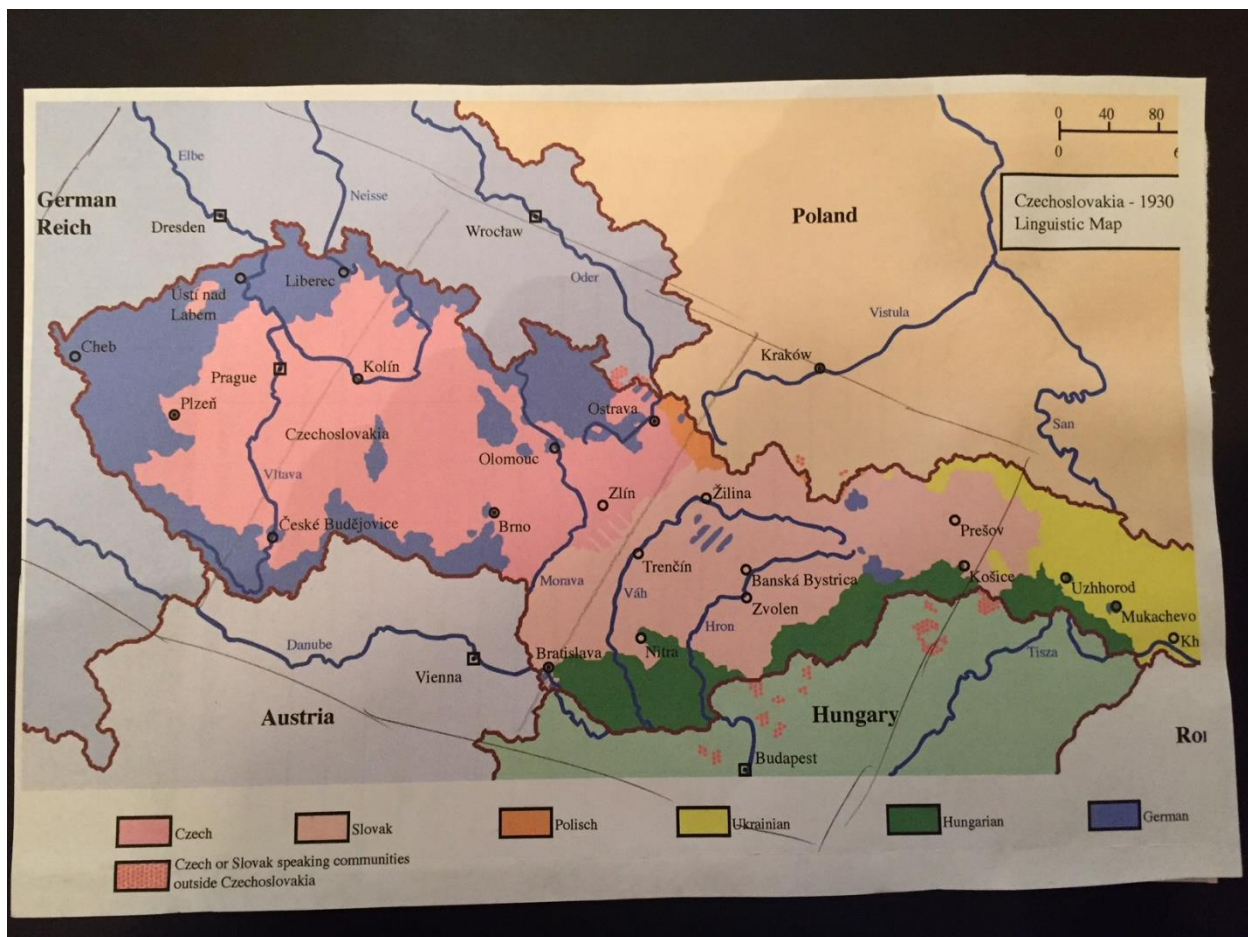
Case Green, *Sketch Map*

German Ground Order of Battle

		11th Inf Reg						COL Konrad Haase
		32nd Inf Reg						COL Max Horn
		53rd Inf Reg						COL Walter Gräßner
		14th Art Reg						COL Friedrich von Scotti
8th Army HQ				Świebodzice	4|2	0	Unlimited	GEN Fedor von Bock
8th Army	III Corps			Wałbrzych (Waldenburg)	8|5	0	0|10W	LTG Erwin von Witzleben
	Corps Asset	1 Artillery Group		III Corps HQ	26|13-4	2	2L|10W	
		*	I/s 39th Art Reg					MAJ Hermann Beeken
		*	II/s 39th Art Reg					MAJ Hans Bruhn
		*	I/s 54th Art Reg					LTC Hans Berger
		*	II/s 54th Art Reg					MAJ Kutschera
	3rd AK	3rd Inf Div		Wałbrzych	18|9	3	3L|4L	MG Walter Petzel
		8th Inf Reg						COL Heinrich Wosch
		29th Inf Reg						COL Erich Schroeck
		50th Inf Reg						BG Paul von Hase
		3rd Art Reg						COL Max Mühlmann
	Attached	*	8th MG Bn	^	4|2	3	3L|14W	LTC Fritz-Huber Gräser
	8th AK	18th Inf Div		Wambierzyce (A	18|9	3	3L|4L	MG Erich von Manstein
		30th Inf Reg						BG Hermann Böttcher
		51st Inf Reg						COL Wilhelm Bohnstedt
		54th Inf Reg						COL Wilhelm Richter
		18th Art Reg						COL Kurt Anger
8th Army	XI Corps			Hirschberg (Jelenia Góra)	8|5	0	0|10W	LTG Wilhelm Ulex
	Corps Asset	1 Artillery Group		XI Corps HQ	26|13-4	2	2L|10W	
		*	I/s 55th Art Reg					MAJ Altmann
		*	II/s 55th Art Reg					MAJ Jaeckel
		*	I/s 67th Art Reg					LTC Walter Stud

5

Case Green, *German OoB example showing the kind of research that goes into game design*

The following is from David's Introductory Notes:

Case Green simulates a German invasion of Czechoslovakia in October 1938 following the latter's rejection of the Four-Power Settlement reached at Munich, Germany. Case Green is the first game in the series to depict a hypothetical, albeit highly plausible conflict.

Simulating a hypothetical event, Case Green examines how a war might look between Germany and Czechoslovakia in October 1938. The game begins on 1 October and runs through the middle of December, with the possibility of stretching into the winter of 1939 and later. Player-specific rules and random events may trigger the entrance of other belligerents. Throughout, players will be challenged by the many subtle but genuine differences in the makeup and interplay

