

# 1918 GAME PROFILE / ANALYSIS

## Nobody Loves You When You're Old and Good

by Charles R Turner

Even though I'm no great fan of WWI games, I do respect 1918. I've played it a few times (long ago) and found it to be worth the time and with so many games to play, that's high praise. It suffers from being about WWI, being "old," and not having state of the art graphics and rules. Nevertheless, I'd hate to see such a good game be entirely neglected and this prompts me to prompt you to haul it out of the closet and play it again - read the article first, though. - RAS

On March 21, 1918 the blast of over 6000 guns heralded the beginning of the first and largest of the German "Peace Offensives" of 1918 designed to defeat the British and French before the Americans arrived in force. Using troops made available for use on the Western front by Russia's collapse, the Germans managed by means of new infiltration tactics to penetrate almost 40 miles in seven days into the Allied front before being halted by their own supply difficulties, the arrival of French reinforcements, and the desperate Allied defense which drained German manpower. 1918 simulates this first German offensive of 1918.

1918 was first published as one of the old Test Series Games by Poultron Press (S&T) in 1970. The second Simulation Series edition was first published by SPI in 1972. Because 1918 is an older game and because games on World War I have never been particularly popular, 1918 is almost forgotten today. This is unfortunate for 1918 is quite a good game that is rarely decided until the last turns. Although its basic system is fairly standard, it has enough unique elements (infiltration, its handling of supply and artillery, etc.) to keep it interesting today. There are large amounts of combat (and blood) and movement in 1918. The game is given variety through the Order of Battle Options available to each side. Overall, 1918 portrays a tense situation in which the Allied player is trying to slowly drain the initially irresistible German forces to a point where they can no longer carry out offensive operations before the Germans have seized their geographical objectives while also trying to keep their own outnumbered forces from being completely annihilated. The German player's primary challenges are to move as quickly as possible with as few casualties to his own troops as possible toward his objectives while keeping his troops supplied (which takes considerable logistical forethought, especially in the later stages of the game).

The map covers the area in France from Amiens on the west to a little east of the line Cambrai, St-Quentin, La Fere, and from Lens in the north to Noyen in the south. Each hex represents 2.8 kilometers, or about 1.74 miles of terrain measured across. The front line runs from almost in the southeast corner up to about the middle of the north edge of the map. On each side of this line are the trenches, or fortified zones as they are called in the game. The German fortified zone is from three to four hexes deep whereas the Allied fortified zone is three hexes deep only in the northern third and on the southernmost three hexes of the front, south of the Oise River (the French sector). Along the rest of the front, the Allied fortified zone is only one hex deep. Besides aiding friendly defenders, units must spend an additional movement point to enter an enemy fortified zone hex. Directly west of the frontline and including most of the Allied fortified zone is a gray area which runs like the inverted vortex of a tornado from the southern map edge to form a point just north of Arras. This represents the area devastated by the Germans when they retreated to the Hindenburg line in 1917. This area severely impedes the German advance. Whereas a clear terrain hex costs one movement point, each hex in the devastated zone costs two. But this zone also hinders the Allies by slowing up reinforcements and by making retreats during the movement phase difficult. Rivers are another impediment to the German advance. To cross a river, a unit must expend two additional movement points. Among the rivers, the Somme-Canal du Nord system is the worst obstacle, because much of it lies in the devastated zone and so four movement points must be expended to cross it. (All movement costs are cumulative.)

Around the map are various aids to the play of the game. Besides the combat results table and the terrain effects chart, there is a replacement pool for each player. There is an area for each player to place units which have been permanently destroyed. Also, for the German player, there are boxes to store units which have exited from the map and thus count toward the victory conditions. And there is also the time record chart for keeping track of when reinforcements will arrive, and it gives the five different Allied reinforcement schedules. Which schedule is used depends on the Order of Battle Option the Allied player is using.

Each combat unit in 1918 represents a division. Except for eight 6-4's (the British Guards and the divisions of the Commonwealth countries), all British infantry divisions are 4-4's. All French divisions are 5-4's and the few Allied cavalry divisions in the game are all 2-7's. The Germans have three types of infantry divisions. The most important and most numerous are the Stosstruppen (assault) divisions (7-5's). These units represent the divisions trained in the new infiltration tactics and have special capabilities which are discussed below. Then come the regular German divisions (6-4's) and finally, the Trench divisions (5-3's). The Germans do not have any cavalry in the historical order of battle, but have three such divisions in one of the hypothetical orders of battle. They are the same strength as their Allied counterparts (2-7). In addition to these units, both sides have corps/supply/artillery units. They are the same strength for both sides, namely 4-3's. They have the symbol and historical designations of corps headquarters, although they do not function in a command control capacity, but rather as a supply source or as artillery. These units will be discussed in more detail later.

