

## The Battles of Hue: Understanding Urban Conflicts through Wargaming

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# **The Battles of Hue: Understanding Urban Conflicts through Wargaming**

## **Abstract**

Recent years have seen increased interest in the professional use of wargames, and wargames are a potential tool to enable a better understanding of past urban conflicts and to plan for future urban security. Whilst access to professional wargames are limited, hobby wargames have been identified as useful and closely related areas to study. Previous work has identified around 214 manual hobby wargames that deal with urban conflict, but only 5 battles are covered by 5 or more wargames, and so provide a reasonable sample for comparative reviews. The Battle of Hue battle had many of the hallmarks of a modern urban battle, with both symmetric and asymmetric opposition, combined arms, a civilian and media presence, and the use of innovative technology. This article examines how 6 different wargame designers have approached the Battle of Hue, and how their design choices relate to the key characteristic of the Battle of Hue. The article also identifies where the principal deficiencies are. The article concludes by considering the issues highlighted by these games that wargaming has in representing urban conflict, and how these could be addressed in order to make wargaming a more useful tool to model urban conflict and security.

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## Introduction

In trying to better understand past urban conflicts and better plan for future urban conflicts, wargaming offers a valuable approach to the challenge. Wargames allow for a “vicarious understanding of some of the strategic and tactical dynamics associated with real military operations,” are active learning, and present players with decisions similar to those in actual engagements.<sup>1</sup> The renewed interest in urban warfare since Iraq, exacerbated by operations in Ukraine, has led to an increased focus on urban wargaming in the professional military world, for example, the Urban Warfare Planners Course in the United States of America.<sup>2</sup>

This article takes a comparative case-study approach to examine how valuable wargames could be to understanding and planning urban warfare and security. It looks at one urban battle in Vietnam, the Battle of Hue in 1968, and the wargames produced about it. After summarizing wargaming and the issues involved in wargame research, the article presents the reasons for choosing Hue, followed by a summary of the actual Battle of Hue. The article then introduces the wargames on Hue and analyzes their structural elements. This is followed by an identification of the critical characteristics of the battle (which may apply to other urban battles) and a discussion of how they are (or are not) represented in the wargames. The article concludes with a summative assessment of the wargames and how well they represent the characteristics of Hue and a broader discussion of how such wargames might help us better understand past battles such as Hue and plan for future urban conflicts.

## Wargaming

The US Department of Defense defines wargames as

representations of conflict or competition in a synthetic environment, in which people make decisions and respond to the consequences of those decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The professional community (those involved in delivering wargames principally to militaries and governments) differentiates between using wargames for training and analysis.<sup>4</sup> Such a categorization can also extend to wargames for entertainment, edutainment, and education.<sup>5</sup>

In the last 12 months, the UK Secretary of State for Defense and the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have stated the importance of wargaming.<sup>6</sup> Beginning principally with the Prussian military, wargames have been used to help military planners evaluate options and to train their staff.<sup>7</sup> Wargames were used in the inter-war period by the US Navy to train senior officers and examine strategies for any future war with Japan.<sup>8</sup> During WW2, the Germans utilized wargames widely, from planning the 1940 invasion of France to reacting—live—to a United States attack in the Ardennes in 1944.<sup>9</sup>

In the immediate post-war period, wargaming was challenged by computer-based operational research, resulting in computer-assisted wargames such as the multi-day *Global Wargames* series to help inform Cold War strategy.<sup>10</sup> However, these ran alongside manual, tactical training wargames, such as *Dunn-Kempf* and *Blockbuster*. Although first-person computer-based virtual training systems (such as Bohemia Interactive's *VBS4*) are increasingly taking on some of the training roles, the use of manual wargames persists for both training and analytic purposes.<sup>11</sup>

Recent years have also seen the introduction of Matrix games – structured discussions – particularly for more strategic and operational wargaming.<sup>12</sup> Regarding the current conflict in Ukraine, the USMC was using their Operational Wargame Series (OWS) manual wargaming system to examine the course of the war in the weeks leading up to its outbreak, and wargames have been used during the war to evaluate possible Russian and Ukrainian actions and Western responses to them.<sup>13</sup>

Running a wargame, or even multiple wargames, will not provide a prediction of the future—or an exact recreation of the past—but they may give an idea of the shape and likelihood of possibilities and help analyze past and future conflicts and decisions.<sup>14</sup> In many wargames, rigor and plausibility are more useful reference points than a prediction; the purpose is often to stimulate player decision-making for insight rather than making predictions on outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

