THE ROAD TO
CHEREN
1941 EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

REVOLUTION
GAMES

Introduction

The Road to CHEREN is a two player game about the Allied invasion of Italian East Africa in 1941. This Italian colony consisted of the two former Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland, plus the occupied country of Abyssinia (*current Ethiopia*) and the occupied colony of British Somaliland. One player will play the Italian colonial army (*Col*) with elements of Blackshirts (*Bl-shirt*), naval garrison (*Marina*) and metropolitan units (*Alpini, Bersaglieri and Savoia*). The other player will play the Allies consisting of six Indian brigades (*Ind*) and various special units like the Sudan defense force (*Sudan*), tank squadrons (*Tank and Matilda*), commandos (*Comm*) and Free French units (*French*).

I would like to thank *Roger Miller* for his playtesting. I also like to thank *Richard Handewith, John Welch, Mikael Norrby, Anders Västberg, Robert Mårtensson, Stan Hilinski, Dave Alston, Michael Fostar, Luc Olivier* and *Philippe Parmentier* for their assistance in the development of this game.

Thanks! Kim Kanger

Table of Contents (version 1.1)

1.0 Map

The map depicts western Eritrea where the hardest fighting took place (*especially around the town of Cheren*). Each hex is 12.5 km across (*7.5 miles*) and each Game Turn is one week. All names, except Kassala, has the Italian spelling (*do not pronounce "ch" as in "chat". It is hard as in "cat"*). It is worth mentioning that rough and clear terrain among the hills are not valleys but high flat plateaus. You may also wonder why Barka river that flows past Agordat is not there? That is because it is dry as dust during this season.

1.1 Info: The *Terrain key* at the top shows the Movement Point costs to enter/cross different terrain, by off-road (*mp*) and by road (*rd*). It shows the Stacking limit (*st*) (*rule 3.1*) and the number of combat column shifts (*cs*) (*rule 11.1*) in different terrains. The *Combat Table* is to the left while the *Game Turn track* is in the upper right corner. Each Game Turn "slot" is used twice. Return the *Game Turn marker* to the first slot when you start on Game Turn 7.

1.2 Towns, Setup-letters and Victory Points (VP): Each town has a VP value. Total the VPs for all Allied-controlled towns (*rule 2.1*) at the end of the game and see rule 14.0 to determine the Victory level. Most towns have a Setup-letter that shows it is a town where units with the corresponding Setup-letter are set up or will arrive, if a reinforcement.

1.3 Garrison Areas: The yellow line shows the former border between Abyssinia and Italian Eritrea. South of the line, in occupied Abyssinia, are two Garrison Areas: Wolkait and Tigre (*they are separated from each other by a yellow border as well*). Garrison units are marked by a colored header and, in the case of native units, by having their garrison written on the left side of the counter (*rule 6.0*).

1.4 Supply Sources: The Allied Supply sources are represented by red/white circles. Af Abed is an Allied Supply source only from Game Turn 5 and later. The Italian Supply sources are represented by green/white circles (*rule 12.0*).

2.0 Counters

2.1 Control markers are placed on each town the Allied player was the last to occupy or pass through. Remove it if an Italian unit enters it. A town with a *Control marker* is controlled by the Allied player. It is controlled by the Italian player if it lacks one.
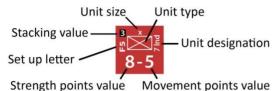
2.2 Supply markers show you a unit's supply status. See rules 12.4 - 12.6.

Low Supply | No Supply

2.3 Units

Unit size — Unit type
Stacking value —
Set up letter —
Unit designation
Strength points value — Movement points value

8 - 5

Allied chits are red and Allied units are red or blue. Italian chits and units are both green. Native units are black and have a green (*Italian*) or red (*Allied*) header showing their allegiance. Units have different sizes. There are brigades (x), regiments (III), battalions (II) and tank squadrons (I). There are several types of units in the game and some have certain capabilities and limitations:

a) Units that may not enter mountain, due to their unit types, are listed below in italic/bold (*rule 9.1*).

b) Support units are listed below with an underline (*rule 11.4*).

c) Units that can move during Exploitation phase are listed below with an asterisk. They also have black unit type symbols on the counters (*rule 13.0*).

