

THE ROAD TO
C H E R E N
1941 EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN



REVOLUTION

G A M E S

THE ROAD TO CHEREN 1941 EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

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 and for publishing this game through Revolution Games. 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

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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"*).

1.1 Info: The terrain key at the top of the map shows the movement costs to enter/cross different terrain (*you see the corresponding terrain beneath the terrain key*), by road or off-road (*the hexes beneath the numbers are not playable*). It shows their stacking limits and column shifts (*the clear terrain among hills and mountains are not valleys but high flat plateaus*). See rule 9.1 regarding mountains.

The *Combat table* is in the lower left corner and the *Game turn track* 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 (*although some are villages and Asmara is a city*) has a VP value. At the end of the game, total the VPs for all allied controlled towns (*rule 2.1*) and see rule 14.0 to determine the victory level. Most towns have also a letter that shows that it is a setup/arrival town for units.

1.3 Garrison areas: The yellow line shows the former border between Italian Eritrea and Abyssinia. South of the line, in former 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 color bar or, in the case of the native units, by having their garrison written on the side of the counter (*rule 6.0*).

1.4 Supply sources: The two Allied supply sources are represented by white/red circles. Af Abed is an allied supply source only on game turns 5-12. The five Italian supply sources are represented by white/green 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 Allies. It is controlled by the Italians if it lacks one.

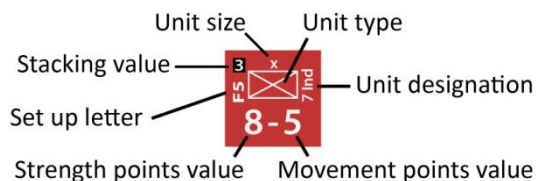
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Low
Supply

No
Supply

2.2 Supply markers show you a unit's supply status. See rules 12.4 - 12.6.

2.3 Units



Allied units are red and the units red and blue. Italian units and units are green. Native units are black and have a green (*Italian*) or red (*allied*) bar 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 in *italic* below (*rule 9.1*).
- b) Support units are listed below with an underline (*rule 11.4*).
- c) Units that can move during the 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 mentioned in the introduction.

A set up letter shows which town it will set up in or arrive at as reinforcement. If there is a number with a letter, then that 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. The 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 (*rule 11.6*). Units belonging to the 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 terrain type (*see terrain key*) and is enforced for both sides at the end of every phase, except the Reinforcement and Replacement phase. Total the stacking values of all units in a stack. The total may not exceed the limit for the terrain type in the hex the units are in (*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 units project a ZoC except...

- a) The air support unit.
- b) A unit with a *No supply marker*.

You have two kinds of ZoC:

Hard ZoC: A unit or a stack of units which total a stacking value of **3 or more**.

Soft ZoC: A unit or stack of units which total a stacking value of **2 or less**.

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

ZoC (both hard and soft) has the following effects:

- 1) It costs **+1** movement point to enter an enemy ZoC, regardless if it's occupied by a friendly unit or not. Never pay more than +1, even if there are several ZoC in a hex.
- 2) You must stop when you enter a hard ZoC.
(*you don't have to when entering a soft ZoC*)
- 3) Regarding retreat into ZoC, see rule 11.7.

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

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5.0 Set up the game

Place the allied brigade replacement units and the *Low/No supply markers* off map. Place one *Control marker* on Kassala and the rest off map. Set the *Game turn marker* on game turn 1 on the *Game turn track*. Place the units that arrive as reinforcements off map, and those units that begin the game at the towns corresponding with the letters written on the counters. Native units start on their Italian side (*green bar*). They have their garrison and native village written on the counters showing where they shall be placed.

The Italian player puts all green chits in a cup and draws four chits randomly from it, looks at them and places them face down on the table. The allied player does the same with the red chits. Do not reveal your chits to the opponent. All remaining chits from both sides are then placed into a single chit cup.

5.1 Chits: You can reveal and play a chit on certain occasions, 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 place it face down in front of you, if it is yours. If it is one of your opponent's, look at it and remove it from play without revealing it, and don't 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 (*and that is just tough luck*). See the Chit chart for description of the chits.