## Challenges with Wargaming Research

One of the main challenges in wargaming research, particularly for professional wargames, is that they tend to be relatively ephemeral.<sup>16</sup> Even if the wargame leads to a filed report, the wargame itself may not

be kept.<sup>17</sup> There can also be issues around classification, cloistering of data, and intellectual property issues with the wargame design.<sup>18</sup> Initiatives such as the History of Wargaming project and the Hoover Institution's new Wargaming and Crisis Simulation Initiative collection are beginning to help address the issue but have limited reach. Philip Sabin identifies that hobby wargames offer "three overwhelming advantages" compared to professional wargames: Their number and availability; that they deal with the past (which most professional games do not) as well as the future; and that there is a better balance between manual and computer wargaming (the former being far more transparent in their workings).<sup>19</sup>

In addition, there has long been a porous boundary between hobby and professional wargames. Professionals have used hobby games as-is; for example, *Gulf Strike* by Mark Herman, used by the Pentagon during the Gulf War, or have commissioned hobby designers to create professional games, for instance, Jim Dunnigan and *Firefight* for the US Army. Professionals have created hobby games based on their experience and expertise, for example, *Urban Operations* by Sébastien de Peyret, a French Army Officer at their urban training school. Professionals have also evaluated hobby games for ideas and potential military applications, for example, the United Kingdom's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory's Blockbuster study into urban wargames.<sup>20</sup> The military has also used hobby wargames for professional military education.<sup>21</sup> This diffusion of ideas between the professional and hobby communities reinforces the argument that hobby games are a viable field of research. However, hobby games' different aims than professional games must be born in mind.

## Why Hue?

Ongoing work to build a database of over 230 hobby and professional urban wargames has identified only five urban battles that are covered by five or more wargames: Stalingrad (27), Hue (10), Berlin 1945 (6), Budapest 1956 (5), Fallujah II (5), all of which are common urban conflict case-studies.<sup>22</sup> It is intended to produce comparative studies on the wargames of each battle in due course. This first study chose Hue since it presented elements of symmetric and asymmetric conflict, enabling aspects of different forms of urban combat to be studied in one battle. It would have enough games for analysis even if some were not suitable or obtainable for the study. This study also acts as a pilot

before examining the significantly larger number of games on Stalingrad.

## Methodology

While there are a few reviews of individual wargames within the academic literature, one on Budapest 1956 being a rare example<sup>23</sup>, no examples of academic comparative studies for wargames of historic battles have yet been identified.<sup>24</sup> Apart from the more considered reviews in the hobby literature, for example, a review of 29 Eastern Front games in *Moves* magazine,<sup>25</sup> the closest is perhaps on the representation of air warfare in games in the book *Zones of Control*—although covering the picture from WW2 to the present.<sup>26</sup>

The method, therefore, developed for this initial study was to compare the structural elements of the games, examine any Designer's Notes to understand the intent of the games, and then, through a play of the games and a reading of the rules, examine how the games represented the previously identified key features of the battle. The study did not emphasize how closely the games' plays matched the historic battle and outcome since no meaningful view on this could be taken from one or two plays. As described above, wargames should not be seen as predictive tools—even retrospectively—although they should demonstrate the issues and choices that forces and commanders of the time faced.

## The Battle of Hue

The Battle of Hue was part of the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive in early 1968. With a population of about 140,000, Hue was a culturally significant city split by the Perfume River, which was crossed by only two bridges. The large Citadel with a moat and high walls, north of the river, contains the Imperial Palace and the Tay Loc airfield. South of the river was the more modern part of the city, known as the Triangle, about half the area of the Citadel.

Before 31<sup>st</sup> January 1968, significant numbers of Vietcong (VC) had infiltrated the city. At 0233 on 31<sup>st</sup> January, the VC seized the gates to the city, and by the end of the day, some 10,000 VC and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops had taken control of most of the city. The defending forces initially consisted only of HQ 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division, based within the northeast corner of Citadel, and 200 US troops south

of the river in the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) compound.

