

КРАСНОАРМЕЕ

KRASNOARMEETS

The Role-Playing Game of the Unglamorous Parts of the Battle of Stalingrad

By James Holloway



It is the autumn of 1942. In the Hero City of Stalingrad, heroic Red Army defenders are battling for their lives against the fascist hordes who have invaded Mother Russia. Street to street and house to house, the hard-bitten Soviet soldiers fight with the desperate ferocity of madmen.

You are not one of them. You are a new arrival on the scene, one of a huge number of Red Army troops moved into position along the banks of the Don river, northwest of Stalingrad, in recent weeks. Everybody knows that you're here for the big push. When winter starts to set in and the ground freezes hard, Marshal Zhukov will order you and your mates forward to smash the thinly-defended German lines and trap the Hitlerites in the city. For right now, though, the rains continue to pour down, turning the yellow earth into mud. This horrible mud. And because idleness in soldiers is a recipe for trouble, and because Comrade Stalin wants to keep the fascists on their toes, you have to go out on patrol in it.

HOW TO PLAY KRASNOARMEETS

In *Krasnoarmeets*, most players take on the roles of infantrymen and –women of the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45. These characters are all members of the same squad, posted along one of the flanks of the city of Stalingrad shortly before the beginning of Operation “Uranus.” The remaining player is the Game Master, who is partly responsible for the layout of the game area, as well as taking the part of the German, Romanian, Croatian and Hungarian soldiers who oppose the player characters.

Unlike many role-playing games, *Krasnoarmeets* is played exclusively with miniatures, either on a map or on a tabletop laid out with model terrain. Each squad member is represented by a miniature figurine, as are any other Red Army soldiers, civilians, and the enemy. The game's action takes place on this board.

Figures to represent the game's characters are available from a wide variety of sources. For economy, I recommend buying a few boxes of 1/72 scale plastic model figures. They may not be particularly stylish, but you can get a large number of them for a low cost. Vehicles and scenery are also available in this scale, although you may like to make your own.

The representation of space on the gaming table is necessarily somewhat abstract. No specific scale is envisioned, as a realistic ground scale would require an enormous table. Similarly, the playing area is divided into three separate zones. Each of these contains a representation of a location, and it is possible to move between them, but they are not contiguous. These zones, discussed later, are the Base, the Trail, and No Man's Land.

SOLDIERS OF THE RED ARMY

All characters in *Krasnoarmeets* are infantry soldiers in one of the Rifle Divisions moved up in preparation for the big attack on the Germans surrounding Stalingrad. Most will be recent conscripts or volunteers, and few will have seen combat before. These young men and women have received some basic training, but it will take a long time for those who survive to become battle-hardened *frontoviks*. *Krasnoarmeets* is about that transformation.

Characters in *Krasnoarmeets* are described on an Identity Card. This is a 3x5 index card on which each player records the following data about his or her character:

NAME
RANK

AWARENESS
AGGRESSION
STEADINESS
MOTIVATION

TOVARISHTI:

STRESS:

EXPERIENCE:

Each of these attributes is used to carry out different tasks while on patrol, and each of them may be raised or lowered by the events that occur there.

NAME: Russian names are comprised of three parts. The first name is a given name, while the second is a patronymic and the third is a surname. Names are gendered. For example, Maria Ivanovna Ivanova is Maria Ivanova, the daughter of Ivan Ivanov. In addition, Russians commonly use nicknames. Maria would be Masha informally, Maschenka to people with close affection for her, and Mashka in very informal, almost vulgar settings. Over 100 different ethnic groups supplied troops for the Red Army, but you'll forgive me if I don't go into all of them. Most people are Russian.

A variety of styles of address exist within the Red Army. Formal address might include the other party's rank ("Comrade Senior Sergeant") or, in a somewhat friendlier tone, first name and patronymic ("Comrade Alexei Alexeevich"). Longtime squadmates are likely to refer to each other by nicknames ("Sasha" for "Alexei Alexeevich" in this case).

