



(zech Mate '38



An Operational Megagame, by Paul Howarth



## Designer's Notes

It's eighty years since the Munich crisis and a war averted for just a year. I've recently been reading alternate histories which feature variants on a full Czech-German war in 1938 and the consequences thereof. Common perceptions of the German armed forces in the Second World War involve a well-oiled machine, running rings around the enemy and overcoming all odds through aggressive exploitation and the combined arms of Blitzkrieg. In recent years various myths along these lines have been addressed, leading to a more realistic appraisal of German capabilities. The game will try to present some of the problems faced by commanders on both sides, in a contest which should be much more even than conventional wisdom suggests.

Operational games are my favourite type of megagame and unfortunately in short supply, so I thought it was about time I designed one myself to mark the anniversary and also try out some new ideas I've been mulling over after working with Rob Cooper to bring 'Not Over By Christmas' up North. It was tempting to try and develop a double blind game, with a completely hidden map, but this usually requires a large number of umpires to adjudicate and feedback, often with significant 'lag' between orders and resolution. For many megagamers this is a feature, not a flaw, but bearing in mind a desire to encourage more people to try operational game, an open map has been chosen for this run. Also, when you spend time and money on a map and playing pieces, I do think it's a shame that players rarely see the fruits of your labours.



Open maps themselves, of course, present their own challenges, including enough familiarity with rules to move turns along quickly, the inability of umpires to adjudicate most likely outcomes rather than fight out every single combat, as well as fog of war, hidden movement and what is known as 'friction' – the difference between what a commander intends happening and what actually happens when plans meet reality. This can be replicated to a degree through using several layers of command.

## Blockspiel

The original inspiration for this system came from watching 'A Bridge Too Far' and other films featuring map rooms with great big, painted wooden blocks and national flags on maps, often with some token German for effect and subtitles, e.g. "Wo ist PATTON?!" The visual effect appealed to me as a starting point.

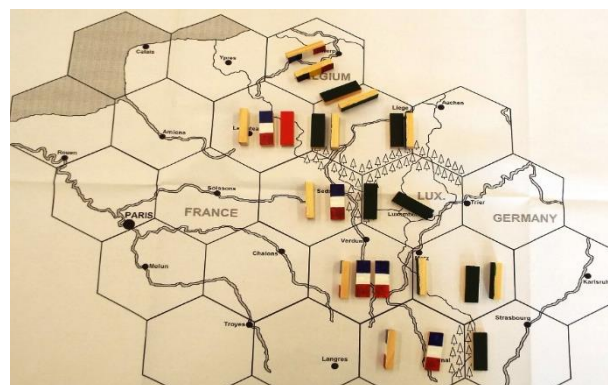


In addition, wooden blocks have become more popular in a number of relatively recent games. Richard Borg used them in the Commands and Colours series with a hex map, usually to fight a full ancient or Napoleonic battle and using stickers to differentiate unit types, with relatively simple rules.

At the smallest skirmish level there are games such as Urban Operations, modelling modern warfare and adding a layer by rotating blocks to show different strengths. I then started to think about using all the sides of a block to try and reduce clutter on the map.



I've also been influenced by games such as Phil Sabin's 1914 (Pictured right, with wooden Jenga pieces from a run by Bob Cordery). Whilst I felt more detail was required for a megagame with corps commanders in it, the idea that tracking individual strength points was 'below their pay grade' and could also speed up play was worth trying. Likewise, combat resolution has been kept deliberately simple, with the assumption that lower-level commanders are doing the best they can. There are a limited number of cards in play which will represent those times when it's not the case.



I'm also aware that the game for the land commanders is often more involved than that of the air commanders, so in this game the respective high command players will take on this latter responsibility once the game begins. As ever, there's a compromise between trying to replicate actual command situations and ensuring players have a good day. For this reason too, political roles will be played by Control, due to the limited role for them within the timeframe of the game. This will also apply to other countries, such as France, Britain, Poland and the Soviet Union. A broad outline of their respective viewpoints at the start of the conflict will be found in briefings.

The main body of the game covers the military operations by both sides in which the outcome is entirely dependent on player decisions. There is no historical baseline against which to measure success and the key for all players is as much about teamwork and good communication as it is about strategic brilliance.

With thanks to Rob Cooper, Tony Morphet, Pete Sizer and Pennine Megagames for advice, playtesting and the regular application of common sense when I get carried away with another new idea.

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## The Chain of Command

This game focuses on the military decisions as much as possible and therefore in this game you are part of a chain of command which will need to be observed as far as possible. You can disagree with senior commanders but you may not wilfully disobey them without consequence. The game simulates a real military hierarchy and will allow negative consequences for failure or disobedience.

