

P500 Sneakpeek: Tactical Infantry Combat in WWII

Combat Commander:

Discovered in San Francisco

by Rodger B. MacGowan

For the second year in a row, I was honored to be invited as "Special Guest" to the **ConQuest** convention up in San Francisco (September 2-5, 2005). San Francisco is my home town, so it was a pleasure to go home to visit family, friends and our fans.

My 15 year old son Steven volunteered to help me. We drove up from Los Angeles, as we did last year, to man the company booth — along with assistance from some of our local raving fans (thanks guys!).

During the course of the game convention, I was pretty much chained to the booth, with the dealers room being open from morning-to-evening (9am-6pm), plus I had seminars to present in the evenings.

So, when I first heard *the* buzz from the players about "the game" it came in the form of guys coming up to the booth and telling me "Rodger, you got to check this game out", "man it's cool", "you just have to publish this game", etc. I was listening.

As *the* buzz increased in both frequency and enthusiasm I quickly spread the word to my helpers to ask Chad, the game's designer, to please come up to see me in the dealers room, which he quickly did.

Chad Jensen and I first met at **ConQuest San Francisco** and thus began this little *behind the scenes* story of our new **P500** announcement for **Combat Commander**.

I invited Chad, and his wife Kai, to come down to Santa Barbara the following month (mid-October) for our annual **GMT West Weekend** and to demo his **Combat Commander** game there over the course of our 4-day gaming event. I also asked Chad to prepare a special prototype copy of the game to send off to Andy Lewis for official playtesting. Andy is in charge of reviewing all our new game submissions.

Chad on *Consimworld* after **West Weekend**: "...Oct 17, 2005 — Back from a *great* **GMT West Weekend**. Rodger ran a tight ship



and it appeared that everyone attending had a thoroughly wonderful time. I demo'd **Combat Commander** all weekend and received some great feedback. Many thanks go out to Andrew Tuttle, Aaron Fishman, Rick Billings, Marc Guenette, Brian Simmons, Lyman Leong, James Jones and Richard DeBaun who spent the time to provide additional written feedback for both Rodger and myself...Overall a fun weekend. Greatly looking forward to next year!..."

Yes, the feedback at West Weekend was

fabulous for **Combat Commander**. Here are some samples of the feedback comments we received: "...Card driven events give a nice flavor of C3 as well as a large assortment of special events while keeping the rules very streamlined!... the variable game length and secret VPs gives a tension which eliminates the mad dash for VPs common in other tactical small-unit games...game seemed quick, and rules easy...the game is very interactive..hidden objectives makes for interesting tactics... fast moving, unpredictable, but within realistic bounds..."



Sample Playtest Fate Card (not final artwork)

In addition, after my many attempts to break away from running **West Weekend**, I finally found an opportunity to sit down with Chad and Kai so we could enjoy playing **Combat Commander**. What follows below is an *After Action Report* of our exciting first game together.

Combat Commander:

After Action Report

by Chad Jensen (Designer)

So Saturday morning at **GMT West Weekend** rolls along and Rodger MacGowan has a bit of time to spare from his duties as convention host and wants to learn **Combat Commander**. I spend ten minutes explaining the counters, Fate Cards, terrain and victory conditions, then we roll up a scenario.

P500 Sneakpeek - Combat Commander

We end up with a map depicting a vast stretch of forest along one length of the board that empties onto a small farming community. Map orientation ends up 'wide' (15 hexes wide by 10 hexes deep). It is 1941. Rodger will command line-quality Germans against my green-quality Russian troops. We each draw one (secret) Objective chit, then reveal an (open) Objective that is known to both of us — which ends up being one of the specialty chits: "Objective #5 is worth 10 victory points". Since it is very difficult to amass 10 VPs more than your opponent via casualties and breakthrough, this pretty much means that this particular scenario will be won by whichever side controls Objective 5 (a stone building) when the battle ends.

At this point it is time to (secretly) choose our Order of Battles — our choices are numerous but they must match the year, nationality and troop quality as determined above. Rodger picks a Rifle Detachment (a Rifle Company would be a larger pick and the Rifle Platoon smaller), netting him 2 Leaders, 6 Squads, 2 (weapon) Teams, 3 Light Machine-guns and 1 Medium Machine-gun. I select a Militia Detachment which includes 2 Leaders, 10 Squads, 1 Team, 1 LMG and 1 MMG. His OB costs 19 points and mine 11: so I get the difference in starting victory points.

We then roll on the Leadership Table to determine which specific Leaders we get (modified for nationality, year and troop quality) to command our forces. A few other rolls/choices are made and Rodger ends up as the Attacker (he will get a 6-card hand and set up 2 hexes deep) with me as the Defender (4-card hand and 8-deep setup). Instead of saving my 8 victory points as a 'handicap', I opt to spend 5 of them on ten Barbed Wire markers — the other 3 I

keep as a buffer. These end up making an arc two hexes deep in front of, and on the left flank of, Objective 5 (the right flank being covered by the board edge).

