

The Spanish civil war (SCW) is often described as a prelude to WW2, and indeed it was. It saw the development of new weapons as well as of new tactics, with the first, still incipient, examples of Blitzkrieg and carpet bombing. On a wider scale, it represented a battle arena for all the political ideologies of the time, from Anarchism to Nazism; representatives from the entire gamut of political forces were there fighting on one side or the other, fighting each other and sometimes even themselves.

The SCW is also unique in the sense that it's probably the civil war in history with the highest contingents of foreign forces intervening on both sides. Boosting the Nationalists were 'volunteer' forces sent by the two fascist powers of the time—from Germany, the highly specialized Condor Legion; from Italy, the large but somewhat ineffective Corpo Truppe Volontarie--as well as some minor contingents of true volunteers of other nationalities, such as Irish, Portuguese and White Russians.

On the other side, the Republicans were flooded with bona fide volunteers. Both men and women, from every continent, from all stages of life, they represented every political ideal that opposed fascism and any form of dictatorship. These volunteers bore the standard of liberty. For many, the fight in Spain was a message to be sent to the world, a warning of perils and events to come; at the same time, however, their participation presented a vision of a more just world. It was in the SCW that Oliver Law became the first African-American to command a mixed military unit, in which black and white soldiers fought alongside each other for a common cause; even though he might have been chosen to command for political reasons, his leadership was nonetheless a significant message sent to a country where segregation was still an unjust reality.

Although the opposing forces differed in nature, they both shared a common start and a common end. Each began as a mixture of amateur organizations--Nationalist Requetés and Anarchist columns, for example--tempered with strong army elements. This was much more obvious on the Nationalist side, which had the professional Legionnaire and Moroccan units. By war's end, each had progressed to more traditional armies. These changes were not without internal struggle, and on both sides two ruthless forces arose and managed to stamp out the internal differences. On the Nationalist side, Generalísimo Francisco Franco effectively squashed both the Falangists and the Carlists, converting them into mere extensions of his Army of Africa, whilst, on the Republican side, the extremely organized Stalinist Communists did the same to the Trotskyists, Anarchists, Socialists, and even to other Communists not so inclined to conform to a Stalinist form of power.

These armies battled across Spain, demolishing the country and creating a divide between the people that lasted into the '70s and up to Franco's death in 1973. As they fought, they committed heroic acts of glory as well as brutal acts of horror. With the Condor Legion becoming infamously notorious after the bombing of Guernica, both the Spanish forces and the external armies committed heinous crimes, not only against the other side, but even against their own, in order to settle disputes and differences of opinion.

The main powers busied themselves defending their interests either through troops in the guise of volunteers—in the case of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union--or through non-intervention—in the case of the US, the UK, and France. The latter case resulted in extremely awkward situations along the French-Spanish border, which was open or not according to the state of peace talks and France's interests. Meanwhile, the rest of the world watched in horror.

This game of Squad Battles focuses on the Battle for Madrid, with all its initial staging, after the Army of Africa is transported onto the mainland and slowly advances towards Madrid to connect with the

nationalist forces coming from the North. It also includes the successive battles aimed at encircling the capital and the ensuing Republican counter-offensives. It presents the gamer with a wide spectrum of battlefields and of different troop organizations, from the early columns to the later armies. It also takes the gamer to other locations where combat was intense, such as Teruel (the Stalingrad of the SCW) or the banks of the Ebro and its surrounding mountains.

Some abstractions were used in the design of the scenarios in order to accommodate the engine characteristics to the forces in battle, but none detract from allowing the scenarios to provide the experience and feeling of what was a bloody and violent conflict. One cannot avoid sensing the prelude to a World War in the fighting, as many of the tactics later used were tested on the battlefields of Spain.

Designing the scenarios for this game was a bit of a time travel experience for me. As are most gamers, I was used to the lavishly (and uniformly) equipped armies of WW2. It came as a surprise to me, as it did to the international volunteers arriving in Spain, that the troops had to make do with the little they had at the start, as they slowly upgraded their materials with foreign supplies. This makes for quite a change of pace over other titles in the series since, although not so explosive as WW2 ones tend to be, the engagements here are extremely attritional, and a careless player, misled by the fact that the opposing force is equipped with bolt rifles and a couple of MG's, will find himself surprised by the state of his force by scenario's end. In most scenarios, players will be confronted with a variety of possible approaches, and the steamroller one, even if obvious, might not be the most sensible. Another difference from other titles is that SCW is much less vehicle-intensive; players must use the precious vehicles with which they are presented wisely and understand that, while sometimes they must move great distances, at other times they are much better used close to the troops.

The players will also note how the organizations change from the early war actions to the later ones. As 'amateur' militias give way to much more organized and better equipped armies, one of the most interesting aspects of the game remains that both armies were born from a common point: the pre-SCW Spanish Army ; although they diverged as the war progressed, they stayed similar in many respects. Combat between vastly different units (e.g., Militia vs. Legionnaires) makes the early war action somewhat more varied than later scenarios and provides for a unique gaming experience on both sides. An excellent example of the above are the actions revolving around the Casa de Campo – Puente de los Franceses - Ciudad Universitaria, where vastly diverse units fight in a varied set of environments.

This game is dedicated to the men and women of Spain who died believing that they were defending the right cause, believing that individual liberty and freedom of choice cannot ever be stamped out by authoritarian governments, no matter how much force they apply. Their bodies may be gone, but their ideals will live forever. The best homage we may pay them is to learn the lessons which they left us and never let their dreams die.

Joao Lima
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Weapon Abbreviations:

Due to space limitations within the game interface we had to make some alterations to the names of some of the weapons used in the game. They are as follows:

Hotchkiss Mle 1922/25 - Hotchkiss LMG
Degtyaryov LMG - DP LMG
Pattern 1914 Enfield - Lee-Enfield
Mosin-Nagant M1891/30 - M1891/30
Mosin-Nagant M1891/30S - M1891/30S
Carcano M1891 - M1891
Browning wz. 1928 - wz. 1928
Mannlicher M1888/1895 - M1888/95
Lebel Model 1886 - Lebel 1886
Mauser M1893 - M1893
Mauser M1898 - M1898
Bergmann LMG15 - Bergmann
MG-34 Machine Gun - MG-34 MMG
Smoke Hand Grenade - Smoke Gde

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