- Infantry
- Mountain troops
- Artillery
- Naval garrison
- Cavalry*
- Commandos
- *Tanks**
- *Motorized infantry**
- *Motorized artillery*
- Air support

Unit designations are to the right (see introduction). A lone letter to the left shows which town it will set up in. If there is a number with a letter, then it is a reinforcement and the number is the Game Turn when the unit will arrive at that town. The Stacking value is explained in rule 3.0. The Movement Point value is explained in rule 9.0. The Strength Point value is explained in rule 11.0.

Most units have two steps while some have only one. Allied brigades have four steps. Each Allied brigade has a replacement counter, identified by a white dot. It replaces the original counter when the brigade has lost two steps. Units belonging to phasing player are called "friendly units".

3.0 Stacking Value

All units have a Stacking value of **1**, unless it says differently on the counter.

3.1 Stacking limit is determined by the terrain (*see Terrain key*) and is enforced for both sides at the end of each phase, except Reinforcement and Replacement phase, and after each retreat (*rule 11.7*). Total the Stacking values of all units in a stack. The total may not exceed the limit of the terrain in their hex (*if more than one terrain in the hex, pick the least favorable*). Eliminate steps, if necessary, until you no longer exceed the limit.

4.0 Zone of Control (ZoC)

A ZoC covers the six hexes surrounding a unit. All land units project a ZoC except a unit ...

a) In a hex with mountain terrain.

b) With a *No Supply marker*.

You have two kinds of ZoC:

Hard ZoC: A unit or a stack of units with total Stacking value(s) of **3** or more.

Soft ZoC: A unit or stack of units with total Stacking value(s) of **2** or less.

No ZoC ever extends into or out of a mountain hex.

ZoC has the following effects:

a) It costs **+1** Movement Point to enter an enemy ZoC, regardless if it is occupied by a friendly unit or not. Never pay more than +1, even if there are several enemy ZoCs into a hex.

b) You must stop when you enter a Hard ZoC (*you do not have to stop when entering a Soft ZoC*)

c) Regarding any retreat into enemy ZoC, see rule 11.7.

You may move from ZoC to ZoC as long as you heed to the rules above.

3

5.0 Setting up the Game

Place the Allied brigade replacement units and all *Low/No Supply markers* off-map. Place one *Control marker* on Kassala and the rest off-map. Set the *Game Turn marker* to Game Turn 1 on the *Game Turn track*. Sort the units that will arrive as reinforcements and place them off-map. Units that begin the game on-map are set up in the towns with the corresponding Setup-letters. Native units are set up with their Italian side up. They have their garrison and native village printed on their sides, showing where they shall be set up.

The Italian player gathers all green chits and draws four random chits, looks at them, and places them face-down on the table. The Allied player does the same with the red chits. Do not reveal any of your chits to your opponent at this stage. All remaining chits from both sides are then put together into a single Chit cup.

5.1 Chits: You can reveal and play a chit on certain occasions, as defined in the Chit chart. You can only play from those chits in front of you. If played, immediately draw a new one from the Chit cup and, if it is yours, place it face-down in front of you. If it is one of your opponent's, look at it and remove it from play for the whole game without revealing it. Do not draw a new chit to replace it.

At the end of the phase (*or later, if so specified*), return the chit you played back into the Chit cup, or remove it from play if it is a one-time chit (*they have a star at the top*).

There are some duplicate chits. You may only play one of them during a single phase. Some chits are drawn "too late" to be of any use. You are stuck with them (*tough luck*).

6.0 Wolkait and Tigre Garrisons

Italian garrison units, including native units, may not move, but they still project a ZoC. A garrison is released if an Allied unit, at the end of any phase, is within that garrison area or next to one of its units. A released garrison will allow its units to move freely and to leave the area. A release will also test the allegiance of its native units (*see below*). A released garrison will not automatically release the other garrison. The Allied player must enter both garrisons to release them both. The Eritrea native unit is not a garrison unit. It is just an Italian unit.

