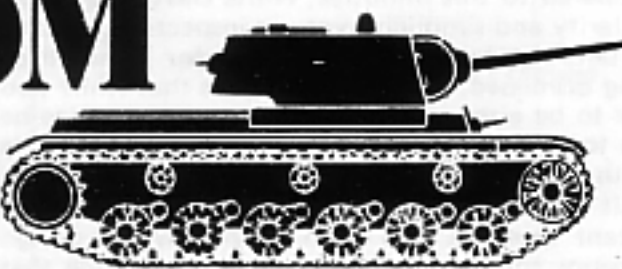


GOTTA PICK A POCKET FROM TWO



Geoff Barnard

I have been placed in a somewhat difficult position. I was all set to write a review of *Korsun Pocket* and my review was going to be favourable, albeit with certain reservations. However, leaping forth from the Game Designers' Workshop team comes *White Death* where upon I began to feel a bit like a motoring correspondent who has been commissioned to review the Mini only to discover for the first time an E-type Jag. The whole foundation for my former opinions has been altered. Maybe it is not completely fair to either game to compare them in detail as they do have considerable differences; nevertheless they have a great deal in common and they indicate two dramatically conflicting trends in wargame design.



Korsun Pocket is designed and published by Peoples Wargames, in the person of Jack Radey. It first appeared as a commercial game at Origins 79 when it was being sold, easily, without the rules! These, as promised, followed at a later date. In fact, anyone attending Origins 78 would have been able to see the playtest game, which was well advanced even then, so the game had a long gestation period. *Korsun Pocket* covers the operations surrounding the Soviet Offensive in January 1944 when a large pocket of Germans were cut off around the supply depot at Korsun, the subsequent attempts of the German forces to break through to relieve the defenders and, eventually, when all this failed, the attempt of the remaining defenders to break out. The game is based almost fully on the SPI *Wacht am Rhein* game-system, hence uses battalion sized units with artillery counters, barrage and FPF equivalents, road movement problems, and, for the Germans, company breakdowns. The rules relating to combined arms bonuses have been altered, and in *Korsun Pocket* are more similar to the rules appearing in the SPI successor to *WAR*, *Atlantic Wall*. *Korsun Pocket*, with four maps, masses of counters and a wad of charts and set-up maps, is a very big game.

White Death, a new arrival from GDW, is a much more compact affair. Within the area of one map sheet it covers the Soviet attack in November 1942 which proposed to capture the German fortified town of Velikiye Luki and thence cut a major north-south rail link a few miles beyond. The town was surrounded and eventually reduced but, in the meantime, the Germans made a number of attempts to break through the Soviet front line to re-establish links with the pocket. The game is based on a 5 day game turn as opposed to *Korsun Pocket*'s 3 turns per day. Soviet counters are generally regiments while the Germans have battalions and a few companies. The rules system is really original, although anyone who has played the same company's *Avalanche* will recognise aspects of the movement system while parts of the combat system will awaken memories of *Operation Crusader* — but more about these details later. The only point of detail that should be introduced at this point is the *White Death* turn system. Each five day game turn may contain a number of impulses, depending upon how the players choose to expend their available movement points. A player may expend the whole lot available for that turn in one massive impulse or he may spread them out over a number of impulses to produce a sequence of alternating impulses involving movement and combat. Once one player has used up all his movement points, the other player may continue on his own. Things are not completely free, as, to a great extent, the supply and movement rules restrict a player's freedom to spread his turn out too far. Also, the Russian player is subject to a minimum movement point expenditure for each action impulse. Even so, the effect of this rule is that when a lot is happening the game is spread out and when very little is happening a game turn can be run through speedily. The effect on playability is dramatic.

The first thing that you notice about these two games is that the situation is almost identical and in both cases the game has been structured to take the best advantage from the ebb and flow of the historical battle. In detail, the games open with a thinly held German front line and a mass of Russian troops poised for the attack. Assuming the games run true to history, the Soviet assault will cut the front line and the troops will advance towards their objectives, surrounding a number of Germans in the meantime. In *Korsun Pocket* this is caused by the location of the Russian attacks along an extended front line forming a bulge in positions, the attack nipping off the tip, while in *White Death* the pocket is formed by the German fortifications in Velikiye Luki town. Once the Russians have gained their new front line and sealed off the pocket, the German reinforcements begin to appear and apply pressure to the extended Soviet positions. In fact, in neither case was the German army able to restore communication with the surrounded troops. At *Korsun Pocket* the final outcome was a breakout by troops abandoning their equipment and fleeing through a blizzard and the Russian positions to the spearheads of the force attempting to relieve them, while in *White Death* a small body of troops were able, eventually, to get through to the pocket but only so as to lead a slightly more organised breakout before the last

bunkers in Velikiye Luki were smashed. In both games the action takes place during winter so the vagaries of a Russian winter are an important factor in play; it is possible that the weather will suddenly take a turn for the worse and render effective action difficult, if not, in the particular case of **Korsun Pocket**, almost impossible. The two games are organised by scenarios and these allow the full timespan of the battle to be split, chronologically, into the initial assault, relief attempts and eventual breakout. The sheer size of **Korsun Pocket** allows geographical division into the eastern and western halves of the battle, producing 8 scenarios to cover the three phases of the action. In **White Death** there are six scenarios covering most of the relief attempts. Both games include a full campaign game; it is worth noting that in **Korsun Pocket** this can be 72 game turns long.