of forces in late 1938, nineteen months before the earliest period depicted in the series (The Blitzkrieg Legend, May-June 1940).

In all this David has presented a considerable body of design work which I believe deserves consideration. The problem is limited development resources to move his project forward. This is the same problem (to a varying degree) for all the games mentioned in this *Current Design Activity* section. More on this issue is found below.

Ch'ang Sha 1941

Design – Forest Webb   **Developer – ???**
(One 11" x 17" Map –5.0 miles to the hex, Countersheets – One)

Forest Web, one of our Baltimore NEBO Gronard guys, has been working on this game for the past couple of years. I've mentioned above as the one who's provided the great mapping data for *CCA*. He's now put his mapping talents to work here for his *CS* title. There are a variety of new terrain types that appeared necessary for the area of this campaign, staring of course with – rice paddies. In additional the effects of seasonal flooding had to be considered.

His take on the opposing forces has been thoughtful. Using *Burma* as a base of reference, he has included battalion breakdowns for the Japanese divisions. However, due to the nature of operations, these divisions are also portrayed as divisional units which can also breakdown to regiments. The scaling of steps for these breakdown units is still under condideration The Chinese divisions are most ill trained, and ill-equipped units which will mostly get mauled if they stand and fully engage the their opponents. However, these units where elusive and hard to pin down by the Japanese. Accordingly, Forest is considering a withdrawal play mechanic for the Chinese. In addition there are Chinese guerilla units that will operate like a mobile interdiction marker. Thereby the Chinese forces can act more like a mobile blocking force against Japanese movement.

