

# Red Winter: AAR of “Battle For Hirvasvaara” scenario

Created by Mark Mokszycki (designer), August 2010



*Above: Finnish soldiers during the Winter War. Note the German steel helmets, white snow coats, and the Laplander boots with curled-up toes.*

The Red Winter Play Book has this to say about the scenario:

## **17.10 The Battle for Hirvasvaara (the final day- north sector)**

*The Finns and Soviets unexpectedly clash as each attempts to circle around the Lake Hirvasjärvi from the north. The outnumbered Finns are attempting to retake Hirvasvaara with minimal artillery support. This scenario is playable in less than an hour.*

Play notes: This is a short scenario involving a very small number of units. As such, it makes an excellent introduction to the game. It should give both players a sense of the importance of positioning their units / ZOCs. However, the low unit density gives it a "chess like" feel, and the outcome can swing suddenly based on only one or

two critical dice rolls. Both sides have a roughly equal shot at victory, but must employ very different strategies to win. It should take an hour or less to play to completion.

Duration: Turns 27-31 (5 turns)

Play area: Only hexes north of \*17, exclusive, are in play for this scenario. Additionally, neither player may move into or adjacent to either Hevossalmi Bridge hex, and the Finnish player may not move into or adjacent to the gravel pits, hotel, or nearby village hex at N16. *Design note: This is to simulate enemy units or eZOC in these locations.*



*Above: The contested settlement Hirvasvaara. The tourist hotel, and Lake Tolvajärvi beyond, lie off map at lower left.*

Play Sequence: The Soviet player is Player One. *Design note: Unlike the other fifth day scenarios, the Soviet player retains his Player One status in this scenario. I felt this was necessary to encourage historical “opening moves”.*



#### Soviet Setup:

The Soviet player sets up his units first in this scenario.

In Hirvasvaara (hex S11):

- 3/718 Battalion (all 4 units). All units of this battalion begin the scenario on their reduced strength sides.

Within 3 hexes of X12:

- 1/718 Battalion (all 4 units). Two units of this battalion begin the game on their reduced strength sides.
- 2/718 Battalion (all 4 units). Two units of this battalion (any one infantry company plus the MG unit) begin the game on their reduced strength sides.

In either of the above two setup areas:

- 718 Mortar unit

Soviet Reinforcements: 5/2/609 Infantry Company arrives as reinforcement at hex Q16 on turn 28. It enters the game on its reduced strength side.

The Soviet reinforcements that normally enter during this scenario, as given on the Turn Track, are not available.

Soviet Artillery: 2 x 76mm battalion.

Soviet 76mm Ammo: 3



#### Finnish Setup:

After the Soviet player's setup is complete, the Finnish player sets up his units.

Anywhere within 3 hexes of G9:

- 1/1/JR16 Infantry Company
- 2/1/JR16 Infantry Company
- Both MG units of 1/JR16
- Erp9 Battalion (all 3 units)

Finnish Reinforcements: The remaining unit of 1/JR16 Battalion, the infantry company 3/1/JR16, enters as a reinforcement (at the Finnish supply source hex) on turn 28.

The Finnish reinforcements that normally enter during this scenario, as given on the Turn Track, are not available.

Finnish Artillery: 1 x 76mm battery.

Finnish 76mm Ammo: 2

Special Rules:

Hex Q16 is treated as a Soviet supply source for all purposes.

No unit of the Soviet 3/718 Battalion may move more than 4 hexes from Hirvasvaara (S11) at any time during the scenario. This restriction also applies to retreats; units that would be forced to retreat outside this area must instead take step reductions. *Historical note: This battalion was under orders to defend the settlement.*



No Finnish unit may move into or adjacent to the following hexes: The gravel pits, the hotel, the Soviet supply source hex (Q16). *Historical note: A fierce battle was raging in this area, and these hexes were Soviet controlled.*

The Soviet player may not commit armor to the battle in this scenario.

Two Digging-In markers are available to the Soviets. Although no Soviet units begin the scenario dug-in, they may attempt to do so. The Finns may not dig in.

The Replacement points normally available on turn 28 are not available to either side in this scenario.

Finns may not change operational stance. As mentioned previously, Soviets go first in the Turn Sequence throughout the scenario.

Keep in mind that it is Dec. 12 and therefore the standard rules for Finnish morale bonus and the Soviet -1 DRM recovery penalty apply throughout the scenario.

Victory:

Players do *not* score VPs for enemy losses per 17.0.3 in this scenario. Instead, both players score VPs at the end of the scenario as follows:

- 1 VP for each enemy unit destroyed (not merely reduced).
- Control of Hirvasvaara is worth 4 VPs to the Finns, and 2 VPs to the Soviets. If the hex is controlled but OOS to the controlling side, it is worth only half the normal amount (2 VPs for Finns, 1 VP for Soviets).

The Soviets also score points as follows:

- one half VP for each full strength infantry or MG unit which exits the map at any time during the game via hex N16. Reduced units do not score VPs for exiting the map. *Historical note: Troops were desperately needed for the defense at the hotel.*
- 1 VP if no Soviet unit has been destroyed at the end of the game (reduced does not count). *Design note: This forces the Finns to go on the offensive. If they merely sit back and play it safe, they'll lose.*

The Finnish player automatically loses the game the instant a full strength Soviet unit enters the Finnish supply source hex.

The player with the most VPs at the end of the final turn is declared the winner. A draw is possible.

Strategic notes:

The Finns should be able to capture and hold the Hirvasvaara settlement about one game in three. Most games will see the Finns accumulating points via kills, but the Soviets will still have the 2 points for the settlement. A fair number of games will see the Finns capture the settlement, only to lose it again by the final turn. Victories should be split about 50-50, with draws being fairly common.

As the Finns, you are the aggressors in this scenario. Your assaults (at a 3R column shift due to morale plus SMG bonus) are deadly- use them whenever you can. Remember: the enemy cannot commit support in an assault. Your normal combats are also quite effective (at 1R), but they are somewhat mitigated by the Soviet support- especially those annoying mortars! Don't forget that there are two paths to victory. If the settlement seems unobtainable, go for the win via kills.

