

Columna Adelantar!

By Neil Patterson

For many gamers, the ultimate aim is that of the campaign, where strategic moves lead to tabletop battles, the outcome of which determine success or failure in a wider context and which can produce more interesting games with each sides' players providing their own "victory conditions" or reasons for engagement.

For many gamers however, this remains an unfulfilled dream. Lack of time or enthusiasm can prevent a campaign taking off, or a detailed campaign (the product of much hard work by the organiser) collapse through apathy, length of time needed to play it or the situation where one side reaches a position of inevitable defeat very early on. All these situations can lead to frustration & lack of enthusiasm for future campaigns.

One solution is the "one day campaign", where all strategic & tactical campaign moves are played out in one day. Another is the "mini-campaign", where a very narrow strategic area or campaign is chosen. Often one problem with this approach, is that not only is much pre- preparation needed, but also large quantities of figures, vehicles, terrain etc. This is less of a problem if it is a "club effort".

In my experience, enthusiasts for the SCW are often in a minority in a club, or it is a period played infrequently. This leads to the situation that not only are troops & vehicles etc limited in quantity (especially when beginning the period), but that players often lack the enthusiasm or interest in the period necessary to sustain a large campaign game. Thus, such SCW games as are played are "one offs", often hypothetical, & reliant on the ingenuity of the organiser to sustain interest with engaging scenarios. Too often, the result is that the organiser of the game has to come up with a different situation for each game, which often requires a lot of work beforehand, or face reluctant or poorly motivated players.

The solution I have reached to overcome this owes much inspiration to an article by Richard Marsh in an old copy of "Wargames World" in which he outlined a WW2 game set in Tunisia, based around the Kasserine battles. In this campaign, designed to be played solo, he describes how his aim was to produce a system "like a boxed boardgame, that could be played over & over with a different result each time".

The aim was to produce a system that will give a campaign-like game which can be played out in a day where the players have to make the sort of decisions found in a larger campaign, but which can be set up with a minimum of preparation. It should also be one which generates interesting tabletop games, & be different each time it is played.

What struck me about the early days of the SCW was the way improvised columns struck out, often covering vast distances with little resemblance to later formal campaigning, more concerned with reaching a strategic or symbolic city than with capturing terrain in the normal military fashion. The following game is based around these early, almost colonial campaigns (but could be adapted for later campaigns or even periods), & is designed to be played solo or by 2 or more players. If played solo, the player takes the Nationalist side.

In addition to a larger version of the map, you will need:

- Counters to represent the columns
- Supply markers
- "Control" markers to show ownership of boxes (tiddlywinks are ideal)
- "Columna Adelantar!"

The Map (see last page).

The map consists of 12 linked boxes, connected by roads. For a shorter game use less boxes, or for a longer one, more. With 12 boxes, a game should last around a day in real time & feature several tabletop battles.

Each box represents a table, which should have terrain placed on it by an umpire or neutral 3rd party. Alternatively, a simple random system can be used or a series of maps drawn up before the game, it all depends on what terrain the players have available. The available road net can be deduced by the main map.

In addition, certain squares represent particular terrain or strategic locations:

- R = Republican start point (with a town).
- N = Nationalist start point (with a town).
- C = Provincial Capital (Major town).
- 7 = Bridge over major river or mountain pass (impassable surrounding mountains) or possibly crossroads (with difficult terrain surrounding road net).
- 3 & 4 have hills/mountains (passable) with a minor pass running through them.

Supply.

Each side receives supply markers (I gave the Nationalists about 5 or 6 & the Republicans rolled 1D6 for each "Column"). These are used during movement (see movement section). Additional supply markers can be obtained as a result of random dice throws when entering squares (see later) or by the winner of a battle (see Resolution).

In addition, troops must be able to trace a line of supply back to their base town/start point ("N" & "R"). If this is interrupted by enemy troops UNDISPUTED control of a box (if there are any friendly troops in the same box it counts as disputed), troops cannot move forward, but may retire or retreat (or more probably retreat to deal with enemy sitting on supply lines), surrendering a supply marker as per movement rules.

Forces.

Nationalists: Initial forces comprise a "typical" column, in the south a Legion Bandera, 1-2 Moorish Tabors with a battery of artillery (75mm gun), in the north 1-2 Carlist Tercios, 1-2 Regular Army Battalions with possibly an artillery battery (limited ammo) or mountain battery.

Republicans: Initially 1 " militia column" randomly generated. For Command Decision (CD) this is as set out in "Command Post Quarterly" 7 (reproduced here in a slightly modified form), but a similar system can be found in "Rompan el Fuego" the SCW adaption for "Rapid Fire". In the CD rule system, the basic randomly generated unit (Column) is based around varying numbers of platoons (elements/stands), with or without support weapons/vehicles. Generate a "Column" thus:

Roll 3D6 for the number of stands (platoons), one stand becomes the columns command infantry stand (HQ) & the rest are organised in up to 6 "centuries" (companies). Troop quality: Green, Morale 1D6 +4 when 1st fired on.