Below is a brief description of the campaign by Col Roy M. Stanley form his book, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor*:

> With only a few months before the start of the War in the Pacific, "…Japanese Generals in China knew they had only a few weeks left before their units would be stripped to man the new southern adventures. The main strength of Japanese air and ground forces was already shifting to French Indochina. Japan was negotiating for the United States to recognize Japanese primacy in China (with little real hope of success), and planners in Tokyo feared that any indication of military weakness would disclose their new deployments to the west, which would reveal

their forthcoming expansion in Southeast Asia. Even if the Japanese Army in China had been having second thoughts, the Changsha battle had to come off.

Japanese troops were pulled to Yuehyang, at the junction of the Hsiang and Yangtze rivers, from Hunan, Honan, and Hupeh provinces. Twenty warships, 200 steam launches, 600 junks, 100 aircraft, and 100,000 Chinese impressed as porters were to support the 120,000 Japanese combat troops. From 7 to 11 September, Japanese skirmishers drove Chinese guerrillas deeper into the mountains. Chinese generals knew the signs and went to an advanced state of alert, calling for reinforcements. Again they planned to give way gradually, drawing Japanese units into an ever increasingly exposed east flank.

The main Japanese body lunged into motion on 17 September 1941, crossing the Hsin River 10 miles south of Yuehyang in four places and striking south in four main columns. Chinese units fell back fighting, destroying the roads as they went, to negate Japan's vehicular superiority. Japanese logistics began to break down almost at once, and local Chinese were impressed into road-repair work. China had six corps in the path of the advancing Japanese, but it also had an equally large force massing in the hills to the southeast, waiting for a weak flank to attack or as a last-ditch force to defend Changsha.

On 21 September, Japanese paratroops were boldly landed 30 miles beyond Changsha to cut off Chinese lines of communication. That same day the main body of Japanese troops was struggling to get over the Milo River just 30 miles from their start lines and a full 40 miles short of Changsha. It was also on that day that Chinese flank and counterattacks began. Chinese divisions severed communications at the Japanese rear, working havoc on the less effective reserves and service troops.