As the Soviets, you'll need to decide where to defend. If you play aggressively, you'll lose. You'll also need to find a compromise between giving up ground and taking losses to protect the settlement. When possible, try to put your forward units where the Finns won't be able to assault them. One attack per turn is bad enough, and that 3R modifier is a killer! Remember to use your mortar unit for support as often as possible. You'll find it can really blunt the Finns' teeth in regular combats. Save it for defensive support when possible. If the Finns are doing poorly and have lost some units, you might want to consider chasing them down for more kills, but only if you can clearly overwhelm a reduced unit or two.

Historical notes:

The battle was a confused affair for both sides. After the initial encounter, in which both sides were surprised, many of the Finns retreated back to the main road. However, their right flank did not realize this and proceeded to capture Hirvasvaara. Hopelessly outnumbered, the Finns dug in and managed to tie down a large number of Soviets. See the historical notes for the Fifth Day scenario (17.12) for details.

Now, on to the AAR!



**Setup.** The players setup their units accordingly:



Note that the Finnish player has chosen to divide his forces, with one battalion-sized task force in each of the two possible setup areas.

The Finnish control markers at bottom designate the playable map area for this scenario. A Soviet control marker has been added to the Soviet supply source hex (also where the Soviet reinforcements enter the map).

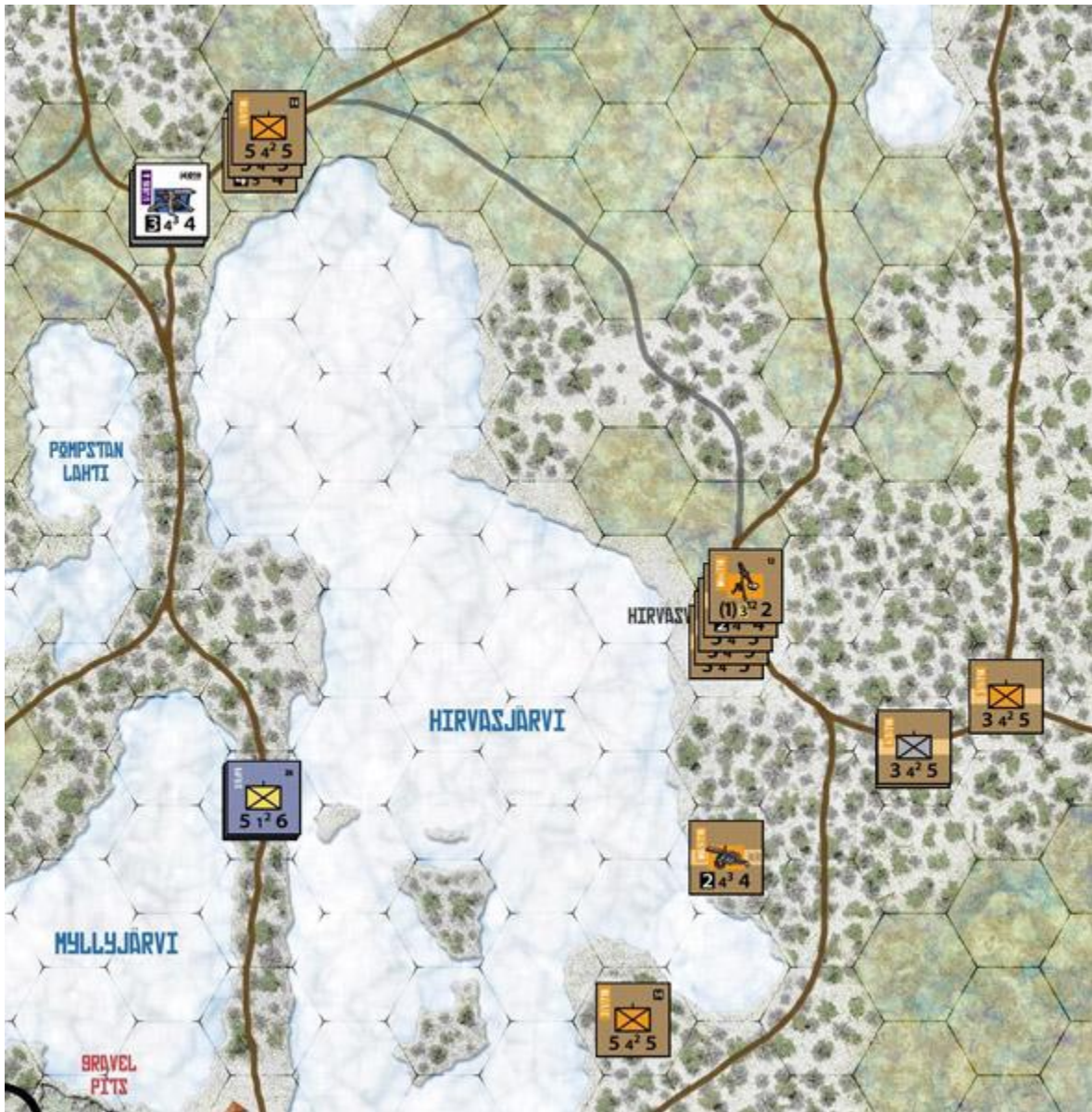
**Soviet Turn 27.** The Soviets attempt recovery with their reduced infantry units, but with a slim 1 in 6 chance of success. A minus one DRM applies because it is December 12<sup>th</sup>. *Historical note: The Soviets are becoming demoralized and exhausted, and replacement troops are thinning.* The -1 penalty means the Soviets need to be 4 or more hexes from all enemies just to have a 1 in 6 chance of successfully recovering to full strength.

The Soviet player moves some of his MG units and full strength infantry companies to cover the possible Finnish approaches to the settlement.



