

NUTS!

The Game of Man to Man Combat in WW2

Produced by **Two Hour Games** and Written by Ed
Teixeira

I was first intrigued by this company a couple of years back – promising a quick but believable game with its ‘Chain Reaction’ rules. The creators also seem to have the following of a group of skirmish gamers who swear by them for realism and game play.

I did buy them at one stage under the ‘Girls ‘n Guns’ guise. They looked intriguing but to be honest they seemed confusing and I basically couldn’t be bothered to sit and wade through them.

When CR 2 came out the layout problems and some mechanisms had been tweaked – so wanting to give them another chance I bought them and then waited for the right time to test them out. Unfortunately that time didn’t arrive although the reaction rule mechanics had me ‘well intrigued’.

When the WWII version hit the Internet (simply called NUTS!) I got hold of them, but as I was again wrapped up with play-testing a few other WWII rule sets and playing Warmaster Ancients, again NUTS sat on my hard-drive. This changed when our club wanted to use our 36mm (1/48) WWII kits for a quick one off session and it seemed like the ideal opportunity to try them out. So after a rather awkward start I’m very glad I did!

For the sake of the review I have used the US terminology of a ‘squad’ being what we Brits would call a section (usually 8-12 men).

Firstly, an important point for gamers to understand, where do the rules sit ‘level wise’ among the gamut of ‘skirmish’ rules available? This isn’t that easy a question to answer, but I’ll

give it my best shot:

They are certainly not at the ‘Final Combat’ or even ‘Face of Battle’ end of the spectrum in terms of complexity. This is where it gets tricky and the anomalies began, as they have a lot more scope for character detail than say ‘Arc of Fire’ or even ‘We Can be Heroes’ but seemed to be a fairly ‘simple’ set of rules.

So I’d say they are basically aimed at having a squad or maybe two squads per player on the table, maybe even with scope for running a platoon each.

At my local club we now regularly have a platoon on the table in bigger games. For those interested right from the start by such things, they are d6 based (also use a deck of cards for initial force generation) and not in the ‘buckets of dice’ category as you will usually be rolling from 1-6 dice. While basically being an initiative driven IGO UGO system the ‘reaction’ checks mean you barely notice that they are!

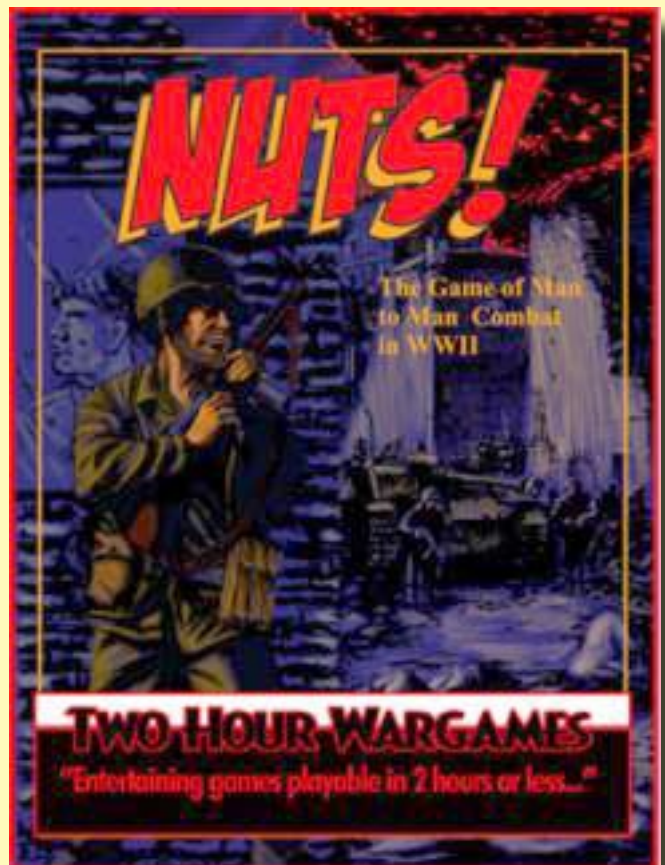
The rules are 60 pages long including all the frills such as the campaign and forces mechanisms as well as 6 Quick Reference Sheets. While normally touted as portraying ‘Hollywood’ action I’d say that John Wayne or Audey Murphy would not have made the first interlude had Hollywood action been this ‘real’.

