

The march on Madrid

Gaming the Spanish Civil War part 3

Andrew Rolph concludes his series on gaming the Nationalist advance north with detailed commentary on the rules that appeared in issue 385, along with some suggestions for transposing the campaign to other periods. Photos courtesy of Minairons Miniatures.

ORDERS OF BATTLE

The starting forces for the Rebel player are the two initial columns of Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Asensio Cabanillas and Major Antonio Castejón under the overall command of Lieutenant Colonel Juan Yagüe Blanco. They comprised the 2nd Tabor of Tetuán, the 4th Bandera of the Foreign Legion, two armoured cars, a battery of 70mm mountain guns, a company of engineers, the 2nd Tabor of Ceuta, the 5th Bandera of the Foreign Legion and a battery of 75mm field guns. Later, on 8th September, each column received a second tabor – the 1st of Tetuán and 3rd of Ceuta. Although this is not strictly accurate (the individual battalions switched around a good deal), it is close enough in terms of total numbers and types for the purposes of a wargame.

A Bandera comprises an HQ, nine platoons of infantry

and three 2-machine gun platoons of machine guns. A Tabor comprises an HQ, six platoons of infantry and a single 2-machine gun platoon. In my rules, I would ignore the two armoured cars as being inconsequential and the artillery and engineers would form additional assets for one or more of the other battalions.

The OOBs, such as they exist, for the Government forces are given within the main body of the text. If you feel the Government will have too hard a time of it with your own rules, feel free to increase the number of platoons of militia. Furthermore, the official TOE for the battalions of the Popular Army envisaged up to twelve rifle platoons and four 2-gun MMG platoons – so there's some flexibility there also.

NOTES ON COMBATANTS' CHARACTERISTICS

The troops of the Army of Africa should be the best available under your rules. They should have the highest morale possible and be able to take horrific losses before breaking in the face of the enemy. They should be flexible and responsive and capable of complex manoeuvring on the table. The platoons themselves ought to be primarily rifle-armed, with little in the way of mortar, LMG or SMG provision. If you work on the assumption



20mm Republican anti-tank guns holding a key position near Badajoz. The Republicans used the original German model PaK 35/36 and may have imported as many as 145 of them.



(Left) The ubiquitous Chevrolet 1.5 Ton truck, used extensively in the Spanish Civil War and many other theatres. (Right) The Henschel 33 or Henschel Type 33 was a German medium three axle 6 x 4 driven cross-country truck. It could be equipped with auxiliary tracks over the rear wheels for driving in heavy terrain.

that each of these types of armament was available at the next highest level than you would expect in a standard Second World War force then you will be about right, i.e. an LMG at platoon level, a 50 or 60mm mortar at company level, and so on. They should not, therefore, be able to put out a huge volume of small arms fire, but what they do produce ought to be well directed and effective. These advantages should be considerably reduced when fighting in an urban environment, however (particularly, perhaps, the Moroccan *tabores*).

Regular troops and the battalions of the International Brigades and Fifth Regiment should generally be very ordinary – other than the morale of the International Brigades and Fifth Regiment which should be as good as the Army of Africa. Their equipment will be very much the same as the Army of Africa, but their competence in using it considerably less. Similarly, battlefield manoeuvring and flexibility of response should be challenging. Think of them as late 1941 WWII Soviet conscripts.

The Militia troops are perhaps the most challenging to represent. Everything other than their morale (at least sometimes) ought to be very poor. Anything beyond straightforward 'advance' or 'hold' orders ought to be essentially impossible for them. Once underway, any change in direction or of objective ought to be beyond them and getting underway in the first place should be subject to potential delay (whilst a meeting is held to discuss the validity/wisdom of the orders). They were prone to panic at the appearance of aircraft and thus, if so attacked, a compulsory one move retreat might be in order. They were also extremely uncomfortable about their flanks being turned. Simply the spotting of an enemy unit behind their front line probably ought to presage a retreat or even rout. Their casualties from fire ought to be higher due to a lack of fieldcraft and their ability to inflict casualties should be reduced. Only in urban environments and hand to hand combat should they begin to be capable of fighting the Army of Africa on near equal terms. By way of example, I would suggest that a company of the Army of Africa should be able to assault about three times their number of militia in the open with some equanimity. With those positions reversed, the attacking militia ought probably still to be the underdog. Militia crewed artillery can fire directly or indirectly only at targets which the artillery crew can themselves spot. Regarding the militia's morale, I would suggest a variable approach. Once the first casualty is taken, roll 1D6 and on a 1 the formation's morale is poor, on 2 or 3 it is ordinary and on 4+ it is high. Defending with militia only should be very tricky. Attacking should be almost impossible.