I set up the rest of my forces, with three key positions: Sgt. Pyotor and a Squad go into the key building; Cpl. Kutisov, a Squad with the LMG and the Team with the MMG go into a building in the center of the map to cover the open ground hexes at the edge of my Wire field; and two Squads are set up on the far left edge of the board — this will serve to either draw off some forces from the attack on the key building or, if not (it did not), they will move off of Rodger's board edge for exit victory points.

Rodger sets up a large firebase led by Lt. Hunfziger in a woods hex that can see both my MMG group and Objective 5, though this latter line-of-sight passes through several hexes worth of brush which will reduce his Firepower when firing at the key building. The rest of his forces are set up opposite the Wire field, ready to take casualties for the Reich in order to *secure that building!* At this point Rodger asks if he gets an artillery bombardment, as historically an attack such as this would have been preceded by one. I explain that artillery was not purchased by either of us, so it will not occur in our game unless a subsequent "Reinforcements" Event nets us a Forward Observer with a Radio. His preparatory artillery strike may have happened 30 minutes before this scenario's start time, or perhaps it *is* happening right now — two maps over.

So the game begins and Rodger and I take turns firing at one another as he maneuvers forward a bit. About 5 minutes into the game, Rodger makes a Fire Attack

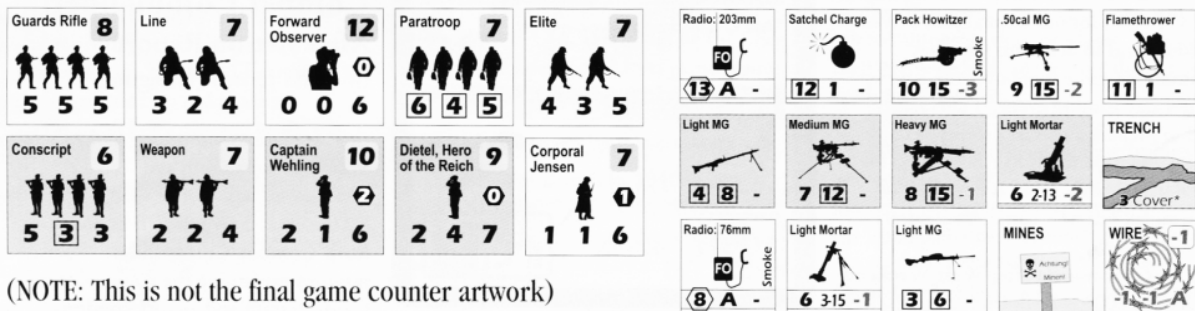
against my firebase and his die roll comes up "Event". The game pauses as he reveals the next card from the top of his Fate Deck and reads aloud the Event on it: "*Reinforcements — Select one available German support unit (roll) then place it along your friendly board edge.*" Rodger rolls on the German Support Table and ends up able to choose an FO and Radio commanding a 75mm Artillery Battery! "I guess they're ready to start firing in our sector now," he exclaims. The Forward Observer is plopped down with a clear line of sight to Objective 5 — and Rodger just happens to have an "Artillery Request" Action in hand, so he promptly goes to work.

Several turns later, there is another interesting series of occurrences. Objective 5 is only 3 hexes from Rodger's front line (with the Wire field in between), and an "Artillery Request" Action targeting the building goes awry. The area of impact ends up falling directly on his far flank — including his FO! Many German units break under the scourge, and things are looking grim for the Axis commander. But a fortuitous "Rally" card in hand saves the day for Rodger, which is further followed up by a "Fire" attack that breaks the Russian Squad in the key building.

But that's not all.

A few turns later, Rodger gets a "Sniper" roll that reminds my broken Squad that *War is Hell*, and he is eliminated, leaving Kutisov to defend the building alone. Ah, but I still have the protection of the Wire field, you say. True, but during this same turn, one of Rodger's Squads on the other side of the Wire went "Berserk", which gave it +3 Morale, +3 Movement, and it must Rally and charge the nearest enemy unit at the beginning of

Combat Commander (P500) Sample Playtest Counters



WWII Tactical Infantry Action - Combat Commander

each of Rodger's turns. Wire forces a unit to stop moving whenever it enters or leaves it, but when a Berserk unit gets a free "Move" Action at the beginning of a player's turn and then can still be activated normally for "Move" later in the turn, Wire becomes a minimal concern.

Kutisov needed help.