RANK: something about Red Army ranks goes here. No time today.

The next four traits describe battlefield characteristics.

AWARENESS: on the battlefield, it is vitally important to notice your surroundings.

Awareness is used to detect enemies and to react to threats.

AGGRESSION: very few people are naturally killers. Characters with high Aggression have developed the capacity to attack without hesitating. Aggression is used to attack enemies.

STEADINESS: this trait represents the discipline and calmness under fire that allow soldiers to function in combat. Steadiness is used to remain calm under fire.

MOTIVATION: even professional soldiers need something to fight for. Motivation describes how much your character cares about the job he or she is supposed to do. Motivation is used to advance into dangerous situations.

Awareness, Aggression, Steadiness and Motivation are all rated from 1 to 10. To begin with, you have 25 points to divide between them.

TOVARISHTI: All of your squadmates are important, of course, but certain soldiers are more important to you. These are the people who mean the most to you, whose troubles you share. When nights get cold, these are the people you button your greatcoat together with to make a single sleeping bag. In *Krasnoarmeets*, these characters are called *tovarishti* (comrades). Your *tovarishti* can lend you extra help in times of trouble, but when bad things happen to them you share some of the consequences. I have completely left out how your *tovarishti* help you, because I ran out of time. I'll get to it.

Each player should pick a number of other characters in the squad to be his or her *tovarishti*. For most squads, two *tovarishti* is a good number for a character. Very large squads, with nine or ten characters, might warrant three apiece.

STRESS: patrols in No Man's Land are tense. At every minute, your character will be on full alert, straining every sense to detect the enemy. Things get even worse when the enemy turn up. Bullets and grenades fly, machineguns rattle and cannons boom. You press your face into the mud, trying to make yourself as small as possible. All these experiences build up Stress. Every time your character gains a point of Stress, tick off a box on the character card. During the game, your character can attempt to burn off stress by taking

coping mechanisms. Each mechanism has long-term consequences for your character. If too much Stress builds up too quickly, your character will have an Episode. These can be very dangerous, possibly exposing your character to enemy fire or even endangering your comrades.

EXPERIENCE: By surviving enough patrols, the rawest recruit can become a battle-hardened *frontovik*. Experience allows recruits to add to traits or pick up new abilities.

Creating Your Squad

Character creation in Krasnoarmeets is a communal experience. Characters should be created as a squad, with thought given to the relationships between them. Ideally, character creation should be done at the same time as miniature painting. Get all the players for the game together. Each player should bring the figure he or she intends to use, or select one from a group. Paints can be shared and more experienced painters can help beginners. Don't worry about uniformity – the Red Army of the Great Patriotic War wore a wide variety of clothing, ranging from light brown to dark green, as well as incorporating captured enemy and civilian equipment and clothes. Some Red Army soldiers wore no decorations or insignia at all, so don't worry about painting finicky little details. Similarly, don't worry about painting a beautiful, museum-quality model. Just give the general impression of the soldier and remember that the figure will be at arm's length during play.

Use models for input when creating your character. Is the figure attacking? Waiting patiently? Taking cover? From these actions you can begin to infer the soldier's personality, and from there assign points to traits. Solicit the opinions of other players, especially those of your *tovarishti*.

In order to put a unifying finishing touch on the models, base them all the same way. Give the bases an uneven surface by texturing them with filler or modeling putty. When this is dry, paint it in a yellowy-brown color. This is the color of the ubiquitous mud of the autumn steppe.

