

Review - 1914: Dispatches

Three years ago the limits of my understanding of the Eastern Front in the First World War went something like this:

- Germany had won an important victory in 1914 at Tannenberg in East Prussia, using double envelopment tactics;
- Tannenberg had helped make the reputations of Hindenberg and Ludendorff of later Western Front fame;
- by 1916 Russia was having grave difficulties supplying its armies with basic equipment like rifles and basic munitions like shells;
- despite those difficulties, the Brusilov offensive that year went close to restoring Russia's military position; and
- in 1917 support from Soviets which had sprung up in military units was an important element in the success of the Bolshevik revolution.

Some of what I “knew” was probably erroneous, at least in part. And as a body of knowledge about an important theatre of the Great War it was pretty limited.

But in early 2009, I stumbled across Michael Resch's *1914: Twilight in the East*, which helped fill in some of the many blanks.

Quite apart from the game opening my eyes to the shape of the 1914 campaigns in East Prussia, Poland and Galicia, I came to admire Michael's design for what it does as a game. It represents some uniquely First World War operational issues in a way which is elegant, and which strikes me as authentic to the way the armies of that era fought. My review of the game was published here:

<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/thread/433095/old-dog-new-tricks-the-hex-and-counter-genre-re>

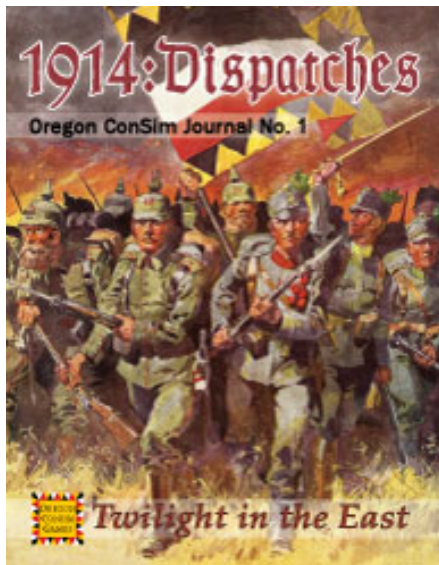
It is not an exaggeration to say that the game turned my wargaming habits on their head: before TitE it was ASL and CDGs to the fore. ASL will never really fade into the background, but TitE itself – and the (unrelated) Operational Combat Series to which it led in a fairly direct path – are probably now the mainstay of my gaming (thanks are also due to VASSAL).

One reason for that is the tie between game and history: good operational games like TitE map fairly closely to the viewpoint from which much military history is written.

The bibliography of TitE sent me in the direction of Norman Stone's *The Eastern Front*, G Irving Root's *Battles East*, and Dennis Showalter's *Tannenberg*. All worth a read (I particularly enjoyed the latter).

It was clear, however, that the research underpinning Michael's design went well beyond those excellent secondary source operational-strategic accounts of the Great War in Eastern Europe.

Three years on, Michael (and his small game company Oregon ConSim Games) have brought much of that research to the table in *1914: Dispatches*, sub-titled Oregon ConSim Journal No 1.



As the name suggests, *Dispatches* is a magazine and it is devoted to *1914: Twilight in the East*, which it approaches from a number of angles.

Content

There are really four types of content in the magazine:

- historical articles;
- articles analysing game play;
- new scenarios (large and small) for TitE; and
- revised material for TitE itself.

I will say something about each (in reverse order).

Revised material for TitE

The first thing that pops out when you open the mailer are two multicolour cardstock play aids for TitE (one for summer game turns and one for autumn turns).

In look and feel they are very different to the original play aids included in the boxed game. But there are no changes of substance. The new charts are all about efficiently presenting the same

information. They look much better than the original charts – more colour; more creative use of fonts to distinguish between more commonly and less commonly used information; more white space. The new and the old are shown beside each other below.

Combat Results Table (CRT) [206] (10.9)

Die	1-4	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	Die Roll
2	+0	+1/D	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	2
3	+1*	*0	+1/D	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	3
4	+1*	+1*	*0	+1/D	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	4
5	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	5
6	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	6
7	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	7
8	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	8
9	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	9
10	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	10
11	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	11
12	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	12

Odd Column Shifts (10.8)
 7L Terrain Effects per TEC
 1R * Prepared Attack (10.3)
 1L Attacking units attached to more than one Corps
 2R = Flank Attack (10.4)
 1L, 4L Defender in Improved Position (IP)
 * = for enemy High Trajectory artillery; - = for enemy Heavy artillery

Step Loss Determination (10.10)

