

WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

Stalingrad – Verdun on the Volga	★★★
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Period	WW2	Publisher	Against The Odds
Conflict/Battle	Stalingrad (1942, GER attack)	Designer	Michael Rinella
Force Size	Army	Date	2016
Mvr Units	Regt	Grid Size	67 areas,13 Zones
DOWNness	3DOWN	Map Size	1" = 750m, area ~ 2km x 4km terrain dependent
Players	2	Turn Dur.	4 days
Player Roles	Army commanders	Playing Time	180 min
BGG Link	https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/154472/stalingrad-verdun-on-the-volga		

Introduction

Subject of the game	The initial German attack on Stalingrad in Sep-Nov 42
Scope	The whole battle, including the rural perimeter and some elements of the RUS outer ring. Only just counts as an urban game with ~50% (more like 40%) urban
Components	<p>2 x 17" x 22" maps, very nice</p> <p>2 sheets counters – nicely done, small writing</p> <p>24pp rule book (magazine insert)</p> <p>4 scenarios</p> <p>Good set up and reinf cards</p> <p>2 x PACs</p>
Presentation - Good	<p>Excellent looking game, well laid out rules</p> <p>Excellent sheets for set up and reinforcements</p>
Presentation - Bad	Some minor counter text a bit small
Designer's focus/objectives	<p>Grew up with Greenwood/AH's Turning Point: Stalingrad, but "fails for the most part to model or model accurately the relentless nature of Soviet counter attacks and on going attrition" – and too CBty based. Also poor ORBAT. Nakamura's Storm Over Stalingrad also fails to have good model.</p> <p>Wanted to include the threat and combat to the N and E of the city to give ongoing dilemmas.</p> <p>Their 6th Area-Impulse design. Design goal was a "quick playing, fun, yet challenging and historically up to date depiction of the opening weeks of the battle, neither too complex or too simple". Reflect attritional grind and need to drive Sovs to the Volga before too many reinforcements. Storm groups and lack of German night time air let Sovs rule the night.</p>
Overall system description	<p>Very Area-Impulse, Storm Over style – in fact very reminiscent in map and feel to Storm Over Arnhem – even to the extent of not really feeling like an Urban game.</p> <p>Neat mechanics with the impulses though, with a 2D6 roll determining whether the impulses switch between combat and logistical pause (rare) and between day and night then end turn. So never sure how long you have to fight.</p> <p>Combat and most mechanics simple, so crack along with the PACs/QRS after a couple of turns, and impulse mechanism means you're not slogging through every unit – but also means whole chunks of battle may not happen.</p>

Real Battle Notes	See the books! Germans started rolling up from W (of map, SE in real life?), bit battle over hill in the centre, and then into the maelstrom of the Tractor Factory etc, all whilst fighting off Sov attacks from the perimeter. Germans ended up with most of city, but Sovs still had a foothold and were being resupplied across the Volga, but the Sovs completed the encirclement and retook the whole city early in 43.

The Game System

Principal areas of reality represented in the game	Not a lot? Use of the Volga for resupply, threat of Sov attacks from perimeter, attritional grind, Sov superiority at night
Important abstractions	Support counters for air and Div Fires. All Regtl fires in units. Single combat value, not separate attack and defence Terrain variation a single PV value
Types of decisions required	Where to put main effort and where to leave as impulses may expire. Which units to sacrifice (and which areas) in order to keep best units going (as strong units more useful than many weak ones – they only count +1 in combat).
Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making	Variable turns force to focus on the main things want done- hard to keep pressure up across whole board. Some counter husbanding to keep strong units to lead attacks. Div Integrity bonus encourages to keep together, but replacements can come from anywhere.
How well do game decisions map to real life decisions	Somewhat in terms of where to place resources and when to use Arty, but that's about it
Likes/Good Elements (inc ease of play; really good below)	Simple, easy to play. Gives a good feel for the geography, and possibly for the very high level strategy – but that may be better with a wider game. Too caught in between?
Contributions to the wargaming state of the art	Maturity of the impulse mechanism for day/night and combat/pause
Deficiencies	Just doesn't really feel urban – very much like fighting over a 2D map, and if changed area names for "fields", and PV for different forms of "rough" would feel no different – very Storm over Arnhem.
Improvements? (beyond fixing above)	No, needs a different game
Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals	Good model – not really sure, certainly not urban Threat and combat to the N and E – only if Russia plays that way, and that not till Turn 5+ quick playing – yes fun – probably challenging – only tell in PvP historically up to date – seems to be Neither too complex or too simple – might actually just edge to too simple Reflect attritional grind – yes Storm groups and lack of German night time air let Sovs rule the night – just about

Overall Evaluation

Evaluation of the player's experience	A reasonable introduction to the geography of Stalingrad, but may only come alive then played PvP, otherwise a fairly repetitive (but simple) core loop
Does the game work? (Veracity/Internal Validity)	Game works well on its own terms, so is a good game.
Is the game engaging?	Reasonably, but could get competitive unless a good PvP game
Is the game useful – for what?	Useful to get to understand basics of the environment and the battle – Edutainment only
How valid is the game? Is the game realistic?	Not sure, at a big picture level possibly, as just a grind which the German's are likely to win. But no real detail of urban.
Does it provide any special insights	No
Replay value	Limited possibly given the duration.
Who would be most interested in the game?	Eastern Front fans. Not sure the best introduction to the battle, but may be. Not great for urbanistas.
Is the game good value?	£50 – nice production but minimal replay so probably no, just a one-off
Overall Impressions	As above, nicely produced, some nice ideas, get to know the terrain, but doesn't feel urban