In spite of the differences in size both games use the same map scale, one mile per hex. There is a much more significant similarity between these two games, however, and that is their attention to historical detail and accuracy. In the case of **Korsun Pocket**, the heart of its designer Jack Radey is clearly as 'red' as it can be, this is clearly shown by the asides in the text of the rules and by the very name of his company. His game is therefore a labour of love but Jack should be congratulated for not allowing his obvious political bias to 'colour' the quality of the simulation. The birth of **White Death** is not a one man affair, the historical groundwork was done outside the GDW who were presented with the necessary brief. Hence it was the task of Frank Chadwick, as designer, to turn this information into a game without damaging the quality of the history. In this task he has succeeded admirably. **Korsun Pocket** and **White Death** are superb examples of historically accurate wargames in which it is clear, almost from the very moment that you open the package, that the historicity of the simulation was one of the prime considerations of their respective

designers. The fact that Jack Radey did not succeed in making a game as well as, of course, another matter altogether.

The most obvious difference between these two 'pocket' games is that you'll need the pockets of a Harpo Marx raincoat for **Korsun Pocket**. This action covers the operations of a part of two Russian 'Fronts' spread over the four large map-sheets; to give the total number of unit counters is bad enough yet on top of these there are piles of markers for entrenchments, ammunition, road movement or whatever. **Korsun Pocket** is big and it is congested, even relatively weak sections of a front can be a mass of counters of one type or another. The attention to detail is phenomenal for a game of this scale, as you quickly discover when shunting piles of ammunition counters about the map so as to ensure that your batteries have enough ammo near to hand to enable them to fire. Compared to this minutiae, **White Death** is a haven of clarity and simplicity yet, on inspection, a lot of the detail is covered and allowed for rather than being dismissed. The result of this is that while you have to be either very keen or very generous to be able to describe **Korsun Pocket** as 'playable', **White Death** is eminently playable. This is not really the result of the different size of the battles, an important role has also been played by the design decisions that were made. I can only assume that Jack Radey picked the SPI **Wacht am Rhein** system for his game because he liked that level of detail, because it was known and it was fairly popular at that time. He then proceeded to pile a mass of extra detail on top of the original game system. **Korsun Pocket** is not so much 'designed' as 'constructed' and, to continue in this vein, it is built like a battleship and unfortunately it moves like one too!

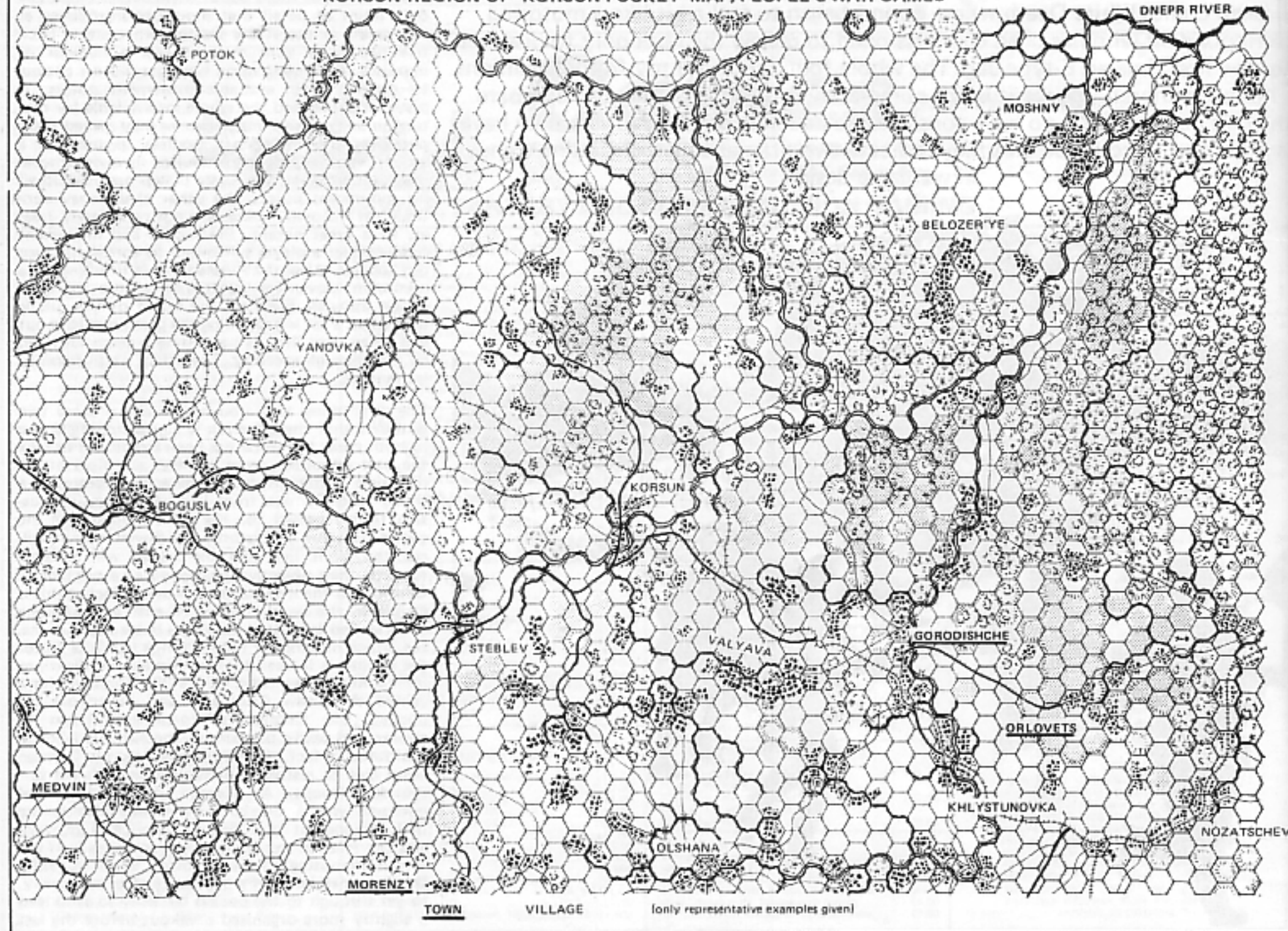
It is clear from the 'Designer's Notes' in **White Death** that Frank Chadwick had seen **Korsun Pocket** when he designed his game and, although