Italian units that do not belong to a garrison may move through a garrison area as they wish, whether the garrison is released or not.

If a garrison is released, then the Italian player immediately rolls a die for each native unit in that garrison. On a roll of 1-3, it stays Italian. On a roll of 4-6, it defects and flips to its Allied side (*red header*). It becomes an Allied unit. If the defecting unit is stacked with an Italian unit, then the native unit is placed 1 hex away by the Italian player, but not on another Italian unit. If that is not possible, it is eliminated.

(*Hint: The Allies can take Om Ager without releasing Wolkait garrison. They stop north of the town, eliminate the unit in combat and not advance afterwards. Then they can pass through and control the town during their exploitation without ending their move there next to the native unit*).

7.0 Game Turn Sequence

Each Game Turn represents one week and consists of two Player turns: first an Allied turn followed by an Italian turn. Both turns are played through a sequence of phases, starting with the Allied turn:

1) Reinforcement and Replacement
2) Movement
3) Enemy Reaction (*opponent plays this phase*)
4) Combat
5) Supply check and Attrition
6) Exploitation

The Allied player is the phasing player during the Allied turn and the Italian player during the Italian turn.

8.0 Reinforcement and Replacement Phase

The phasing player places any friendly reinforcement at the "arrival town" with the same Setup-letter as the unit.

8.1 If the Allied arrival town is Italian-controlled but not occupied by any unit, then place your reinforcement there, and a *Control marker*. But if the town is occupied by Italian unit(s), then both sides loses a step each. One step from the Allied reinforcement and one step from the Italian occupant (*one step per stack, not per unit*).

The Italian unit(s) will then retreat one hex (*rule 11.7*) while the Allied reinforcement is placed in the town (*do this in Game Turn 6 as well, when a sole artillery unit arrives, even though one must assume it has "attacked" on its own*).

8.2 If the Italian arrival town is Allied-controlled but not occupied by any unit, then simply remove the *Control marker* and place your reinforcement there. But if the town is occupied by Allied unit(s), then the Italian reinforcement is placed at any town that is not occupied by any Allied unit in the Tigre garrison area. If that is not possible, the reinforcement is delayed until it is possible to be placed in any Tigre town during this phase.

8.3 Allied Replacements. One Allied unit on the map, without a *Low/No Supply marker*, may replace one step loss during the Allied Reinforcement and Replacement phase at Game Turns **3**, **6**, **9** and **12** (*the Game Turns are marked with a circle on the Game Turn track*). If that is not possible, then the replacement is forfeited.

8.4 Allied Reinforcements arriving at K7-F8. These will arrive at Kassala on Game Turn 7. You may, if you wish, postpone them and let them arrive at Af Abed instead on Game Turn 8. Both units must arrive together.

8.5 Massaua Naval Garrison. The Italian unit that sets up at Massaua may not move, advance after combat or retreat (*it must take a step loss instead*).

9.0 Movement Phase

The phasing player may move none, some or all friendly units. Move a unit from hex to hex. There is a movement cost to enter each hex, based on its most expensive Terrain. Pay extra when you cross a hexside with a river.

The total movement cost of all hexes and rivers that you enter/cross may not exceed a unit's Movement Point value. A unit may not enter a hex if it does not have remaining Movement Points to pay for it.

Movement along a road has its own movement cost. You do not pay for any other terrain in the hex, including rivers, when moving along road. You have to follow a road from hex to hex, or from track onto road, to be allowed to pay the road cost only.

"Dotted roads" are tracks and do <u>not</u> exist for road movement (*pay terrain movement cost instead when you enter track*), but they <u>do</u> exist supply-wise (*rule 12.0*). Tracks were either tracks, literally, or serpentine roads in hills so rough that the route became at least three times as long.

<u>For example</u>: If you enter the town of Cheru you pay the cost of rough terrain, although there is some clear in it also, unless of course, you enter the town along the road, in which case you pay the road cost only.