Roll 1D10 on support table:

- 1 = 1 MMG stand
- 2 = 4 medium trucks
- 3 = 1 75L27 field gun, limber & crew (Trained) + 1D6 tons ammo
- 4 = 1 MMG stand
- 5 = 1 medium truck or 1 ton artillery ammo, player's choice
- 6 = 1 armoured car or homemade armoured truck (Tiznao)
- 7 = 1 MMG stand
- 8 = 1 105L20 field howitzer, limber & crew (Trained) + 1D6-2 tons ammo
- 9 = 4 medium trucks, 1 MMG stand
- 10 = Reroll twice, reroll any additional roll of 10

Roll for Alignment (1D6):

- 1 = FAI
- 2 = CNT
- 3,4 = UGT
- 5 = POUM
- 6 = PCE

This table can be modified for different regions such as Catalonia or the Basque provinces. Troops will only obey orders from command stands of their own political party. Players may also modify the above tables to better reflect their own collection of figures, vehicles etc. Finally give the "Column" a suitable name reflecting their political allegiance.

Each side (Nationalist/Republican) also receives a column commander (1 command or command infantry stand + car or truck). For Republicans, roll for political alignment as above

Sequence.

Each turn follow the following sequence:

1) Roll for Republican reinforcements. On each turn after the 1st, roll to activate another militia column as above. To activate a column, roll 1D10 & score equal to or under 10 minus the number of boxes captured by the Nationalists. At the start all boxes except "N" are Republican territory. If for example, the Nationalists had captured boxes "7" & "8", the Republicans would need to score 8 or less. To capture or control a box, it must be free from or have not been entered by enemy troops. Disputed boxes (those containing troops from both sides) count for neither side.

2) Republican movement. Roll 1D10 for each column:

- 1-4 Defend. Hold current box, no move.
- 5-7 Probe. May advance 1 box with up to 3D6 stands.
- 8-10 Advance. Advance & seize neighbouring boxes. May advance with whole column either 1 or 2 boxes.

Move 1 box for 1 supply marker, 2 boxes for 2 supply markers (supply markers are removed from play after being "spent"). Cost is per road, so moving on 2 different roads would in effect cost double (eg troops moving from "N" to both "8" & "9" would need 2 supply markers).

Roll 1 D10 for contents of box ending move in, -2 if moving 2 boxes:

- 1-4 Nothing.
- 5,6 Enemy [1D6: 1,2 Falange, 3,4 Civil Guard, 5,6 Regulars. Roll 1D6 for number of stands, 1st being command inf stand. On a "6" 1 stand can be a MMG stand].
- 7,8 Friends [1D6: 1,2 Local militia (can't move), 3,4 Assault Guards, 5,6 Regulars, strength as above].
- 9,10 Supplies [1D6: 1,2 supply marker(s), 3,4 (tons) ammo, 5,6 Truck(s), 1D3 for number].

3) Nationalist movement. Column may move 1 or 2 boxes, surrendering 1 supply marker per box moved.

Roll 1D10 for contents of box ending move in.

- 1-4 Nothing.
- 5,6 Enemy. [Roll 1D6 apply results as per "Republican Friends" as above].
- 7,8 Friends. [Roll 1D6 apply results as "Republican Enemy" as above].
- 9,10 Supplies. [as above].

4) Combat. Transfer assembled forces to the tabletop & fight out the game. If a column is entering a box that contains enemy or friendly troops from above rolls, &/or an enemy column is entering the box, deploy as follows:

- 1st: All troops produced by rolls. In some circumstances this may mean local Republican & Nationalist forces on table together! Use common sense here, smaller forces should be being "besieged" by larger. If equal, divide territory between them &/or dice for position.
- 2nd: Defender. Troops who have entered box on previous turn or troops "probing".
- 3rd: Attacker(s). If both sides are "attacking" the same box, throw 1D6 for period of arrival/deployment, if tie occurs Republicans win & have choice of deploying first or second.

5) Resolution. Loser of battle retreats if able, losing 1 supply marker. May only retreat into unoccupied box, & MUST remain in supply. In any other circumstances (no supply marker, unable to retreat) will instead "fight to the finish" until morale collapses or troops are destroyed/captured. The victor may attempt to "capture" a supply marker (booty!). Roll 1D10, 1-5 fail. Note that this does not represent any actual supply markers held (or not) by the enemy column, & any supply marker gained is from those not in play.

Victory.

Nationalist forces automatically win if they capture box "R" by the end of the time set aside to play the campaign.