he saw fit to pinch a rule idea or two and use a similar scenario format, he must certainly have been aware of the need to avoid the cumbersome detail of the earlier game. He set out to design a clean system that allowed the vast quantity of quality historical detail he had been given, to be used while keeping a cleanly flowing game. Not only the time scale used but also the unit scale was calculated to this end. While **Korsun Pocket's** heaps of counters use the full strength front, reduced rear and company cadre step-down system to cover combat losses, the GDW game achieves an excellent system of full step reduction with strength chits by generally using larger units for the Russians, (i.e. infantry regiments with up to 9 steps) though the fact that there are many small units with one or two steps is covered by certain quirks of the combat system whereby they don't vanish too quickly. The longer turn span in **White Death** means the loss of the complications of road movement, artillery columns and such like is not missed; also, while the GDW game does have an ammunition rule, it is so generalised within the overall system as to be of no difficulty. One is left with the thought that the **WAR** game system was great for a Bulge game where everyone knows what is going on anyway, which units are doing what and in which players will be mainly interested in the real nitty gritty of the mechanics of the battle. However, the same factors may not apply to a game set on the Russian Front where the cleaner approach of **White Death** seems much more appropriate. Anyway, let's move on to look at each of the two games in greater detail.

Korsun Pocket

While **Korsun Pocket** is an amateur design it is, in all respects apart from design philosophy, a professional product. All the components are of excellent physical and aesthetic quality, the map-sheets especially being superb in design, use of colour, clarity and interest. There's none of this SPI-like 'we'll only give you the important terrain/towns/













KORSUN REGION OF 'KORSUN POCKET' MAP; PEOPLE'S WAR GAMES



whatever and disregard the rest' — in Korsun Pocket the maps give the impression that everything is shown and this really gives the feeling that you are fighting the battle as it was fought. The hexes are not numbered yet very detailed set-up information is given. This contradiction is resolved by the use of 3 set-up maps, of reduced size, each showing the location of each side's combat formations at each of the three breakpoints in the chronology of the game. Corps and Army assets are placed more freely. The effect of all this is complicated by the fact that you need to refer to three lumps of information to set up, namely the map, the detailed OOB table which tells you which counters comprise which formation and which assets are in support and, thirdly, another table which defines any losses already suffered by the formation at the date of set-up. These are all in different places so it's not easy! The rule book is a smartly produced document written in a more narrative than legalistic style, spattered with historical, political and player asides, making it interesting to read but often difficult to find a ruling. Finally, there are the turn record charts which include notes for the historical weather, the arrival of reinforcements and some DIY displays for weather. All the combat, movement etc. charts are printed on the back of two of the set-up maps.

The movement rules are essentially straightforward; basically they follow the *Wacht am Rhein* system with a lot of detail added, especially important because of the weather during which the battle is being fought. Different classes of unit have different movement allowances which they expend at different rates, the effect of the weather being the same for all unit types. You will find that you have to constantly keep referring back to the rules to make sure you are using the right calculation, especially when you are trying to move the masses of artillery counters. These are especially difficult to move, realistically, as they are split into light, medium, heavy and self-propelled, each with slightly different provisions. In order for artillery

GAME COUNTERS — KORSUN POCKET

	ammo points		In Column
	unsupplied		Artillery Column
	pontoon bridge		Fortified
	fatigue marker		Dug In
	supply unit status		Emplaced
	improved road		building