By 26 September the Japanese main body was well down to Changsha, moving through the grisly remains of the September 1939 battles. It was also surrounded. In wicked fighting the Japanese columns managed to reverse and break out of their encirclement on 30 September. Chinese troops drove the shredded Japanese units back to their starting positions by 8 October. Chinese sources claim that two-thirds of the Japanese attack elements were slaughtered: 80,000 men. The Japanese admit to 40,000 killed and a like number wounded, with 269 taken prisoner
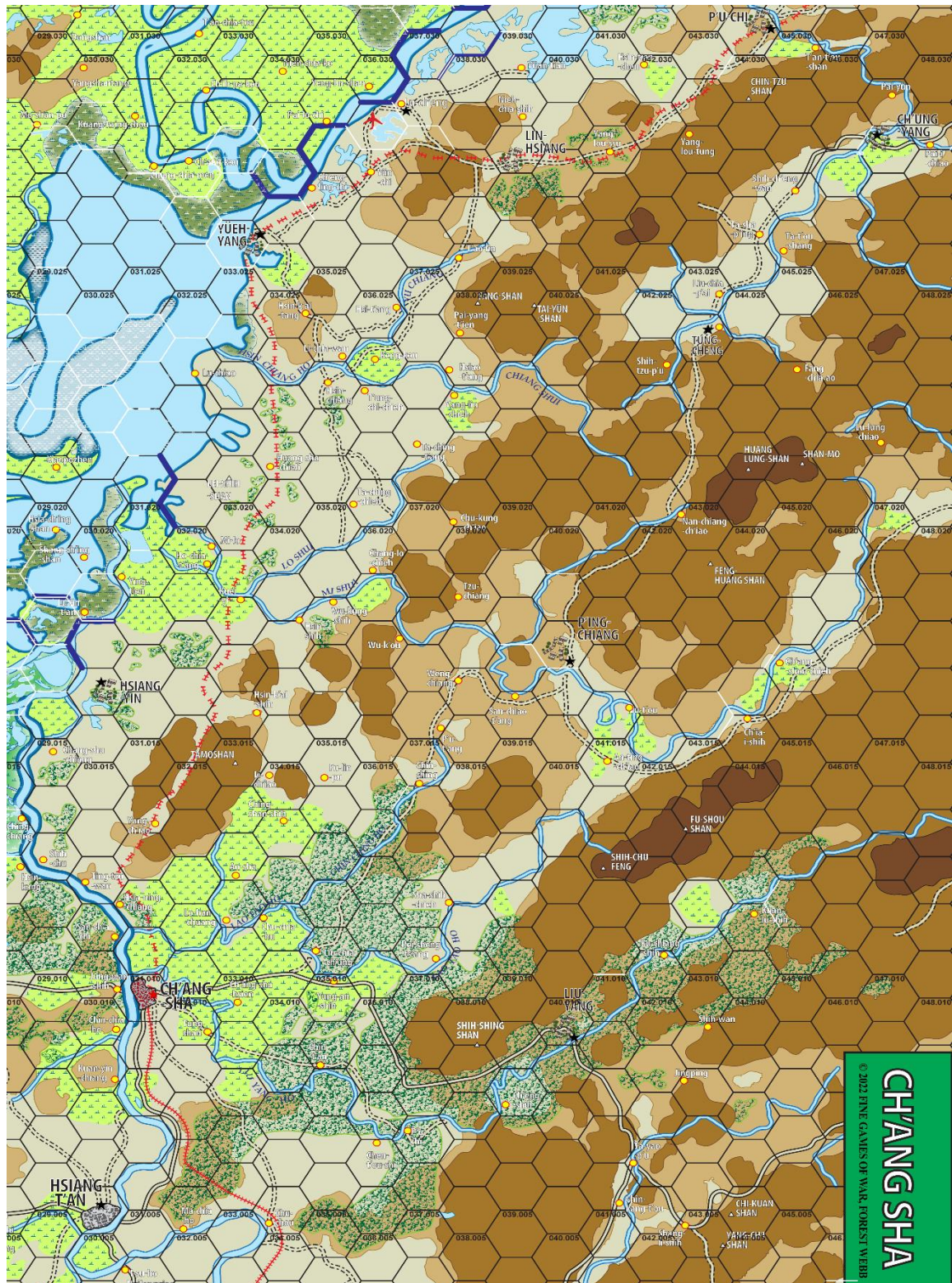
Ch'ang Sha – Playtest Map

Ch'ang Sha – Japanese Playtest Counters

Ch'ang Sha – Chinese Playtest Counters

Design Ideas Further Out on the Horizon:

These are all at an early state of design and research:

Sea Lion (Marcus Watney)
Anvil Dragoon (Curtis Baer)
Malaya (Tony Zbaraschuk)
Prussia 1945 (several designers are looking at this period)
Operation Torch (Curtis Baer)
Greece and Crete1940-1941 (Curtis Baer)

Shanghai-Nanking (Mark Mazer)
Norway 1940 (Chris Hall & Bruce Nicholson)
Case Blue Redevelopment ???

Let us know if you are working on a title.