Step Loss Results Table DRMs (10.10.3)
 ● Opponent's Artillery Value:
 0-2: 3-6: 7-11: 12-17: 18-24: 25+:
 +0: -1: -2: -3: -4: -5:
 -1 Opponent has no intrinsic artillery (2.1)
 CRT result
 ● -1 Affected units are only German
 ● +2 = Defender receiving a Flank Attack
 ● -3 Any one Defender in Demoralized (DM)
 ● -1 Attacking a Level 4 IP
 ● -1 Defender for every combat odds < 1:4
 ● For combat odds < 6:1 Attacker: +1 for every 3 odds > 6:1
 Defender: -1 for every 3 odds > 6:1

Post Combat Effectiveness Check (206)

Roll separately for each Stack, apply DRMs to each Formation separately
Effectiveness Check DRMs (11.3.1)
 ● For each Step lost by the force in current combat
 ● 0 or +1 EC DRM from SLRT (applies to only one formation)
 ● +1 Each Retreat obligation received from the CRT
 ● -1 Defender in IP Level 2, 3, 4 & did Not Retreat
 ● +1 = Defender Flank Attacked
 ● -1 = Attacker's CRT result included a star
 ● -1 Low Supply
 ● -1 Defender for every combat odds < 1:4
 ● -1 Attacker = for every 3 odds > 6:1

1914 Twilight in the East

New chart (Autumn – CRT side)

Combat Results Table (CRT) [206] (10.9)

Die	1-4	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	Die Roll
2	+0	+1/D	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	2
3	+1*	*0	+1/D	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	3
4	+1*	+1*	*0	+1/D	*0	*0	*0	*0	*0	4
5	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	5
6	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	6
7	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	7
8	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	8
9	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	9
10	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	10
11	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	+1*	11
12	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+2*	+1*	+1*	+1*	12

Step Loss Results Table (SLRT) [146] (10.10)

Small	Medium	Large	Massive	Steps
< 3	≤ 2	≤ 0	≤ -2	0 + 0
4, 5, 6	3, 4	1, 2	-1, 0	0 + 1
7, 8, 9	5, 6	3, 4	1, 2	1 + 0
10+	7, 8	5, 6	3, 4	1 + 1
—	9, 10, 11	7, 8	5, 6	2 + 0
—	12+	9, 10	7, 8	2 + 1
—	—	11, 12, 13	9, 10	3 + 0
—	—	14+	11, 12, 13	3 + 1
—	—	—	14+	4 + 0

Unit Size Chart

Infantry division	Div. Equivalent
1	1
Infantry brigade, reduced infantry division, division-sized cavalry unit, Formosa	1/2
Other (supply unit, artillery, infantry regiment or battalion, cavalry brigade, Fort, etc.)	0

Post Combat Effectiveness Check (206) (11.3)

1) Roll two dice for each stack.
 2) Determine the DRMs for each force in a stack individually.
 3) If the modified die roll is a unit's current CEL, the force passes the check.
 4) If the modified die roll is a unit's current CEL, the force fails the check, subtract the current Combat Effectiveness Level from the force roll, consult the Effectiveness Check Failure Chart, and implement the results.
Effectiveness Check DRMs (apply to both attacker's & defender's rolls)
 ● For each step lost by the force in the current combat: -2
 ● EC DRM from SLRT: +1
 ● Each retreat obligation received from the CRT: +1
 ● If any unit in the force is marked as having Low Supply: +1
Effectiveness Check DRMs (apply to Defender's roll only)
 ● Flank Attack: +1
 ● Defender was in IP Level 2, 3, or 4 & did not retreat: +1
 ● For every combat odds < 1:4: -1
Effectiveness Check DRMs (apply to Attacker's roll only)
 ● Attacker's CRT result included an asterisk (*): -1
 ● Combat odds > 6:1: -1 for every 3 odds > 6:1

1914, Twilight in the East Charts

AUTUMN (GTs 28 to 47)

Procedure (10.10)
 1) Add unit sizes for both sides to find the Combat Magnitude.
 2) Determine the die roll modifier for each side.
 3) Each side rolls, finds the modified roll under the appropriate magnitude column, and reads to the right to find the steps lost for that side and any possible die roll modifier to the Post Combat Effectiveness Check.
 NOTE: Any die roll modifier applies only to one Force's Post Combat EC.
 DRMs (apply to both attacker's & defender's rolls) (10.10.3)
 ● CRT result:
 ● Opponent has no intrinsic artillery (2.1): -1
 ● Total terrain-modified strength of opponent's artillery that received APs: 0-2: +0 3-6: +1 7-11: +2 12-17: +3 18-24: +4 25+: +5
 ● Affected units are only German:
 DRMs (apply only to Attacker's roll)
 ● Any one participating defender is Demoralized: -3
 ● Defender in a Level 4 IP: +1
 ● For every combat odds < 6:1: -1 for every 3 odds > 6:1
 DRMs (apply only to Defender's roll)
 ● Defender receiving a Flank Attack: +2
 ● For every combat odds < 1:4: -1
 ● For every combat odds > 6:1: +1 for every 3 odds > 6:1

