

PATHS OF GLORY DESIGN NOTES

The Map

The map for PoG went through several different incarnations, including a hex map and an area version before evolving into the one you have (I hope) set up on your game table. The main advantage of a point to point movement system is it allows the designer to focus. No elaborate supply or terrain rules are required to prevent unrealistic strategic operations or highlight the importance of key locations; the map does it for you.

The map for PoG was designed to allow all the actual campaigns of WWI to develop historically, while giving realistic room for alternative campaigns. To do this I “played” historical versions of the game, adding or deleting spaces and connections until I was satisfied with the results.

The Order of Battle

The Order of Battle for PoG does not include every army designation found in WWI. The French for example, formed an 8th Army in 1914 not found in the game. Instead the OB represents all the most important formations, while maintaining the relative strengths between the different powers. So in game terms the French 8th would be represented by a couple of corps.

Army units represent troops supported by heavy artillery, air, and other assets. (The Serbs are the sole exception-being given army status based on their fighting record in the war.) Corps units are smaller bodies of troops, armies with weaker command and logistical capabilities, and the remains of armies after heavy losses. In a more abstract sense, through the use of the Reserve Box corps represent the ability of a nation to support the demands of modern industrialized war. This ties in with the Replacement system to give players a limited form of control over their wartime economies.

What If?

Before the Schlieffen Plan Germany had a defensive strategy in the west. Schlieffen’s original version called for a German invasion of Holland as well as Belgium. In 1914 Italy was supposedly allied to Germany. Romania swung back and forth between the Central Powers and the Allies in 1914-15. Why then in PoG can’t Germany open the war with its armies deployed to the east, or invade Holland? Why can’t Italy or Romania join the Central Powers?

Though PoG allows players to explore a wide range of what ifs? it deliberately excludes others. Some were excluded because they were judged too unlikely to be worth bothering with. Italy, despite its treaty with Germany, was almost certain to join the war on the side of the Central Powers only if the Allies had already clearly lost (as in 1940). Since what Italy wanted most was territory under Austrian control, the Allies had the upper hand diplomatically. It is always easier to offer an enemy’s lands as a bribe.

Romania, though it veered back and forth following the fortunes of war, was also unlikely to fight on the side of the Central Powers because it too wanted Austro-Hungarian lands. In any case what the Central Powers really desired from Romania was not her inept armies, but her oil and wheat. If Romania is still neutral when the Tsar falls, she economically becomes a German vassal, represented by the two Victory Point award.

Other what ifs? were excluded as outside the scope of the game. Not simply the course, but the cause of the war depended on the pre-war plans drawn up by both sides. If the Germans had never adopted the Schlieffen Plan, there might have been no war in 1914. Certainly if a war had taken place it would be so different as to require a new deck of cards.

Other what ifs? were dropped because in game terms they made so little sense you'd have to mandate a player to do them. The invasion of Holland falls under this heading; for a limited tactical advantage the Germans would add a strategic headache and more diplomatic damage (which is why Moltke the Younger dropped the passage through Holland in the first place).

Finally, certain possibilities were excluded to counter player hindsight and also to prevent serious damage to play balance. Perhaps as some still argue, Schlieffen's original plan could have won the war in 1914. In a game covering all of WWI it wouldn't make much sense to allow the Germans a serious shot at winning on turn 2.

War Status or Why The Bolshevik Revolution Depends on Sinking the Lusitania.

War Status is one of the most important mechanics in PoG, and admittedly one of the most abstract. But the War Status numbers were not simply assigned randomly to various events. A great deal of thought (and trial and error) went into them.

War Status in PoG has several elements. First, it represents the progression of each alliance towards a state of modern industrialized Total War. For example, War Status increases when the British 1st and Second Armies enter play because of the importance of Britain's break from its traditional reliance on sea power.

Second, through the rules for Combined War Status, it shows the various effects of such a prolonged and costly struggle on national morale, politics, and diplomacy. As the intensity of the war increases unstable Russia grows more vulnerable (the Russian Capitulation track) while the United States finds it increasingly difficult to stay out of the war (through the US Entry track). In this way the Great Retreat adds War Status because refugees in western Russia undermine Russian morale, while the Lusitania increases War Status because it pushes the US towards joining the Allies. Increased CP play of War Status to weaken Russia increases the chance of US Entry. Likewise Allied action to hurry the US into the war increases the chance of Russia's exit. This see-saw effect not only presents an interesting game problem for both players, but effectively captures the dynamic that led to both US entry and the Fall of the Tsar in the space of a few weeks

Finally, through the Armistice mechanism, the effect of war weariness outside Russia is introduced. If the war ends in an Armistice (historically on turn 19) the losing side is considered to have asked for terms. If neither side is winning at the point, either negotiation or mutual exhaustion has brought the war to a close.

Victory Conditions

The Victory Conditions were designed both in the interests of play balance, as a measure against the historical outcome, and to provide operational reasons to fight certain campaigns on the ground. For example, the Turks kept a full corps at Medina throughout the war-by making it a VP space they have reason to do so in the game.

The Peace Term rules really represent the propaganda war, as much internal as external, between the two sides. As in the real war, a player will make an offer of peace only when he feels he is in a position of strength (ahead in VPs). The purpose of such an offer is to score propaganda points (in the game a VP) though if the offer is too obviously insincere it can backfire (costing a VP). If a Peace Offer is accepted real diplomacy has replaced posturing-and though the side that made the offer may be assumed to get the better of the resulting deal, in game terms the result is a draw because you've failed to turn an edge into outright victory. It is against the spirit of the game, btw, to accept a Peace Offer if you still think you have a chance to win.