In case you don’t know your Ardennes history the title of the rules comes from the alleged response the commander at Bastogne gave to the Germans invitation to surrender. So background details out of the way ... what are they like to play?

MECHANICS

The average WWII gamer will find the mechanics quite different from the norm I suspect. However those with a bit of a roleplaying game (RPG) background will feel very at home. In the game each commander plays the ‘Star’ who has to ‘control’ (with the aid of a junior leader) a squad of soldiers who have the propensity to want to sit behind the nearest cover and only pretend they are fighting.

Each figure has a Reputation value (REP) which encompasses a wide range of personality and physical



traits. The highest REP is 6 the lowest squad member will be a 3 while civvies may be a 1 or 2. Your starting squad is likely to be a mix, you being a 4 or 5 and everyone else being a 4 or 3. The REP plays a major part in the game mechanics, you add it to a die roll to determine shooting, you need to roll under it to 'PASS' dice for the reaction tests which drive the game. It sounds tricky but it grows on you.

Now, the whole 'PASSING' die rolls thing is the bit that seems to throw the mainstay WWII gamer into a stress related frenzy. I can't quite figure out why as the mechanics are simple - basically for various tests you roll one or two dice and the reaction is determined on how many dice you PASS. Pass zero and you are normally left in the lurch, passing the maximum possible means you are flying and in-between is well ... in-between.

Easier to imagine with an example of movement maybe: A character can normally move 8" but can try to dice for a fast move. In order to do this they role 2 d6 and see how many they PASS. If the figure has a REP 3 and rolls a 3 and a 6 it has only passed one; it can therefore only move/run 12". If it had rolled say 3 and a 2 then there are 2 passes (the maximum possible) and can move/run 16". If both dice fail then the figure still moves but only a basic 8".

This basic mechanism runs throughout the reaction tests ... perhaps the major ones being the 'in sight' test and the 'taken fire' test. These two are the ones that mostly define what your troops do during the game:

The **In Sight** test is taken by anyone that comes into view (or potential view) of any enemy. It is perhaps seen by our club as more of a 'reaction/reflex' test than a 'spotting' test as something may move into plain view but can you react and fire at it? It also determines the order that people can fire in.

The **Taken Fire** test basically informs you of what the figure does when they are fired on (not necessarily hit, just fired at). Pass two dice checks and you can fire back and complete any move, pass one and you are likely to fire back less effectively or 'duck back' into cover, don't pass any and you hit the ground and hunker like a baby ... well that or run away!

If you do pass and fire back then obviously the firer then has to take a test and so on ... each may fire several times until someone ducks back or takes a hit or worse. One thing that makes the whole system quicker than it sounds is the concept of being 'outgunned'. In the perceived threat hierarchy, some guns are better than others and make people duck back automatically. The Garand outguns the Kar 98 rifle - the MG42 outguns everything. So you have to make sure you get in first and make it count!

The whole reaction and out gunned mechanisms recreate suppressive fire and being pinned down very well. Lay enough fire down on the dug in MG and you may not be able to kill them but you can make them keep their heads down while a group works its way close enough to lob a grenade in!

Movement is done by initiative dice rolling - but with a twist. The number you roll also determines who can go that turn because only the figures with an equal or higher REP to the throw can move. Leaders can 'take along' lesser REP figures (a quick boot up the rear for you sonny) but if you leave lower REP figures alone they are not going to do much very often unless they really have to - like having an enemy figure appear in front of them waving a bayonet fixed rifle!

