

WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

The Battle of Hue!	★★★★★
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Period	Post-War	Publisher	Tiny Battle Publishing
Conflict	Vietnam/Hue	Designer	Jay Ward
Force Size	~5 Coy vs ~2-3 Bn	Date	2019
Mvr Units	~PI	Grid Size	Hex. ~75m
Turn Dur.	~ 1day, Game = 15 turns/~15 days	Map Size	c. 1250m x 750m, 13 x 9 hex
Players	1 (AI for NVA)		

Introduction

Subject of the game	The battle to retake the southern/modern part of Hue during the Tet Offensive, Jan/Feb 1968.
Scope	Southern part of city only, all-arms, asymmetric
Presentation	Print and play, good quality graphics. Clear rules
Components	A3 map, one counter sheet, 85 counters, QRS, 9pp, 11pp counter descriptions and designer notes. OK designer notes.
Designer's focus/objectives	Doesn't seem to have been more than proving that the Ramadi system could be used for another battle. Aims to be more tactical as at a lower level (PI not Bn MU).
Overall system description	<p>Solitaire, very similar to Ramadi. US/ARVN player decides on how to assign troops and assets to ops, then NVA 3 part opposition (force, asset, event) generated for each target hex, and then fight to expel NVA from hexes and grow seized area, whilst protecting LOC from infiltration.</p> <p>Main changes from Ramadi:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Off board artillery assets to suppress hexes - MUST attack every adjacent non-suppressed hex (really bad news) - Counter-attacks are built into the main engagements - Simple die roll for infiltration - Number of ops dependent on active Coy HQs (rolled each turn) - 15 not 6 turns
Real Battle Notes	NVA infiltrated during night of 30/31 Jan and then took most of the city. Small US force (~Coy) in the MACV compound was gradually reinforced and steadily cleared "the triangle" against steady opposition.

The Game System

<p>Principal areas of reality represented in the game</p>	<p>The slog through the dense urban area, max 1 new hex per turn per unit/attack. Every adjacent hex must be attacked or suppressed as NVA tended to press in on all sides. Security of LOCs more abstracted, simple die roll. IEDs just one flavour of events, as with civilians, media, POWs etc – broader than in Ramadi. “Assets” steadily build, and have to get Fires release. Also off-board Fires. Tempo based on active Coy HQs – less abstracted than for Ramadi. Set time table for reinforcements reflecting real world situation. Nice set of “Operational Constraints” that effect various factors and change based on d6/turn: Urgency/Relieve Prison, An Cuu bridge blown, Prison control, Fire support release. Checkpoints for VP/turn to keep on “real” track.</p>
<p>Important abstractions</p>	<p>Only CF differentiates units (even airpower)</p>
<p>Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play</p>	<p>Very simple differential cbt system CF+DMs vs CF+DMs. Margin gives loss chance. Unlimited movt along LOCs (very good). Random generate 3 layer NVA opposition for each encounter – units+assets (wpns)+events (IEDs, Fires, civpop, POWs, media). Simple die roll for infiltration Die rolls to recover attrited assets and units.</p>
<p>Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals and representing the real situation</p>	<p>Not sure how good at predicting Good at showing the nature of the battle in terms of the grind, and the threat to LOCs. The “attack all” is meant to force use of assets/fires to suppress, but limited assets at start and fires only ~ 25% effective when is available, so becomes a very tough fight. Civvies really just a reminder they are there – nothing you can do about it.</p>
<p>Contributions to the wargaming state of the art</p>	<p>Nice asymmetric AI for this type of engagement, with some enhancements on Ramadi. Rolling for CoyHQ effectiveness. The Operational Constraints model Checkpoints for VP/turn to keep on “real” track.</p>

Improvements?	<p>Not really for what it's trying to achieve. Always the issue that that a unit just becomes a CF 1/2/3/4 rather than anything else.</p> <p>Seemed in some ways over-complex compared to Ramadi, but that eased by turn 4, the "attack all" rule was the big issue.</p> <p>Seem to be able to move US troops about too much and mix Coys, would give a -1 on that.</p> <p>Board should look more like Hue. Otherwise I could really just mix and match counters and boards from Hue and Ramadi and wouldn't know which I was playing.</p> <p>Web/mobile app to generate the AI force would be a lot speedier.</p> <p>Having some null counters so don't fight all 3 tiers every time would make less samey and give more variety.</p>
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The Game in Play

Play time	~2-4 hours if really understand it. Would be a lot faster with an app to generate the NVA threat rather than drawing counters (esp as typically ~6 per turn).
Player roles	USMC Bn commander only
Types of decisions required	How many attacks, what to try and suppress. How to assign troops and support for each attack. Ensuring LOC protected (but not to same degree as Ramadi as just occupancy AND needs adjacency)
Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making	<p>Free movt in LOC really helps focus.</p> <p>Attack or suppress all rule really means you can't focus down on just 1 or two hexes.</p> <p>Lot of ground to cover, and to make the checkpoints so you have to crack on – but initially a very weak force</p> <p>Lack of knowledge about NVA strength means you might be fighting 0/1 or 6/8 – so what do you risk?</p>
Evaluation of the player's experience	Even more of a slog than Ramadi. Still more about resource mgt and risk appetite than tactics.

