

# A Spanish Crossfire

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Looking for fast, playable rules last year, a friend mentioned an interesting review of Arty Conliffe's Crossfire. Being an inveterate rules junkie, I had a set within a week and could see Crossfire converting to refight Spain with little difficulty.

A year, many playtests and a big demo-game later here are some thoughts and suggestions.

If you haven't come across Crossfire some explanation may be helpful. The rules are intended to recreate company-level infantry combat in WWII; designer Arty Conliffe states that the emphasis is on movement, firepower and terrain. What makes Crossfire unusual is the simplicity of a system that dispenses with rulers and fixed game turns yet still manages to present players with a challenging array of tactical problems.

There is no mention of scale in the rules as it is assumed that combat is taking place within effective small arms range - hence no need for rulers. Perhaps more innovative is the concept of tactical initiatives that replace the usual game turn sequence found in most rules. Whilst a player holds the initiative, actions such as movement, firing and rallying can be carried out until an action fails or successful enemy reactive fire causes the initiative to switch players. In practice, to retain the initiative, players need to pay careful attention to those basic principles of fire and movement as well as effective use of terrain.

The basic units used in Crossfire are stands representing squads, heavy machinegun sections, battalion and company commanders whilst single figure models represent platoon commanders and vehicles. During an initiative phase stands can move and fire as often as desired until one of three things happens; a stand is suppressed or killed by reactive fire, a phasing player's firing fails to suppress or kill its target or a player chooses to pass the initiative to the opponent.

Firing is carried out by rolling 3d6 per squad or 4d6 per HMG section, each 5 or 6 achieved results in a Hit, one Hit is a Pin, two Hits a Suppression and three Hits a Kill. Squads that are no more than a stand apart may combine their fire but a commander is needed to coordinate more widely separated squads and / or HMGs. The number of firing dice is modified if the target is in cover so the careful use of movement and leaders, to achieve good firing positions and bring effective fire to bear, are neatly and simply brought out by the mechanics of the rules.

There are no morale tests per se, troops are rated green, regular or veteran which determines their ability to recover from Pin or Suppression. As commanders are needed to rally troops a further refinement of unit morale can be effected by the bonuses given (or not) to a platoon, company or battalion commander. The provision of a retreat move as an action allows a player to

withdraw a unit from a terrain feature without incurring further fire, in effect the player takes a morale test based on the possibly conflicting needs of retaining the initiative, holding ground or minimising casualties.

## So, how does Crossfire transfer to Spain?

Early playtests showed that Crossfire's concentration on recreating infantry combat make them very suitable for refighting smaller Spanish Civil War actions. The simplicity of the system meant that all that was needed was to develop features that give the "feel" of the conflict in Spain. Further playtesting involving players with a wide range of interests, including three with a definite interest in the Spanish Civil War, resulted in the following rules adaptation:

### **Command and Control**

Troops are rated either:

- A - a squad needs line of sight to it's Platoon Commander to move but may end it's move out of line of sight;
- B - a squad needs line of sight to it's Platoon Commander to move and must end it's move within line of sight as well.

Certain elite units may have some squads designated I : these squads may operate independently until the completion of a simple set task, eg. taking a bridge.

### **Troop Ratings**

Troop morale is rated Green, Regular or Veteran; we gave general ratings but varied them to represent the changes that occurred over the course of the war or due to the circumstances of a particular scenario. Common sense and research should dictate ratings in recreating historical clashes, otherwise we use these ratings. However veteran is a relative term, also bear in mind the relative proportions of such units in overall forces

### **Cover**

Although the Crossfire rules played well, several adaptations were made as play tests progressed either to give a greater feeling of the conflict in Spain or for aesthetic reasons (or both).

The former can, I hope, be seen in the troop ratings above and are of course subjective. More difficult was the problem of cover - the rules recommend a substantial proportion of the battlefield be given over to features that block line of sight or give cover.

Consequently our first playtests just didn't look right yet it was obvious that games would be over very quickly without as much scenery. Reducing the number of firing dice didn't seem right so we developed scrub to replace the rough ground of the rules in providing cover that reduces enemy fire by one dice per firing stand.

The rough ground of our rules are scrubby, rocky low rises that serve to block line of sight in lieu of having many woods features. The result was battlefields with a more open appearance but that still gave enough cover to provide a challenging and enjoyable game.

## Spanish Civil War AFVs

Part of the appeal of the Spanish Civil War for myself and a number of the playtesters is that armour didn't dominate the conflict. Crossfire strictly limits the role of tanks in the game but under the standard rules the T26, Panzer I and Renault 17 seemed merely decorative.

In Crossfire AFVs get one action per initiative leading to very static tanks, this was fine for representing the slow "mobile pillbox" armoured trucks but seemed very odd for the speedy Panzer 1 and T26.

The addition of actions available to tanks (but not armoured trucks) did not unbalance the scenarios where we tried this, my overall preference is to add two extra actions to PZ1 , T26 and BT5 tanks and leave the Renault with one action.