As the scale of the Communist (NVA and VC) operation gradually became apparent, the Allies (ARVN and USMC) began to drip-feed reinforcements into the city, the battle splitting into fights north and south of the river. In the Citadel, the ARVN managed to keep the airstrip secure, using it for reinforcement and resupply. The USMC started to clear the Triangle, taking four days to clear the first two blocks but securing it by February 10, 1968. The USMC used boats to cross the Perfume River and reach the walls of the Citadel, but it was not until 21<sup>st</sup> February that the USMC managed to secure a gate to help the ARVN. Concurrently, the Allies tasked the US 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division to block the Communist supply lines north and west of the city, and they stumbled onto the Communist HQ at La Chu. However, the night before an assault on the HQ, the Communist's command slipped away. By 23<sup>rd</sup> February, the Communists started to leave the city as it became surrounded by Allied forces. The Allies completed the retaking of Hue on February 25, 1968. Military analysts and historians often use the battle as a case study of urban warfare.<sup>27</sup>

## Wargames of the Battle of Hue

Ten wargames (all hobby games) have been identified on the Battle of Hue.<sup>28</sup> Table 1 provides essential information on these games, along with their scores for Complexity and Rating (roughly player satisfaction) on the comprehensive BoardGameGeek hobby website—although these scores have their biases.<sup>29</sup> Three of the games—*'65 Hue City Map Expansion*, *ATS: The Fight For Hue*, and *Fields of Fire 2*—are scenarios for more generic tactical level games (*ATS* works in 90-second turns), and their scenario details being unavailable will not be considered further here. *A Bloody Business: The Battle of Hue, 1968* is an earlier version of *City of Confusion* and is not considered separately. Of the games that make up this case study:

- *Hue* came out only five years after the battle and used a traditional hex-and-counter mechanism.
- *Vietnam Battles: Hue!* is also a hex-and-counter game, published in *Strategy & Tactics* magazine. It is notable as the only game to include a significant area outside the city.
- *A Week in Hell: The Battle of Hue* is a hex-and-counter solitaire game published in *Battles* magazine.

- *City of Confusion: The Battle for Hue* uses areas rather than hexes to manage movement and a card-based activation mechanic.
- *The Battle of Hue!* is a solitaire hex-and-counter game based on the designer's previous *The Battle for Ramadi* game.
- *Block by Block* is an area-based game published in *Modern Warfare* magazine.

Table 1: Battle of Hue Wargames

Game	Date	Designer	Publisher	Complexity (/5)	Rating (/10)	Solitaire?
<b>Hue</b>	1973	John Hill	Mayfair	2.43	6.7	N
<b>Vietnam Battles: Hue!</b>	1999	Joseph Miranda	Strategy & Tactics	2.5	5.8	N
<b>A Bloody Business: The Battle of Hue, 1968</b>	2006	Perry Moore, Paul Rohrbaugh	Firefight Games	2.00	8.0	N
<b>A Week in Hell: The Battle of Hue</b>	2010	Laurent Guenette	Battles Magazine	2.41	7.1	Y
<b>City of Confusion: The Battle for Hue</b>	2012	Paul Rohrbaugh	High Flying Dice Games	2.5	6.9	N
<b>'65 Hue City Map Expansion</b>	2016	Mark H. Walker	Flying Pig Games	3.00	7.8	N
<b>ATS: The Fight for Hue</b>	2016	Critical Hit, Inc.	Critical Hit, Inc.	-	9.0	N
<b>The Battle of Hue!</b>	2019	Jay Ward	Tiny Battle Publishing	2.67	6.9	Y
<b>Fields of Fire2</b>	2019	Ben Hull	GMT Games	4.60	8.2	Y
<b>Block by Block</b>	2020	Nicholas Edwards	Modern Warfare Magazine	3.25	6.0	N

Source: Extracted from the individual game entries on the BoardGameGeek website and the game documentation.

Figure 1 shows images of each game used in this case study.



Figure 1: Images of the Battle of Hue Wargames



Source: Photographs by the author of games in the author's private collection.

## Structural Comparison

Wargames use a variety of mechanisms to control actions in time and space and represent the forces and effects involved.<sup>30</sup>

Table 2 summarizes the essential details of the Hue games.

