Chinese Farm – SPI, 1975

*Editor's Note: Mark Saha is a noted gamer with a long history of excellence over the board, and on the printed page. The following is a gamer's guide to Chinese Farm, from the Modern Battles Quad in 1975. Mark will get your game – and your mind – into the game with tips for getting your game ready for rapid setup. He will also delve into the history behind the incident! I am honored to have this article in the SPIGames.net pages. – **RHG***

This fast little nail-biter of a game simulates one of the boldest and most daring operations in military history – an operation that succeeded so brilliantly it very nearly triggered a nuclear confrontation between the US and Soviet Union.

Because the game map for **CHINESE FARM** covers only the critical combat area of this operation, the enormity of the implications of what is occurring here is not obvious to players.

So here are some brief comments (by an amateur) for gamers unfamiliar with this action…

I. FORGET THE BASIC GAME

This was the first **Modern Battles Quad** so probably that little "starter" was intended to show how to move units and use the Combat Results Table. It did that, but not very impressively.

II. HISTORICAL SCENARIO:

The Historical Scenario is the whole point here – what really happened. Most experienced gamers today should be able to jump right into it.

III. THE GAME MAP:

The Historical Scenario has Israeli map exit rules for specific sections of West and South Map edges (all West of the canal). Israeli units get Victory Points for exiting but must retain a line of communication.
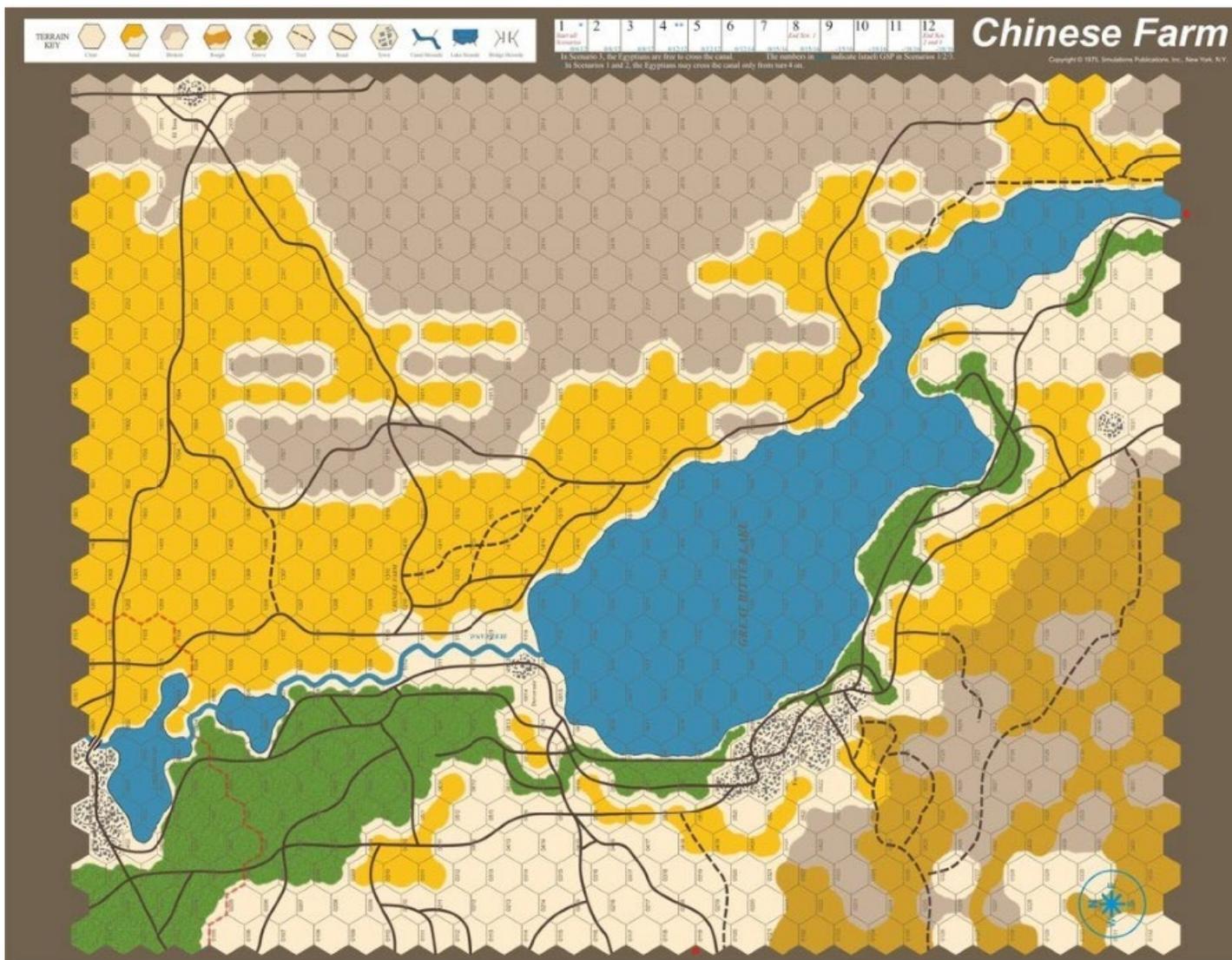
Before play, I suggest using a straight edge to draw a line along the map edge of each such exit area, with brackets to enclose its exit hexes.