Third Party Reviews	https://boardgamegeek.com/video/524547/stalingrad-verdun-on-the-volga/a-look-at-stalingrad-verdun-on-the-volga
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Interesting Expansions	None, but model seems to have been used for other games by Rinella
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MECHANICS (relative to Urban/PhD)

(include Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play)

Aspect	Mechanic
Activation/C&C	Automatic, but limited by impulses. No C&C
Comms	None
UxV	NA
CEMA	NA
Other ISR	None
Movement	Only MP for assault moves, else can move whole map – seems reasonable for 4d turns!
Damage	2 step units
Direct Fire	None.
Assault	Single CF for att and def. But typical CF of 4 or 5, rises to 9 or 10 with DMs (most automatic/obvious), then 3D6 for final value, so huge chance dependence
Indirect Fire	Abstracted Div fires as +2 bonus. Aircraft as +D6, but only daytime
IEDs/Engineering	Have Pioneer/Engineer units but seem to only fight as infantry. Can't even build bridges. Can clear rubble though with Pioneers
Casualties	None
Logistics	Most have LOS. Can degrade other units to build degraded ones back up. Can resurrect independent units. Limited (1 or 2) replen points each turn to rebuild units as well. No ammo etc
Morale	None
Opinion	Na
Victory Condition	Simple area VPs
UTZs	PV value for different areas, 1=rural,2=wood/suburban,3=urban,4=factory
Building Damage	None
Civilians	None
Subterranean	None
Other Urban Specifics/Notable	Rubble markers (at start!), stops movt that turn, reduces air Sp Have/build fortifications Storm groups enabler, ni only, RUS attack only Water terrain PV added to defender

Triad Representation

	Challenges		Solutions	
	Elms	Comment	Elms	Comment
Civilian Population	0	Nil	0	Nil
Civilian Infrastructure	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforcement across Volga (11-, +DMs to succeed) 	0	Nil
3D Man-Made Terrain	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 UTZs (suburban, urban, dense/factory) Cover fm damage - PV for each area (1-4) Rubble from overkill, max 1 Rubble stops movt & overruns Rubble increases defence 	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pioneers can clear rubble (5+, + DMs) Russian can build Fortifications Fortifications give +1 defence Storm groups at night, Soviets only in Soviet attacks, give D6 DM

FROM PLAY NOTES

Likes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• set up locs on counters• Very clear set up instructions• Rubble• Reinf sheets• Lovely map• Right sort of counter numbers• Relatively small PAC footprint• 2D6 shift in phase and day/ni and ending• Troop transfer, sort of• sep of assault and other movt• good for geography
Dislikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2D6 for CV on top of only a 1-3 CF• German log pause seems very long!• Impulse model means you tend to on,y have one main effort per 4 days!• No bridge/ravine def bonus• Have to attack empty controlled zones even if mopping up• Air power too auto?
Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only build RUS fortifications when RUS attacking?• Can Engrs attack, and lead?
Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	26 Nov 25	Scenario	Core game, no options
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

- Turn 1
 - Stalemate on attack on Minina
 - Success on 2nd try, cleared on 3rd
 - Kupor taken 1st try
 - Overrun into 25th October Lumber Mill
 - Some fill in attacks to N to restrict boundary and push back to city
- Turn 2
 - 24Pz charged thru Cemetery and over run to take Volga Station/Docks
 - 29th took Train Stn 2
 - tidying up in N
 - Triggered night on impulse 5!
 - T34 counter attack vs Hill 107.5 wiped out 295Div
 - 389 takes Triangle Woods
 - End turn at 7

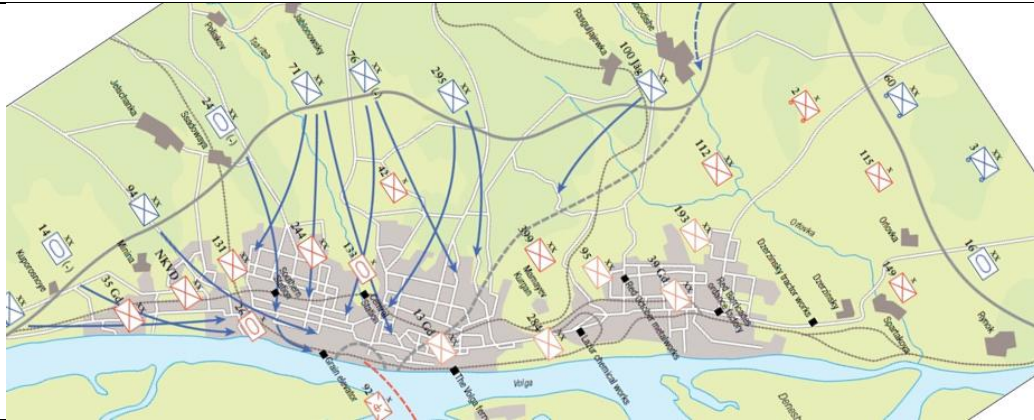
RESULTS

3VP gained by end T2

THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

Again a good case for developing One Page Urban!

IMAGES



Historic Map



Set-up



End Turn 1



Detail



End Turn 2



Detail



Detail