Through careful positioning, the Soviet player has denied the Finns access to the far shore of Lake Hirvasjärvi. Only the shoreline north of Hirvasvaara is undefended, and the Finns will not have enough Movement Points to reach it in a single turn.

**Finnish Turn 27.** The Finns move adjacent to the Soviet stack in the north, but do not have enough MPs to conduct an assault. The Finnish independent battalion to the south stages itself for a lake crossing.



The Finns do not declare any combats this turn. A combat in the north would, at best, push the Soviets back a hex or two. At worst, it would cause a step reduction to a full strength Finnish unit. The Finns play it safe in order to set up for what they do best- outmaneuvering their opponent, and conducting assaults.

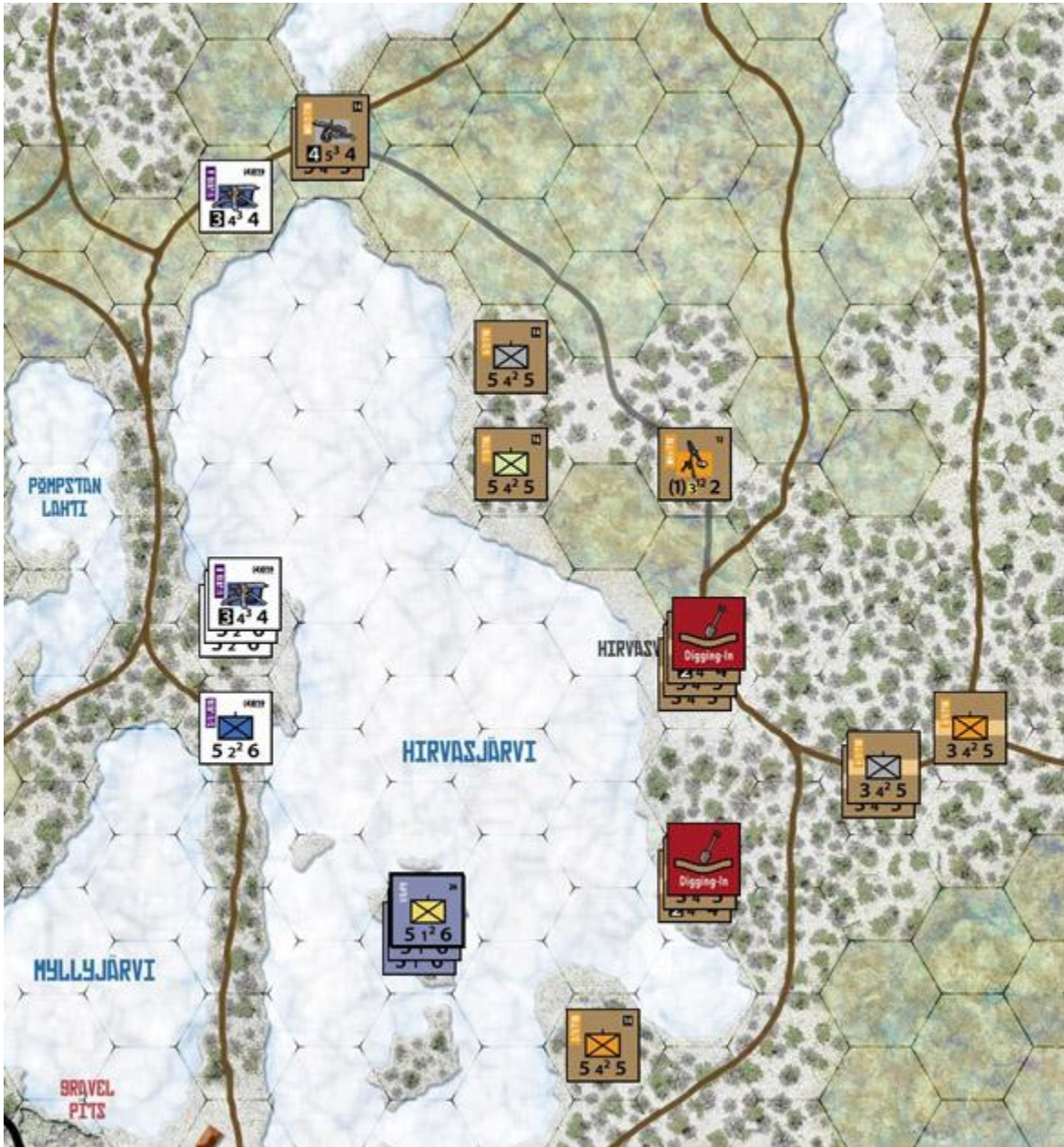
**Soviet Turn 28:** The Soviet stack in the north backs up a bit in order to avoid an assault. Due to the difficult terrain (suo, or wetland in English) the Finns would not have enough MPs to move adjacent and assault in a single turn. The Soviets wish to avoid being assaulted whenever possible. This is because the Finns receive a 1R column shift in assaults, known as the “submachine gun bonus.” Additionally, the Finns’ 1R morale bonus on December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> doubles to 2R in assaults. This means the Finns’ net a whopping 3R in assaults! Thus, even an attack with base odds of 1:2 becomes a 3:1.



The Soviets also shift some units to the shoreline north of Hirvasvaara, which will be accessible to the Finns on their next Action Phase. They move their mortars northward, within 6 hexes of the north end of the lake, should the Finns decide to attack there. The reduced Soviet infantry companies attempt to recover again, but without success. The Soviets begin digging in at

Hirvasvaara, and along the shoreline just to its south. Note that the Soviets have only two Digging-In markers available in this scenario. Limiting the number of available markers was an intentional design decision which reflects the Red Army's overall stance; they were prepared for a quick offensive in the Winter War, and unprepared to shift to the defense.