Above each such line, write in the number of VPs awarded for exiting there. This allows both Israeli and Egyptian players to see at a glance the possibilities and threats of the developing situation.

IV. QUICK SET-UP

Rather than deface the map with set-up notations, I suggest writing set-up hex numbers on backs of units with a fine point black indelible ink pen.

There are three scenarios, so place three set-up numbers on back of unit from top to bottom (even if set-up is same in each): First scenario set-up is always at top, second scenario in middle, and third scenario last.

If a unit does not appear in a scenario, place a "—" in it's space.

If it arrives as a reinforcement, place the arrival turn there as "T6".

When setting up for play, both players simply invert all their units. Remove those that are not used, and set reinforcements aside. Remaining units are placed on map in proper hexes. Reinforcements are placed on arrival turn on Turn Track.

SET UP HISTORICAL SCENARIO ON MAP

Notice how different it is from the Basic Game. That Egyptian 2nd Army's right flank is dangling in mid-air near the lakes….

V. QUICK HISTORY: WHAT'S GOING DOWN HERE

The 1973 Yom Kippur war began with surprise attacks by Syria and Egypt. Israel's 300,000 troops were outnumbered by Egypt's 650,000 and Syria's 150,000.

The Syrian offensive was most critical as it immediately threatened Israel. This was stabilized first after some furious battles (depicted in the companion GOLAN game).

The Sinai desert acted as an Israeli buffer in the west, but two Egyptian armies successfully crossed the Suez there.

The **CHINESE FARM** game map shows ONLY the area of the Egyptian 2nd army crossing in north Sinai.

Off this map, to the south of the Bitter Lakes, the 3rd Egyptian army was also across and drove east for the Mitla Pass. Israeli tanks were nastily surprised by the potency of Egyptian infantry wire-guided missiles. But the Egyptians were defeated in a furious tank battle for Mitla Pass.

That still left Israel confronted with the problem of two large Egyptian armies facing them in the Sinai.

Israeli intelligence realized – obvious at a glance at the Historical set-up -— that Egyptian 2nd and 3rd Armies had carelessly failed to close the gap between them created by the Bitter Lakes.

Sharon's Israeli Reserve Division was assigned a daring attempt to exploit that gap and thrust into Egypt, forcing the Egyptian armies to withdraw.

VI. HOW THE GAME PLAYS OUT:

The Historical Scenario opens with that Egyptian right flank dangling carelessly… and Israelis move first.

Israelis on the first turn can hit this flank from front and rear, turning it back. Meanwhile the Israeli bridge unit moves forward to the canal.

Amazingly, both Egyptian armies were historically slow to react to this move.

Thus by scenario rules 2nd Army is forbidden to attempt immediate withdrawal across the canal.

3rd Army sent some force from the south to pinch off Sharon's drive in cooperation with 2nd Army in north. But what arrives from south is too little too late….

Israelis should quickly establish a bridgehead across the canal. While Israeli Bren's Division chews into 2nd Army.

VII. THE AIR WAR – TACTICAL HINTS

The previous reviewer wondered why SAMs score points against Israel air, but air suffers no actual losses.

SPI explained that in '73 the desperate Israelis ruthlessly replaced air losses immediately and persisted in attacking their targets at full strength. Their losses were real and hurt, and could not be sustained forever, but in the short run there was no noticeable reduction in Israeli air ferocity.