9.1 Mountains: Tank and motorized units (*rule 2.3*) and units with a Movement Point value of just 5, may <u>never</u> enter, attack or retreat into hexes with mountain terrain (*one exception in rule 11.2*).

10.0 Enemy Reaction Phase

The non-phasing player may now move up to 3 units, but not more than a total <u>Stacking value of **3**</u> (adding all Stacking values of reacting units). You may <u>not</u> move a unit that …

a) Is adjacent to an enemy unit (*regardless of ZoC*).

b) Has a *Low/No Supply marker* (*rules 12.5 -6*).
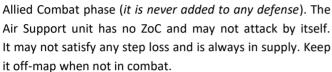
11.0 Combat Phase

The phasing player's units may attack adjacent enemy units. Combat is not mandatory. Only non-motorized units with a Movement Point value of 6 may attack into mountain hexes (*exception: Rule 11.2*). Separate units in a stack may attack separate enemy units and not all units in a stack must attack.

When attacking enemy units, total the Strength points of all participating attacking units (*that may be in separate hexes*). Then total the Strength points of all defending units in the defending hex. Compare the total attack and defense Strength values to create a combat odds ratio, and round it down (*for example: an attack strength of 17 and a defense strength of 5 will create an odds ratio of 3-1*).

11.1 Terrain in defender's hex may give a column shift in the defender's favor. Use the most beneficial one if there is more than one Terrain (*for example: hill, which is "-1", makes an odds ratio of 3-1 become 2-1*). A column shift for river only applies if all units are attacking across the river. Road will <u>not</u> negate the river column shift.

11.2 Artillery may not attack an adjacent enemy unless there is a non-artillery unit in the same hex or in a separate hex that participates in the attack. They may defend alone, though. Artillery may attack an enemy unit in a mountain hex if a non-artillery unit that is eligible to attack a mountain hex, participates.

11.3 The Air Support unit is a "flying artillery" that arrives on Game Turn 3. The Allied player may add its Strength Point to a single attack every Allied Combat phase (*it is never added to any defense*). The Air Support unit has no ZoC and may not attack by itself. It may not satisfy any step loss and is always in supply. Keep it off-map when not in combat.

11.4 Support units (*artillery, air, tanks,* see rule 2.3), add their Strength Points in combat like any unit. But they might also give you a column shift. Total the Strength Points of each player's Support units. The player with the highest total will get a column shift in its favor.

For example: The Allies are attacking at an odds ratio of 2-1. Of their attacking strength they have 5 Strength Points from Support units. The Italians have only 3 Support Strength Points, so the Allied player wins this comparison and gets a column shift. 2-1 becomes 3-1.

11.5 The Combat Table does not have all odds ratios. If your odds ratio is not there, round it down (*for example: 4-1 becomes 3-1*). Odds ratio less than 1-3 is rolled on the 1-3 column. Odds ratio above 13-1 is rolled on 13-1. Find your final odds ratio and roll a six-sided die, Cross-reference the result of the die-roll with the final odds ratio column to get a combat result. The combat result applies to both players. To the left of the hyphen is the attacker's result. To the right is the defender's result.

The number in the combat result is the number of steps that side must take as losses (*in total, not per unit*). A result of 2 step losses can be taken by separate units. An "r" means the defender has to retreat after any losses (*rule 11.7*). The defender applies any results first, then the attacker.

11.6 Losses are applied like this: An Allied brigade flips the "8-5" unit after the first loss. The flipped unit is replaced by its brigade "4-5" replacement counter (*it has a white dot to the left*) when it takes its second loss. Flip the replacement counter after the third loss and remove it after the fourth loss.

All other units are flipped when they take the first loss (*shown by a gray bar across the back side of the unit*) and removed when taking the second loss. If they have a blank back side, then they are removed after the first loss (*including native units. Their back side is the enemy version*).

Artillery steps may <u>only</u> be taken as losses if …

a) You retreat, or ...

b) There is no other unit that can take the step loss.