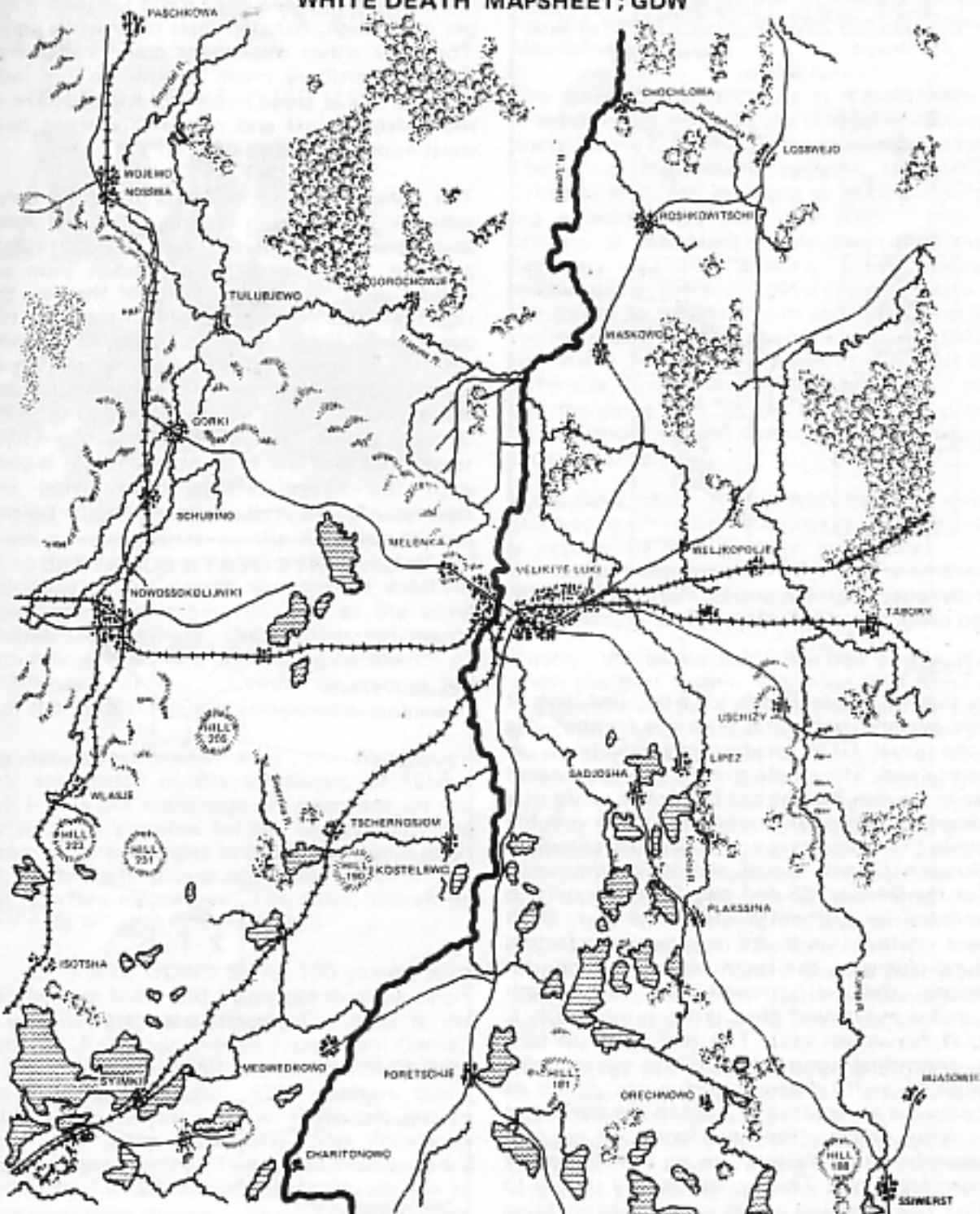
to move by road and cross bridges — and this is the only way they can move any real distance — they must be in artillery column. This not only takes time to enter and leave but also involves clogging up the road hexes on each side of the unit. Other units may also use column formation to move efficiently by road but they do not have the same clogging effect. There is an added problem for the Russians in that their artillery units must be emplaced if they wish to use spotted fire. This is to represent the time taken for communications nets to be established by the less well equipped Soviet forces. The result of this is that although the Russian artillery is extremely powerful in terms of combat factors, it is very cumbersome. When set up and emplaced the temptation is to try and keep it that way as you know that once you start to move it the units will be effectively out of action for a number of turns. There are two types of Zone of Control in *Korsun Pocket*, Strong and Weak. A strong ZOC halts movement while a weak ZOC allows continued movement at a 2MP cost over and above terrain costs. Some units, such as HQs, artillery units in column and bridge units, have no ZOC. There are no stacking differences between the two sides except that the German ability to split into companies allows them to have three units in combat as opposed to the Russian two. Each side may have no more than two battalions fighting though the Germans may add a company, or replace one or both of the battalions with further companies, so as to spread the effect of their specialist units and gain extra benefit from the combined arms rules.

In general terms the combat system is an odds based one with Barrage and Final Protective Fire for ranged artillery. Complexities are added in many layers from the ubiquitous weather through odds shifts to special additions covering counter-battery and defensive artillery fire. Combat results involve retreats and/or steps loss, morale rules are optional and may force retreats rather than allow losses. The rules list 15 different factors that can affect the combat result, shifting the odds column used, although there is a limit to a net shift of four columns (so no 1:3 can become a 10:1!!). The majority of the modifiers are due to terrain or defensive fieldworks, the main tactical factors are regimental support and, most importantly, Tank/Anti-Tank support. This latter is quite a novel system, being an improvement over the combined arms system of *WAR* without being quite as detailed as that in *Atlantic Wall* (although there is great similarity of effect to the latter). The system involves giving all tank and anti-tank units an extra factor, ranging from 1 to 4, to reflect the armour or anti-armour value of the unit. Some units composed of assault guns without turrets have their value underlined; this means that their attacking 'Tank' value is one less than the printed number while they use their full value when operating 'Anti-Tank'. In combat the relative values of effective Tank and Anti-Tank values are compared and the relationship can result in combat shifts either for or against the attacker.

The rules regarding artillery barrage and FPF are basically as per the *SPI Quad/WAR* system with the details of ammunition supply and special modifiers for things like visibility and direct fire added. There are, however, two important additions to the system. The attacking player may use Counter-Battery fire — in this he may fire his artillery at observed enemy artillery units that are 'In Battery', he may even pick just one unit from a stack for this special attention! After this, and before combat proper, the Defending player may fire Defensive Barrage — again this allows him to pick a single unit in a stack if he so wishes. This is especially vital where the combat shifts play such an important part in determining the final combat odds. A good attack can be really hammered before the die is rolled if for example the weaker link of a combined attack is eliminated or forced to retreat such that the tank bonus no longer applies — this can and does happen!