Table 2: Key Characteristics of the Hue Wargames

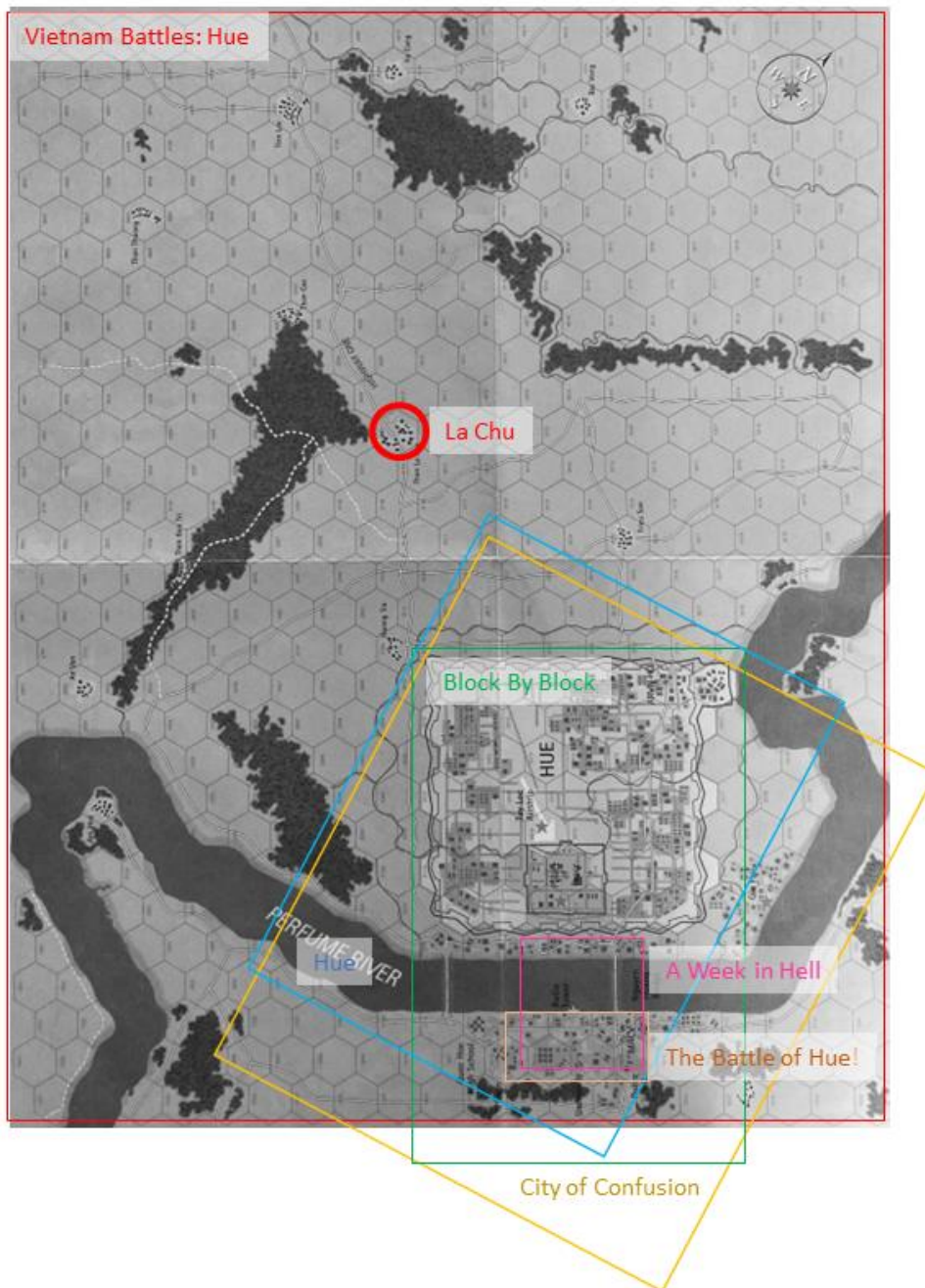
Game	Feature	Space Regulation	Space Scale	Turn Length	Number of Turns	Resolution
<b>Hue</b>		Hexes	~180m	One day	12+	Company
<b>Vietnam Battles: Hue!</b>		Hexes	~360m	One day	24	Company & Battalion
<b>A Week in Hell</b>		Areas	~100m	One day	7	Platoon
<b>City of Confusion</b>		Areas	~150m	2-3 days	10	Platoon
<b>The Battle of Hue!</b>		Hexes	~100m	1/2 day	15	Platoon
<b>Block by Block</b>		Area	~400m	Five days	5	Platoon to Battalion

Source: Analysis by the author of physical copies of the games and their documentation. Notes: Space scale is per hex, or more approximately, per area, depending on the space regulation used.