NOTES ON RULES

There are a number of aspects to this campaign model which need to be considered regardless of the rules used. Clearly, you will know your own rules and will therefore have to employ your common sense in modifying such things as the number of turns, what 'high' morale actually is, how to adjust firepower within the system, whether the numbers of troops for each side are correct and so on. Bear in mind when doing so that the early battles in particular are deliberately designed to be difficult for the Government forces – a 'no effect' result in the first three turns is a major success for them. The tempo of the campaign should be a gradual build up to a climactic battle, or set of battles in Madrid, with a Rebel force much worn down by what has gone before. Everything before Madrid is a delaying action for the Government.

The scale of the maps previously presented in this series is based on a one foot square grid at one inch equals 100 yards and all are oriented with north at the top. You will need to consider what this means for your own rules where the specific city maps are concerned. If fighting the campaign at a smaller scale, you may wish to trim the table down to make the city more of a focus. For the remaining, generic tables, the actual scale probably will not matter as much but in my rules, the length of the table represents about twelve infantry moves. Given the numbers of turns in each game, this practically requires the Rebels to conduct flank attacks if they are to exit the table.

So what do I mean by 'Flank Attack'? The idea is that some part of the attacker's force be allowed to enter the table from the first turn of the game from either one side (rather than end) of the table or the other. Such a move ought not to be automatic, but ought to be relatively easy for the Army of Africa and difficult for a militia unit; for example, a roll of 3+ for the former and 6 only for the latter. This may be modified by reducing the die roll by 1 if the move is plotted to enter beyond the halfway point. If unsuccessful, continue rolling each turn thereafter. Militia positions in particular were routinely outflanked in the earlier parts of the campaign and this rule encourages and allows that.

Fortifications and entrenchments are another area where you will know how best to apply your rules. The intention is that the Government troops start with none and only gradually improve. The first trenches dug were notably inefficient (Spain had not fought a war where trenches had previously featured) and offered little protection. If your rules do not 'grade' trenches, then you may simply treat the 'light scrapes' to which I refer as cover against being spotted only.

The Alcázar is a special case. It was practically impregnable. Its walls were proof against shells below 150mm, it survived air bombardment relatively comfortably and a mine dug under its walls failed to completely breach them. It should be possible to storm it, but it should be costly and by no means a guaranteed success, regardless of the numbers of attackers. I feel that there needs to be a special rule which has the attackers assailing a limited proportion of the defenders who are constantly replenished from the non-engaged forces. Only when the attackers are deemed to have a foothold inside should all the defenders be engaged, at which point the latter's chances of survival ought to fall away swiftly.

I think it is important that some form of command and control be in place which is liberal in its restrictions on the Army of Africa and brutal for the militia (in particular). I also mention reserves at various points. Within the modified *Spearhead* rules I use, the availability of reserves is a critical command flexibility. As I have mentioned in a previous article, *Spearhead* command and control rules are extraordinarily restrictive in where and how a formation may move and designated reserves are frequently the only way of covering an unexpected gap or exploiting an unforeseen opportunity. Along with the need to severely restrict the militia's freedom of movement, the availability of a greater proportion of their force as reserves is what allows the Rebel forces to routinely take on two or three times their number in the tabletop battles. Without knowing which rules you might use, it is difficult to suggest a coherent approach to this for the reader, but I might suggest the following.

- Designated reserves may not move until ordered to do so and may not be so ordered until an enemy formation has been spotted.
- Otherwise, all formations must move towards an objective or remain in position on/around an objective until fired upon directly. At that point, they may abandon their objective (if defending it) or stop and fire (if attacking it).
- Additionally, however, all militia formations must be given an objective from which they must not move (if they currently occupy it), which they must attempt to retake if they move away involuntarily or to which they must move (at full speed by the straightest route) if they do not currently occupy it.
- Once fired upon, militia may stop to return fire. The formation as a whole must move or fire or do nothing – they lack to sophistication to give covering fire to an advance. They may pivot on the spot, but only towards enemy stands which have fired at them.
- Militia must open fire against any enemy that comes into range as soon as those enemy do so – they may not wait for a better target or for the range to close. Don't try ambushes with militia!