The effect of these two phases is to bring considerable subtlety into the artillery exchanges. Counter Battery fire obviously will try to break up or prevent possible Defensive Barrages and reduce FPF capability while Defensive Barrage will be aimed at reducing combat modifiers as well as firing at enemy artillery units adjacent to friendly units. An interesting aspect of this detail is the

'WHITE DEATH' MAPSHEET; GDW



ability of certain self-propelled artillery units on each side to 'shoot and scoot'; these units may fire and immediately revert to 'Out of Battery' thereby avoiding any repercussions from enemy Counter battery or Defensive Barrage that might soon have come their way.

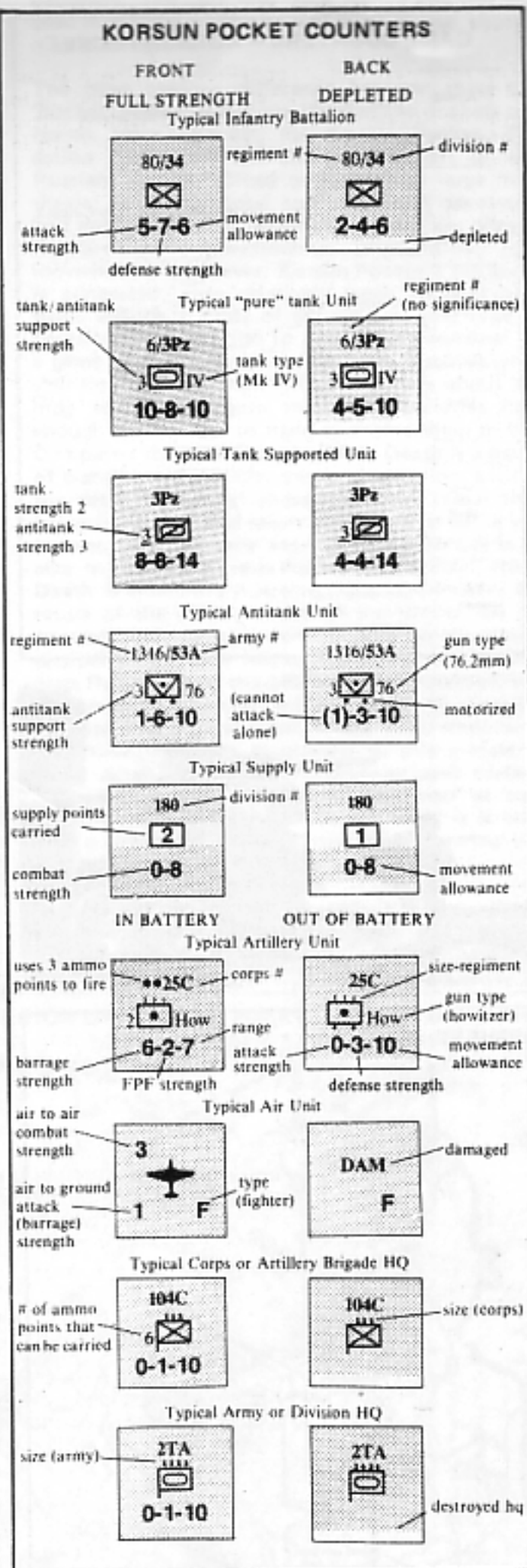
In general, the Korsun Pocket combat system works well, the fact that it is detailed rather than complex merely means that until you are very practiced at the calculations you have to have your wits about you. The special factors such as the artillery novelties and the tank/anti-tank factors noted above add interest and realism while the complexities of supply and weather, noted below, place appropriate restraints upon players freedom of action.

Of the various remaining rule sections, weather has the widest area of effect, as the reader will already have noticed. In Korsun Pocket weather is determined by checking the three variables, temperature and atmospheric conditions being decided by a die roll for each and the third variable, ground conditions, being decided by the results of those previous die results for the present and previous game turns, thereby giving a realistic flow to the weather changes. There are modifiers for the die rolls to take into consideration, these depend on previous weather results and the time of day. Also, when the atmospheric conditions give precipitation a further die roll is needed to determine if it is rain, clouds, snow or blizzard and again the result will be varied by time of day and temperature. Fortunately you can avoid all this by using the historical weather - this has the advantages of being easy and enables players to keep better track of what is going on but conversely gives both players an ahistorical forewarning of the weather changes.

Korsun Pocket includes Air Rules very similar to WAR, except that you are allowed to attack enemy air bases off the map - these though do have an anti-air strength denoted! The main use for air units, weather permitting, is over the battlefield, particularly for combat assistance and supply. The German pocket at Korsun should manage to include the Korsun airstrip - otherwise the German player is in deep trouble.