1918 lasts ten turns, and each turn represents the passage of one day of real time beginning with March 21. Each player turn consists of a first movement phase, followed by the combat phase, and then a second movement phase, with the German player turn occurring first in each game-turn. This second movement phase differs from the second movement phase in most other dual movement phase games in that all units may move again whether they have been involved in combat in the immediately preceding combat phase or not.

Zones of control in 1918 are of the usual type which do not force combat and do not allow movement directly from one enemy controlled hex to another. There are, however, two important exceptions to this scheme which allow some movement through zones of control. The first exception is that German Stosstruppen divisions (7-5) that begin their movement phase in an enemy ZOC may move 1 hex only directly into another enemy controlled hex, or in other words, one hex per phase or two per turn. This, of course, simulates the Germans' infiltration tactics. The other exception is called a leapfrog withdrawal. In this case, a friendly unit in an enemy controlled hex may move onto an adjacent friendly unit in an enemy controlled hex if that adjacent friendly unit has not yet moved in the current movement phase. This is especially useful to the Allied player because he will need it repeatedly to save his units that have been surrounded by German infiltration. The only other notable rule pertaining to zones of control is the rule that says the Allies (only) must pay an additional movement point when leaving an enemy zone of control.

Units may stack two high, but whereas both may attack, only one may defend and only that one suffers any adverse combat result. Thus a line of units stacked two high can stop any attack if reinforced to make up for losses. But the Allies can almost never afford this luxury.

The simulation of supply and artillery in 1918 is handled in an abstract, but nevertheless effective manner. It is also a unique manner in that supply and artillery are not represented by separate units, but are one and the same unit. In effect, these corps/supply/artillery units represent the flow of ammunition and other supplies to the

front. In any given player turn, they may function in any one of the following ways: (1) to provide general and/or attack supply; (2) as offensive artillery; (3) as defensive artillery. General supply is usually traced five hexes to a road that leads off a friendly map edge, but if that is not possible, general supply may be traced four hexes to a corps/ supply/ artillery unit. A corps/ supply/artillery unit may be used indefinitely for general supply without being consumed, but it is consumed and removed from the map when it is used to provide attack supply to units within four hexes of it. All units within four hexes of one of these units can be supplied by corps/supply/artillery units and any unit in attack supply is also in general supply. Since units cannot attack without attack supply, it is important to keep the front line well supplied. Units which are defending need only general supply to function normally and thus do not consume corps/ supply/ artillery units. The Germans will usually have to expend between three and five of these units per turn to keep his entire line supplied for attacks. Expended corps/ supply/artillery units return on the first friendly movement phase of the game turn after they were consumed.

When used as offensive artillery, a corps/supply/artillery unit may attack with its combat factor of 4 any enemy unit within three hexes of the attacking unit. It may attack alone or in conjunction with attacking infantry units and is always consumed when used as offensive artillery. German supply/artillery units being used as offensive artillery and firing from the German fortified zone are doubled in strength to 8 factors. This simulates the British tactic of putting a relatively large percentage of their troops in the front line where they were exposed to the full extent of the initial German bombardment.

Supply/artillery units may also be used to aid the defense of a friendly unit(s) which is defending within three hexes of that supply/artillery unit. Here the defender has the option of using the supply/ artillery unit at full strength (4), in which case it is consumed, or at half strength (2), in which case it is not. Either way, since the attacker declares his attacks before the defender allocates his defensive artillery, the attacker may find his odds drastically reduced before the attack is resolved.

Actually, there is one further use of these units. As a last resort, supply/artillery units may be used, in defense only, as a regular unit, defending with a strength of one. If destroyed while being used in this manner, they are placed in the box that is for permanently destroyed units and never return. Nevertheless, the Allied player may find this necessary at times when no other type of unit can plug a serious hole in the line.

It should be clear by now that the decision each turn as to which supply/artillery units will function as supply sources and which as artillery and the decision as to how many of these units total the player can afford to consume each turn without jeopardizing the success of future turns is crucial to the game. When returned to the game, Allied supply/ artillery units come on from the western map edge, German from the eastern. Thus in the early part of the game, the Allies must budget their expenditure of supply/artillery units, because they are so far from their friendly map edge that it will take several turns for an expended supply/artillery unit to reach the front. In the later stages of the game, the situation will be reversed and it will be the Germans who will have to budget their supply/artillery units.

1918 was one of the first games to use die roll modifications to reflect the effects of terrain on combat. Units are never doubled (due to terrain) or halved (due to lack of supply) as in many games. Instead, the die roll is modified in the following ways: out of supply, -1; defending in a friendly fortified zone hex, +2; defending in a town or behind a river, + 1. Modifications are always cumulative.