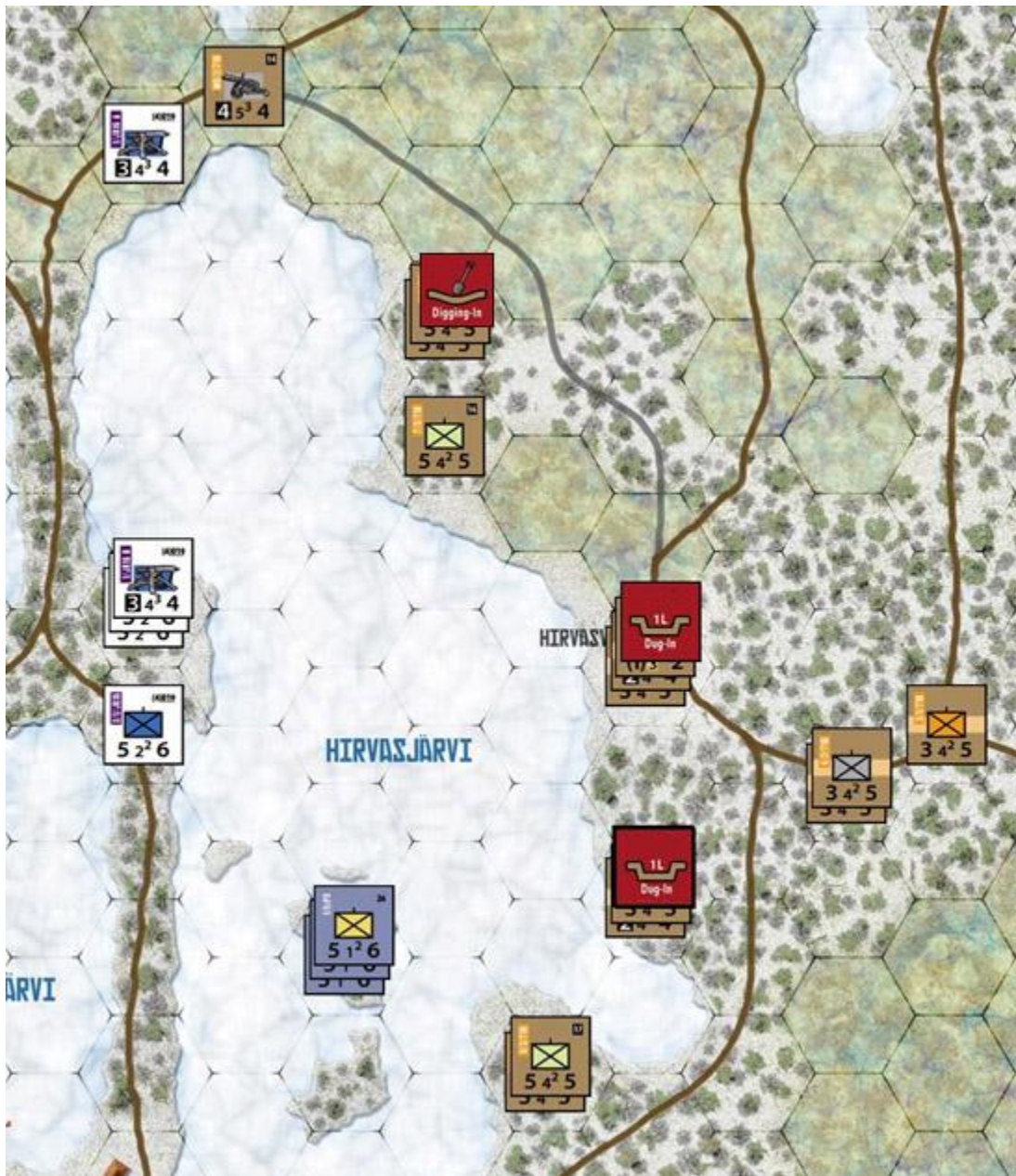
**Finnish Turn 28.** The Finns choose to ignore the Soviet stack in the north, leaving behind a MG unit to keep the Soviets honest (since the Soviets automatically win if they capture the Finnish supply source hex). The remaining JR16 units prepare for a lake crossing north of Hirvasvaara.



Near the south end of the lake, the Finnish independent battalion (minus one company) situates itself on a small islet in preparation for an assault the following turn. They are joined by the