The supply rules operate on many levels during each player turn: a) in specialised mutual supply phases when supply is moved from off-map to dumps on the game map and subsequently dished out to fighting units or, in the case of ammunition, by forming front-line dumps, and b) also later during combat when much of the consumption takes place. The whole system is both realistic and detailed and forms a logistical 'game' in its own right as your "quartermaster self" fights against the weather and lengthening supply lines, not to mention enemy action and combat consumption (especially of ammunition). Divisions and Russian Tank and Mechanised Corps have specific Supply units which can be used to form a supply line or consumed - the number given for each unit being a realistic representation of the efficiency of its rear echelon services; hence most German fighting units have 3 while most Russian only 2. Units out of supply go through various stages of isolation during which combat and movement abilities are progressively reduced. The rules covering ammunition expenditure for artillery units are, however, the most intriguing as there are so many artillery units on the maps that even large stocks of ammunition can dwindle rapidly. Artillery ammunition can be held in static dumps on the map (shown by a pile of numbered chits treated just like money), can be carried by artillery formation HQs and finally each artillery counter is considered to have an intrinsic ammunition point in reserve. The rules are then complicated by the fact that some artillery units must expend 2 or 3 units of ammunition to fire while many units in some circumstances can fire 'free'. Players can therefore treat the designer's suggestion that you may mark ammunition counters by type and calibre and thereby set up an even more complex and realistic system as a joke, although if you've got the time, the inclination and a quartermaster player it can be done (cries of "help - I've run out of shells for my 152mm howitzers but have got heaps of mortar shells all over the place that I don't seem able to use"!!)

Other special rules allow an extra night turn at the



cost of fatigue, engineer works, Partisans and dismounted mechanised infantry.

White Death

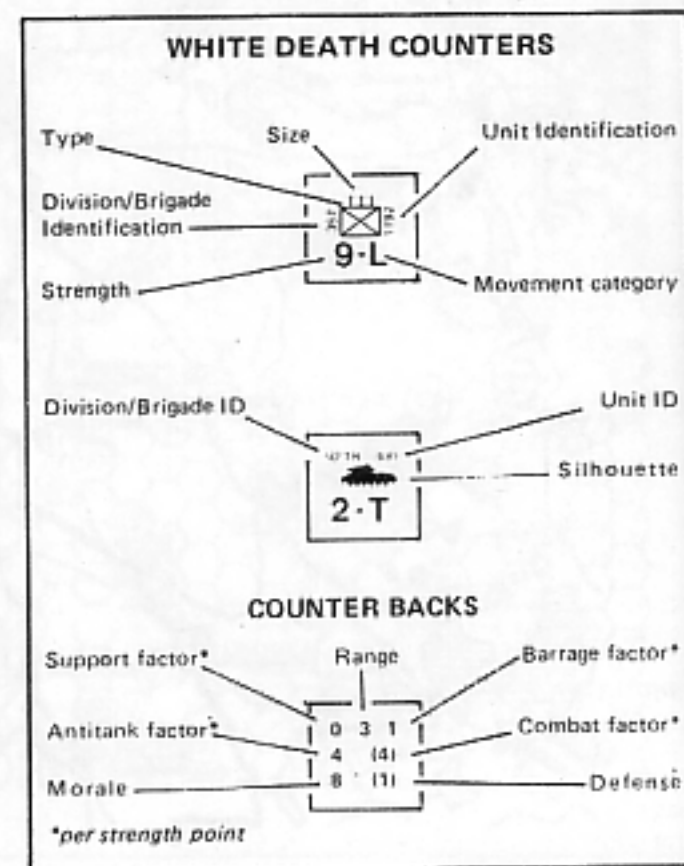
I'll now turn to White Death for a detailed look at the game system, beginning with the components where the usual GDW professional standards are well maintained. The single map is plain compared to those in Korsun Pocket but this is the result of a more desolate landscape rather than any graphic deficiencies. The counters are glossy and colourful with Russian Guards being red while the usual Black for the German SS and grey for other units is supplemented by Luftwaffe and Police blue. Both sides have white ski units. All counters have factors printed on the rear, the front bears only the unit designations, the full strength size in strength points, and a movement class letter symbol (i.e. L for leg, W for wheel etc). The rear gives up to 8 factors, depending upon unit type, to cover range, fire values, morale, defensive value etc. Some of these factors are a multiplier, and to get the actual combat value you multiply the factor by the current strength. Other factors are an absolute value unchanged by losses. This system is very similar to Operation Crusader and works superbly in enabling a mass of realistic detail to be included without

undue complexity. The White Death package is completed by the rule book charts and, most helpfully, by two very good coloured unit organisation sheets which allow most of the counters to be arranged before the game commences.

The movement rules initially seem complex but are soon grasped. Each unit has the same movement allowance but different units expend their factors at different rates depending upon terrain. The details are clearly set out on a single chart. The main feature of the game though is the Impulse system which means that a unit does not have to expend all its Movement Allowance at one time. Within the span of a single Game Turn each player in turn decides how much of his remaining Movement Allowance he will expend in his impulse, impulses alternating until both players have expended all of their 10 Movement Points. Hence a turn can contain anything from one big action Impulse per side to 4 Russian and maybe more German impulses (the Russian must expend at least 3, or all remaining, MPs while the German can spend his freely) although the movement costs often make very small impulses futile. A Pass Impulse requires the expenditure on one MP only and allows only Barrage artillery fire and rail movement. During the course of a game there are cases where one or both sides will find it better to use all their Movement Allowance at once, giving only one move/fight sequence for your side, and other instances where it is preferable to take a number of smaller move/fight sequences - the player is free to choose although the German player is slightly free-er than the Soviet player.