Weapons and Equipment

Both roleplaying games and miniatures games tend to pay a lot of attention to what kind of gear the characters carry. *Krasnoarmeets* doesn't bother with this. The focus is on the character traits and motivations that allow men and women to fight and die, rather than on the tools with which they do so. All weapons are assumed to be more or less the same in this kind of close-quarters fighting. Your character probably has some or all of the following:

- A uniform. These aren't mass-produced, but made in thousands of different locations to hundreds of slightly different patterns. You may have kept your helmet, or you may prefer a fur hat or cap.
- A weapon, either a bolt-action Mosin-Nagant rifle or a PPSH sub-machinegun.
- A tarpaulin or tent half. In most cases, the tent pegs are gone. This is worn around the body like a fat sash.
- A mess kit. This is often just a civilian bowl, or may be a captured German mess tin. A couple of times a day, you can count on getting this filled up with cabbage soup (*schi*) or buckwheat porridge (*kasha*). This is one of the advantages of not being right in the thick of the fighting. Meals are eaten with a wooden spoon, customarily kept in the top of the boot. Spoons are not provided by the army; soldiers bring their own from home.
- Poor-quality tobacco (*makhorka*). Cigarette papers are almost impossible to come by, so most people just use newspaper. Some soldiers argue in favor of *Pravda*, while others think *Krasnaya Zvezda* makes the best smoke.

- Vodka. This is the single most important thing you can have. Each soldier is supposed to receive 100g of vodka a day, but this is hardly enough. When people die, you don't report it so that you can continue to draw their vodka ration. When there is no vodka, you'll run medical alcohol or antifreeze through the filters of gas masks.

MISSIONS

Soon, the rain will stop and the freeze will set in. Then the ground will be hard enough to move heavy tanks and trucks, and the rivers will freeze solid to allow troops to be moved across them on foot. When winter comes, the big offensive will begin – unless the fascists attack first, of course. For now, the rain pours down and the trenches fill with water. Somewhere across the muddy expanse of no-man's-land is the enemy line.

Your job is to go out into that area. Sometimes you'll have to bring back a prisoner (called a "tongue") for interrogation. Other times, you'll have to scout out enemy positions and report back. You might have to retrieve another patrol or attack an enemy outpost. When you get back, you'll report in, wait a while, and then go out and do it all again. The company commander, played by the Game Master, assigns missions seemingly at random.

Almost all missions begin at the Base. At the base, characters receive their assignments. The players will often have some input into the composition of the squad, or decisions to make before the mission begins. These will be listed on the Mission Briefing. I recommend playing out scenes in the Base away from the table, or using it as a tactical map. A small space should serve well to represent the dugout where the troops live and rest.

After nightfall, or once preparations are complete, the squad will leave the Base and make its way along the Trail. This winding network of trenches, trails and fortified observation posts connects the Base to No Man's Land. Enemy patrols may be encountered here, or other unusual events. During the move along the Trail, the squad will have to struggle against the terrain itself, especially the slick yellow mud that grips at their clothes and boots.

As characters move toward the front, everyone has to fight the mud. Each character has to deal with the land in his or her own way. The earth is simultaneously the infantryman's greatest friend and his worst enemy. Moving through No Man's Land automatically generates one point of Stress. In addition, every character moving through No Man's Land must attempt to roll under his or her Motivation. Characters who fail the roll fall toward the back of the group, stuck in mudholes or losing their footing. Stragglers may be at additional risk of enemy attack.

No Man's Land is the most dangerous place the characters have ever been. It consists of a wilderness of mud, shell-shattered trees, craters, bombed-out villages, wrecked tanks and vehicles, mud, trenches and mud. This is not the cramped No Man's Land we think of from the First World War – this is the Russian steppe, after all. It would probably be possible to spend all day in No Man's Land and never see the enemy – if you weren't looking for them, that is.

The tabletop scenery arranged by the GM is the environment in which the missions take place. The final version of *Krasnoarmeets* will have more detail on how to determine line of sight, cover, terrain types and so on; right now, I'm assuming you all have a pretty good idea of how this works.

ACTIONS

Once the characters are out of the base, the game of *Krasnoarmeets* is divided into a series of turns. During each turn, the character may move and perform one additional action.