6.0 Wolkait and Tigre garrisons

Italian garrison units (*see rule 1.3*) 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 garrison units. A released garrison will allow its units to move freely and also to leave the garrison area. It will also test the allegiance of its native units (*see below*).

A released Wolkait garrison will not automatically release the Tigre garrison (*and vice versa*). The allied player must enter both garrisons to release them both. The Eritrea native unit is not a garrison. It is just an Italian unit.

Italian units that don't 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 bar*). 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.

(If the allies wish to take the town Om Ager without releasing the Wolkait garrison, they can 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 movement there next to the native unit).

7.0 Game Turn sequence

Each game turn represents one week and consists of two player turns; 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 town that has the same letter as the unit.

8.1 If the allied arrival town is occupied by Italians, the allied player will remove a step from their reinforcement, as the Italian player will remove a step from the Italian occupants (*both remove one per stack, not per unit*). The Italians will then retreat one hex according to rule 11.7.

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Place the allied reinforcement in the town (*do this in game turn 6 as well, when there is a sole artillery unit arriving, even though one must assume it has "attacked" on its own*).

If the town is controlled by the Italians but not occupied by them, then just place your reinforcement and a *Control marker* there.

8.2 If the Italian arrival town is occupied by the allies, the Italian reinforcement is placed at any town in the Tigre garrison not occupied by an allied unit. If that is not possible, the reinforcement is delayed until it is possible to be placed in a Tigre town during this phase.

If the town is controlled by the allies but not occupied by them, simply place your reinforcement there and remove the *Control marker*.

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 this is not possible, then the replacement is forfeited (*don't confuse this with brigade replacement counters*).

8.4 Allied reinforcements arriving at K7-F8. These will arrive at Kassala on game turn 7. You may, if you wish, postpone and let them arrive at Af Abed on game turn 8 instead. 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. In each hex, pay the movement cost of the terrain that costs the most (*see the terrain key*).

For example: 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.

Pay for river when you cross a hexside with a river. The sum of all hexes, with their respective costs, may not exceed a unit's movement point value. A unit may not enter a hex if it does not have sufficient movement points to do so.

Movement along a road has its own movement cost. You don't pay for other terrain in the hex, including rivers, when moving along road. You have to follow a road from hex to hex, or from track (*see below*) onto road, to be allowed to pay the road cost only. Roads that are "dotted" are tracks and do not exist for road movement (*pay the terrain movement cost instead when you enter track*), but do 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.

9.1 Mountains: Tank and motorized units (*rule 2.3*) may never enter, attack or retreat into mountain hexes.

10.0 Enemy reaction phase

The non-phasing player may now move his/her units, up to a total stacking value of 3. But you may not move a unit that:

- 1) Is adjacent (*regardless of ZoC*) to an enemy unit.
- 2) 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 value of 6 may attack mountain hexes (*exception: Rule 11.2*). Separate units in a stack may attack separate enemy hexes and not all units in a stack must attack.

When attacking an enemy hex, 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 strengths to create a combat odds ratio, and round down (*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: 5-1 becomes a 3-1. A column shift for river only applies if all units are attacking across a river.

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11.2 Artillery may not attack an adjacent enemy unless there is another non-artillery unit (*in the same hex or in a separate hex*) participating in the attack. They may defend alone, though. Artillery may attack an enemy unit in a mountain hex if a non-artillery unit, eligible to attack a mountain hex, participates (*rule 11.0*).



11.3 The air support unit is a "flying artillery", arriving on game turn 3. The allied player may add its 1 strength point to single attack every allied Combat phase (*it is never added to any defense*) by placing it on the defending Italian units. The air support unit has no ZoC; may not attack by itself; may not satisfy any step losses and is always in supply (*rule 12.0*). 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. 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 the odds ratio is not there, round it down (*4-1 becomes 3-1 etc*). Odds ratio less than 1-3 is rolled on the 1-3 column. Odds above 13-1 is rolled on 13-1. Find your final odds ratio and roll a six sided die, Cross reference the die roll value row with the final odds ratio column to get a combat result. The combat result applies to both players; the left one is the attacker's result and the right one is the defender's.

