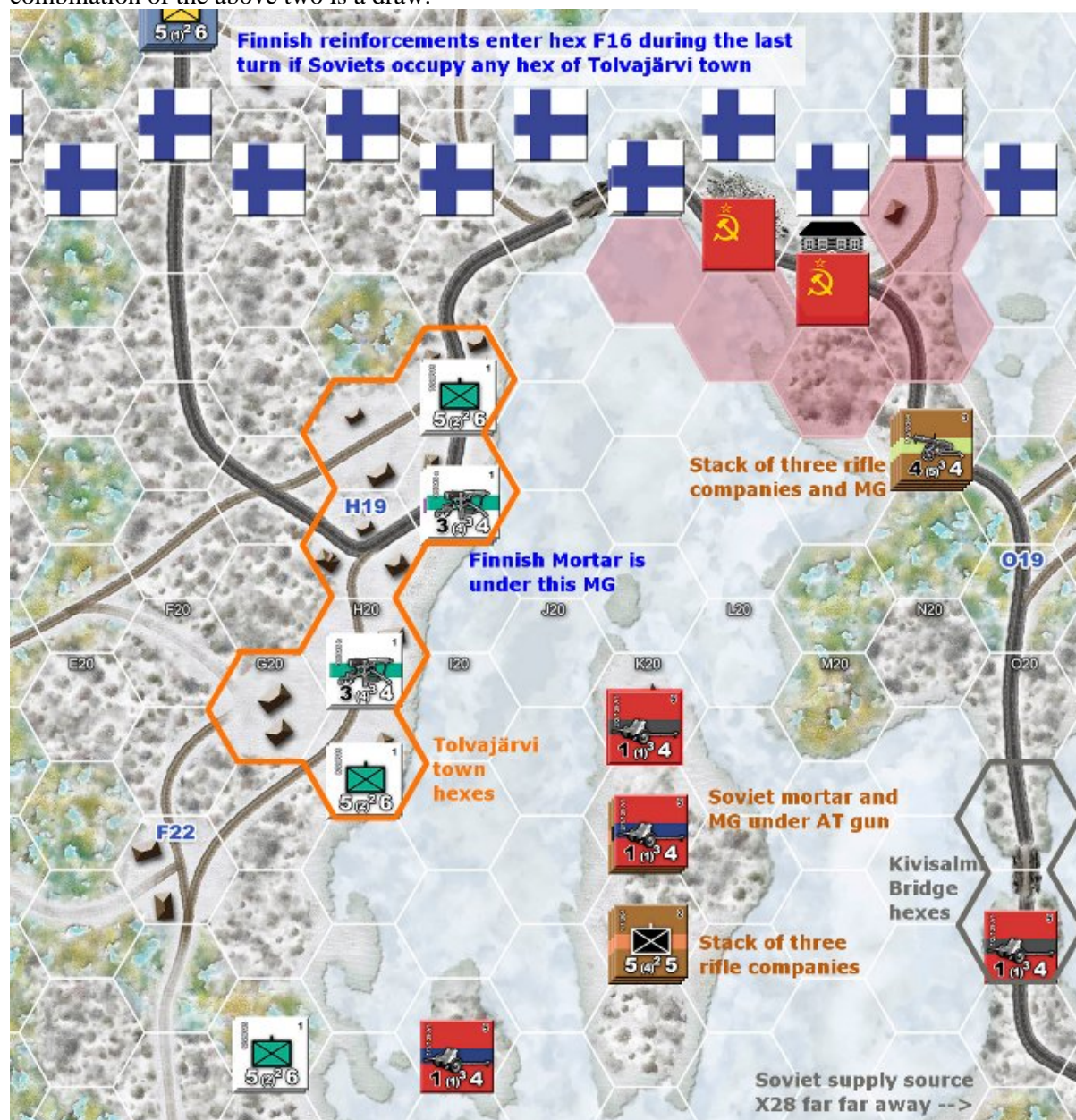


Red Winter: Firefight on ice scenario AAR

- by Vesa Teräs (assistant researcher)

This is a hypothetical variant of the Lake Crossing scenario which examines what might have happened had the Soviets waited until later in the day on the 11th to launch their attack across the ice. By waiting, the Soviets would have had time to fully recover their units, but they also would have been crossing the ice in broad daylight. The delay also might have given the Finnish Erp9 battalion time to reach the battlefield.