This means that, as in real life, no commander has a completely free hand to do as they like. National political authorities (represented by Control) have the power to replace formation commanders. This might be done by moving a new player into the role from another team, or by swapping roles within the team.

Sacking like this isn't done for being unlucky or losing a battle. It is done for obvious incompetence or blatant insubordination. If you like your role, the best way to hang onto it is to do a good job.





# Czech Mate '38 - Setting the Scene



Hitler needed a war to demonstrate German military might as Goebbels' propaganda machine continued to justify prodigious and unsustainable public spending. Meanwhile, British intelligence had convinced Neville Chamberlain that whilst Western re-armament was only slowly bearing fruit, sacrificing the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany was not the way to buy time. Reports indicated that behind the parades and manoeuvres designed to impress visiting dignitaries and the world press, the Wehrmacht was not the swift, motorised machine of the newsreels. Its infantry generally marched and its guns were pulled by horses.

Czech defences across the Sudetenland could tie down substantial numbers of German troops and the much-vaunted panzers had littered Austrian roads during the Anschluss of 1937 after a rash of breakdowns. Mainly armed with machine guns, they would struggle to cope with the latest Czech armour rolling out of the Skoda factories. It was far better that these excellent tanks should fight Germany than for her. In addition, Czechoslovakia secured Poland's southern border and was an ally of the Soviet Union. Wise heads counselled, 'If Herr Hitler wants Czechoslovakia so much, then make him pay for it.'

The meeting in Munich was later seen as an opportunity for the Czechs to put their house in order whilst Chamberlain hemmed and hawed and Hitler grew increasingly frustrated. Eventually he called a halt to proceedings, declaring that Perfidious Albion was playing at politics once again, interested only in preventing the rights of the German people from being protected. Shortly afterwards, German speakers in the Sudetenland began demonstrating at recent attacks on their families by Bolsheviks. Self defence leagues, or Freikorps, were established, their ranks bolstered by strangers to the area and known colloquially as 'Little grey men'. When the bodies of attackers on a police station were found to be wearing German Army identification discs, Goebbels was quick to respond. Enraged by what was seen as the oppression all along the Sudetenland Strip, German soldiers on leave had spontaneously decided to cross the border and protect those who could not protect themselves. Surely the only sensible option to reduce tensions was for Czech forces to withdraw from the Sudetenland and leave a demilitarized zone?

Hitler never expected these suggestions to be accepted, but uncertainty and excitement provided excellent cover for the gradual mobilisation of German troops to 'guard the border', prevent reprisals on German soil and provide protection for German speakers. Frantic telephone calls were exchanged across Europe as Czech leaders realised that war was coming to their twenty year-old state...At this point, our game begins.

## Key Information to bear in mind when planning and playing:

- Each turn represents 24 hours
- Each hex represents 5 miles
- 5cm Cubes (In Red and Grey) represent 1 infantry, cavalry or armour regiments
- 30mm Counters represent artillery or Czech Fortress and Border units (in Brown)
- 1cm cubes represent command planning capacity and supplies reaching the right place at the right time. The regular supply of these may be disrupted during the game.
- The side which is uppermost on a cube or counter signifies its current posture. It requires command points to change this (except for units which become disordered as a result of combat).

## Design Overview and Principles

- Each turn will consist of alternate movement and combat, with initiative (who goes first) decided each turn in each region on the map. Each side will have a set number of initiative tokens at the start of the game which they commit to seize the initiative each turn. They do not know how many their opponent has.
- Operational 'momentum' is important. If one side wins the initiative regularly it is likely to continue to do so until momentum is lost. This can be frustrating for the player acting second. Accept this.
- Command and Control are crucial to success on the battlefield. Units without orders will be passive unless an umpire rules otherwise. Commanders will have limited information and capacity in a confused situation. Therefore they will use command tokens to activate and re-order units. The number of tokens will vary between players but there are unlikely to be enough for every unit to be doing something each turn. The planning cycle for attacks in particular will occupy a good number of tokens.
- As Army and Corps commanders, there will be a minimum of record-keeping relating to regiments and their ability to fight. It is assumed that there is a replacement system in place for units so there is no tracking of 'hits' or 'steps'. Regiments (infantry), as the lowest units represented, are fit to fight or not and can be destroyed as viable units. The main consideration will be their 'stance' (attack/defence/move/exploit) and whether the unit is fit to fight (Disordered or not). Disordered units are weak and vulnerable.
- Commanders must decide whether divisions are fit for the front-line or need replacing. Reserves are important in this game.
- There will be a limited number of cards in play during the game. If you have assembled your units correctly, secured local superiority and have terrain in your favour, then you should have a very high chance of success.
- Supply will be heavily abstracted within the 'command point' mechanism given the time represented in game. A key issue will be fuel for motorised troops and ammunition for attacks and artillery. These will be fed into the game through identified supply routes which have a limited capacity. Commanders must decide which resources to bring in for divisions and how to allocate them.
- 'Zones of Control' are a common feature in many wargames which use hexes, but are not a major feature of Czech Mate. In this game, the commander must decide whether to concentrate his forces for movement or attack, or spread them to cover more ground.
- Air power is not the major factor it becomes over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with regard to the land battle. Having secured air superiority within a region, the main decision will be whether to focus on bombing lines of communication or urban areas. Close Air Support as we know it is not an effective option.
- Although it is a commonly accepted 'rule' that attackers need odds of 3:1 to likely secure victory, the statistics of those such as Trevor Dupuy do not seem to back this up and other issues should be considered. <http://www.dupuyinstitute.org/blog/2016/07/11/trevor-dupuy-and-the-3-1-rule/>
- What will be a crucial factor for commanders is the use of terrain, artillery support in the attack/defence and motorised troops in exploiting breakthroughs.