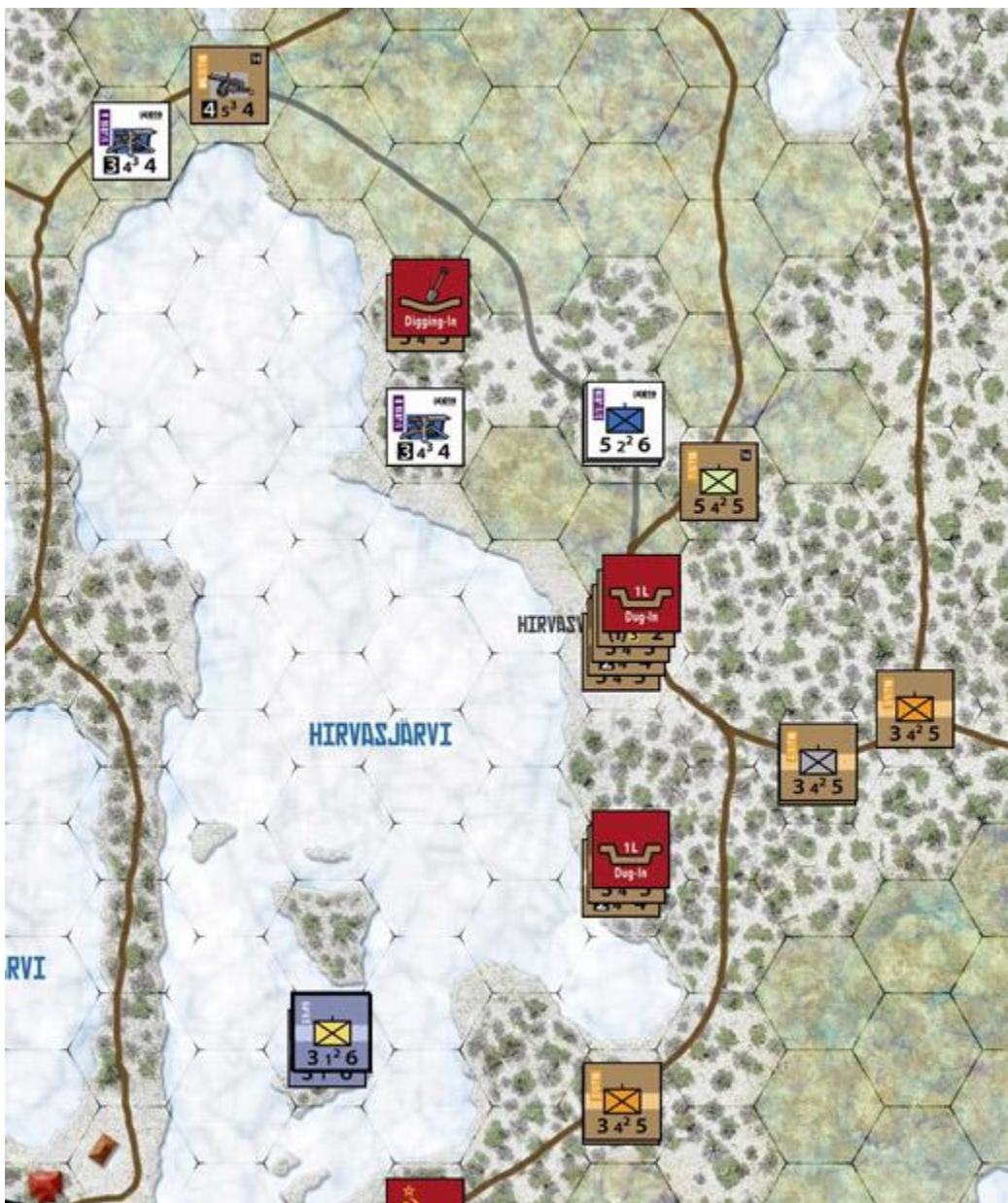
remaining company, which enters the map as a reinforcement this turn, and is able to use Extended Movement along the road to reach the front.

**Soviet Turn 29.** The Soviets brace themselves for the inevitable assaults. They do this by finishing Digging In at and south of Hirvasvaara, beginning to Dig In on the north coastline, recovering reduced units, and shuffling an additional infantry company to the far south, where the defense is weakest. *Errata: The Soviets should only have 3 Digging In markers available in this scenario, thus the placement of the marker along the north coastline was illegal. I didn't catch this until after completion of the AAR. As it turns out, the marker was irrelevant to the outcome of the game; the Soviets never finished digging in at that location.*



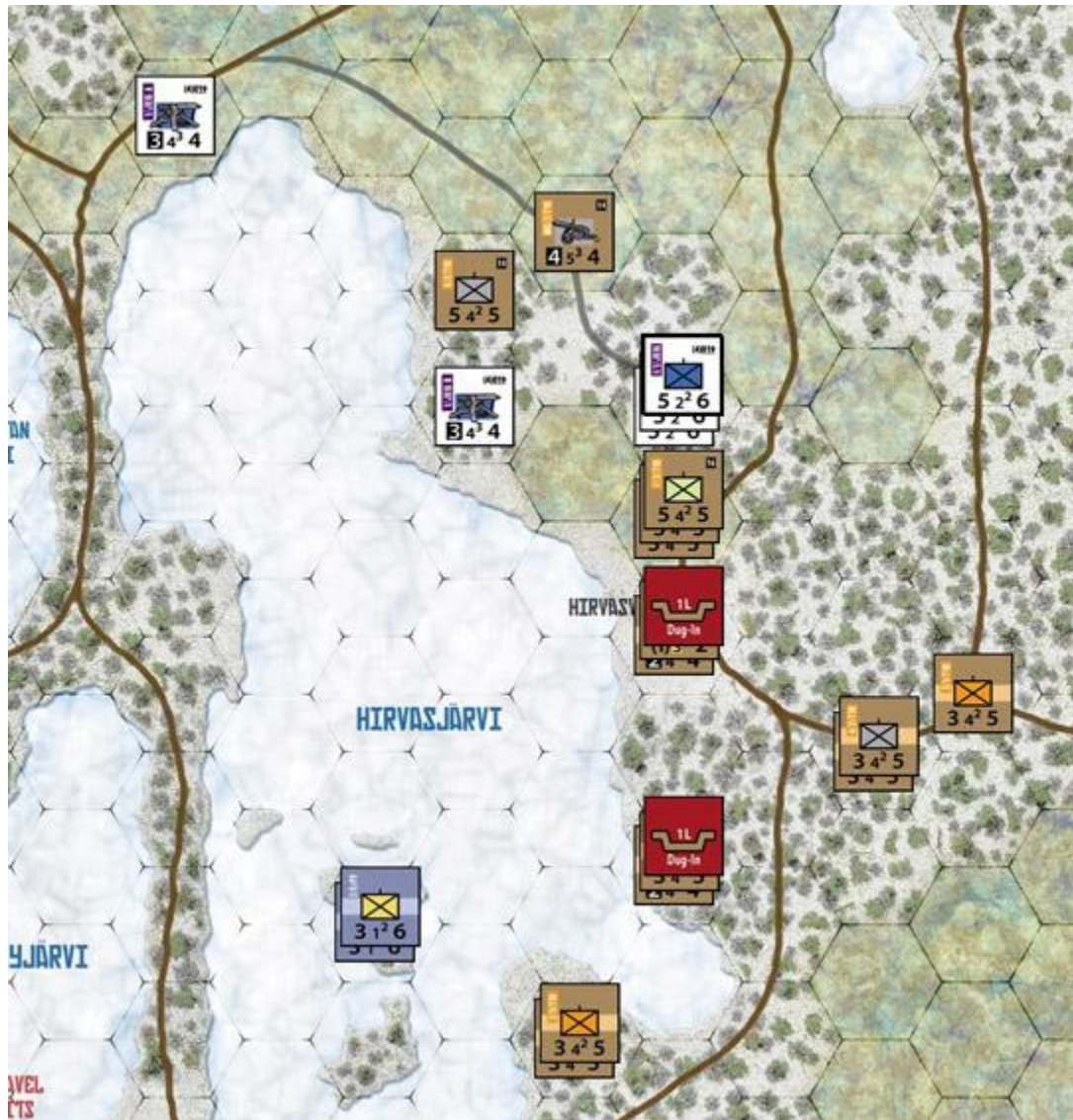
**Finnish Turn 29.** The Finns assault from the ice in the far south, with losses to both sides. The Soviets opt to take their loss as a step reduction, rather than retreat and allow the Finns to come ashore. The Finns also assault and come ashore north of Hirvasvaara. This time the Finns come ashore intact, and the Soviets retreat and take a step reduction.