That's how Mark Mokszycki, the game's designer, has described the scenario in the Red Winter rulebook. The Scenario is only 4 turns long and has a very small number of units. Yet there are a great variety of units involved, including rifle, MG and mortar companies for both sides and three AT-guns for Soviets which are handy in exerting zones of control. The play area is also limited to the southern half of the whole map. The Finns win automatic victory the instant they eliminate three Soviet infantry or MG units or enter the Soviet supply source at hex X28. Otherwise the game continues until the end of the fourth turn. Finns can still win if they are the last ones to occupy either of the Kivisalmi bridge hexes. Soviets win if they occupy any of the Tolvajärvi town hexes. Any other result or combination of the above two is a draw.



Here is the setup before the first Soviet turn. The hexes near Hotel and gravel pit are under Soviet ZOCs since they occupied those two locations at the time. In the screenshot I have defined some areas

and what's in each stack. The Finnish units are all dug-in. The Finnish control markers were used as reminders to denote the boundary of the playable map area.

Turn 1

Turn 1 for this scenario is actually the turn 29 on the turn track. The Soviets began their turn by initiating two separate attacks against both northern and southern ends of Tolvajärvi town. Another option would have been one strong thrust through the middle of the lake. Widespread positions of the Finns guaranteed that Soviets hit the Finnish ZOCs on Ice and have to start their combats on ice and with halved strength because of it. The Soviet AT-guns were also moved cleverly next to Finnish units in center of the town to prevent ranged support from the Finns' LMGs and MGs.

The Soviet attacks on both ends of the lake weren't too tough on Finns and Finns only lost 1 step in both combats. That means the rifle companies got flipped but stayed in their positions to keep Soviets still on ice. The Soviet ranged support wasn't very effective but Finns managed to cause one step reduction with their very limited artillery support before the actual combat rolls.

The Finns then made their counterattacks in south and against one AT-gun in hex I19. The Finns were also supposed to attack in the northern end of town too but they never got their commands. I sent the game file to Mark for resolving possible Soviet ranged support and the actual combats after that and then to continue straight ahead with the next Soviet turn. In the heat of the battle Mark missed my mention of that northern attack at the end of one long sentence I used in my log file and the combat wasn't resolved at all. Well that's one of the dangers when playing by e-mail and trying to keep the number of game files to something reasonable. Finns managed to eliminate that AT-gun on ice easily and the southern attack forced one Soviet unit to retreat further away from town borders. Destroying the AT-gun didn't count against the three eliminated Soviet units for automatic victory but was necessary to free ranged support from adjacent units.



The screenshot is after turn 1.

Turn 2

The Soviets begin their turn by moving into slightly better positions and attacking the now lonely Finnish mortar in the north effectively. I will still need my mortar as all my artillery is gone so it will take the loss as a retreat. Unfortunately that allows Soviets to enter Tolvajärvi town. In the southern end of town the Soviet attack is futile, with the only result being one step reduction for Soviets. So far the things appear relatively good for Finns...

Finns will receive their final turn reinforcements as the conditions are met: Soviets occupy one or more town hexes. First however two MGs and a rifle company I18 hex assault the Soviet stack to soften them up. With 0/2 result Soviets have to retreat through my ZOC and as their all units in the stack are already flipped, one of them is eliminated. One down two more still to go for automatic victory. Soviets retreat into the crossroad at G18 to avoid "on ice" modifiers for Finnish attacks. This location also prevents reinforcements to reach southern end of town in attempt to drive rest of the Soviets out of town.

Next the lonely rifle company in north and the reinforcements move around the Soviets in crossroads to finish them in concentric attack. In the 3:1 column the dice fell on snake eyes again forcing a step reduction and retreat for newly arrived reinforcements. That also confirmed the Soviet victory for this scenario.



Conclusions

The outcome of this scenario - as well as its more historic counterpart "Lake Crossing" - depends quite a lot on small number of die rolls. This fact is also mentioned in the scenario descriptions which also states that the scenario is primarily intended as a learning scenario rather than competitive play. Though the Finns lost this particular game the scenario seems to slightly favor the Finns with properly set up defense lines to keep Soviets on ice for long enough.

Reaching the Soviet supply source in this scenario is more or less theoretical option as it is so far away. In the historical Lake Crossing scenario I gained a victory versus Mark by that strategy, mostly because of there were no Soviet units set up to effectively prevent it. That scenario begins with night turn and double movement for units, giving a nice head start for single Finnish unit to race for occupying that distant hex. This could be also quite easily prevented by Soviet player by placing one AT-gun in some nice spot to create ZOC to stop such a sprint.

Reaching Kivisalmi Bridge is also rather difficult objective for Finns as that would mean pretty much crossing the lake through the Soviets milling around there. So in my opinion the best tactic for Finns is to achieve an automatic victory by eliminating three Soviet rifle or MG companies. Once the Soviets are stopped on ice and softened up there, Finns could gather up their strength to finish most prominent looking Soviet units.