Shooting is worked out by throwing a number of dice equal to the target number of the weapon: ranging from 1 for Bolt Action rifles to 6 for the MG42. Some weapons have a cone of fire allowing multiple targets etc. The

dice roll added to your REP is read off on a table which tells you if you have hit a target or not (based on the position and status of target ... i.e. are they in cover etc). Then a quick roll on the damage table may see your figure knocked down, 'obviously dead' or out the game with you not knowing quite how badly hit 'til you get to them and check ... you run all the way across to him dodging fire only to find he's about to die next go anyway!

The vehicles work in the same vein - each crew member is responsible for different things - again a lot smoother than you imagine it is going to be.

So already an intriguing set ... but we haven't even hit the cool bit yet! It may be me but all the rules that have tickled my fancy lately seem to have a built in advancement/campaign system which doesn't require heaps of paperwork or maps etc.

NUTS has one of the better versions I've come across and you feel like you are bordering on the RPG world, but without the time commitment and paper work! Firstly there are the mission tables - nothing new in this really you may think; roll on a table and check what mission you are playing. What makes it stand out though is that this may be a stand-alone mission for your section (section patrol etc) or sometimes that is part of a bigger plan, i.e. you are just one part of a much bigger attack.

This determines the level of random support, pre-game happenings (mortar, air support, outflanking etc) and reinforcements you may receive. These reinforcements arrive at a randomly determined and unknown in advance time and consist of a variety of possible troops. Sometimes this swings the game a **LOT**, but as the man said 'life's a bitch, then you die'.

It does get you well involved in the game - in one game I played just as my squad was getting to the objective on popped a 251 halftrack full of eager

FIRST LOOKS

out popped a 251 halftrack full of eager Panzer Grenadiers ... and so a tactical retreat was called for. Then the next go the smile was wiped from my opponents face as I won the equivalent of the lottery and got a rampaging M4 Sherman heading across the table towards my opponent's troops.

After the game a quick few roles may lead onto a related game or you may get to start afresh next game (maybe your platoon was sent for R&R and a shower). Figures may advance their REP and abilities, they may be put forward for honours – or if you used the Star abilities to cheat death or be cited for cowardice in the face of the enemy. All this is done with simple, quick mechanics.

By now I was a convert but the rules allow for one more thing that stands them out from other rules which I enjoy. The reaction rolls can be used to make one side (usually the defenders) play on auto pilot! The rolls determine who fires when, who runs who stays etc.

This makes them ideal for either solo play or a game with both players on one side versus an 'automatic' enemy without that normal 'solo' feel to the

reactions of the opposing forces. My daughters have both played through games on the same side as me, handy to teach the rules and more enjoyable than having a newbie thrashed by the old hand.

So just when I was happy playing my own set of rules, 'Face of Battle' or 'Final Combat' for squad level stuff, NUTS has done a FUBAR on me! Once you get used to the mechanics they really do offer what they say on the cover – give a damn fine game in 2 hours or less!

But having said all of this they will not be for everyone. The level of detail is strange but they definitely concentrate on the effects of combat on the men. If you want fine weapon detail, want to know where your figure is hit (damn there goes my left lapel button) and how many yards of movement you lose running through that hedge – then these rules may not be for you.

If you like knowing that your troops will follow your every command and that your plan will run like clockwork then these rules may well give you stress related symptoms!

But if you are after a quick, easy (once

you get the mechanics sorted) game where figures tend to do as they like (or rather ... do things you don't want them to) unless you go and kick them up the backside then NUTS may be for you.

I find that they can give some very bloody results. In my last game before writing this review one MG 42 burst left 3 of my squad face down in the mud dead and the rest of the squad hiding in a ditch – all I'd done was run over a bridge.

Lastly they are ripe for converting – Neil F get those weird world war II figs out, or even better those 40mm Stargate figures!!

They are also supported by two thriving yahoo groups which can be joined through the links on the THW site – <http://www.angelfire.com/az3/twohourwargames/index.html> The author is very helpful and the rest of the crew have a lot of good ideas of how the rules can be 'adapted'.

As to price well the printed copy will set you back US\$23 or you can buy a PDF version for US\$17.

By Rich Jones



Some very nice scenery is also available