During the Combat Phase, the Finns in the south attack the two reduced Soviet infantry companies, but stiff resistance from the Soviet artillery, in conjunction with the mortars and MGs/LMGs to the north, cut the Finns to ribbons before they can get off the ice. One Finnish company is utterly destroyed, and the other two fall back to the islet to regroup. It is a crippling blow for the Finns. But in the north, the Finns attack the retreated Soviet units and, with help from their meager artillery, manage to destroy one. All is not lost for the Finns.



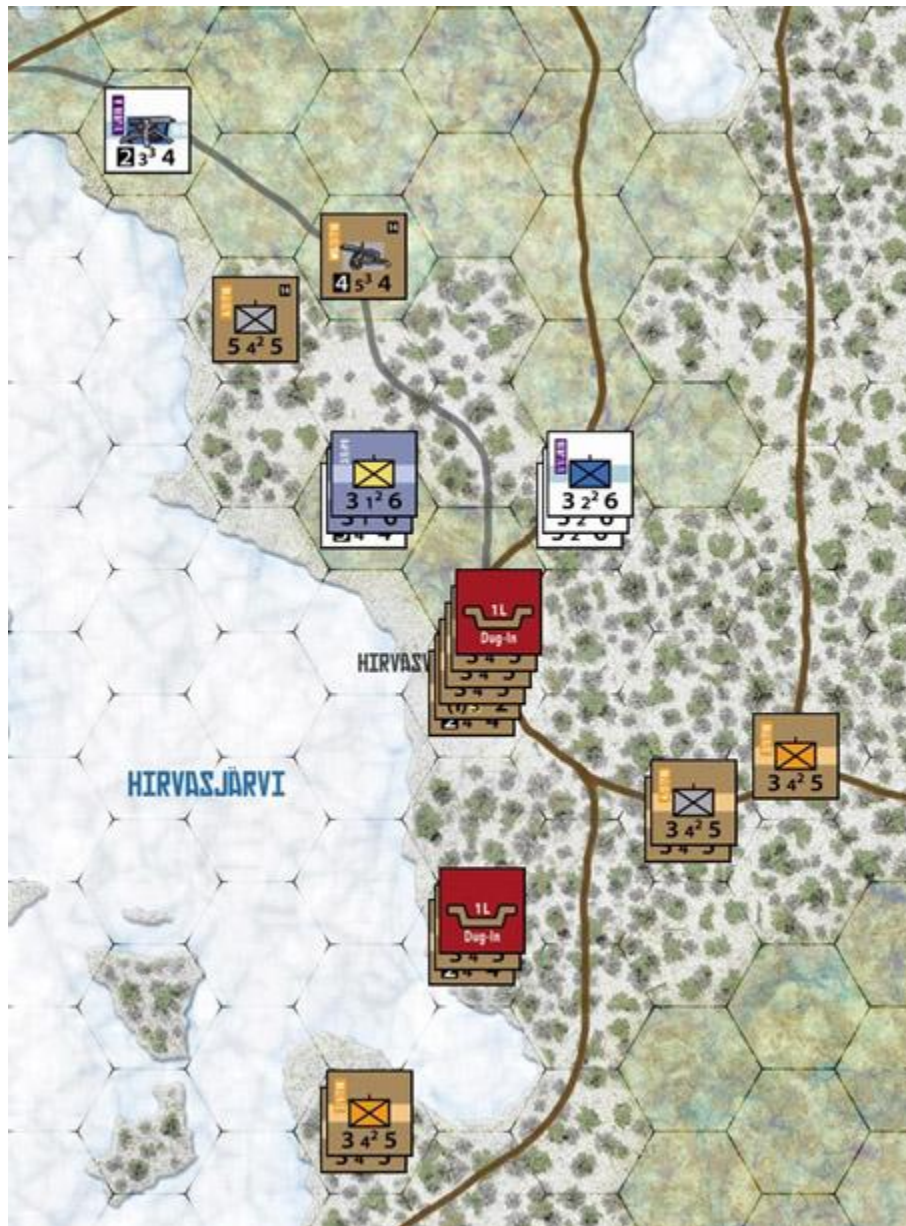
**Soviet Turn 30.** Now forced to keep pressure on the Finns lest they capture the settlement, the Soviets pull back their remaining forces from the north in order to capture the Finns in a pincer move.

In the south, the Soviets return to their former position along the shore, while all reduced infantry companies try, yet again, to recover.

