

# Rehearsal For Armageddon

## The Balkan Wars 1912-13

### A Brief Biased History

The long and bloody history of the Balkans is like any other hotly-contested region of the world, where various groups or states have 'interests' which unfortunately (for the general population) overlap... The original hotch-potch of petty feudal states evolved after the fragmentation of the old Roman Empire, and continued a precarious existence on the edge of Europe's two enormous medieval power-blocks, namely the Holy Roman and Byzantine Empires. Up until the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century all the states were 'clients' of one or the other to some extent, even if their levels of national pride and independence would have been more suited to a Chinese Emperor! Much of this continued independence owed less to their fighting ability than the 'cost benefit' to the other powers to take them out. All this changed quite rapidly with the arrival of the Ottoman Turks...

Following rapidly in the political shockwave of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, a relatively young and vigorous Ottoman Empire conducted several campaigns which at times threatened the borders of central Europe itself. In the process, of course, the Balkan states were wiped from the political map – often faster than necessary, given their propensity to 'back the wrong horses'! The romantic Victorians would have us believe that virtually all progress now stopped for the next 400-odd years under the 'dead hand of the [muslim] Turk'. However, whilst it is true that there were occasional rebellions (bloodily crushed, when the Turks could get around to it), at least the Ottomans stopped the interminable 'border wars' in these rich provinces, and many Balkan subjects could and did achieve training, fame and fortune serving the Sultan. But by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century a new political force, 'nationalism', was on the rise among small (and not-so-small) states everywhere – and it coincided with the decline of the very Ottoman power which held the precarious balance of peace/terror throughout the eastern Mediterranean...

Beginning with Greece in the 1820's, throughout the next 90yrs gradually a combination of Turkish political, economic and military exhaustion, combined with local national fanaticism (not to say bloody-mindedness) to wrest chunks of territory from the Ottoman Empire. But none of this would have happened, however, without the various 'Great Powers' in the wings, either bullying, cajoling or encouraging the different parties for their own ends. The only problem was, no-one noticed that their newly-independent 'clients' were becoming difficult to control until the 'July Crisis' of 1914, when it was too late....



## The Game

This lack of control (from outside or within), competing historical and national demands, plus the usual ‘god is on our side’ crap, led to the two-and-a-half Balkan Wars in 1912-13 – and makes ideal fodder for an unruly bunch of wargamers. It is a good ‘taster’ for players to point out that the half is the ‘middle one’, (re)started by a new revolutionary Turkish govt while the others were still arguing about the peace conditions of the first war! Unfortunately, the Turks had not quite replaced the means to actually prosecute the war, and simply gave the squabbling neighbours their only common enemy one last time....?!

The game I have in mind will be a somewhat unusual format, with player-teams representing the governments of key nation-states (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and Turkey), plus a special team of ‘Great Powers’ (Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary) as an aloof sort of ‘Gentlemen Club’, giving and receiving favours in a desperate game of one-upmanship on the ‘influence table’ - mixed with fears over European instability...

Each of the Balkan state teams will consist of three abstract political factions vying for power as well as running the war! They will need to raise force levels (and thus popular expectations of success), select and appoint non-played commanders from a set of possible candidates. Military operations would be conducted on an abstract area map, with battles (essentially exchanges of territorial control) operated by said ‘non-player commanders’ at arms length from the National Govt. The appointment and control of such will be major issues for each national team, as it was the attitudes and psychological make-up as well as inherent skill of these fellows which had such critical effects on operational outcomes. While success in the field has bonuses for the faction at home, there is thus a *political* price to be paid for any sackings of the less-than-competent.... Logistics and levels of sickness in failing weather are *critical* to maintaining operations, dictating timing, strategy - and the end to operations, signalling the politicians to make peace before the army starves and you lose all the gains so far!