11.7 Retreat: An "r" result means that all defending units retreat 1 hex or that they all stay and take an extra loss instead (*one extra loss per stack, not per unit*).

If more than one unit retreats, they may do so into separate hexes. You may never retreat onto an enemy unit. Only units that may enter a mountain hex may retreat into one.

If you exceed the stacking limit in the hex you retreat to, then immediately, before any other attacks take place, remove the exceeding steps. Units that have retreated into a hex that also will be attacked are included in the defense there. Therefore, the attacker should be aware in which order the attacks are made. You must retreat or take a step loss even if the attacker is eliminated. If you cannot retreat, then you must take a step loss instead.

When a unit retreats, you must do so in this order (*if you cannot retreat as in option 1, then you must retreat as in option 2, and so forth*):

1) First to a hex not in enemy ZoC.

2) Second to a hex in a Soft ZoC.

3) Third to a hex in a Hard ZoC, but <u>only</u> if that hex is occupied by a friendly unit (*otherwise, it is not allowed*).

11.8 "Push": If the combat die-roll result is a "5" or "6", and the defender does not retreat (*takes the step loss instead*), then the attacker may declare a "Push". If so, the attacker will take one extra step loss and the defender will receive a <u>new</u> retreat result (*retreat or another step loss*).

11.9 Advance after Combat: If the defender retreats or is eliminated, then the attacking units may advance into the vacated hex. If the attacker decides to advance, then …

a) Units that have taken any step loss in the attack will advance (*if still alive*) before any other unit may do so.

b) It may not include any artillery units.

12.0 Supply Check phase

The phasing player will now check supply for all friendly units. To be in supply, a unit has to draw a Supply line to a friendly Supply source or to a road or track that leads to one. A Supply line does <u>not</u> include the hex where the unit is, but it includes the hex where you reach the road/track/Supply source. It may not enter a mountain hex (*but the unit itself may be in one*). The Supply line may be no longer than …

3 hexes, or …

2 hexes, if it enters a hill hex <u>or</u> an enemy ZoC, or …

1 hex, if it enters a hill hex <u>and</u> an enemy ZoC.

12.1 The Supply line and the road/track may not enter enemy units nor enemy-controlled towns (*native villages do not matter*). They may <u>not</u> enter any enemy ZoC <u>unless</u> it is occupied by a friendly unit.

Example: The Allied 8-5 in Arresa is in supply, and so is the Allied 2-6, since the Italian 3-6 in the mountains have no ZoC (*rule 4.0*). The Allied 3-6 is out of supply though, since a Supply line that enters both hill and enemy ZoC (*in this case, the hex where the Allied 2-6 is*) may only be 1 hex long, which is not enough to reach the track.

(Italian ZoCs are highlighted, to make it easier to see them)

12.2 Allied units adjacent to the red map edges are also in supply. But the red edge close to Af Abed only offers supply to adjacent Allied units from Game Turn 5 and later.

12.3 A native unit, Italian or Allied, is also in supply if it is in its <u>own</u> native village hex.

12.4 A unit, unable to draw supply, is marked with a *Low Supply marker*. If it already has one, the marker is flipped to its "*No Supply*" side. Remove all *Low/No Supply markers* from units that are able to draw supply during this phase.

12.5 A unit with a *Low Supply marker* may not receive any replacement, and it may not move during the Enemy Reaction phase or during the Exploitation phase.

12.6 A unit with *No Supply marker* suffers the same effects as one with a *Low Supply marker*, with the addition that it …

a) May not move at all, if it is a Tank or motorized unit.

b) May not participate in an attack (*it may defend and it may retreat, even if a tank or motorized unit*).

c) Has no ZoC.

d) Will take a step loss as attrition, as soon as it receives its *No Supply marker*.

12.7 Towns "check supply" (*like units*) **during this phase to see if it changes control.** Italian-controlled towns that are unoccupied and <u>only</u> able to draw Allied supply when Italy is the phasing player, will become Allied-controlled. An empty Allied-controlled town will also change control when the Allies are the phasing player, if it <u>only</u> is able to draw Italian supply. Check towns <u>before</u> you check units.