The OCS Game Development Process

There is a careful process for bringing an OCS game into the world, which results in well-designed games but is limited by the development team's bandwidth:

- Every OCS game starts with an idea from a designer. The designer is akin to an author in the publishing world. He is responsible for researching the campaign, becoming virtually a subject matter expert on the topic. Then for his design to progress the designer needs to create four key items for submission to the development team:

  1. Game-Specific Rules,
  2. Charts/Tables,
  3. Counter Manifest/Order-of-Battle/Order-of-Arrival, and
  4. Draft Map.

- Once these four items are ready, a developer can get involved. Continuing the publishing metaphor, the developer is similar to a book's editor. The Developer/development team puts together the graphical content, to a level sufficient for playtesting and creation of a playtest Vassal module. At this time, we have a limited number developers, which makes this a choke point.
- The Developer/development team reworks the design, based on playtesting – there might be major reworking or fine-tuning or a bit of both. The art of this to me is how to get the most effect from working within the system (counters or unit types or terrain that don't require much in the way of special rules) and how to have only the special rules that really make a difference. Some games require major reworking when the initial playtest spin off in completely ahistorical ways. There is a constant back-and-forth with the game's designer. The developer coordinates playtester activities, and a detailed proofreading effort of all game materials.
- Once the graphics reach an acceptable state, we work with the Vassal team of Jeff Coyle and Herman Wu to produce a playtest module. This is becoming more and more important in game development.
- Along with our freelance author and editor, we also need a publisher. MMP must want to publish the designs that come along. They like a variety of OCS titles and feel the game

market prefers a mix of one-map games and big games. When they decide to move a title towards pre-order, a lot more activity takes place:

- o The OCS team/honchos need to generate production-ready countersheets, rules, and play-aids. This is a Layout/Artwork process that is getting us very familiar with tools like InDesign and Illustrator.
- o Dean Essig is a cartographer (his university degree), and he loves to create maps. He prefers to be the final hands on the map artwork and does an art proofing of all game materials.
- o Box Art is usually done by MMP with input from the OCS team.
- o Proofreaders do a final blitz of all materials (there's a lot of verify: every map/rule reference in the text must be checked, scenarios need to be validated, counters have to be checked (and checked against the scenarios), the map gets a thorough going-over with a high magnification, etc.) We have learned that the designer and developer cannot be the proofreaders of their own material.
- o The Vassal Team create the production Vassal module.
- o After publication, there are still day-to-day on-line questions, errata compilation, and maintenance of the OCS Depot on-line resource (by the OCS Team) and Gamers Archive Materials and Maintenance (Dean Essig)

- Preorder goes up, eventually makes its number, all the proofed materials are submitted to MMP, and the game gets published. OCS titles haven't yet failed to make their pre-order number, but it helped that we put a big push on for *The Third Winter* which I believe worked very well.
- As you can see, there is a LOT of effort put into creating and supporting quality designs for the OCS.

After explaining all of this, I must ask for volunteers who may be interested in taking on the exciting and romantic job of being a developer. Unfortunately, at this time we can promise very little renumeration. You can expect plenty of eyestrain. And understand, this endeavor will require about 10 times more effort than you anticipate. The reward is - you do get to help bring one of these games into the world! Believe it or not it is very satisfying to see a game you've worked so hard on become a success and well accepted. Bear in mind we will of course help with your development assignment. You will not be thrown into the deep end and simply told to swim. Have no illusions though, development of an OCS game takes time, energy, and focus.

If you are an experienced OCS player who wants to give back to the OCS community by taking on a development effort, please reach out to me or Chip to discuss this in detail. At this time, lack of experienced people devoted to development is the biggest "critical path" challenge we face. So, we really do need you experience players to seriously consider playing this role.

In addition, we are always interested in recruiting experienced players who have the time and focus to playtest games in development. At this time most playtesting is done via Vassal. We

do however have the capability to produce a few physical map-sets and counter-sheets for players who can meet face to face for playtesting and prefer our analog form of game play. Please let me or Chip know directly if you are available for ongoing playtesting.