Figure 2 compares the areas covered by each of the games. *Vietnam Battles: Hue!* is notable for including a significant amount of terrain beyond Hue (and well beyond La Chu)—although most of that area has little impact on play. *The Battle of Hue!* and *A Week in Hell* only cover the USMC operations south of the Perfume River. Three games expect the play to represent all 25 days of the battle, and three cover only the first 12 days when the US was mainly engaged south of the river. The counters in the games cover the relevant orders of battle for each game's scope, but what each counter represents varies, as shown in the Resolution column in

Table 2. Each of these wargames is rigid—played to strict rules.<sup>31</sup> Both solitaire games are semi-open, with counters inverted or randomly drawn, so the player is unsure of exactly what enemy forces are where. In contrast, the competitive games are open with no mechanic to hide units from the other player—although *Hue* does suggest inverting the counters for Communist units.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 2: Comparative Areas covered by the Hue Wargames



Source: Image created by the author based on photos and measurements by the author of game maps in the author's private collection.

### Designer's Intent

*The Battle of Hue!* is the only game with formal Designer's Notes. In his notes, Jay Ward writes that the game is a follow-up to, and uses the same basic system as, his Iraqi Insurgency era *Battle of Ramadi* game. He sees command and control implemented through a command point system as critical. The player also has trade-offs— particularly in using



heavy weapons in civilian areas. Ward notes that the victory conditions are “based on comparing progress in the game with the historical rate of progress” and encouraging the player to match the real-life operational priorities.<sup>33</sup>

In *A Week in Hell*, designer Laurent Guenette places short designer notes within relevant rules sections. Guenette comments on: The block-by-block tactical approach making the area division of the city straightforward; the lack of training of the Marines; that counters represent combined arms units (including the Ontos),; that narrow frontages limited combined attacks; the infiltration issues, and that the order mechanism reflects the problems with communications in the city.<sup>34</sup>

Rather than a set of Designer’s Notes, *Block by Block* has introductory comments by Joseph Miranda, the *Vietnam Battles: Hue!* designer, and an influential contemporary wargame designer. Miranda notes that: Movement is limited by enemy contact, not distance; there is a trade-off between using heavy weapons to destroy the enemy weapons and increasing collateral damage; each of the allied forces needs to fight separately due to command and control issues, and that the “Political Track” is an acknowledgment that Hue was a battle fought as much “in the press room and on television sets” as on the ground in Vietnam.<sup>35</sup>

## The Key Features of the Battle of Hue

This section identifies the key features of the Battle of Hue and if and how the wargames represent them.

### *Combined Arms*

The firepower of the M48 tanks was essential, particularly for blowing holes in walls. A typical pattern was to “first pump out the target building or complex with mortars... Then came a [CS] gas cloud, tanks, Ontos [self-propelled recoilless rifles], 106s [recoilless rifles], bazookas, and finally Marines.”<sup>36</sup> In the Citadel, the narrow streets caused problems for the US armor, but more significantly, the ARVN did not have direct-fire heavy weapons available and suffered.<sup>37</sup>

*A Week in Hell* and *Block by Block* both only have infantry counters, although according to the accompanying notes, they are meant to

represent combined arms groups. In *Hue* and *Vietnam Battles: Hue!* combat simply combines counter strengths but does not include a modifier for the infantry and armor operating in combination. *City of Confusion* gives assaults a positive modifier if tanks or Ontos are present. *The Battle of Hue!* treats all tank types as assets so they cannot make attacks on their own, forcing the players into a combined arms approach. In several games (notably *Hue* and *Vietnam Battles: Hue!*), the combination of hex-based mapping, rules, and a traditional combat results table means that the player is focusing more on counter positioning and unit values than on any combined-arms tactics.

The M50 Ontos, a small, lightly armored tank equipped with six 106mm recoilless rifles, was a crucial weapon in Hue.<sup>38</sup> “The tremendous firepower of the Ontos proved significantly more effective than other supporting arms, especially against heavy buildings or enemy positions in the Citadel wall.”<sup>39</sup> The only *City of Confusion* and *The Battle of Hue!* have counters for the Ontos, but their role in combined arms has no distinctive effects beyond its essential combat factor.