Effectiveness Check Failure Chart (11.3.2)

If force fails	Infantry die result on IP	If it's new	Or if failed
1, 2, 3	-1E	0	-1S + 0
4, 5, 6, 7	-2E + 0	0	-2S + 0 + D1
8, 9, 10, 11	-3E + 0	0	-2S + 0 + D2
12+	-4E + 0	0	-2S + 0 + D2

● -1 = Loss that number of Combat Effectiveness Levels.
 If the formation unit becomes Demoralized before it can lose at the indicated Effectiveness Levels, add to the result:
 ● For the 1st extra CEL loss: -1S + D1
 ● For the 2nd extra CEL loss: 0 + D2
 ● For the 3rd extra CEL loss: -1S
 ● -1 = Loss that number of Steps.
 D1 = Retreat 1 or 2 hexes.
 D2 = Retreat 1 or 2 hexes.
 Note: The "New Demoralized" column is cumulative with the main result; the "Status Demoralized" column is mutually exclusive with the other two.

Unable to Retreat Chart (12.2.6)

If the force...	Can't retreat even 1 hex	Permanent elimination
A CRT result	Can retreat at least 1 hex but not full distance	-1S & -1E per hex it fails to retreat. Convert each CEL a force unit's fulfill to a step loss
Failed Effectiveness Check	Can't retreat full distance	

The new charts are a nice touch in a magazine such as this – useful and attractive. They are not essential for those who own the game who may not wish to buy the mag, but for players who are wavering on the mag they might tip the balance.

(The designer also gives an interesting graphic design based explanation for the new charts in the magazine).

The other revision to TitE relates to victory conditions in the campaign. The campaign VP schedules have been changed to ensure that the early war plans are treated with the same importance in the whole campaign as they are in the shorter scenarios, and to give the players more incentive to fight for territory than existed in the original campaign rules (where force preservation could outweigh fighting over territory after the initial strategic plans had been achieved or abandoned).

One of the things I like about TitE is the way the victory points reward what would otherwise be a somewhat irrational 1914 style mentality in the players. Ensuring that occurs in the Grand Campaign makes sense from a design point of view, which is what this is intended to achieve. The changes are

accompanied by a well reasoned article which, by itself, is an interesting insight into the design process rather than just the outcome.

Disclaimer: I have not played a whole campaign, so I won't offer a view on the merits of these changes, other than to say that the rationale makes sense and the changes look very straightforward. And if they carry over into the campaign the tension from the shorter scenarios which I have played, that will be a good thing.

New scenarios (small and large)

Lodz and Krakau

The central reason that I bought Dispatches was the new Battles of Lodz and Krakau scenario. I will explain why.

The game as originally published was built around two excellent early war scenarios (Tannenberg and Galicia – three if you count the one map Galicia scenario separately) and the Grand Campaign. The two introductory scenarios were subsets of Tannenberg and Galicia.

In Tannenberg and in Galicia the opening two months or so of the campaign are played out (Russian v German in the North in Tannenberg; Russian v Austro-Hungarian in the South in Galicia). To go beyond the first couple of months you had to play the campaign.

Of course, after a couple of months grand campaigning, the correlation between the game situation and the historical situation at any given moment in time will have broken down. TitE did not come with any later campaign starts, or scenarios set beyond the initial period of the war.

Lodz and Krakau therefore fills an important gap in the repertoire of TitE scenarios. In effect it is a 16 November 1914 campaign start: the scenario has its own victory conditions, which attribute value to a number of locations important to these battles, but the whole map is in play (as are most of the counters – this is big). The early campaigns north and south have played themselves out. Autumn has arrived. The Germans have pulled off another undetected strategic concentration in preparation for an all-out offensive against the overextended Russians in Poland. The Austro-Hungarians have dragged themselves up off the carpet to try again.

For veteran TitE players this adds something very new – the campaign has been fast forwarded beyond the familiar opening exchanges. Many of the units on both sides are already weakened. These are not the fresh divisions of August. No-one still thinks the war will be over by Christmas.

And the campaign has moved westward. The battlegrounds here are on real estate that is not usually fought over in the early war scenarios.