The most notable aspect of the combat result table is the large number of exchanges. The odds range from 1-1 to 10-1 and there are two exchanges (V, possibility) in every column except 6-1 (where there are three) and 10-1 (where there is only one if the die roll is unmodified). 10-1 with the defender unsupplied in clear terrain is the only sure way to avoid an exchange. There are also quite a few "both retreat" results and this result is possible even at 10-1 if the

defender is in his fortified zone. Also, if the defender is defending in his fortified zone, an attacker retreat result is possible up to 6-1. Thus, as one would expect the defense has the upper hand, especially if the defender is in the trenches. However, the defender's advantages disappear when the defending unit is surrounded in clear terrain, for this decreases the chance of an exchange if the odds are at least 3-1 or better and means the certain destruction of the defending unit, since in a both retreat, the defender is retreated first. So by surrounding Allied units through infiltration, the German player can often overcome the defensive advantages inherent in the combat results table.

Few German players would allow their Units to be surrounded by the Allies so it might look as if it would be impossible for the Allies to attack successfully, especially in the early turns. But this is not necessarily the case. For odds of less than 1-1 are treated like 1-1. Furthermore, the exchange rule reads: "the defending unit(s) are destroyed and one of the attacking units ... " is destroyed. This can lead to the ridiculous result of a British cavalry division, for example, attacking two or three German Stosstruppen divisions (7-5's) at 1-1 and rolling an exchange (a 1/3 possibility) and destroying all of the German divisions at the cost of only a cavalry division - a most favorable exchange for the Allied player. Yet it may not be as ridiculous as it seems. The German player, in the earlier stages of the game will inevitably surround many Allied divisions, thus minimizing or eliminating the chances for exchanges. Thus, German casualties during this period may sometimes seem unrealistically low. However, such 1-1 attacks by the Allies even things up a bit, if lucky.

Replacements are available at the same rate for both players. For every three supplied units that are destroyed, one may return as a replacement. As supplied units are destroyed, they are placed in the replacement pool on the map board. When the number of units in the pool reaches three, one may return during the next turn, and the other two are placed in the permanently destroyed pile. Because it may take more or less than one turn to accumulate three units in the replacement pool, replacements arrive at irregular intervals. Units destroyed while out of supply cannot be replaced.

This brings us to the order of battle option. The Germans have seven OB options (numbered 1-7) and the Allies have six (numbered 8-13). Any German option can be played with any Allied option, so the game can be played in 423 different ways. Since some options are obviously stronger than others" each is given a relative strength rating. The strengths of the German options range from 100 (option #1) to 85 (option #7), of the Allies' from 53 (option #8) to 39 (option #13). These ratings are used to determine an equitable level of player victory conditions when using a combination of options which gives one side or the other a distinct advantage.

Perhaps it would be best to look at the forces of the historical order of battle and then compare them with the "what if" options. Actually each side has two OB options with historical conditions and order of battle. One for each side (#5 for the Germans, # 13 for the Allies) has both the historical forces and deployment (the historical placement of all units is printed on the map). The other (#3 for the Germans, #12 for the Allies) has the historical forces, but players may set up as they wish, within certain restrictions. The German's historical OB consists of 47 Stosstruppen divisions, 16 regular divisions, 15 trench divisions, and 19 supply/artillery units, or 78 divisions in all. The Allies begin the historical options with 32 British, 3 Commonwealth, and 2 French infantry divisions plus 3 cavalry divisions and 11 supply/artillery units, or 40 divisions in all. Thus the Germans have almost a 2-1 superiority at the beginning of the historical option. The Allies also receive 7 British, 5 Commonwealth, 3 cavalry, and 17 French divisions, and 6 supply/artillery units over the course of the game as reinforcements, or, in other words an additional 32 divisions. Thus the final ratio comes to 78 German divisions to 72 Allied divisions. (The Germans never receive any reinforcements in any of their options.)

Of the five hypothetical OB option for the German player, three (#2, #6, & #7) negate certain rules of play while keeping the historical order of battle and the other two (#1 & #4) add a few units

to the historical order of battle, while keeping the rules unchanged. In option 2, there is no devastated zone. This of course supposes that the Germans did not destroy this area when they retreated in 1917. Option 6 presumes that the British improved their tactics by not filling their front trenches so much. Thus in this option German artillery is not doubled when firing from their own fortified zone. Order of battle option 7, the weakest option for the Germans, presumes that the Germans did not develop infiltration tactics and so the Germans' Stosstruppen units may not move through zones of control. This is not really as bad as it might seem. The Germans can still blow holes in the Allied line which can be exploited in the second movement phase, but naturally the Germans will not be able to surround as many Allied units as they normally could. In the other two hypothetical options, only the order of battle is slightly different in each case. In option 1 (the strongest), the Germans have six additional regular divisions (6-4's), or a total of 22 instead of the usual 16. These 6 extra divisions are divisions which could have been, but were not, withdrawn from the defunct Eastern front. Option 4 supposes that the Germans had had cavalry available to help exploit the breakthrough. They are, however, rather vulnerable and usually not a lot of help.

