

WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

City of Confusion: The Battle for Hue	★★★★☆
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Period	WW2	Publisher	High Flying Dice Games
Conflict/Battle	Hue, 1968	Designer	Paul Rohrbaugh
Force Size	~Div vs Bde	Date	2012
Mvr Units	Platoons/Companies	Grid Size	Area, ~500m (100yd per inch)
DOWNness	2-3DOWN for US 2-3DOWN for NVA	Map Size	City plus immediate outskirts c.15 x 15 areas, 6km x 6km
Players	2	Turn Dur.	2-3 days
Player Roles	Cmdr of US and ARVN "Bdes" Cmdr of NAV/NLF force	Playing Time	~5 hrs on first time, possibly halve that in due course

Introduction

Subject of the game	The Battle of Hue, January/February 1968
Scope	The whole of the battle, assuming that the NLF are already infiltrated and the NVA have arrived in the city
Components	c.A1 map (in 4 sections). 10pp rules (incl 1pp Notes/References). 280 counters. 9pp of play aids
Presentation	<p>Good: Really nice looking map in muted colours. Nice counters. Rules layout very logical.</p> <p>Bad: Some of the play-aids are in a faux-noticeboard format which can make them hard to read and means they take up too much space, could have reduced number and made easier to use.</p> <p>The roads look like area boundaries, and boundaries like roads. Many areas meet at corners but rules don't tell you how to treat them. Many areas have 2 or even 3 terrain types. Rules say to use worst, but would have been clearer just to follow UTZ boundary (and help make those clearer)</p> <p>The various bridges over the canals and smaller waterways are unclear. The Suppress/Pin counters use icons which could stand for either, or anything, would have been clearer with text.</p>
Designer's focus/objectives	Designer notes are unfortunately just a brief recap of the history and suggestions for each side on how to play. So one assumes the standard boardgamer's edutainment.
Overall system description	Fairly conventional 2 player boardgame but uses a standard card deck or a custom one (I used latter) for activation and almost all resolution. Actually pretty slick. No step losses, but units can recover back to the board. Combat is unit vs unit based on attackers combat factor or outnumbering.
Real Battle Notes	Having infiltrated the city during the Tet ceasefire and celebrations the NVA and NLF occupied the citadel and the modern part of the city S of the Perfume River. ARVN in their compound in the citadel and the Marines in their MACV compound S of the river then basically held out until reinforcements were drip fed to them until their numbers were sufficient to overwhelm the defenders, albeit in bloody street and foxhole battles. The media coverage of the battle has been described as a turning point in the US attitude towards the War.

The Game System

<p>Principal areas of reality represented in the game</p>	<p>The mix of combat types, with regular and irregular forces and how the battle developed differently N and S of the Perfume River. The limitations on US operations N of the River.</p>
<p>Important abstractions</p>	<p>No C2 (except US & ARVN can't do joint attacks). Air, Fires and NGS all by a fire mission allocation and direct placement. Only one "urban" terrain type, despite different natures of N and S of river.</p>
<p>Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play</p>	<p>Mostly card based.</p> <p>Sides alternate drawing 1 card which tells how many inf units can activate, or how many fire missions or random event or end of turn (on 2nd random event "joker").</p> <p>Movement is by MA and MP, 2 MP for urban. Vehicles limited to roads in urban.</p> <p>NLF have freer movement and in a "concealed" mode if not moved.</p> <p>Fire is by drawing card, apply DMs to value, and then hit if equal or UNDER unit fire factor. Hit then rolled with D10 again table to see if eliminated/suppressed/pinned based on wpn type. Same for Fires but only 2 DM.</p> <p>Close Cbt by drawing card, apply DMs and then hit if equal or OVER 6. Get +1 per unit > en (and -1 per < en) – so best to use weak units, esp as only results are all en eliminated or all attacker eliminated.</p> <p>D10 rolls to both recover from Pin/Suppression and to recover eliminated units (so elimination more represents fatigue/morale?) – if fail then permanently gone.</p> <p>If using playing cards there's a table that explains different card meanings for different tasks, but custom cards nicely embed on card. All pretty slick after 2-3 turns.</p>
<p>Types of decisions required</p>	<p>Where to send limited troops. How to get best odds on close assault. Where to put limited fire missions. How long to wait for a fire mission before putting in an assault – and game of chicken given random turn length.</p>
<p>Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making</p>	<p>Close assault odds are a bit transparent so best to use weakest troops which seems odd – no extra bonus for a strong unit as in Storm Over..</p> <p>Uncertainty of turn length forces you to do critical stuff early.</p>

<p>Likes/Good Elements (really good below)</p>	<p>Map, just tweak the zones and colouring/markings a bit, certainly looks faithful.</p> <p>Random # of activations for each side and random end of turn. Bringing in specific reinforcements on either side loses VPs, so have to judge need</p> <p>The fact that the nature of the battle does (can?) end up being different N and S of the river, very different types of fight (asymmetric on S, symmetric on N)</p> <p>Congestion in movt given 3-4 unit stacks and slow move thru urban, and vehs restricted to roads. Bridges can be blown to further restrict.</p>
<p>Contributions to the wargaming state of the art</p>	<p>Card mechanism with multi-function cards</p>