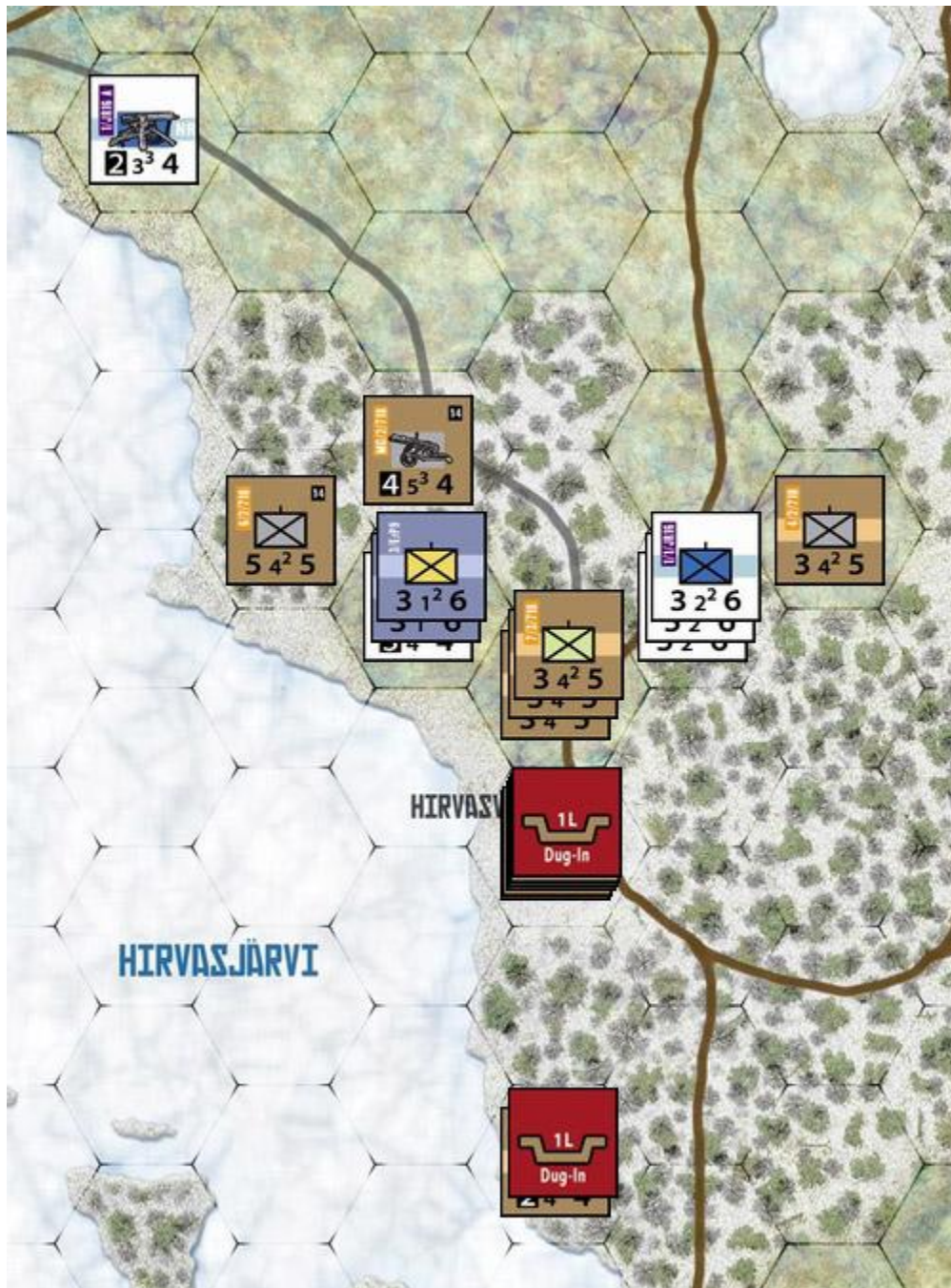


The combat in the north goes poorly, and the Soviets end up the worse for it. The net result of the combat is one reduced Soviet unit.

**Finnish Turn 30.** Rethinking their tactics on-the-fly, the Finnish player sends the reduced infantry of ErP9 from the islet in the south to the unguarded region of wooded shoreline north of the Hirvasvaara settlement. They come ashore unopposed by eZOC. The Finnish JR16 Battalion launches an assault against the adjacent Soviet battalion and forces it to retreat into the Hirvasvaara hex.



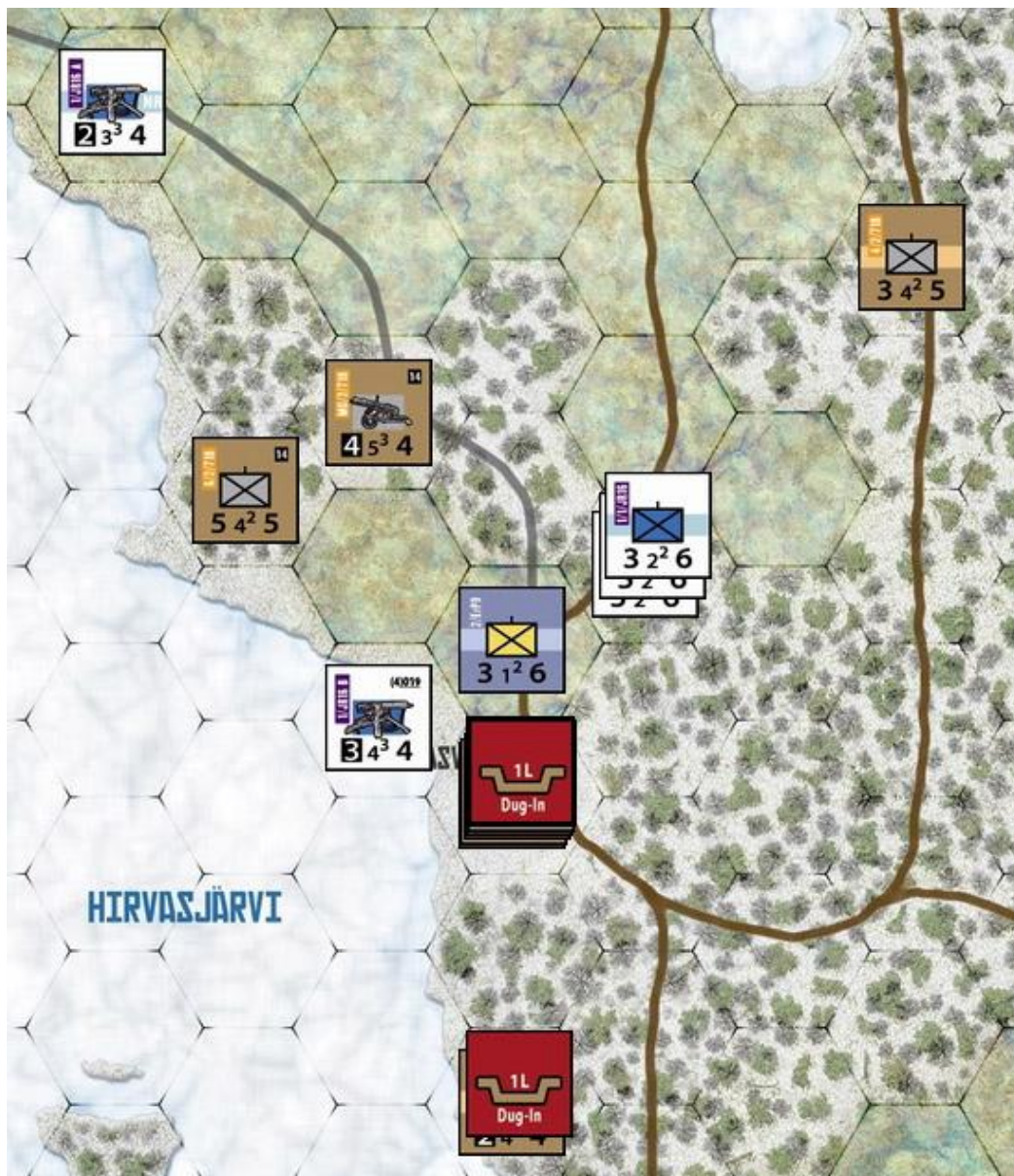
**Soviet Turn 31.** Unwilling to give up the settlement without a fight, the Soviets line up to make a stand in the hex north of and adjacent to Hirvasvaara. They also move in their units from the northwest in order to attempt another pincer attack against ErP9. One of the reduced infantry companies along the road, east of Hirvasvaara, forgoes its recovery attempt in order to form the anchor of a second pincer attack, against JR16.



