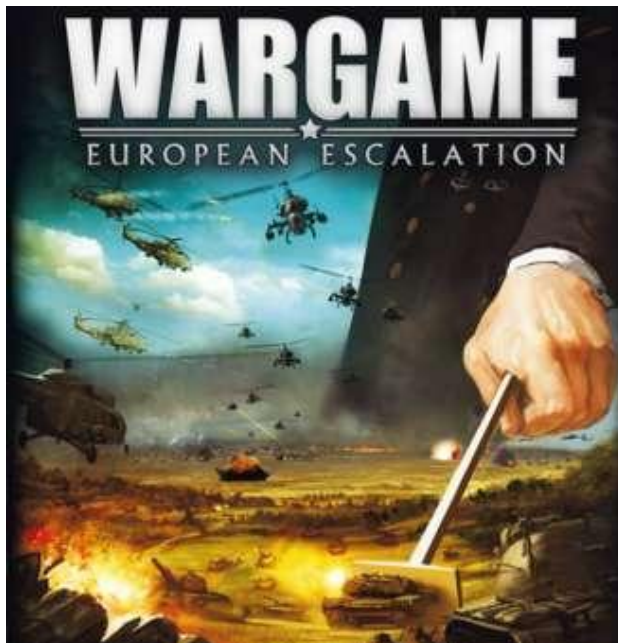


Wargame: European Escalation

A new computer game brings the Cold War to a boiling point

By Dan Barbuto

Greetings fellow solo wargamers. I have recently played *Wargame: European Escalation* and being thoroughly impressed decided it is a PC game worth spreading the word. The game is in the real-time strategy (RTS) category which, along with turn-based strategy, is the natural evolution of table top wargaming (in this author's humble opinion). With the campaign being played against an automated system, it is also accurate to call this a solo wargame.



The campaign is set in Europe during a span of time from 1975 to 1985. The “What if?” scenario, starting with a defection of an East German soldier, goes from a violation of the border by East Germans in pursuit of their erstwhile comrade to a NATO invasion of the DDR and the Warsaw Pact response. This begins the first of a total of four “chapters” of the campaign. While the first chapter is played with NATO units, the second chapter is played as the Warsaw Pact, putting down a revolt in Poland and later Czechoslovakia. After a brief interlude of relative peace, the third chapter begins with the players in command of NATO forces again during Able-Archer exercises, which come under attack by the Warsaw

Pact who viewed NATO's maneuvers as an impending invasion. The third chapter ends with France's launch of ICBM's, and a very Dr. Strangelove-esque cut-scene. The fourth and final chapter of the solo campaign is a bit of a potpourri, with units from both sides being collected together by the player, now a self-styled warlord of the post-apocalyptic Europe.

While the last chapter might seem a bit campy, I can assure that the high standard of realism set early in the game is maintained. With the exception of some minor comic relief throughout, such as helicopter pilots on both sides humming “Flight of the Valkyries” or M109's crews pithy quotes of “Artillery brings dignity to what would otherwise be a vulgar brawl”, the game maintains a high level of believability that any military veterans of the Cold War can appreciate, such as the detail of the TO&E.

This list is expansive for both NATO and Warsaw Pact armies, with four nations' military hardware represented on both sides. The units are broken down into major categories such as logistics and command, support, recon, infantry, helicopters, tanks, and misc.

vehicles. Every unit has an info sheet to accompany it, allowing easy comparisons between possible choices of reinforcements and choosing the most dangerous opponents.

The first section of a unit's info sheet covers weaponry. There are a maximum of three weapons types per unit, while some only have two, one, or no weapons in the case of some recon units. The weapon's caliber, range, rate of fire, and ammo capacity are listed, along with three major game mechanics: Accuracy, AP Power, and HE Power. The first is relevant against all targets, determining hits and misses. The second determines attacks results against vehicles, and the third determines attacks against infantry.



The second section of a unit's info card covers specifications: the relative size, the speed, the armor for the front, side, top and rear, whether the unit is equipped with a gun stabilizer system and that systems quality, the optics level of the unit, the operational range, and fuel capacity. One dynamic of *Wargame: European Escalation* that I found to be enjoyable for its realism is the ammo capacity and fuel capacity. Whereas other RTS games rarely, if ever, include ammo and fuel levels, these necessities play a major role in the mechanics of this game. In fact, several missions require the careful rationing of available supplies in order to succeed. The need to keep units supplied to stay combat effective adds a dose of realism that is lost in other PC wargames that don't reach this level of detail.



As you progress through each chapter, units gain experience which improves their capabilities. While their basic unit statistics do not change, their chances to hit and spot the enemy are still increased. Also, they are less likely to panic and rout. Morale is another game mechanic found in *Wargame: European Escalation* that is not found in many other big name RTS games. There is another reason to carefully shepherd your units through a particular chapter;

units that are lost in one mission will not be available for the rest of the chapter. So for example, your TO&E may contain 4 AH-64 Apache Helicopters at the start of the chapter, but if they fall prey to AA fire early on, you won't have them later when they could be crucial.

Another aspect that I enjoyed in *Wargame: European Escalation* was unit availability and selection. As I mentioned, taking care of units is essential. However, performance in each mission goes a long way to determining what units you may use. Different objectives, primary and secondary, award the player "Command Stars", which are used to unlock new units on the players TO&E. Not only can you unlock units, but you can always unlock specific variants. So after unlocking the M1 Abrams, you might decide it is worth the Command Stars to further unlock its variants, the M1A1 and the M1IP.

Without scaring readers away from playing, I will say that this was a tough game. Unlike other games, there was no option to change the difficulty and just like life, what you see is what you get. I had to replay some missions several times until I figured out a workable strategy. I personally favored a helicopter heavy approach until I ran into serious AA vehicles such as 2K22 Tunguska (30mm cannons and SAM). Then I turned to artillery, which though extremely useful, ate into my supplies so deeply that I sacrificed other units need for rearmament and resupply. There are many ways to win each mission, and players can use their own strategies to succeed.



While some readers may not believe they have the requisite skills for this or any PC game, I can assure you that if your computer system meets the game's requirements, you can and should try this game. The solo campaign will provide many hours of play, and with multiplayer and skirmish options available, the game has a high replay value even after the campaign is finished. You can purchase and download the game here: www.wargame-ee.com