# Czech Mate '38 - The Forces

The main focus for this game is land forces and these are organised as follows:

**Germany** – 5 armies, each of 1-3 Army Corps Player numbers in brackets, with a high command team responsible for Luftwaffe during the game.

<p><b>Head of OKH:</b> Generaloberst Walther v. Brauchitsch  <b>Chief of Staff:</b> Generaloberst Franz Halder  Plus up to 2 staff officers.</p> <p>High Command team to play air game whilst Army Commanders are meeting with their team.  <b>Luftwaffe:</b> 3 Luftwaffe Fleets, totalling 7 Air Divisions</p>				
2 Army (4)	8 Army (3)	10 Army (3)	12 Army (3)	14 Army (3)
CO v. Rundstedt CoS v. Salmuth	CO Bock CoS Felber	CO v. Reichenau CoS Bernard	CO v. Leeb CoS v. Manstein	CO List CoS Ruoff
1 Panzer Div. 9 Infantry Div. 3 Landwehr Div. 1 SS Mot. Regt. 4 Border Units	1 Mot. Infantry Div. 4 Infantry Div.	1 Panzer Div. 1 Light Div. 2 Mot. Infantry Div. 2 Infantry Div. 1 SS Mot. Regt.	1 Mountain Div. 8 Infantry Div. 1 Landwehr Div.	1 Panzer Div. 1 Light Div. 1 Mot. Infantry Div. 2 Mountain Div. 1 Infantry Div. 1 Reserve Division. 1 SS Mot. Regt. 1 Border Unit.
Location: Silesia	Location: Saxony	Location: Bavaria	Location: Bavaria	Location: Vienna
OKH Reserve: 1 Airlanding, 5 Landwehr, 3 Reserve Divisions.				

**Czechoslovakia** – 4 armies, each of 1-2 Corps, with local border and fortress units. These will be at varying strengths, depending on how much notice the Czechs have and will also be contending with unrest. There will be a high command team responsible for the Czech Air Force during the game.

<p>• <b>Chief of Army:</b> General of the Army Ludvík Krejčí  • <b>Chief of General Staff:</b> Brigadier General Bohuslav Fiala  Plus up to 2 staff officers to support map operations flexibly.</p> <p>High Command team to play air game whilst Army Commanders are meeting with their team.  <b>Czech Air Force:</b> 6 Air Regiments (3 Mixed, 1 Fighter, 2 Bomber).  <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Army in Slovakia may not be played.</b></p>			
1 <sup>st</sup> Army "Havlíček" (3)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Army "Jirásek" (2)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Army "Štefánik"	4 <sup>th</sup> Army "Neruda" (3)
CO Gen Sergěj Vojtechovský CoS Ludvík Kašpárek	CO Gen Vojtěch Boris Luža CoS F. Vejmelka	CO Gen Josef Votruba CoS B. Kratochvíl	CO Gen Lev Prchala CoS A. Páral
5 Infantry Divisions 6 Border Commands	2 Infantry Divisions 2 Border Commands	1 Fast Division (Cavalry/Armour) 2 Infantry Divisions 4 Border Commands	2 Fast Divisions 4 Infantry Divisions 3 Border Commands
HQ: Kutná Hora	HQ: Olomouc	HQ: Kremnica	Location: Brno
Army Reserve: 1 Fast Division, 8 Infantry Divisions			

## The Map

Armies marked with Squares. Czech Army Corps with circles. German Corps TBC