<p>Deficiencies</p>	<p>Citadel walls are only a +1 barrier, and then only if moat. From reading it seems the gates or explosives were the only way in, so could have been better modelled (no gates even shown).</p> <p>The rules only refer to playing cards, not the custom cards, and seem to be some slight discrepancies</p> <p>Close combat is purely a # of units game, not quality of units, seems odd (CiH has at least some correction for that).</p> <p>All or nothing close combat is brutal, meaning that you tend to only attack once you have +4 or so in mods, but you also can't attack with more than 3 or 4 units (as have to move into area first rather than attacking from multiple areas) which seems a bit odd, so does make most combats a close call. Add to that most infantry is CF 2 or 3, best US are 4, and defender gets +2 for urban, means that you only get a hit on a 1 or 2.</p> <p>Tanks only give a +1 for close combat in open areas, not in cities. Not clear what ONTOS counts as. Given difficulty of getting hits in urban makes tanks pretty useless.</p> <p>Ineffectiveness of firing make it hard to suppress from one area and the attack from another. Ditto in terms of using FIRES to suppress, play chicken for them to come up, and then good chance miss.</p> <p>CD (card draw) test is high for close assault, low for firing which is confusing.</p> <p>For the US once they have moved all units (and usually by that time NVA has also moved all units) then US just rolls through the deck trying to get all the Fires cards out before drawing the two end of turn cards – which seems cumbersome/odd.</p> <p>No DM for defending in urban or in rubble</p> <p>Some zones actually extend across canals (which are +1 to cross) which is very confusing.</p> <p>HQs seem to be just ordinary combat units, no VP or C" impact from loss, and given the close combat mechanism are best used as cannon fodder!</p> <p>End of game mop-up could drag on, end up just focussing on key areas given the random turn length.</p> <p>Once key moves are made just becomes Allies turning cards over hoping to get Fires to suppress so can then launch an assault, all before end of turn comes – not very elegant.</p>
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Improvements? (beyond fixing above)	<p>Rubble is only caused by Fires that cause elimination whereas surely should be always or random. Game ends with very few rubble counters given that “80% of the city was in ruins”</p> <p>Given the emphasis on the cards seems odd that some elements (close combat, recovery) then use D10 – would move all to cards.</p> <p>Would be tempted to say that activation points on Allied side can only used for US or ARVN for each card, rather than both.</p>
Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals and representing the real situation	<p>As a piece of edutainment I think it works very well, gives you the whole scope of the battle and in a system that is interesting and fun to play. Doesn't seem like a grind, and plenty of room to manoeuvre.</p> <p>Some of the “urban” aspects – rubble, defencability, do seem underplayed, but broad sweep of the engagement is represented.</p> <p>No compelling need for the US in the MACV to really do anything other than stay put until the cavalry arrives. Then once US/ARVN there in force the NLF/NVA just hunker down.</p>

MECHANICS (relative to Urban/PhD)

Aspect	Mechanic
Activation/C&C	Alt sides but random # units. No US/ARVN offensive co-operation. No other C2 modelling
Movement	MA and MP. Slower in urban and vehs restricted to roads.
Direct Fire	Need LOS, blocked by urban. CD+DM < CF. Protection DMs for urban or key structures.
Damage	Pin/Suppress/Eliminate/Permanently Eliminated
Assault	CD+DM > 6. No DM for urban or rubble.
Indirect Fire	Need LOS fm any unit for on-map. As DF. Off map as fire missions (NGS)
Air Support	As Indirect fire. Results than can kill a/c with AA.
Engineers	Not in game. Would be very useful for better demolition/breaching.
CEMA	NA
Comms	Nil
UxV	NA
ISR	Need to spot targets – 3 area range.
Morale	Used for recover/replacement only.
Building Damage	Rubble only on successful Fires, and then in both park and urban!
Civilians	Rubble in urban causes an optional media test which effects VPs
Subterranean	Nil. Didn't seem to be a big thing in the battle, although lots of mouseholing and hidden foxholes
Other Urban Specifics/Notable	

Overall Evaluation

Does the game work? (Veracity)	Yes, all mechanisms pretty solid
Evaluation of the player's experience	Fun to play, doesn't get bogged down or boring or too much of a slog
Does it have real world validity?/Insights?	Think it needs better urban modelling for that, but getting there, and certainly may let you explore some options for Hue itself, but reinforcements arrive so soon that ending never really in doubt
Is it a good game?	Yes
Who would be most interested in the game?	Anyone board wargamer given the novel mechanisms and anyone interested in Hue or Vietnam or urban.
Is the game good value?	\$26.95, plus \$15.00 for custom cards. \$42 for international shipping (but covers 4-5 games). Yes in the US, less elsewhere!

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	28 Oct 22 – 24 Nov 22!	Scenario	Main game
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

NVA and NLF managed to take half the airfield and spread out over as many of the Southern VPs as possible on Turn 1.

On Turn 2 took the rest of the airfield and on Turn 3 took the palace as US/ARVN reinforcements began to arrive in force, but too far away to impact.