### *CS Gas*

CS gas proved invaluable in clearing buildings without causing any structural damage.<sup>40</sup> “The greatest difference in firepower for US forces in Hue relative to earlier battles was the extensive use of non-lethal gas.”<sup>41</sup> There were problems, though, with it drifting into unprepared friendly troops.<sup>42</sup> *Hue* includes using CS Gas, removing the Communist ability to fire back, but increasing the Communist Victory Points (VPs). In *A Week in Hell*, CS Gas reduces the enemy combat factor but can drift into neighboring spaces, adversely affecting other Allied units. *The Battle of Hue!* applies CS Gas as a benefit to the attacker—a random dice roll, which is significant but also uncertain, with no secondary effects.

### *Asymmetric Combat*

Hue had elements of both symmetric and asymmetric combat, with the Viet Cong leading the infiltration and conducting covert guerilla-style operations alongside the more formal operations of the ARVN.<sup>43</sup> The games typically represent the VC troops as just being weaker counters. In *Hue*, the Communist player may play counters face down to hide their strength, so the Allied player knows where the enemy is but not

how strong they are. In *City of Confusion*, only VC units have a “concealed” status, which gives them a bonus in combats and allows multiple activations. As solo games, both *A Week in Hell* and *The Battle of Hue!* use a common mechanism of drawing Communist counters from a pot as the USMC moves into each new area, and both also have an infiltration mechanism to allow the Communists to reappear behind the USMC lines. *The Battle of Hue!* also includes booby traps.

### *Staggered Reinforcements*

Reinforcements and replacements on both sides were drip-fed into the city by land, river, and helicopter.<sup>44</sup> Many US reinforcements were unseasoned, and Lt Col Cheatham, CO 2/5<sup>th</sup> Marines, famously spent the night before his deployment rapidly reading US military urban doctrine.<sup>45</sup> All of the games have relatively detailed turn-by-turn reinforcement charts. *Hue, Vietnam Battles: Hue! A Week in Hell* and *City of Confusion* include the ability to do heliborne or air-landed reinforcements. *A Week in Hell* has an explicit reinforcement mechanism. New USMC units arrive in an off-map Phu Bai box and then move up to the MACV compound as trucks are available but being ambushed or flown directly in by helicopters. This gives the player some awareness of what is happening beyond the city.

### *Riverine Activity*

The Perfume River and the landing stages around the city enabled the Allies to use Landing Craft to resupply and deploy units relatively unmolested.<sup>46</sup> Boats are operated in *Hue* and *City of Confusion* as an alternative way to bridge the Perfume River. *Vietnam Battles: Hue!* has one “Patrol Boat, Riverine” counter, but this is only a gun platform. *Block by Block* allows Allied units to move directly between dock symbols on the map—regardless of distance.

### *Co-ordination and Command Friction*

The United States and ARVN command relationships “remained disjointed and confused throughout the battle.”<sup>47</sup> *Vietnam Battles: Hue!* uses a system of Initiative Points to drive combat bonuses, but USMC troops can only gain them from nearby USMC HQ, and likewise for the ARVN. In *City of Confusion*, US and ARVN troops can occupy the same space but cannot deliver coordinated attacks. *A Week in Hell* and *The Battle of Hue!* both have a command-point style system to

restrict how many units can activate each turn. *City of Confusion* uses cards to randomize which unit activates when, and not every unit will activate every turn. Each of the oppositional games use face-up counters, so there is no “fog of war”. This contrasts to a game like *We Are Coming Nineveh* where both blocks and dummies are used to hide opposition locations and strengths.

### *Operations Beyond the City*

The failure of the United States to isolate Hue is seen as “the most notable shortfall at Hue for American forces.”<sup>48</sup> The fortunate discovery of the Communist Thung Front HQ at La Chu and the eventual fleeing of the Communist command staff had a significant negative effect on the resilience of the PAVN defense of Hue.<sup>49</sup> The only game with any specific consideration of isolation is *Block by Block* where Communist reinforcements are proportional to the number of Citadel gates that they still control. Whilst the *Vietnam Battles: Hue* map extends out beyond the Communist HQ at La Chu, the size of the area and lack of forces make isolation and interdiction operations a formidable task. La Chu has no special significance in the game.