In White Death Zones of Control stop movement except for tanks which may move through, subject to anti-tank opportunity fire, and Ski units which have certain special abilities. Stacking, meanwhile, can be a little complex with different rules for each side. Basically, either 3 German battalions or a Russian Regiment may occupy a hex, although there are various combinations, and all units in a hex may assault in combat. Generally, the small German units mean that some German stacks can get quite high, Russian ones meanwhile stay small. The only other movement complications are the fact that artillery must 'deploy' to fire indirectly (this is easily done with the expenditure of one movement point) and any unit wishing to assault must expend an additional MP.

The combat system in White Death is very interesting - it combines certain aspects of Avalanche and Operation Crusader with conventional game practice. For example, 'soft' units (non armour) defend with the terrain value of the hex they are in, this value - each of the three unit types of personnel, light weapons and heavy weapons having a different value in each terrain type - is a constant. The assaulting player calculates his attack value, which is fire value multiplied by remaining strength points, for each unit assaulting a particular target unit and the total attack factor is compared with the hexes defense value giving an odds column. A die roll gives strength points lost:



however the result may not exceed half of the defending unit's remaining strength points unless that strength is one whereupon the unit will be eliminated. A morale check will be required and the loss required will be a die modifier even if the unit did not actually lose that many. For example, a unit with 3 SPs is fired at and the result requires a 3SP loss. In fact, it can only lose one as 2 or 3 would be more than half. However, when it checks for morale the die roll is modified by the full 3. The effects of morale loss are various depending upon the actual situation and may involve a 'pin' effect, a retreat and, maybe, further SP loss in case of rout. There is a different combat system for Tank and Anti-tank Combat as tank units have a numerical defence strength. A simple odds system is used involving, again, possible loss and morale check. In certain circumstances the same units may fire both conventional and anti-tank fire in the same combat impulse. The use of AFVs may result in extra 'Tank Fright' effects although only German AFVs, anti-tank guns and heavy anti-aircraft protected stacks are immune — even Russian tanks are prone to fear the Panzers.

The sequence of play is layered as in *Korsun Pocket* but here with combat as well as in artillery exchanges. Combat follows movement, opening with the Barrage fire of the phasing player. In this, the attacking factors are applied in turn to each unit in the hex with various die modifiers depending upon terrain and target unit type. After Barrage fire the non-phasing player has a Defensive Fire phase, which involves both conventional and anti-tank fire and can include artillery if available. Only enemy units declared to be assaulting may be engaged. Only after these phases are completed and any morale results acted out may the phasing player make his assaults, and sometimes either the Barrage has removed the target or the Defensive Fire has made the attack hopeless. Never mind, either advance or, in the latter case, shrug your shoulders and thank the rules for there being no

'attacker elim' result — the poorest result in *White Death* is 'no effect'!

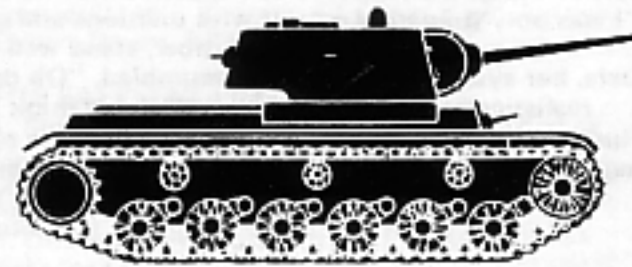
The only real complication to this system is the effect of the Bunker hexes in *Velikiye Luki*, as in practice these must be hammered with artillery before there is any chance of attacking the units in the hex!

Unlike *Korsun Pocket* in spite of the similar scales in these two games there are no tank/infantry combined arms modifiers in *White Death*. There are certain aspects of the way the game plays that will tend to encourage mixed stacks but such are not to the clear advantage which maybe they should be. The game's designer has commented in print (in *Fire & Movement*) that maybe this is something to be improved upon should this system be used again but in the context of *White Death* this slight loss of realism is amply counterbalanced both in other areas of the rules and in ease of play.

The rules covering weather and supply in *White Death* are amazingly simple and yet give just enough effect to be historical. There are only three categories of weather, namely Clear/Frost, Thaw (which makes rivers and lakes dangerous), and Snow which reduces visibility and affects morale and air supply to a cut-off *Velikiye Luki*. Supply is restricted to two aspects; artillery must trace a supply line to a road and then off the map to fire effectively, all other units are merely subject to the fact that the army as a whole must expend supply for any unit to assault although if a unit is isolated its combat values are reduced by half. *White Death* has some neat 'special' rules such as that allowing weapons units to abandon their equipment, flee as personnel units, exit the map and then subsequently re-enter re-armed. The single Russian rocket artillery unit is, however, too valuable and may not do this. Also, the Brandenburg Commando units have a Russian speaking

ability and may try to infiltrate through Soviet zones of control by deception — they actually did this in the battle! Rules are also given for bridges, cavalry charges and replacements.

As has already been made quite clear, in terms of play experience these two games are poles apart. *Korsun Pocket* is utter hard work, a veritable slogging match, while *White Death* covers similar ground in a seemingly easy flow. *Korsun Pocket* allows you to savour the real nitty-gritty of running and organising a real battle, *White Death* does that for you and allows you to get on with the fighting. *Korsun Pocket* is a battle of fronts, masses of units clogging the terrain and congesting the roads while supply struggles to get through, *White Death* is a game of small actions and much manoeuvre and even when the fronts do form later in the game it flows much better than *Korsun Pocket*. In their own ways the two games are of similar complexity, *Korsun Pocket* by sheer detail, *White Death* by great subtlety, and both are eminently historical. If you can organise a multi-player game *Korsun Pocket* will provide a magnificent adventure. It should not be denigrated because of its sheer mass as within its chosen counter/time/map scale it is a massive situation. One is however tempted to think that the designer, Jack Radey, should have allowed game design to progress further before settling on his game system; I wonder if having seen GDW's *White Death* he would have designed *Korsun Pocket* exactly as he did?