Movement: at a steady walk or marching pace, figures move 5" a turn. It is possible to move faster than this, in a mad dash. However, the ground of No Man's Land is either muddy and slick or strewn with wreckage and debris. This makes running a little unpredictable. Characters who run move 5 + d6". This means that it is sometimes possible to get caught in the open when you overestimate your ability to run to a particular spot. Characters who run may take no other action in the turn.

Shoot: most soldiers tend to fire in the general direction of the enemy rather than singling out targets. This requires no test. The character is assumed to be blasting away toward a particular spot. Multiple characters may fire at the same target. Each additional firer adds 1 point of Volume of Fire (VoF). The maximum VoF is 6.

When fired upon in this manner, the defenders must a d10 and add the VoF, adding or subtracting any cover modifiers. If the result is:

- Equal to or under their Steadiness, they are unaffected. Their discipline holds and they are able to carry on with whatever they were doing.
- Greater than their Steadiness, but not double it, they are **Suppressed**. Suppressed troops suffer a -2 penalty to their Aggression and Motivation.
- More than double their Steadiness, they are **Pinned**. Pinned troops may not shoot or move except to retreat or move toward better cover. The targets will remain pinned as long as they are fired upon unless they are encouraged by another model.

Attack: characters with the instincts or training to kill may shoot directly at an enemy model. To do so, they must roll a d10, adding or subtracting any combat modifiers. If the result is:

- Equal to or under the character's Aggression, he or she may make an Attack as normal.
- Greater than the character's Aggression, but not double it, he or she Shoots instead.
- More than double the character's Aggression, he or she may neither Shoot nor Arrack.

Targets of this kind of fire are in great danger. They roll a d10, adding or subtracting any cover and combat modifiers. If the result is:

- Equal to or under the character's Awareness, they are Suppressed.
- Greater than their Awareness but not double it, they are Pinned.
- More than double their Awareness, they are Hit. Characters who are Hit can do nothing more in the mission; they must be evacuated back to the Base.

Take Cover/Dig In: characters behind cover may spend an action reinforcing it, or at least scabbling in the mud to dig a shallow foxhole. If under fire, this requires a Steadiness check. Cover may only be improved by one level.

Spot: characters may attempt to search for concealed models or objects. Characters attempt to roll under their Awareness, applying cover modifiers. Extreme range for spotting is beyond 6".

Assist: characters within two or three inches of other characters can assist each other. They may attempt to encourage another character who is pinned. This allows the target to

roll against their Motivation in order to break the pinning. If the encouraging character is the target's *tovarich*, the Motivation is increased by 2.

Haul: up to two characters may try to drag a third. This is usually done to evacuate wounded squadmates, but may be done to carry prisoners. One character can move another, but cannot run or take any other action while doing so. Two characters can run with a third, but cannot take any other action.

Communicating: characters should communicate freely in combat, but keep it brief. When the enemy is in sight, most people are not going to waste time laying out a detailed battle plan.

MODIFIERS

Cover modifiers for type are cumulative. Cover modifiers for weather effects and range stack.

Soft cover: -1

Hard cover: -2

Prepared position: -3

Smoke: - 2

Rain or mist: -1

Extreme range: -1

Combat modifiers

Extreme range: -1

Target face to face: +1

Returning fire: +1

Plus more stuff not immediately obvious to me.

DEALING WITH STRESS

Characters accumulate a Stress point every time one of the following happens:

- a Mission begins
- the character Hits someone
- someone within six inches of a character is Hit
- one of the character's *tovarishti* is Hit.
- The character is Pinned or comes under heavy fire for an extended period.
- The character is subjected to artillery or mortar bombardment.

Once ten stress points have been accumulated, the character has an Episode. The Episode will take one of a number of forms. The character may:

- begin firing wildly at the enemy, perhaps giving away his position. He will leave cover to do so if necessary.
- Become catatonic, refusing to act and needing to be evacuated.
- Flee the battlefield, leaving cover to do so if necessary.