### *Fire Support and Rules of Engagement (ROE)*

Despite the forces fighting in close proximity, indirect fire support (including naval gunfire support - NGS) played a significant role.<sup>50</sup> Observers brought fire down within 100 yards of their own troops, and only about half a dozen cases of casualties from friendly fire were reported.<sup>51</sup> Whilst air support was available, bad weather and rules of engagement made its contribution less significant.<sup>52</sup>

The United States was wary of the political ramifications of damaging important cultural sites: “The initial ROE played a key role in the difficulties incurred in the early days of the battle.”<sup>53</sup> The Close Air Support (CAS) and NGS restrictions were gradually lifted but were not evenly applied, with the ARVN using CAS in the Citadel from the beginning.<sup>54</sup> In *Hue*, the Imperial Palace is off-limits to both artillery and armor, and weather strongly affects availability. In *City of Confusion*, a specific die roll after turn 5 is required to gain “US Free Fire release”. Before this happens, no United States units may operate in the Citadel, or CAS or NGS be used within the Citadel. *The Battle of Hue!* has a 33 percent chance of supporting fires available from turn 3 onwards and automatically from turn 7. *Block by Block* has no ROE

rules but makes all use of supporting fires subject to a 50 percent chance of also inflicting damage on one's own forces. It also combines a wide range of weaponry (Ontos, Artillery, CS Gas, CAS, NGS) into a single Heavy Weapons roll. None of the games use the card mechanics for additional but abstracted capabilities (such as fire support, close air support, and electronic warfare) found in more recent games such as *We are Coming Nineveh* and *Littoral Commander*.

### *Population & Infrastructure*

It is estimated the fighting destroyed that 80 percent of the city, and around 116,000 (82 percent) of the population was made homeless.<sup>55</sup> As the fighting started, most residents sheltered in basements and caused little disruption to the combat itself, but emerged as areas were cleared, causing significant management issues.<sup>56</sup> Dead bodies (there were at least 5,800 civilian deaths) became a public health hazard.<sup>57</sup> The Communist forces used the population as human shields.<sup>58</sup> They also purged several thousand residents for political reasons.<sup>59</sup>

*Vietnam Battles: Hue!* has a random refugee event which can delay troop transport. *A Week in Hell* has a civilian random event which delays an attack. *The Battle of Hue!* has Civilian counters in its random pot, which a dice roll then converts into either rescues or casualties—the concurrent use of supporting fires increases the chance of the casualty result. *City of Confusion* creates rubble from some supporting fires which limits movement. In *Block by Block* the player chooses between two levels of supporting fires, the greater causing more enemy damage, but also increasing a Destruction count collateral damage, which counts against the player in victory terms. *Block by Block* is also unique in giving the Communist player a “Clearing” action to gain victory points and represent the political purges (although this can encourage some possibly unrealistic player behavior).

### *Political and Media*

The Battle of Hue, and the greater fate of the Tet Offensive, led to a rapid erosion in public support in the United States of America for the Vietnam War.<sup>60</sup> While Hue may have been a tactical defeat for the Communists, it became part of their strategic victory. The populated and accessible location led to a significant media presence which put the USMC actions in the spotlight.<sup>61</sup> Most of the games use the Victory Point (VP) track as a way of reflecting the political and media



dimensions alongside locations taken or forces lost or destroyed. In Hue, the Communists gain VPs if the United States uses CS gas. In *Vietnam Battles: Hue!*, the random events include an “Atrocity” event, which can affect Allied or Communist VPs. In *City of Confusion*, rubble can become an “atrocity” that has a variable (but always negative) and unlimited impact on VPs. *The Battle of Hue!* has Media counters in its pot, which can have a positive, neutral, or negative impact on VPs. *Block by Block* has separate tracks for “Publicity” and “Destruction,” both of which contribute adversely to Allied VPs. Some more modern games, for example, *We Are Coming Nineveh*, have dedicated political tracks rather than binding them in with the combat results.

### Summative Analysis

The conclusion from the above is that none of the games capture all the different aspects of the Battle of Hue. All the games represent staggered reinforcements, but only two games a-piece cover features such as Combined Arms, the Ontos, CS Gas, Command Friction, and Rules of Engagement. None of the games has any extensive representation of the Operations Beyond the City, Civilian Impact, or Media and Political considerations. *City of Confusion*, *The Battle of Hue!* and *Block by Block* possibly provide the best coverage overall, but *The Battle of Hue!* only focuses on the fight in the Triangle, and neither of the others include the impact of CS Gas. *City of Confusion* includes minimal reference to the civilian population, and *Block by Block* is more abstract and does not include Rules of Engagement.