Another change to the AFV rules is that we allow HMG sections the possibility of disabling AFVs. It was felt amongst the playtesters that even during 1939 and 1940 tank crews could be un-nerved by HMG fire so, in addition to the standard rules for HMG vs AFV fire, we allow AFVs to be pinned, suppressed and killed as other units - it takes an extra hit to do so though ie.

- two hits to pin
- three hits to suppress
- four hits to kill.

However, I take the point about tanks stood still so its no real problem to make pinned or suppressed afv's retreat. As for rallying, AFVs self rally .

# Spanish Civil War Aircraft

Crossfire makes no provision for airpower but we wanted to see if it was possible to add a plane or two to scenarios and so came up with the following ideas.

First, to determine the appearance of aircraft in an unplanned scenario the two sides rolled a d6 against each other to determine air superiority with a +1 to the Republicans in 1936 or a +1 to the Nationalists in 1938 or 1939. The difference between rolls is the number of initiatives during which the winner may deploy an aircraft over the table, draws mean neither side has managed to deploy any planes.

In a pre-planned scenario the number of aircraft initiatives per side can be determined as an historical account or the designer's common sense dictates, however, I don't recommend giving more than two or three aircraft to a side except under unusual circumstances.

The aircraft themselves work somewhat as artillery does in the standard rules, the number of attacks per plane acting as the fire missions given to artillery. During an initiative an aircraft can make a sweep across the table in a straight line attacking targets along it's route.

We assigned a number of attacks per plane based on armament and bomb load, usually a 4d6 attack for the plane's machineguns and two to four 3d6 or 4d6 attacks depending on the number and weight of the plane's bombs.

The player must declare how many of it's bomb attacks a plane is unloading on a target before any attack rolls are made. Once the plane's bomb attacks are exhausted remaining initiatives can be spent strafing with it's MG attack. Failure to suppress or kill with an aircraft's attacks does not end the phasing player's initiative (as per artillery fire missions).

Anti-aircraft guns and HMG sections may give reactive fire when an aircraft makes it's move, this is carried out similarly to the anti-AFV fire mentioned above with three hits (suppression) meaning that the plane has been forced to return to base and four hits downing it .

So far the ideas outlined above have produced some entertaining games that satisfied those players looking for a fast-moving battle as well as those with a deeper interest in the Spanish Civil War. I'd welcome suggestions or rules ideas for areas not covered as yet. Last but not least, my thanks to all at the Guards who helped with ideas and playtesting.

## **Spanish Civil War Republican forces**

- Anarchist Militia (1936) - V in towns, otherwise G
- Durrutti Column - V in towns, otherwise R
- Other Militia (1936-7) - R in towns, otherwise G  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 for rallying only; CCs, BCs +2 rallying
- Communist 5th Rgt - R
- Basque Communist Militia -R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat

### **International Brigades**

- Centurias, XI & XII Brigades - V in towns, otherwise R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying only; CCs, BCs +2 rallying
- Anglo-American, Commune d'Paris, -V
- Garibaldi, Thaelmann Battalions  
Command and Control - A  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat
- Other International Battalions - R  
Command and Control - A  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat

- 2nd and 3rd Mixed Brigades -V  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying only
- Other Mixed Brigades -R
- Army of Catalonia ( 1936-1937 ) -G
- Army of the East ( 1937-1939 ) -R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying only; CCs, BCs +1 rallying only
- Anarchist 84th Mixed Brigade - V when attacking, otherwise R
- 10th, 15th, 34th and 35th Divisions - V when attacking, otherwise R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat
- 11th and 46th Divisions - V when attacking, otherwise R  
Command and Control - A  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat
- Asaltos \* - V early war , R late war  
Command and Control - A  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat

### **Notes**

- \* Indicates units that count SMG bonus in close combat
- # Indicates units that ignore Pin results from reactive fire prior to entering close combat, however, Suppression results in Killed.

# Spanish Civil War Nationalist Forces

- Carlist Militia (1936) # - V when attacking, otherwise G  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying only; CCs, BCs +2 rallying only
- Carlist Brigades (mid War) - V when attacking, otherwise R
- Carlist Divisions (late War) - R
- Galician Divisions (late War) - R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying only
- Falangist Militia - R when attacking, otherwise G  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying only; CCs, BCs +1 rallying only
- Falangist Battalions de Choque # - V when attacking, otherwise R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying, +1 close combat
- Foreign Legion Banderas - V  
Command and Control - A (I)  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying and close combat
- Italian Blackshirt Units (1936-1937) - G  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - No Bonuses to PCs, CCs or BCs

- CTV (1937- 1939) - R
- Littorio Division - R  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying; CCs, BCs - No Bonuses
- Bersaglieri - V  
Command and Control - B  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying; CCs, BCs +1 rallying
- Moroccan Regulars # - V , R in towns  
Command and Control - B (I)  
Leadership - PCs +1 rallying and close combat; CCs, BCs +2 rallying and close combat

## Notes

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# Indicates units that ignore Pin results from reactive fire prior to entering close combat, however, Suppression results in Killed.