Overall Evaluation

Does the game work? (Veracity)	Yep, nothing broken, but not as slick as Ramadi given extra rules.
Does it have real world validity?/Insights?	In terms of nature yes, not really in terms of tactics – although designer notes emphasises that need to suppress or turn flanks is what the game is all about – although real battle does seem to have been on a board front. Doesn't remind importance of LOCs to same extent as Ramdi
Is it a good game?	OK, 3/5

Who would be most interested in the game?	People interested in Hue. Ramadi better for a simple feel of dense urban combat. Hard to motivate to play 15 turns (~90 battles!)
Is the game good value?	Yep, only £9.44

MECHANICS

Aspect	Mechanic
Activation/C&C	# attacks based on active Coy HQs, need 5-, but DM+1 for each spent Pl.
Movement	Free along whole LOC length – good
Direct Fire	Differential cbt system CF+DMs vs CF+DMs. Margin gives loss chance.
Damage	Reduced CEF then lost, but can be restored with reinforcements
Assault	In DF
Indirect Fire	Roll for available, roll to suppress. For tanks etc just roll to suppress
Air Support	Nil, wasn't allowed over Hue
Engineers	Nil
CEMA	Nil
Morale	Nil – but losses reduce activations
Civilians	Random factor, but nothing player can do about them. Ditto media.
Subterranean	NVA can infiltrate anywhere in your rear
Urban Specifics	-1 for urban NVA held, -3 for strongpoint, but have to fight for each hex
Other Notable	Recovery of spent assets and units, 4- on D6.

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	8-22/4/22	Scenario	Default
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

A real slog, and wasn't looking forward to the 2nd session, and then could only stand it til end of Turn 4 – by which times things were actually starting to turn a bit.

First turn I don't think I took anywhere. 2nd turn I think I managed to get into the University, third turn rebuffed everywhere and then on 4th turn actually had a “breakthrough” which let me take Le Loi and the Post Office in one go, but still had 3 platoons in the spent box.

I perhaps played too even a front line, and taking flanks first and then the centre (which may be closer to real life, but not a case of turning the flank) might have been better. Also more use of tanks to suppress as a far higher chance – 66% cf ~25% for Fires.

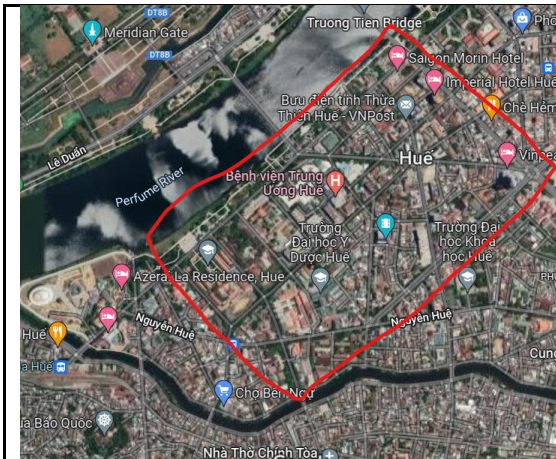
RESULTS

Despite being in negative VPs for first two turns ended up at 15. Way short of 30 target for CP one, but in next 2 turns might have got closer, and might have cleared the first set of target buildings (essentially the Eastern band, had 6 out of 10).

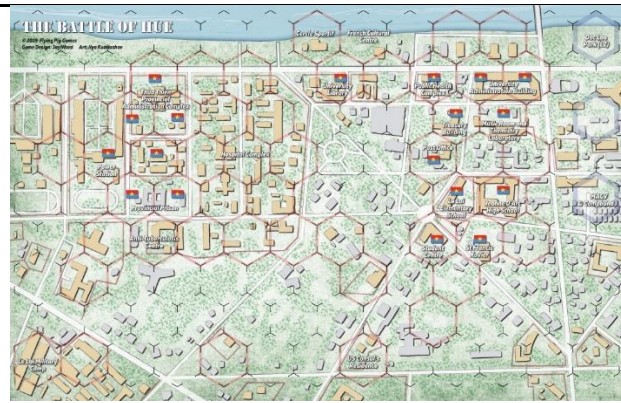
THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN)

More complex than Ramadi for just an introduction to dense urban battle. You could have relabelled Ramadi map and told me it was Hue and would have same effect. Given designer notes emphasis on “more tactical” the sameness of the mechanics just made the two the same. Still some scope for development though.

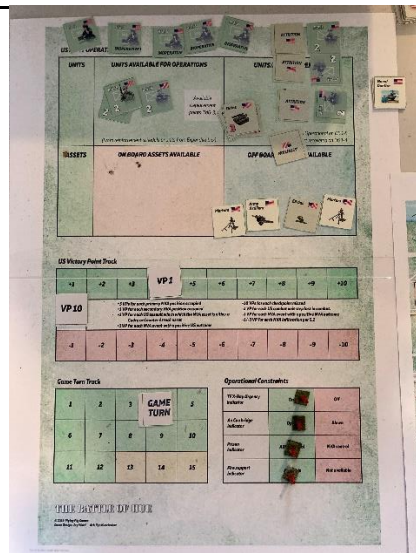
IMAGES



Real terrain



Game board



Player Aid Board



End Turn 3



ENDEX (end Turn 4)

Note: NVA forces just lined up by attack, not placed