

TUNISIA 43 DESIGNER'S NOTES BY DIRK BLENNEMANN

I was enthusiastic when *Moments in History* offered me the opportunity to work on this project. Besides the *Crusader* battle of 1941 and the *Gazala* battle of 1942, the Kasserine battle is the most interesting action on North African soil during World War II.

Similar to my previous games, *Tunisia 43* is based on careful research. You might think that researching the game would have been relatively easy because the battle is well-known and many books have been published on the Tunisian Campaign. However, much of what has been written is either inaccurate or full of gaps. We found it would take one year of intensive work and the help of native English, French, German, and Italian speakers to locate the unpublished war diaries and the scarce unit histories needed to fully document the battle. Without doubt, the Order of Battle of this game is the most accurate OOB ever presented in game form on this subject.

For more than 25 years various designers have been working on the so-called “definite” battalion-level game for WW II. In many cases, these efforts—often classified as “serious”—resulted in book sized rulebooks allowing players to almost do anything they want with their troops. I dislike this evolution because playing these games is most time-consuming and gives players a wrong impression of warfare.

In a battalion-level game, players represent nothing less than the Commanding Officer of a corps, an army, or even a theater of operations. Commanding Officers have to concentrate on decisions (supported by their assistants whose job it is to simplify the decision making process for them). In *Tunisia 43* there is a lot of decision-making each game turn, but these are the kind of decisions that would be made by Rommel, von Arnim or Eisenhower—and not by a NCO of a supply column or repair shop.

Though some groups of players desire “ultimate realism” (whatever this may be...) in a battalion-level game, it is just about impossible to include everything and still have a *playable* game. With the exception of “staff officer types” and those players who believe that a gaming contest should go to the fellow who best memorizes the rules manual, more and more players understand that it is more important what a designer leaves out of a game than what he puts in. Today many players are tired by complex logistic or air subsystems which consume most of a game’s playing time. Instead, they like to concentrate on the interesting stuff—maneuver and combat—and avoid those elements that are beyond the scope of a battalion-level game.

Central to this game system are the concepts of “Mechanical Simplicity” and “Interactivity”. Mechanical Simplicity means structuring the many complex elements in a game so that the player is not overburdened with memorization or bookkeeping. It forces clear definition and contrast of themes, resulting in game mechanics which are realistic in effect and smooth in execution. Interactivity guarantees that both players are constantly involved in the decision-making process during play. This means excellent playability and helps to capture the tremendous ebb and flow of mobile warfare as well.

As a designer, I find it imperative to find a special “focus” and stick to it. Coming up with “Command Control” as the main focus was a relatively simple task because over the history of recorded warfare, this factor generally stands out among the others, often representing the decisive factor of the battle itself. Command Control is absolutely crucial for an understanding of this battle. In short, the elements of the game design other than Command Control take a supporting role only.

Some playtesters asked me during the design process: ‘Why would you modify the well-received game systems of *Triumphant Fox* and *Piercing the Reich*?’ There are four main reasons for my decision:

- (1) It is true that certain elements of battalion-level warfare are universal. But each battle has unique features and requires some unique mechanics. Example: For the serious student of warfare it is out of question to use the Combat Results Table of *PtR* (Western Europe 1944) for a game covering the Kasserine Battle in Tunisia 43.
- (2) The battle was depicted on a different scale.
- (3) The game system was further streamlined and revised.
- (4) Certain wishes and ideas of players were incorporated.

Following strong demands from players of *T-Fox* and *PtR*, the combat system was further developed. Similar to its predecessors, the combat system of *Tunisia 43* is based on analytic combat research and produces realistic combat results. The emphasis was laid on uncertainty and combined arms warfare in order to simulate the attritional nature of WWII warfare. Unlike many other games, a wholesale elimination of a full-strength unit will seldom occur and the attacker may well take losses at high odds attacks.

A lot of historical realism and flavor is designed into the counters which represent the fighting formations actually used rather than any administrative organization. The relative strength, mobility, and doctrine of the participating armies are simulated. Generally, the unit values reflect the strengths and weaknesses of their historical counterparts.

In some games all design factors are subjective, including the unit values. In my opinion, realistic combat results are impossible without the exact determination of unit values. In *Tunisia 43*, the numerical estimates of the unit values were evaluated scientifically using a firepower score method of the NATO, and thereafter modified subjectively by leadership, morale, doctrine, and psychological effects of combat on soldiers.

I guess that “combined arms warfare” is the most common catchword of operational games. But if you ask gamers about combined arms warfare, you more than once get rather disappointing answers like “a DRM” or “tanks are stronger in attack than in defense”. In other words, the knowledge and understanding of combined arms warfare seems to be somewhat limited.

This was the foundation of the combat system. To be successful in combat, the combat resolution process forces players to follow the principles of combined arms warfare. During playtesting I noticed that players first realized and thereafter understood that simple odds computations no longer guarantee success even at high odds after some time, that a proper deployment of forces is more effective than sheer numbers, that artillery itself cannot decide a battle, that a commander can only pray for air support, and that combat support is crucial for both attack and defense. I am truly gratified about this evolution because, in my opinion, the essential element of any serious wargame system is not the re-creation of historical facts, but any insight into military matters it provides.

Some gamers familiar with *T-Fox* and *PtR* may be surprised about the artillery units. The design decision to simulate the effects of artillery without specific artillery rules and actual artillery counters was well-received, but could not be transferred to *Tunisia 43*. The reason is the different scales of the three games.

Great efforts were made to avoid complicated artillery rules or not to over-blow the effects of artillery in relation to other factors. The definition of artillery units with their own capabilities in strong contrast to combat maneuver units avoids the unrealistic situation of having a player utilize individual artillery units as “mobile obstacles” in emergency situations. The introduction of the Irregular Combat Action simulates that the defense of unsupported artillery units against maneuver units followed different principles as regular combat between maneuver units. The complete incorporation of artillery support values into the combat resolution process underlines that artillery was only effective in concert with other battlefield assets.

Tunisia 43 is a wargame which is, like the subject matter itself, close to my heart. *Tunisia 43* reflects WWII warfare at the operational scale more accurately than many other games; its game system demonstrates the numerous effects of terrain, leadership, doctrine, etc. in the Kasserine Battle, but it still remains very playable. *Tunisia 43* is a game full of choices and uncertainty. The concept of uncertainty guarantees a high solitaire suitability and that no two games will ever be the same. Added to this is the fact that there is only one map with 420 counters, setup time is short and the system is easy to learn but rich in detail.

In closing, allow me to express my gratitude to all those who supported *Tunisia 43*. Besides the playtesters who spent considerable help in concluding the design, I especially would like to thank numerous gamers for their constant feedback on *Triumphant Fox* and *Piercing the Reich*. Enjoy the game!