I had another Militia Squad behind Objective 5 — across a road in a woods hex. But this woods hex also had a hedge, which adds to the movement cost when crossing it. My Squads only had a 3 Movement allowance and it would take 4 to get into the Objective, meaning I would have to Move into the road hex and wait for the following turn to Move or Advance in (assuming I draw one of those Actions!). Well, desperate times call for desperate measures so this was the plan. My valiant Militia Squad made it into the road, but

that, alas, also became its grave. The Berserk German unit ended up navigating his way through the Wire and killing Cpl. Kutisov to take the building. At this point, with most of my other forces killed, wounded or missing (but with a goodly amount of damage done to Germans, as well, I might add), I conceded to Rodger with a hearty handshake and a "well done".

I could be mistaken, but I think he liked the game.... (I sure did! — *RBM*)

Combat Commander:

P500 Game Description

by Chad Jensen (Designer)

Company Commander is a card-driven board game covering tactical infantry combat in the European and North African Theaters of World War II. One player takes the role of the Axis (either Germany or Italy & the Axis Minors) while another player commands the Allies (Russia, America, Britain, or France & the Allied Minors).

Fate Cards: players will take turns playing one or more Fate cards from their hands in order to activate their units on the mapboard for various military functions. Each nationality has its own 72-card Fate deck highlighting its historical strengths and weaknesses (lots of Smoke for the US; marksmanship bonuses for Britain; commissar events for the Soviets; broken Italian units will surrender more often; etc.). Each Fate card contains one Action and one Reaction: only one of which may

be declared when the card is played. The bottom portion of each Fate card contains an Event, a random hex symbol, and a 2d6 die roll — these can never be 'played' from the hand, only 'revealed' from the top of the draw pile when a game situation instructs a player to do so.

Actions include: **Fire, Move, Advance, Rally, Rout, Artillery Request** and **Artillery Denied**. Each nationality also has a varying number of **Command Confusion** Actions which act as duds while in hand — these cards are useless except for any possible Reaction on the card. Tension is high, for example, when you want to move a stack of units into a key building several hexes away and you sweat with each hex entered whether or not your opponent has that Fire card with which to reactively fire at you as you move, only to learn during his next turn that he had a mitt full of Command

Confusions and was bluffing the whole way. Actions, when played, generally activate a single unit to perform that Action, unless a Leader is activated: in which case it can further activate any or all non-leaders within its Leadership Radius to perform the same Action.

There are 17 different **Reactions** including **Command Confusion, Sustained Fire, Smoke, Walking Wounded, Interrogation** and **Hero**, to name a few.

Players attempt to achieve victory by means of a scenario's randomly-drawn *Objective chits*, as well as the destruction of enemy units and the exiting of friendly units off the opponent's board edge, each of which award a certain number of victory points. The Objectives are a tense but fun aspect of **Company Commander**: Each map in the game contains five labeled Objective hexes numbered 1 through 5. At the beginning of a scenario, each player draws one (secret) Objective chit that only he knows about (barring certain Events that can reveal them) and then one (open) Objective chit is drawn for both players to see. These chits will generally assign a victory point value to one (or all!) of the five Objective hexes, with the "5" Objective having more chits than the "4" Objective; "4" more than "3"; and so on.

Average playing time for a scenario has been about 90 minutes, with play being generally described as fast, furious and flavorful. A scenario is played on one of several mapsheets, each with a 10x15 hexgrid depicting various terrain at a scale

of 100 feet per hex. In addition to playing one of the many pre-generated scenarios included with the game, players can roll up a random situation. In this case, a player's chosen Order of Battle based upon randomly determined board orientation, date, nationalities, troop qualities and objectives — will contain between 3 and 18 Squads (generally a Platoon, Detachment or Company) and their attendant weapons, fire teams and the all-important leaders.

Units and weapons are rated for their Firepower and Range, while units also have a Movement allowance and a Morale number. Most importantly, Leaders have a Command number as well. Command has two functions in **Company Commander**: first, it allows a leader that has been activated to perform an Action the ability to further activate any friendly non-leaders up to X hexes away, where X is its Command number (or "Command Radius"). Second, a leader's Command number is added directly to every stat on every non-leader currently occupying the same hex. So, for example, a 5-FP, 5-Rg, 5-Mv Squad with 7-Morale in the same hex as a Leader with a Command of 2 would have stats of 7-7-7 and 9 for all purposes as long as that condition existed.

Replayability for **Company Commander** is high. Our core group of four testers has logged over 230 roll-your-own scenarios and still ask to play on most game nights. And with unlimited possibilities as far as additional scenarios, maps, units, weapons, variants, etc that can be released in the months and years to come (as well as the Pacific Theater of Operations now in the design stage), I believe that **Company Commander** is one of those rare exceptional values in wargaming — one that can be revisited time and time again, each with a new tale to tell.

Game Components:

- 492 counters (5/8 and 1/2 inch)
- 216 playing cards (2.5 x 3.5 inch)
- 3 mapsheets (2-sided, 11x17 inch)
- 1 player aid card (2-sided)
- 1 Rulebook (24 pages)
- 1 Playbook

Retail Price: \$79 **P500**

Price: \$55 Status: **NEW on P500 List**