Republicans win if they manage to capture box "N" by the end of the campaign game.

In all other circumstances, victory is decided by victory points (VPs):

Boxes "R" or "N" count as 2 VPs each.

Boxes "C" or "7" count as 3 VPs each.

All other boxes count as 1 VP each.

A box must have been entered or captured by your side to count for Vps. Note that this means boxes "passed through" during movement (2 boxes per turn) still count as having been captured. The last side to enter a box counts as its "owner", thus a box may change sides several times during the game.

Total VPs:

More VPs than enemy = victory, double the enemy's score being a Major victory, otherwise a Minor victory.

Scores equal = draw.

Notes & Variations.

As it stands, the campaign probably works best played solo or with all the players on the Nationalist side, with the umpire controlling the Republicans. Players may of course control the Republicans, & with several different columns of various political parties activated it will work better with multiple players commanding them, preferably those who don't get on with each other!

The Republicans are crippled by inertia & indecision, representing the early chaotic command structures of the militias. They should aim to delay the Nationalists as much as possible, as far forward as possible to increase their chances of activating extra columns.

The Nationalists have better quality troops, but need to advance rapidly (although this cuts down the chances of gaining supplies or friends & increases the chances of meeting enemy or nothing), otherwise they will be faced with increasing numbers of militia columns.

In the basic game there is no provision for aircraft, as in the early days the pilots were often reduced to dropping hand grenades or rocks on the enemy! If you wish to introduce this aspect, I'd suggest limiting their appearance (1 on a D10) to tabletop battles OR on a successful roll, limiting enemy movement to 1 box only.

An interesting variation would be to have an all-Italian force for the Nationalists ("Avanzata in colonna!"), based around a Blackshirt Legion (Regiment) of 3 Cohorts (Battalions) & an artillery battery or two supported by Lancia armoured cars & CV33 tankettes, with possibly some motorcycle mounted Bersaglieri. As the Italians were better supplied with motorised transport than the Spanish (especially at this stage of the war), it may be appropriate to give them the ability to move 3 boxes in a turn (still costing 3 supply markers however). Such a game would be a close approximation to the Malaga campaign, & as such the terrain could mimic this with hills/mountains & a narrow road hemmed in by an impassible coast.

A suggested map is included, "R" & "N" as before, boxes 1-5 should have hills/mountains with the odd village, but being fairly close terrain. One or more boxes could have a town. "cp" is "coastal plains" & should have a coast line, some foothills & a town. "cm" is "coastal mountains" & should have a coast line on one edge & mountains on the other, possibly with the odd village.

For die-hard Republicans, try the following variant ("Columna Durruti"). Make the Republican player the active player (reversing Republican & Nationalist movement rules) if playing a solo game, otherwise use the Republican movement table for BOTH sides & allocate players to either side. Give each side 1D3 +3 supply markers. This represents the fighting in Aragon.

Forces:

Republicans: 2 Full strength Militia columns each of: 1 command infantry stand (HQ) & 6 Centuries, each with 3 infantry stands. One Column can have an "International Century" of higher troop quality &/or morale. In addition, give them 1D3 Tiznaos. Roll on support table, treating "6" as "4 medium trucks". Make them FAI &/or CNT alignment.

Dice for Republican reinforcements, but base chance is number of boxes captured on a D10.

Nationalists: 1-2 Battalions Regulars, 1 "Battalion" Carabineros or Falangists, 1 "Battalion" Civil Guard (Carabineros & Civil Guard were in reality organised as companies, in this case a "Battalion" should have a command stand + 2-3 companies with 1 command inf stand & 1-2 inf stands + 1-2 MMG per "battalion"). In addition give them a battery of field guns or mountain guns with limited ammo.

Should a situation arise which is not covered by the rules, I'd suggest using common sense, but if players cannot agree then flip a coin or throw a dice.

If (through poor dice rolling) the Republicans end up with a weak & lonely militia column which is quickly crushed by hordes of Nationalists, the system is hopefully quick enough to start all over again. Rationalise it if you wish, by counting the 1st campaign as an extension of the map representing "no-mans land" & try to roll better dice!

Likewise, some of the smaller battles produced by random rolls, may be considered too uninteresting or one-sided to be worth playing out. In these cases, I'd allow the small random generated forces to fall back to the nearest friendly forces (if able).

It is possible that one or both sides become immobile due to lack of supply markers. Should this occur, either terminate the campaign (after the player with any supply markers has moved as far as they can) & assess victory using Vps, or re-start the campaign by giving each side 1D6 supply markers to represent fresh supplies.

Above all, have fun! Columns advance! No Pasaran!

"Columna Adelantar" first appeared in "Abanderado" a journal for the SCW by Rolfe Hedges.

Columna Adelantar Campaign Map