The politicians may also pursue ‘favours’ from the Great Powers – although there is no such thing as a free lunch (unless you are Montenegrin and can steal one). Rival territorial claims at the ‘Peace Conference’ will be settled using a system which is fast and highly stylised, and is based on a form of ‘Rummy’, in which sets of cards will represent the key issues – the better the ‘run’ from the territorial cards your forces collect, the better your claim! *Note – an internationally recognised claim to one province is worth far, far more than partial occupation of any number.* Each team will also be rated for popularity as a govt and ‘national pride’, as defined by success on the battlefield or the conference circuit – and of course, the degree of perceived ‘foreign influence’, with WWI always in the near future.



(and no, I can't tell one from t'other, either....!)

# RFA - OPERATIONAL SYSTEM Mk463

The Ops phase should proceed quite quickly following the National Team (politics) phase.

## 1. The 'Operations Map'

- a. Actually, there isn't a map as such! Yes, the politicians will have a big map of the Balkans but operations will be conducted by province.
- b. Each 'province' will have a table in the adjacent hall with an abstract 'control sheet' for each army present, showing current attributes (strength, sickness, morale etc.), plus a card for the current commander and any 'tactical goodies' (heavy guns, defences etc).
- c. Control of each Province will be reflected by the possession of cards. This will be a normal suite of playing cards, but where the J,Q = major towns and the K = Province HQ/city. Political control of said Province will be determined (during the Peace Conference) by who has the 'best' set of cards, as per the game of Rummy!
- d. Any province may only ever have 1x 'field army' from any given state – if a 2<sup>nd</sup> army moves in (from an adjacent province), then it will merge with the current army ***under the most senior commander***.
- e. An army may only conduct field operations in one Province at a time. If it moves on to an adjacent Province, it may leave 'static garrisons' (to hold what it has taken), but these may not attempt to gain more control. Such forces can always be moved back into the 'National Reserve' pot, OR collected by another incoming friendly army (but this leaves any gains vulnerable...).
- f. There may be a SIEGE condition however for the principle fortress controlling that Province. In this case, there will be a CITY card onto which states will place their forces. Sieges are resolved separately to field operations.
- g. NOTE
  - i. If there is no friendly field army in a province in which a SIEGE is taking place and an enemy field force arrives, the siege is lifted (see below) and the besieging force becomes a field army.
  - ii. There will always be at least 1x Turkish 'army' present, representing garrisons etc etc (it is, after all, their land – for now).
  - iii. Move distances are the same irrespective of time of year – I've just adjusted how long a turn represents... 😊

## 2. Operational Turn Sequence:

- a. **Player arrives at table from National Team** (normally 'Minister of Defence', but not necessarily).
  - i. ONLY ONE ALLOWED – NO 'COMMITTEES'!!
  - ii. If arriving 'late' (TBD), deduct 'N' from CMDR rolls; if too late to process normally....
- b. **Set Army Orders.** These can be:
  - i. ATTACK – place arrow marker pointing at target foe
  - ii. DEFEND – await events! This is the default order if nothing set...
  - iii. RETIRE – double any terrain gains (for enemy attacks) but reduce any losses. When all terrain lost, army EITHER moves to adjacent province, OR (if CMDR morale fails) goes into CITY under siege.
  - iv. REST – allows greater recovery from sickness but greater losses if attacked...
- c. **Move strength points to/from armies**
  - i. From 'National Reserve' (call-up) pot to armies in the field
  - ii. From 'Sick' to out-of-combat (i.e. sent home; will not return during game)
  - iii. **Attempt** to move SPs from armies in the field, based on CMDR (staff) ability
    1. roll 1d6 LE to CMDR ability to do so; otherwise, place in 'National Reserve' (=delayed en-route, slow to start etc).
- d. **Resolve any conflicts:**
  - i. Any armies 'cohabiting' a province but not in direct conflict i.e. no-one is ATTACKING only roll for sickness (there may be some skirmishing but it is negligible on this scale)
  - ii. Attacks & sieges – see below
- e. **Check for Sickness**
  - i. Roll 1d6 per SP in 'sick' boxes; 1 = KIA, 2-5 = n/e; 6 = recovers! Deduct from sick total
  - ii. ADJUST ROLL BY:
    1. Weather: Autumn -1; Winter -3
    2. Bases etc: Army controls CITY in Province = +2; TOWN = +1
  - iii. Political effects... For each KIA, create 1x CRISIS for the National Team.