So, for me, this scenario gives me a “new look” TitE. At twelve turns (compared to 47 for the campaign) it is also much more accessible in terms of playing time.

For new players the scenario is an opportunity to see the whole game at work in all its glory – but without diving into the deep end of the campaign.

Ivangorod

The Battle of Ivangorod is a true introductory scenario. It is not a cut down version of any other scenario. It is set at a time and place where no other scenario begins (around Ivangorod on the Vistula in late October 1914).

The scenario is three player turns (one and a half game turns) long. It has (by my count) a total of 23 combat units in play.

As the designer says, it is intended to give new players a feel for combat resolution in TitE.

This will be handy for introducing new players to TitE.

This is what the Ivangorod situation looks like (photo courtesy of Stephen Brasseur):



Battle of Ivangorod (markings show army boundaries drawn onto plexiglass)

The Austro-Hungarian Deployment Plan of Winter 1913/14

This is a historical “what if” scenario which is a companion piece to one of the articles in *Dispatches*. That article discusses some of the indecision and weaknesses of Conrad von Hötzendorf’s

dispositions of Austria-Hungary's armies at the commencement of hostilities in 1914. An earlier plan (Winter 1913/14) intended a greater forward concentration of Austro-Hungarian forces facing the Russians in Galicia.

In this scenario (which requires some counters to be made from scans), players can experiment with that deployment.

Analysing game play

A substantial chunk of *Dispatches* is devoted to an article by the designer entitled "*Playing Both Sides in Galicia: Players Notes for the Great Battle of Galicia Scenario*". Which is about as self-explanatory as a title can be.

The designer's notes in TitE contained some excellent general advice about the overall approach to playing the game. This article takes that into much more specific territory. The role, strengths and weaknesses of each of the opposing armies (four Austro-Hungarian and four Russian) are discussed separately and in some detail.

Galicia is a large scenario with disparate forces – the left wing of each side is generally on the offensive; the right generally on the defensive. The article looks at the terrain; the flow of reinforcements; the need to trade off between space and losses / disorganisation. In short, it is a comprehensive analysis of the scenario and how it is played – without attempting to posit a perfect 'solution' to the scenario.

The article is well illustrated with diagrams and tables (including a double page set of charts comparing relative strength of the different armies in the different sectors over the course of the scenario). An impressive accompaniment to TitE.

Historical articles

Dispatches was probably originally conceived as an outlet for the vast amount of knowledge with Michael Resch, Rian van Meeteren and others unlocked as they designed and developed TitE.

That shows in the number and quality of the historical articles that appear in the magazine as published – a number of which would warrant academic publication.

Rian van Meeteren's article on the way in which national and linguistic differences were accommodated in the military forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is a fascinating insight into the difficulties that faced the empire in such simple things as officers being able to communicate effectively with those under their command. And into the sophisticated way in which that was addressed in what amounted to an early form of multi-culturalism. It also contains an amazing graphic which superimposes onto a map of the Empire colours showing the (very many) dominant

ethnic-linguistic groups in different areas. (It also helped me to finally work out that someone whom an Austro-Hungarian called a “Ruthene”, I would call a “Ukrainian”).

Michael Resch’s articles on Ivangorod and Lodz / Krakau taught me new things about the October and November campaigning in the east, and of course accompany the new scenarios.

His analysis of the botched deployment of Austria-Hungary’s armies in 1914 is not complimentary to Conrad von Hötzendorf – and again there is a variant scenario in the magazine to show what might have been if the deployment had been better organised.

One of my favourite pieces, though, was the short piece on the Polish Legion in 1914 – which gives some interesting colour and life to a couple of otherwise non-descript units that show up on the Austro-Hungarian roster in the game, as well as providing a reminder of just how troubled was Poland’s rise to eventual independence.

Conclusion

I am an unashamed fan of *1914: Twilight in the East*. Perhaps it is no surprise that I am enjoying *1914: Dispatches*. Part of what I love about wargaming is the link between game and history.

In *Dispatches*, Michael Resch and Oregon ConSim Games make that link even more explicitly than they did in the original game: three new scenarios are all accompanied by learned articles on the battles (or hypotheses) being depicted in them.

For me, the Lodz-Krakau scenario – with its mid-November start – was worth the price of admission. I suspect that will hold true for many fans of the game. But there is more to the magazine than that scenario.

This is a quality publication – self-published but very professionally so. It reminds me of an ASL Journal in terms of the quality and quantity of its contents.

If you like TitE you will like *Dispatches*.

If you are on the fence about the game, the historical stuff and the article on the Galicia scenario will probably tip you over.

So be warned ...

Malcolm Cameron