I hope these suggestions will give you some clues as to how to handle command and control/reserves/orders within your own rules – if they lack the capacity to reflect such a lack of flexibility within their core.

Finally, I wanted to retain as unified a set of battle generation procedures as possible to facilitate familiarity and therefore speed of play. However, I also felt that the specific events of Badajoz, Toledo and Madrid were worth trying to replicate reasonably accurately. In the end, I compromised and determined that, at the first two locations, the first battle fought would replicate the terrain around the cities, but that thereafter the main random terrain/battle generation system would take over. Feel free to ignore this and continue those battles on the same terrain in

a similar fashion to the battle(s) for Madrid if you so desire. In particular, the terrain for the Toledo battle is somewhat speculative beyond the city itself – I could not find a decent map from which to work.

Alternatively, and perhaps particularly if playing at more of a skirmish/tactical level, you may wish to ignore the special nature of those battles and simply continue to run the ordinary terrain/battle generation rules for battles located there and deem the result to be indicative of what has happened in the cities themselves.

PLAYER CONSIDERATIONS

Some further thoughts, what might be called 'designer's notes':

- The variable turn length is designed to recreate the pressure/uncertainty felt by the Rebels – they never know exactly how much time they have left.
- This should make the potential detours to Badajoz and Toledo difficult decisions. At Mérida, it is a pity to waste a two zone movement by detouring to Madrid, but the loss of two *tabors* later could be critical. If the Rebels reach Talavera early enough, perhaps the Alcázar can hold out unaided whilst the Army of Africa rushes Madrid before week ten?
- Do not underestimate the impact of the attrition roll – particularly if moving quickly. A couple of two zone advances can easily lead to around 20% of your force lost to attrition alone.
- It is always safe to take a week's rest after a major victory – there is no chance of a Government Counterattack.
- Badajoz, Toledo and Madrid should all be much tougher battles for the Rebels – the urban fighting required should be costly to both sides, but only the Government can afford it.
- There should be little to fear from a Government Counterattack – treat it as an opportunity to rest a significant proportion of your forces.
- There is nothing to stop the Rebel player committing everything to every battle hoping to win a major victory every time and then ignoring detours on the campaign track to try to reach Madrid by week 8-10. He will have no additional *tabors* and will have recovered no losses and suffered some attrition, but the enemy will be weaker too.
- Conversely, the outlook for the Government is grim. The briefest glance at the Advance Chart indicates that at no point will the tide ever be reversed, only stemmed.
- Furthermore, the Advance Chart is biased towards a Rebel Advance. Even if the victory points in a battle are even, the Rebels gain a minor victory 44% of the time (and a major one 6% of the time). This represents the lack of effective co-ordination in the campaign – the Government did not have the authority necessary to capitalise on any individual victories and build them into a successful strategic operation.
- The key therefore is to wear the Rebels down. Losses for the Government are wholly unimportant, but every stand lost to the Rebels is a blow.
- Causing a Rebel battalion to rout is a cause of particular celebration – ensuring it is not selected for the next battle and that it does not receive any replacements in the following turn.
- The Government player needs to thrive in adversity and be able to take satisfaction from inflicting a battalion of casualties on the enemy despite losing every objective and every battalion.
- Every 'no effect' result is to be celebrated.

OTHER USES

So, you don't have any Spanish Civil War figures and have no intention of starting another period – there's only so much weight of metal the loft joists will take. Are there any other applications for this 'linked battle' model? How about these...?