The combat against ErP9 goes poorly, the net result being another reduced Soviet unit. The combat vs. JR16 is successful, if unspectacular. A Finnish company, unable to retreat, is

reduced. Every step counts for the Soviet player. The Finns are very close to their 4 Victory Point prize, but their fangs are becoming blunted by several turns of slow wear and tear.

**Finnish Turn 31 (final game turn).** The Finns assault the Soviet stack; it loses a step and retreats into the settlement. The Finns also launch an overwhelming 6:1 assault against the lone reduced Soviet infantry unit to the east, but the attack goes awry and the unit manages to retreat intact. If the game were to end now, it would be a draw. During the Combat Phase, the Finns launch a desperate attack against Hirvasvaara, through a hail of artillery shells, with a resulting loss of Soviet lives. Another Soviet unit is eliminated, but the Soviets still refuse to give up the settlement. The scenario ends.



**Scoring.** The Soviets score 2 VPs for control of Hirvasvaara, plus 2 for two destroyed Finnish units (no units exited the map for VPs) = 4 VPs

The Finns score 5 VPs for destroying five Soviet units = 5 VPs.

Final score = 4:5, for a narrow Finnish victory.



*Above: Fallen soldiers of the Red Army.*

**Final Thoughts.** This playing was pretty representative of my experiences with this scenario. Both sides took a few unnecessary risks, thus the total number of casualties was a tad higher than usual. I feel the scenario is well balanced, and a game between two seasoned players will often end in a draw. I believe that the scenario earns its inclusion in the published release for two main reasons. It demonstrates the historical situation in the north on the morning of December 12<sup>th</sup>. It also functions as a learning scenario. Apart from serving as a simple and concise template for exploring the game mechanics, the victory conditions necessitate an understanding of assaults, and put a real premium on unit placement.

Personally, I think a small scenario such as this lacks the dynamics and “fun factor” of the larger scenarios. That is not to imply that it is not still fun and satisfying in its own way. I would recommend new players use it as a learning tool, play it a few times, then move on to the real meat and potatoes of the game.

I hope you've enjoyed the AAR. Thanks for looking!

Mark

**More info on Red Winter.** For those interested in learning more about the game, please join us at the Red Winter forum at Consimworld:

<http://talk.consimworld.com/WebX?8@434.daUqedxA9aW.0@.1dd371...>

The current game rules are posted at the above link, as well as tons of screenshots, articles, artwork, Winter War era photos, and several illustrated AAR's like this one covering different scenarios.

Banners by Rodger MacGowan. Banners include artwork by Michael Evans.

**Red Winter**

Russo-Finnish War, 1939

The Attack at Tolvajärvi, Finland  
8-12 December 1939

Company Level Combat

P500

**GAME SCALE – Grand Tactical**

**UNIT:** Company; Section; Platoon

**PLAYERS:** 1-2

**PLAYING TIME:** 30-minutes to 6-hours

**TIME:** 90 minutes per turn

**MAP:** 425 yards per hex

**RANGE OF WEAPONS:**

- 1 hex – rifles (adjacent combats only)
- 2 hexes – light machine guns
- 3 hexes – heavy machine guns & Russian tanks
- 6 hexes – medium mortars
- 12 hexes – heavy mortars

• Close range weapons figure into the rules for assaults

P500 Briefing 08

**Red Winter**  
RUSSO-FINNISH WAR  
8-12 December 1939

**Solitaire – Red Winter**

**Solitaire**

Designed primarily as a 2-player game, **Red Winter** is also ideal for **solitaire play** because there are NO cards or hidden information of any kind. The "fog of war" comes in part from the units' generous movement allowances during night game turns, and the Finns' ability to strike nearly any hex on the map via night raids. These and other mechanics provide a game with continually shifting opportunities.

"fog of war"

Optional fog of war rules are in the Play Book for players wishing to explore this option.

P500 Briefing 13

**Red Winter**  
RUSSO-FINNISH WAR  
8-12 December 1939