The rules do not definitely state whether the German hypothetical options are to be set up using free deployment or not. Presumably they could be set up either free or with the historical set-up, although with the options which change a rule (#2, 6, 7), the historical set up would seem to have been intended. With options 1 and 4, the extra units naturally do not fit into the historical set-up on the map. The choice here is to use free deployment for all units or just for the new units. Either way seems reasonable. None of the Allied hypothetical options change any rules of play as some of the Germans' do, and so the Allied options each offer a different number of units at start and/or different reinforcement schedules than the historical options. Option 8 presumes maximum French frontage. All of the front south of the Peronne to Cambrai road is taken over at the start by 18 French divisions. In option 9 the French frontage stretches further north than originally, but not as far as in option 8. Nine French divisions cover the front south of the Amiens - St. Quentin road in this option. The reinforcement schedules for each of these options differs from the historical schedule in that fewer French divisions and more British divisions are sent as reinforcements, especially in option 8. In other words, with the French front extended, they would not have the same number of reserves to send, but the British with a shorter front would have more. Option 8 is the strongest Allied option by far. Because of the short British frontage, the British can defend in depth and their line will be very difficult to break. The French line however is not quite so heavily held. But this option presents the Germans with quite a challenge.

At this point, there is a slight mistake in the rules. Allied options 10 and 12 are reversed. Option 10 is actually greater French reinforcements and option 12 is actual forces, free deployment. This becomes clear from looking at the reinforcement schedules. In option 10, the French send the maximum possible reinforcements to aid their British allies. Thus the number of starting units are the same, but the French send eight more divisions than they did originally. In option 11, the Allies did not send reinforcements to Italy leaving nine additional divisions in France to help stop the German offensives. Options 12 and 13 are the historical options and are also the weakest. The forces available in all of the allied options are summarized in the chart below.

There are two sets of victory conditions in 1918. Both sets depend on the number of points accumulated by the German player over the course of the game. The German player receives 10 points for controlling Arras, 15 points for Amiens, and 5 points for controlling Montdidier at the end of the game. One point is also given the German player for each friendly unit exited in supply off the southern, western, or north western map edges (behind the original allied front line) and four points for each unit exited north of Arras. If the Germans have 25 points or more at the end of the game, they win a decisive victory; 15-24 a substantive; 10-14 marginal; 5-9 a draw; and 0-4 an Allied victory. In the actual campaign, the Germans managed only to capture Montdidier - a draw. These are the historical victory conditions. The other set of victory conditions reflect player victory and varies with the order of battle options being used. This is where the relative strengths assigned to the order of battle options come into play. The relative strength of the Allied OB option being used is subtracted from the relative strength of the German OB option to give a base number. This base number is cross-referenced on the player victory chart to find the victory levels for when those two OB options are used. Thus if the Germans, for example, use an option which is stronger than their historical option and the Allies use their historical option, the Germans must accumulate more victory points than if they were using the historical option in order to achieve any given level of victory.

In conclusion, it can be said that although some aspects of the game (for example, supply, artillery, losses and replacements) are handled rather abstractly, 1918 recreates the overall flow of the German Michel offensive quite well. The Germans crossed the Somme river on the 23rd of March (game turn 3) and in the majority of games in which the historical forces and setup are used, the Germans will cross that river on turn 3. Few games are so well paced. It is a case of the simulation of some details being abstracted for the benefit of an accurate overall picture of a campaign. 1918 is a must for anyone interested in World War 1 or for anyone who is looking for an interesting game of yesteryear.

<i>Option:</i>		<i>British Infantry Division</i>	<i>French Infantry Division</i>	<i>Allied Cavalry Division</i>	<i>Allied Sup/Art. Units</i>		<i>Total Divisions</i>
8. Maximum French frontage	At start	39	18	3	(16)	=	60
	Reinf.	19	8	3	( 2)	=	30
	Total	58	26	6	(18)	=	90
9. Increased French frontage	At start	37	9	3	(14)	=	49
	Reinf.	14	12	3	( 3)	=	29
	Total	51	21	6	(17)	=	78
10. Greater French reinf.	At start	35	2	3	(11)	=	40
	Reinf.	12	23	5	( 8)	=	40
	Total	47	25	8	(19)	=	80
11. Number reinf. to Italy	At start	39	2	3	(11)	=	44
	Reinf.	15	19	3	( 6)	=	37
	Total	54	21	6	(17)	=	81
12. Hist. forces—free deploy, and	At start	35	2	3	(11)	=	40
	Reinf.	12	17	3	( 6)	=	32
	Total	47	19	6	(17)	=	72
13. Hist. forces—hist. set-up							