The Red Army does not recognize combat fatigue or stress as legitimate ailments. Any display of combat fatigue will probably result in being shot for cowardice.

So how is your character supposed to avoid panicking or going berserk on the battlefield? The answer is by letting off steam. Back at the Base, any character can shed 1 point of Stress by engaging in ordinary recreational activities: singing, playing an instrument, or just reading and smoking.

To eliminate five points of Stress, a character may take a coping mechanism. A coping mechanism penalizes a character in some way, but initially eliminates Stress points and can be used subsequently to remove a further Stress point per Mission. Example coping mechanisms include:

- heavy drinking, which removes a point of Steadiness.
- nervous or compulsive habits, which remove a point of Awareness.
- paranoid behavior, which removes a point of Motivation.

Any behavior which removes a point of a trait can be a coping mechanism.

GAINING EXPERIENCE

A character gains one experience point for each of the following:

- participating in a Mission.
- Evacuating a fallen squadmate.
- proposing a successful strategy
- completing a Mission without any characters being Hit.

Experience points can be spent to increase traits. Every point of a trait costs two experience points. Additionally, points can be spent to buy new abilities, which are not in this draft of the game. Sorry.

THE ENEMY

The final version of Krasnoarmeets will include extended discussion of the German and Romanian troops on the southern flank of the Stalingrad front. For now, suffice to say that they are as demoralized, hungry, and lacking supplies and equipment as the characters. They smear their issued helmets and uniforms with the yellow mud of the steppe to provide themselves with camouflage. The only thing they have going for them is that they know there are thousands of kilometers between their positions and their homes. If cornered or given no option, they are capable of fierce resistance.

For the most part, there isn't any point in treating the enemy as individuals. Assign them ratings for traits, but only differentiate one from the other if you want to make a point. Enemy patrols may include somewhat more Motivated or Aware leaders, but in general it's okay to treat them as identical.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

Many roleplaying games operate on the assumption that you'll play session after session in a campaign of indefinite length; most wargames assume that you'll use the rules to play out any number of battles, seldom in sequence. Neither of these approaches is really a good way to play Krasnoarmeets.

Ideally, a Krasnoarmeets campaign should consist of a number of patrols, raids, captures and other missions, frequently revisiting the same ground. All of this is building up through the month of October in preparation for the offensive in early November. When that comes, the squad should be thrown into a pitched battle, in which the desperately outnumbered Axis defenders hurl their last reserves of artillery, armor and reinforcements into the line. We get to see the characters develop and grow into real frontoviks, and then we get to see some of them die like dogs.

SAMPLE MISSION BRIEFING

Objective: capture an enemy sentry for interrogation.

The characters are assembled at the Base and given their assignment – to bring in an enemy sentry as a “tongue.” Nothing is known about enemy strengths, so the squad must reconnoiter the enemy position beforehand.

The Trail: the danger to the squad is an enemy patrol already in the area near their Base. If they're not eliminated or avoided, they will try to head back to their lines and alert the enemy OP. This will complicate matters for the squad.

No Man's Land: two enemy forward observation posts have been established in a deserted village. Toward the rear table edge, the enemy trench line contains two squads of reserves.

NOTES

1. Creating missions.

The idea behind a Krasnoarmeets mission is that any dramatic tension comes from tactical factors -- that is, from the need to balance risk and reward, personal safety and the safety of one's comrades, etc. The board serves to place these factors literally at the center of play, and sets the idiom of the game as a visual and tactile one. This is not a tactical simulator, but the tactical questions help to facilitate the overall experience and the board helps to facilitate the tactical problems. Hopefully.

2. Presentation.

I was going to put a thing in here about how Krasnoarmeets doesn't have a lot of that Stalinist-chic art and stuff and how it was because I was trying to come up with an atmosphere that differed from other things about the life of a Soviet rifleman, but actually it was just because I didn't have time. You're lucky it has spaces.