13.0 Exploitation

The phasing player may move none, some or all friendly units with black unit type symbols (***motorized infantry, cavalry, tanks,** see rule 2.3*) plus any friendly unit with an *Exploit chit*. You may <u>not</u> move a unit that has a *Low/No Supply marker*.

After the Italian Exploitation phase, move the *Game Turn marker* forward to the next slot and begin a new Game Turn, starting with the first phase in the Allied turn. If you have just played Game Turn 12, check for victory instead.

14.0 At the End of the game

At the end of Game Turn 12, add together the VPs of all Allied-controlled towns to see what Victory level you have. If the Allied player has …

17 VP or less = Major Italian victory

18 - 19 VP = Fair Italian victory

20 VP = Minor Italian victory

21 VP = Draw

22 - **23** VP = Minor Allied victory

24 - **25** VP = Fair Allied victory

26 VP or more = Major Allied victory

15.0 Designer's notes

In September 2012 Roger Miller asked me whether I was interested in doing a game for Revolution Games. Although deep in the middle of another game project I was tempted by the idea of creating a game that was small but still elegant. I had no more than six months to do it which was an extra challenge.

This Allied invasion was a campaign that culminated in long battle outside the town of Cheren (*Keren, if spelled by non-Italians*) which I believe is viewed by many Italians as their finest hour in the war. Eritrea was Italy's oldest colony that supplied Italy with almost all their colonial soldiers. Italy had certainly no intention of giving this one up.

The Allies invaded with six Indian brigades supported by commandos, the Free French and units from Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. After the initial push into the hot Eritrean lowlands the Allied command soon realized that there was only one real road leading up to the highlands and that its point of entry to the highlands was a narrow creek leading up to a town called ... Cheren.

This is a tough game for both sides to win. Neither side has abundant troops and both must save units for the last Game Turn when victory is decided. Keep an eye on those flanks. With such slow terrain and short Supply lines there is not much room for correcting mistakes by rushing backwards dealing with enemy intrusion. Enemy reaction is very powerful. Remember that an enemy unit does not have to check supply during the turn it reacts, so it will not suffer immediate attrition if it moves behind your units. A way of preventing units to react is to move up next to them.

Be aware of if your units project a Soft or a Hard ZoC, and where enemy units might end up, after their move and exploitation are done.

Italy must trade space to save units early in the game and vice versa later on. The trick is to know when to change strategy. The closer the heartland the front approaches the shorter the distance the Italian units will have to move between the enemy approaches. Italian units will act as fire brigades rushing to where the situation is most severe.

The Allies must push, not by bleeding to death but by daring moves and by killing as many Italian units as possible early in the game. Those three motorized battalions are fast and wicked. Not only do they move far but they also move during exploitation. Indeed a concern for the Italians. The Allies will have three possible routes to advance along. It will later increase to five routes between which the Allied played must divide the troops. How many and where to go is a decision that has to be made.

Both sides have a few and equally good units that are capable to move into mountains. These can be a nuisance to the enemy. They are difficult to push away from these mountains since only mountain capable units may attack them (*with the help of artillery, though*). Even though no ZoC extends out of (*or into*) a mountain hex, a unit up there can still step down upon your supply route that is passing by along those narrow valleys.

The chits can be a powerful tool both when they are used and when they are not. For example, the Italian player must always assume that the Allied player has the Infiltrate chit and must therefore position his units in depth instead of in strength up front. The Allied played must assume that the Italian player has the Roadblock chit and can therefore never trust a certain route of advancement.

If an enemy one-step unit rushes off during its movement into your hinterland, then you are more or less safe since it will die through attrition before you do. If it is a two-step unit, then you are in much more trouble. But beware if an enemy unit (even a one-step unit) cuts your supply during its exploitation, or worse, during reaction movement, then you must take great care because you will check supply first, and will also die first. Stay calm and enjoy the game.

Enjoy the game!
Kim Kanger