Rules Issues/Updates

Now that I've reminded everyone of the age of our system, it's important that I address the current state of our rules. The OCS rules were substantially modified through four versions from inception with Guderian's Blitzkreig (1.0, 1992) to Case Blue (4.0, 2007). We are currently using Rules version 4.3. For anyone keeping score that's four substantive rules-sets in the first 15 years of the OCS and zero "significant" rules changes in the past 15 years. On the one hand I value the stability of our rules. However, on the other hand, can we ask – "Have our rules gone stale?"

Any analysis of this issue is of course subjective, but it does seem to me that a review of our rules is warranted. I have kept for the past few years a file labeled – "OCS - 5.0 Rules". In this file are rules topics that have been discussed either in person at the Cons or on the online posting forums. You could each probably guess most of what's on the list, all the usual suspects are there, starting of course with – ***"The Artillery Rules".***

I note a trend in our hobby towards less complicated rules and much quicker playing times for the games. I'm impressed also with how Dean designed his Battalion Combat Series. This series has a much more interactive sequence of play where the players alternate activations and perform operations with just one formation a time, usually a division or a brigade. As we all well know our - IGO with all of my units (on the whole map) and then UGO with all your units - legacy system makes for some very long down time for the inactive players. During the bigger games this down time can be 3 or 4 hours or, unfortunately, with really slow players, longer. It may be the worst part of playing the OCS.

In addition, the BCS combat system does not have the typical Combat Results table. Instead, there is a streamlined approach primarily involving DRMs for attributes of combatants. Then roll a 2D6 and cross reference the result on one of the six lines of a three-column table. It's simple, quick and works beautifully. There also tables for barrage and Engagement type combat, but each is equally streamlined. I not saying the BCS is simplistic, anything but. However, the challenge to learning to play BCS is all in the experience of planning your operations and engaging the enemy effectively, that is playing the system and experiencing the system, not in fighting to learn the system.

I understand the BCS is a different scale and quite a different system. But it is a brilliant, and fresh new take on game mechanics to simulate the subject matter at that scale. I wonder how Dean would imagine a new fresh 5.0 OCS rules-set at this time, given all his experience with

wargame design from the past 40 years. I'd bet we would all pay good money to see just that. And that's the point. (Please understand, I'm not advocating taking Dean away from his current design projects. Just speculating to make the point.)

While our OCS games will never approach the simplicity or speed of the Euro type games, or even the less involved wargame systems, I believe we could benefit from a realistic and focused assessment of this issue. I'd like to hear from you guys on this topic.

Issues we are Considering Regarding our Current 4.3 Rules:

- ***OCS v4.4 rules.*** We have it in mind to do an update of the v4.3 rules. This will be focused on incorporating errata, making the document color, and providing updated play examples and reference cards. No significant rules changes are planned, though there are some house rules/optional rules that may be added.

- ***Higher Level Headquarters.*** Hungarian Rhapsody and Third Winter have incorporated the activity of "higher headquarters" into their designs, particularly for the Soviet player. We believe this concept needs more careful thought and attention to properly reflect the role played by these command, control, and supply nodes in larger games.

- ***Artillery/Air/Barrage.*** Periodically a Great Artillery Debate erupts on social media. We have proposals from several very experienced gamers for modifications to the current rules. These range from a "small solution" (use HR-7 "Artillery Factors", HR-8 "Barrage Losses", and HR-17 "SP Artillery" in combination) to significant adjustments to how artillery, air, and Barrage results function. We would put these in as House Rules for players to evaluate.

- ***Fog of War.*** It's just in the nature of gaming to know more than your historical counterpart, consequently avoiding their mistakes and being much more aggressive. Corps counters and 0-Step Loss markers can help at a tactical level, and several games have made good use of off-map boxes (*Beyond the Rhine's* Wacht am Rhein box, the *Third Winter* RVGK boxes). This is an area deserving of additional effort.

Well, that's about all for now. I can pledge that we will continue to work on all the projects mentioned to the best of our capabilities and to the extent of resources available. We are fortunate to continue to have such a strong following for a mature game system like the OCS. That strong following is a testament to Dean's design, which design has now certainly, withstood the test of time.