- **The Retreat from Moscow 1812/Kabul 1842.** Reverse the roles and have the majority of battles as the Russians/Afghans constantly attacking a much smaller force of French/British as they try to reach safety across the Nieman River or in Jalalabad. In this case, the French/British are the (Rebel equivalent) 'managed' force with a reasonable starting number, but no chance of reinforcement or replacement. Victory to be determined by the proportion of the managed force reaching safety.
- **The Chindit raids.** The Chindits as the managed force conducting attacks on Japanese supply bases/rear areas with occasional 'locate and destroy' counter missions by the Japanese. Again, little chance of replacement and reinforcement. Victory to be determined by the proportion of the managed force reaching safety and some measurement of the damage inflicted in battles along the way. Here the Chindits might want to slow down rather than speed up in order to inflict more damage.
- **A Panzer Division in the Soviet Union or France.** This is the original inspiration and I can do no better than recommend Martin Rapier's original, which sets up a race between two Panzer Divisions to be the first to assault Leningrad. Alternatively, I wrote a variation for the *Journal of Twentieth Century Wargamers* (www.sotcw.co.uk – PDF subscriptions to the magazine now available at www.wargamevault.com) which represents the first six weeks of action for the 17th and/or 18th Panzer Division in Operation Barbarossa. Exactly the same model could be used to recreate Rommel/Guderian's attack across France in 1940 from the Meuse to the Channel Coast.
- **Operation Market Garden** might also present some scope for a similar set up, using elements of XXX Corps as the main managed force, with each turn representing a day and a zone for each bridge on the way to Arnhem. Any German counterattacks would be against the relevant paratroops around the bridge where the battle was taking place. A continual time pressure is exerted on XXX Corps by requiring them to be at each bridge no later than a given day. So, say, five major bridges and Arnhem as the endzone with the possibility of some two zone advances over nine day-long turns? You could assume all the bridges are successfully taken, or play out some operations as side battles, or have some simple dice-based system. A 'no effect' result perhaps means the bridge is blown by the defenders and a successful battle needs to be fought to replace it with a pontoon bridge?
- **Retreat from Mons 1914.** The actions of a British regiment or brigade in 1914 as they pull back in the face of incessant attacks before making a last stand? Alternatively, this could be scaled up to the entire BEF, if you have the rules for it.
- Moving further back in time (and way out of my comfort zone) **The Hundred Years War in France** would also appear to offer some opportunities. The English campaign leading to Agincourt? Or a *chevauchée* out of Gascony? Both of these would seem to be possible clear matches for the original version of the campaign above. It might be possible simply to change the names of the forces/locations and run the campaign as-is.

- **Splitting the Confederacy.** Sherman's Atlanta campaign between May and September 1864 against Johnston and Hood offers an opportunity for two managed forces. A little more bookkeeping, but probably necessary as the two sides were more evenly matched.
 - **Colonial.** It seems to me that any colonial setting has potential here as a small, well-equipped European army conducts a punitive raid against a less well-equipped but well-motivated native force. This was, after all, essentially how the Army of Africa conducted the campaign described here. Pick any location, protagonists, century and scale you like for this one – Italy/Spain/France/Britain in Africa, Britain in India or Afghanistan (all in the 19th or 20th centuries); Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s; Conquistadores against the Incas and so on.
 - **Skirmish Napoleonic.** Lieutenant Sharpe and his small band of riflemen have been sent to find the gold/countess/French Royalist. The French dragoons are out to stop him.
 - **Border Reiving.** In the Renaissance era, clan leader MacSharpe and his small band of rustlers have been sent to find the sheep/cattle/pigs. The locals are out to stop him.
- So, I think, with a bit of tweaking (change some modifiers, troop types and geographical locations), this model has the potential to be adapted to almost any of the main wargaming categories of any period or scale – testament to the elegance of Martin's original formulation. I hope you enjoy it.

FOOTNOTE

Terminology in the Spanish Civil War is fraught with intended and unintended bias and misrepresentation... so I'll declare mine. At this stage, the loose federation of factions which is traditionally termed 'the Nationalists' was far from unified, far from a coherent, alternate 'state in being' and far from certain that their coup against the legitimate government would be successful. In contrast, although the Government was shaken by internal revolution, it was functioning for the majority of the time, was legitimate and had not yet been taken over by an outside power (which is essentially what the Soviet Union achieved by instalments over the next two years). Hence my usage of 'Rebels' and 'Government', rather than 'Nationalists' and 'Republicans', which would later become the traditional (though inaccurate) terminology.



The diminutive IGC Sadurni tankette. Only two prototypes of this Catalan tank were built in the first months of 1937, being rejected for mass production by the Republic due to its poor weaponry and the lack of turret.