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

11.6 Losses are applied like this:



1) 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.



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

Artillery steps may only be taken as losses if:

- 1) You retreat, or...
- 2) 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 they all stay and take an extra loss instead (*one extra loss per stack, not per unit*). Only units that may enter mountain may retreat into it.

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 can't retreat, then you must take the step loss instead.

When a unit retreats, you must retreat 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, occupied by a friendly unit.

(You may never retreat onto an enemy unit; into mountain if you are not allowed to go there; into a hard ZoC without a friendly unit there)

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11.8 "Push": If the combat die roll 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 new retreat result (*retreat or 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 advances, then:

- 1) All units that have taken step losses in that attack, (*if still alive*) must advance before any other unit from that attack may advance.
- 2) It may not include any artillery units.

12.0 Supply check phase

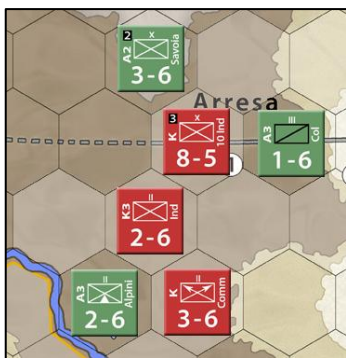
The phasing player now tries to draw supply for all friendly units. A unit has to draw a supply line to a friendly supply source (*rule 1.4*) or to a road/track that leads to one. A supply line does not include the hex where the unit is, but it includes the hex where you reach the supply source/road/track. 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 or an enemy ZoC, or...

1 hex, if it enters a hill hex and an enemy ZoC.

12.1 The supply line and the road/track may not enter enemy units nor enemy controlled towns (*native villages don't matter*). They may not enter an enemy ZoC unless it is occupied by a friendly unit.



Example: The allied 8-5 in Arresa is in supply along the track since the Italian 3-6 in the mountains have no ZoC (*rule 4.0*). The allied 3-6 is out of supply. A supply line that enters both hill and enemy ZoC is only 1 hex long (*rule 12.0*)

(Italian ZoC are made lighter, 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 offers supply to adjacent allied units only on game turns 5-12.

12.3 A native unit, Italian or allied, is also in supply if it is in its own 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 into 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 move during the Enemy reaction phase or during the Exploitation phase (*rules 10.0 and 13.0*) or be the object of some of the chits (*see the Chit chart*).

12.6 Units with No supply marker suffer the same effects as those with *Low supply marker* with the addition that:

- 1) Tank and motorized units may not move at all.
- 2) They may not participate in an attack (*they may defend and they may retreat, even if a tank or motorized unit*).
- 3) They have no ZoC.
- 4) Each unit will take a step loss as attrition.

12.7 Italian controlled towns that are unoccupied and can't draw Italian supply (*like if they were units*) will become allied controlled during this phase, if able to draw allied supply. An empty allied controlled town will also change control if it can only draw Italian supply. Check this before 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 not move a unit that has a *Low/No supply marker* on it (*rules 12.5 - 6*). When the Exploitation phase in the Italian turn has been played, move the *Game turn marker* to the next game turn (*next slot*) and start again with the first phase in the allied turn. If you have played game turn 12, then check for victory instead (*rule 14.0*).

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14.0 At the end of the game

At the end of game turn 12, total the VPs of all allied controlled towns and see below for victory level.

17 VP or less = Italian major victory

18 - 19 VP = Italian fair victory

20 VP = Italian minor victory

21 VP = Draw

22 - 23 VP = Allied minor victory

24 - 25 VP = Allied fair victory

26 VP or more = Allied major 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. I chose a topic inspired by an old favorite of mine: *Bloody Keren*, made by Vance van Borries.

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 realised 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 two game turns 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. A very powerful weapon is the enemy reaction. 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 in 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 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 (*and 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 as well as when they are used as 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 perhaps 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.

Best wishes, Kim Kanger