GDW's Series 120 game reviewed by S.J.Hackett

THE BATTLE OF THE ALMA



I somehow suspect that I am not the only war-gamer whose experience of the Crimean War is limited to Tennyson and the film of 'Charge of the Light Brigade'. The Crimean War was an anachronism containing something of, and at the same time failing to exemplify, the glorious naivete of the Napoleonic Wars and the menacing spectre of the American Civil War. It could be seen as the Korea of the 19th century world-powers.

Coming to *Alma* with only the most rudimentary knowledge of the campaigns of 1854 I suppose I have the advantage of innocence on my side. It was not possible for me to approach the rules from different angles in order to achieve what I *knew* to be the historical result, for the details of Crimean warfare escape me. The rules, therefore, were my only guide in this instance...

Alma, as one of GDW's Series 120 games, is of limited physical form and I suppose that the single battle is suited to this format. The map is the standard SPI Folio (or should I say 'Mini-Game') 17" x 22" printed in 4 colours but hardly a stunning graphic achievement. 120 counters come printed in red (British), blue (French), brown (Turkish) and green (Russians). The Rulebook contains 4 pages of rules, 1 page of tables, and 2 pages of 'notes' which are of practically no use to the game consisting mainly — or so it seemed to me

— of discussion as to the type of shot responsible for the emasculation of the Russian commander Mentschikov!

The game's mechanics are straightforward — and it is here that much of the difficulty inherent in so many (*many?*) of the Crimean games available lies. They use Napoleonic systems to portray the Crimean War, and in doing so they are guilty of as big a blunder as were the equally incongruous officers at Balaklava. It is time that the game designers stopped playing Lord Raglan and developed a *Crimean* game-system which allows the gamer to simulate both accurately *and* without feeling that the game *could* be so much better if ... In *Alma* we have a Movement/Morale/Charge/Offensive fire/Defensive fire/Melee Turn-sequence and the game lasts for ten turns, which allows it to be just about played through in the 2 hours GDW state as sufficient.

Why, then, does *Alma* with its seemingly sound game-system — and I suppose it *is* sound enough as a system (if not entirely applicable) — fail to deliver as a simulation of the events of September 20th 1854? More importantly perhaps why does it fail to satisfy as a game?

Firstly, the battle itself is a bad one to play even given the best system in gaming. The *Alma* was the first battle of the Crimean War and as such both sides were, to an extent, testing each other's armies. The main problem lies in the sizes of those two (four in actual fact, although I'll discuss the Allied army's problems later) forces. The Allies had 62,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry and 128 guns — the Russians had only 35,000 infantry, 3,600 cavalry and 96 guns. The Russians' only superiority lay in the least useful arm, the cavalry, who were used very little in the battle. Russian artillery is better than the Allies (8.4 Fire factors to the Allies 6.9) while the British infantry are the best troops in a firefight. However, the battle is always going to be a one-sided affair, and the Allies usually win.

This brings me to the topic of Victory conditions in *Alma*. Jack Greene, in his article 'Alma and the Quads' ('Wargamer' no. 7) describes the situation vis-a-vis Victory Conditions as being "not unlike a fine runner doing laps in the finest style and then stumbling near the finishing line". In my view it is closer to falling at 10 metres in a three-

legged race, but the sentiment I would agree with. Victory for the Allies rests purely and simply upon the occupation of two non-adjacent hexes on the southern edge of the mapboard. It is a dreadful rule, resting as it does upon an absolutely arbitrary factor — the 'Victory Hexes' do not represent anything in real life; no more, at least than a quick and non-messy end to the game (and with it any element of simulation which may have existed before). The actual battle was a defensive action seeking to delay the Allied forces — hence the choice, by the Russians, of the strongly defensive position on the steep southern bank of the Alma river. To advocate, as the Victory rules do, that the Russians should disintegrate as soon as the Allies have scaled the Heights is going to lead to a very distorted picture of the battle. I feel it would be much better to give VPs for the destruction of Russian units — which will prevent the Russians making isolated 'suicide' attacks on Allied units toward the end of the game in order to preserve the Victory Hexes.

Morale is handled fairly well in *Alma* but I have two points to make here. Firstly, the Allied Divisional Morale rule ought to be changed — as Jack Greene suggests in the 'Wargamer' article mentioned above — so that it applies to all friendly units within 2 hexes of the eliminated unit. This prevents units on the opposite side of the board being routed because a unit of *their* division has been eliminated, while all around other friendly units are being eliminated with no morale effect at all — hardly a realistic situation, but that which the rules lead to. Secondly, Leader counters ought to be introduced to reflect the vast part played in the battle by the dotting, irresponsible, Raglan, the dying and ambitious Marshal St. Arnaud, and the Turk-hating Mentschikov (apparently it was Turkish shot which did the damage...).

So, in the final assessment it must be said that for me *Alma* was both a poor introduction to Crimean gaming *and* a poor game. The restrictions of the very difficult terrain and the appalling Victory conditions restrict strategy to an unacceptable extent, one game being only marginally different from another. Ah, well... you win some, I lose most of them.