## RESOLVING CONFLICTS

### ATTACKS

1. **Determine the army effectiveness.** This is computed by rolling 1d6 LE to CMDR ability for each (STREN – SICK). *This represents a commander's ability to actually **use** the units in a sensible way!*
2. **Check the CMDR *attitude*.** How they are feeling etc has a big bearing on subsequent events, plans etc (both good and bad):
  - a. **Check Morale: roll 1d6 – check difference is score vs C-MOR**
    - i. 2 or more greater than CAT: DEFEND becomes RETIRE
    - ii. CAT is 2 or more less than score: ATTACK becomes 'ALL-OUT ATTACK'
3. **Check for any 'Tactical Goodies'.** These are various bonus cards which may have a significant effect on operations. Some are specific to certain nations, some are one-off uses. Most are dependent on the CMDR ability...
4. **Fighting:**
  - a. Roll 1d6 per *effective* SP
    - i. ATTACK/DEFEND/RETIRE: 5,6 = Hit; 1 = Loss of SP (sick)
    - ii. ALL-OUT ATTACK: 4+ = Hit; 1,2 = Loss of SP (sick)
    - iii. *NOTE – the roll effect is not either/or – the 'sick' score is the **unadjusted die-roll**, so it is possible to have, say, +2 from some temporary tactical bonuses which on a roll of 3 would give 1x hit **and** 1x sick... THIS IS IMPORTANT.*
  - b. Roll for any 'Tactical Goodies' (consult the cards for details)
5. **Results:** Determine the WINNER and LOSER by comparing hits (not overall losses).
  - a. If LOSER orders were RETIRE, the **majority** of losses must be in Province Control cards; defender chooses the rest.
  - b. The LOSER must then give-up to the WINNER a mixture of [1] Province cards, [2] special terrain cards (mountains, defences etc), or [3] SP (prisoners) equal to the difference. If no special terrain, split Province and SP 50/50.
  - c. CHOOSING Province Cards:
    - i. These are normally selected 'blind', one at a time from the owning player's remaining deck. However, there are restrictions (reflecting terrain etc).
    - ii. You cannot take a J or Q UNTIL you have normal cards totalling 10+pts
    - iii. You cannot take a K UNTIL you have either a J or Q AND have cards totalling 15+pts
    - iv. In either case, shuffle and take a different card instead.
  - d. Check the CMDR morale
    - i. LOSER: roll 1d6, and if GT current CMDR morale, reduce by -1
    - ii. WINNER: +1 to morale

### SIEGES

1. Determine available effective strength as per above. However, if this figure ever reaches zero:
  - a. DEFENDER: the place surrenders.
  - b. ATTACKER: the siege is lifted, and the besieging force retires to a friendly (held) Province
2. Check CMDR attitude as per above except that 'RETIRE' becomes surrender!
3. Both sides roll for hits as per normal
4. Determine WINNER & LOSER by comparing hit totals BUT the attacker deducts the DV of the place being besieged.
5. Results - For each net hit, the opposing force loses 1x SP to sick. There is no immediate political effect – other than the rising KIA bill - until the place falls...
6. **POLITICAL EFFECTS:**
  - a. If a besieged place surrenders, the losing team creates CRISES = the greater of either
    - i. the DV of the location OR
    - ii. the 'political reputation level' of the CMDR
  - b. If a siege fails (is lifted)
    - i. ATTACKER team gets CRISES = the DV of the location
    - ii. DEFENDER team gets 'POPULAR ACCLAIM' = the PRL of the CMDR