AIR WAR PLAY HINTS:

I suggest players use actual air chits (with silhouettes), which are easier to keep track of than abstract points. Each such chit is simply worth one air strike factor.

In **CHINESE FARM** (unlike **GOLAN**) it's seldom worthwhile for Israeli air to attempt suppression of SAMs. There are too few air units available, and they are critically needed either for soak-offs or to raise critical attack differentials in the opening battles.

The only exception to this is the suppression of Egyptian mobile SAMs east of Suez -- in the "2nd Army pocket" in the Sinai. These units have high Victory Point value, and suppression renders them immobile and unable to withdraw across the canal to safety. If kept immobilized, Israeli Bren division will eventually eliminate them in ground assaults.

NOTE: SAM suppression occurs in Strategic Phase, and air units used for that are unavailable in the following Game-Turn.

Air units not used for SAM suppression may be used for ground attack/support in Israeli Turn AND for FPF in Egyptian Turn.

AIR POINT CLARIFICATION

Air points (when not used for SAM suppression) are treated exactly the same as artillery combat factors but with unlimited range. Offensively, one air factor can be used to soak-off (diversionary attack) a ground unit, and any number may be added to a ground attack to increase the CRT differential. Defensively the same air points can be used for FPF anywhere on the map.

VIII. 3RD EGYPTIAN ARMY IN THE BAG

Meanwhile, across the canal in Egypt, Sharon's bridgehead expands, wiping out the immobile SAMs and approaching Ismailia. Taking that city is tricky, since approaching units trigger its militia reserves – unless you calculate an assault "on the fly" [move Israeli assault force to just outside "militia trigger range; next turn dash into town from there and occupy key hexes before militia reacts.

The town may be too congested with 2nd Army refugees to accommodate militia or waste time on attack. It's victory points are tempting, and trying for the city is fun -- but the Israeli does better going south.

So whether to attempt Ismailia depends on the situation and player's temperament. But historically the priority should be protecting Sharon's thrust south -- and the huge victory points to be gained exiting the south edge map.

Historically, Sharon's brigade cleared out the immobile SAMs but did not approach Ismaelia [see Wikipedia map linked below].

He then set up a defensive screen to protect his bridge against an Egyptian drive from Ismaelia.

The remainder of Sharon's division protected his line of communication and successfully exited a force at the south map edge. This isolated Egyptian 3rd Army from the rear, preventing its withdrawal from Sinai.

IX. SUPERPOWER CONFRONTATION: SOVIETS VS U.S.

Egyptian 3rd was pocketed between Israeli Mandler's Division in Sinai and Sharon's brigades in Egypt in rear.

Soviets were horrified because they had supplied Egypt with state-of-the-art equipment. Surrender of 3rd Army would put that in Israeli hands – and they'd promptly show it to Americans.

Soviets began a massive air and sea lift of military hardware rumored to include nuclear missiles (controversial to this day). The U.S. responded by moving Sixth Fleet into position off coast. At this critical moment, Nixon was facing Watergate impeachment and reportedly incapacitated on vodka and valium; his chief of staff (Haig) acted on own initiative to raise the US nuclear alert level.

The U.N. declared a cease-fire in place, which still left 3rd Army baking in the desert.

A nuclear confrontation between U.S. and Soviets was averted, and 3rd Army after several weeks of negotiation was eventually allowed to withdraw into Egypt with its weapons.

I'm no expert historian, but that's approximately the context behind this modest little game….

Exploring that Historical Scenario has given me many hours of fun and fascination.

While perhaps not the greatest game ever designed, this is a good short and playable simulation of an amazing and extremely critical modern battle.

X. AIR CHITS AVAILABLE [each chit = 1 strength point]

SPI used abstract "air strength points" only because counter limitations prevented printing adequate air chits. Gamer IanR made the following posting:

"I knocked up a "one hundred counter" dtp sheet of air point markers for the Mod Quads and uploaded it over at CSW in the Modern Battles quad forum. It features period silhouettes such as the F4, Jaguar, A7, F 111, Su7 and Su17, Mig 21 and 23, and others. I put in B52 and a B1 for the DMZ game. There are enough of each nationality to cover all the MBQ games."