On Turn 4 most of regular NVA began with drawing into the citadel, leaving the NLF to slow the US south of the river. A valiant fight by NVA to defend the N bridge meant they could delay ARVN entry by one turn – but may have been better blowing the bridge at the start. NVA decided to storm the ARVN HQ Compound in the citadel but with odds that needed an 8+ and they got a 10, so all key objectives in the Compound taken just as the ARVN airborne breached the undefended NW corner.

From Turn 5 NVA just hunkering down and seeing how long it can hold out, no need to attack any more.

By Turn 8 all of the US and ARVN were engaged, and ARVN all over the Citadel. A good run of dice saw ARVN retake their HQ and a neighbouring area (giving them the whole of the N of the Citadel), and the US take Cercle Sportif and a neighbouring area. The 4stack vs 2-3stack battles in the Citadel a lot riskier than the 4vs1 ones for US vs NLF. Fires support failing miserably but Allies now in VP lead.

Turn 9 the dice changed and the US lost a 3 companies (!) plus one Ontos unit to a single NLF unit. Imperial Palace is being devastated by fires, slowly attriting the defenders (pity there is no rubble count). ARVN was holding off for one more Fires mission before assault but end of turn called.

Turn 10 ARVN loses 3 companies and an M48 tank unit to a single NLF, in the open in the citadel! Allies in a routine of waiting for Fires until End of Turn Warning card called, then switching to assaults. ARVN managed to storm the Palace (4vs3 given reinforcements, rolled 7+1 vs the 6 needed, so only 50:50 chance), NVA was ready for a suicidal counter-attack but drew the End of Turn (and Game) card.

RESULTS

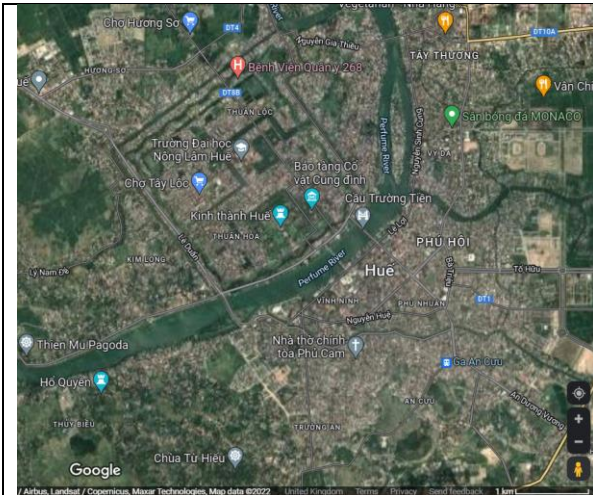
Allies won 61 vs 46.

THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN)

Game end situation probably not far off reality with most of S bank cleared, Citadel largely retaken, just a bunch of NVA in the SW corner where sitting between the wall and the moat makes them really hard to assault!

Certainly some elements of urban in there (slow movement, limited LOS for direct fire, better cover) but could do with tweaks around rubble and both combats, and gets a bit gamey towards the end as you work out how to “play” the mechanics – but could be seen as a realistic “how long do I wait til I assault” which would be missing without the random turn end.

IMAGES



Real terrain



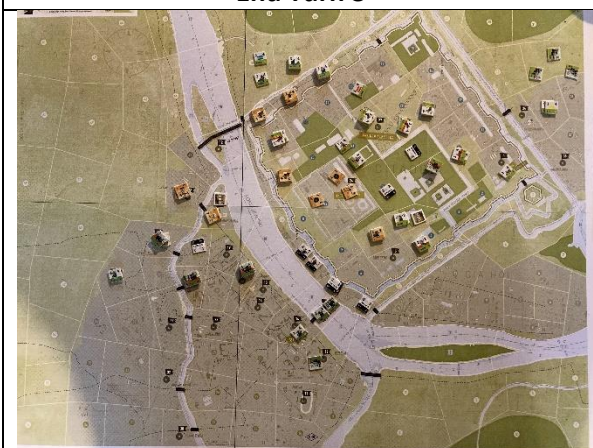
STARTEX



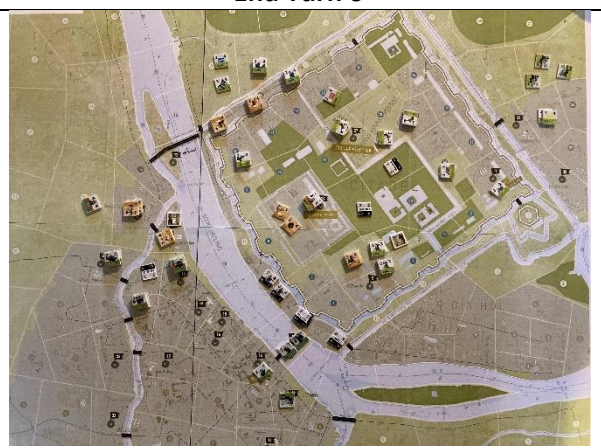
End Turn 3



End Turn 6



End Turn 8



End Turn 10 - ENDEX