On the positive side, there are many elements of the wargames that could usefully inform the design of new urban wargames, for instance:

- The drift of CS Gas (or other toxic chemicals) and the negative political impact of its use
- The modeling of the reinforcement chain and the dock symbols and routes for riverine activity
- The inability of units from different Allies to coordinate attacks
- The ability for a commander to choose between different levels of support fires, and hence the potential for collateral damage
- Some representation of the Media—and particularly the real-life quotes in *The Battle of Hue!*

- The rubble creation in *City of Confusion*, although the same publisher's *Christmas in Hell* about the 1943 Battle of Ortona has a better approach to this

Areas that perhaps any new game on Hue could model better include:

- The role of the direct fire HE weapons such as the Ontos as part of the combined arms operations, particularly in the Citadel
- The different and changing Rules of Engagement
- A more sophisticated treatment of the civilian population, with civilians possibly appearing as each area is cleared, and even their use as human shields
- The operations outside of Hue on both sides to interdict supply lines, isolate the city, and disrupt enemy command and control

#### Implications for Wargaming Urban Conflict and Security

In considering how wargames might help us better understand past battles and plan for future urban conflict, reviewing these Hue wargames suggests four issues for consideration.

The first is that wargaming is an evolving art, and approaches to wargaming have changed significantly since the publishing of *Hue* in 1973. There has been increasing use of the area-type approach of *A Week in Hell*, *City of Confusion*, and *Block by Block*. The use of cards is also becoming more prevalent, both to manage random events and to abstract operations and capabilities outside of the main area of operations, for example, in *We Are Coming Nineveh*. The explicit tracking of the political domain is also more common, for example, in *Littoral Commander*.

While no one of the games provides a perfect example of what a wargame of Hue could achieve, there are a lot of good ideas in them which, when combined with more modern mechanics and a good reading of the critical features of the battle itself, could deliver a valuable game to help understand Hue, the decisions, and options that commanders' faced, and how they compare to those of more modern urban conflicts.

Second, Hue highlights the challenge of wargaming any urban engagement in that urban is complex, constrained and changing, with multiple actors, conflicting demands, limited resources, and a population that has to live with the consequences.<sup>62</sup> Shoehorning all of this into a single wargame for any urban battle is a challenge, and the designer has to choose what they are going to focus on, what they are going to abstract, and what they are going to ignore - and ideally document this in the Designer's Notes. The game's intent should drive these choices—what it wants to achieve and who the audience is.

Third, these are all hobby games, and so are edutainment. It should be no surprise if they do not model the full complexity of urban combat. All the games start when the fighting starts and stop when the fighting stops. Put into a professional context, this is just one phase of the NATO doctrine of Understand-Shape-Engage-Consolidate-Transition (USECT).<sup>63</sup> If a game was aimed at a professional audience, then one could expect mechanisms (but not necessarily rigid wargame mechanics) to also explore the before and after of the battle, and in particular the associated activities in the information and cognitive domains, and the impact on the civilian population and the city infrastructure.

Finally, Hue was a battle won, but a war lost. The consideration of the USECT model and the extension to the information and cognitive domains begins to put the battle (and wargame) in a wider operational, strategic, and even cultural context. Whilst rigid wargames of battles can help to understand the detail at a tactical and possibly grand tactical level, examination of a broader scope may require different wargaming techniques. The concept of the nested game could be a useful approach.<sup>64</sup> *The Battle of Hue!* could give players some understanding of the issues and the sheer grind of the USMC operations in clearing the Triangle, whereas *City of Confusion* could help to situate that within the broader context of the whole city. Above this, a less rigid wargaming approach, such as a Matrix Game, could better explore operational and political issues.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

By developing a more analytic approach to the study of wargaming, such as through the comparative study of wargames on specific battles, there is the potential to develop better urban wargames. These can help professionals to better understand the complexity of urban operations

and to better plan for future urban conflict. Whilst each of these wargames of the Battle of Hue can contribute something to an understanding of the battle, such as the choices facing commanders and some of the general implications for urban conflict, none provides the complete picture. However, there are game mechanics in these and more modern games that could perhaps create a better game. For a professional audience, and particularly one concerned with urban security, all the games leave out what happens before and after the active combat phase of the battle. The complexity of urban conflict is such that no one game is ever going to capture it all, and a nested approach to wargaming urban issues, using different wargaming techniques at each level, seems an appropriate approach.

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