Tutorial:
Memoir '44 Scenario Writing

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Introduction

The objective of this tutorial is to assist you in creating scenarios for Memoir '44. In it I will be discussing what things you will need to look for in order to make a good cohesive scenario with some tips on how to do that as well as a good foundation in scenario structure. While anyone can create a scenario off hand, it takes time and patience to create one that will be enjoyable by the community at large and in the long run, one that you will enjoy. Scenario writing isn't hard if you follow the steps laid out below. Give it a try.

Stage 1: Research

Scenarios will tend to fall into 3 categories, Historical, Hypothetical and Fictional.

A hypothetical scenario is something that might have happened (like Operation Sealion – the invasion of Great Britain for example). Hypothetical scenarios will require research but are a little easier in some areas yet harder in others. Some of the research that would be required for a Historical scenario will also apply to hypothetical ones but in a different way. Things like drawing more on the plans of the action rather than the action itself (which never happened). There is a little more leeway in writing Hypothetical scenarios but you still have to do your homework.

Fictional scenarios are obviously easier but also bring an element of research to them. There are many types of fictional scenarios that I won't really get into in this tutorial as they are far ranging from scenarios based on movies or shows to ideas you just think would be cool to situations that may have actually occurred quite commonly but aren't part of any specific battle per se (for example, you could do a scenario that typifies a meeting engagement of two forces or a set assault etc…) Again, your imagination is the limit here but because of that it will fall outside of the scope of this tutorial.

While all three require some degree of research the Historical scenario is the one I'll be using as an example in this tutorial and requires the most amount of researching.

For a Historical scenario the first thing you will need to do is determine which particular action you would like to write a scenario about. For purposes of example throughout this tutorial I will be using a scenario I created especially for this purpose. It is based on the Canadians action against Germany on the Hitler Line in Italy's Liri Valley.

So now that I have determined what action I want to write on, I need to research it.

Research is not just the who and where it also calls for a quick look to see if it has been done already. There are many scenarios from the front that you will want to have a quick look through. There is nothing saying you can't write about what someone else has already written about but it is worth a look. Perhaps you have a different take on the action or feel that you could improve on one.

Next comes the research involved with the actual action itself. Fortunately WWII being relatively recent in our world history there are plenty of sources to draw from. The internet is a vast wealth of reference as well as your local library and don't forget, while they are still with us, the veterans who fought in the action.

What you'll want to look for…
There are a few things you will want to look for when researching your scenario. They are;

- Nationalities with organizations that took part
- General Terrain features (maps can be had but are hard to find with detailed information) and any specialized terrain (i.e. Swamps, icy rivers etc.)
- The outcome of the action
- Special situations, weapons, or obstacles that were involved with the action
- Dates of the action
- What were the objectives of each side
- Did any specific weapon, terrain, commander decision or tactic have any effect on the outcome
- Was there anything peculiar in that particular action

Find out as much as you can about it. As you do, you'll find some ideas about how to apply certain aspects about it to your scenario. Make notes on the scenario as you go, it will help you later.

Let's have a look at the example I was working on to fill in some of these details.

- Nationalities; Canadian (1st Division) with British Armor (51st Royal Tank Regiment, 142nd Regiment & North Irish Horse) vs. Germany (90th Panzer Grenadier Regiment with elements of the 1st Panzer Regiment)
- The Liri Valley had nothing specific terrain wise…the town of Pontecorvo on the German right flank hugging the town
- The outcome of the action is that the Canadians conducted a frontal assault on the Hitler line, a German defensive in which they did eventually break but suffered heavy casualties
- Special weapons; the Germans employed Panzerturms (tank turrets mounted on concrete bunkers) and of course the Hitler line itself consisted of barb wire obstacles and mines
- Dates May 23 1944

- The Canadian objective was to break clean through the line. The German objective was to stop them
- The Canadians had good artillery support and the Germans had their defensive line. The Canadian engineers had created lanes through some of the obstacles
- Nothing peculiar in this particular action

Once you have done your research and created a good set of notes to work from you are ready to create the scenario.

Stage 2: Creating the Scenario

This is a big step and I find I actually do break it down into smaller steps so I will do the same here. For purposes of this tutorial, I will be using the DoW Scenario Editor to describe how to create a scenario. If you don't have access to it, I think there may be ones out there but I do recommend the one DoW has provided, it works excellent and verifies the terrain available afterward. For the design process, I use the Historical Background section to keep notes and changes as I go. I also sometimes will create different versions if I need to for radical terrain changes etc… I digress. So the smaller steps are…

1. Create the general terrain set up
2. Determine Objectives
3. Add the units
4. Check ranges
5. Modify any terrain
6. Modify unit positions or quantities
7. Write any 'special rules'
8. First draft the Medal count and the command card distribution

Let's examine each of these in detail.

1. **Create the general terrain set up** – If you do have access to any kind of maps of the battlefield it would be very helpful in setting up the general terrain. What I mean by general terrain is how does the ground look in general. Were there towns involved, rivers, hills, woods etc? You can get a good idea from your research on what terrain the combatants had to deal with. Again, a map of the area is of great value. Don't get too worried if it isn't exact this isn't a geography test and besides you will probably modify it a bit later anyway. So for now, get the board to look roughly the way you think it would based on your research.

2. **Determine Objectives** – Using your research on what was trying to be achieved you can probably place your objectives now. In the example, I know that the Canadians were trying to break the line and fight through it so I have made the objectives to exit the board from the German side of the map.

3. **Add the units** – This is one of the trickiest parts to get right. You'll want to place your units in accordance with the research. In my example, the Germans were obviously in a defensive line and the Canadians were making a frontal assault. What I decided to do was position the Germans a little ways back from their half of the board this allows the Canadians a little more room to maneuver. One thing to keep in mind about the board in general is the 'strong spots' these are the hexes

that border two sections of the center and either the left or right flanks. Because they border, watch which units or terrain for that matter that you put there. For now though don't worry too much about that, position the units the way you think they should be, much like the terrain, we will probably move them around in a little bit. Some generalizations about unit positioning (the actual action and situation will override these, they are just a rule of thumb)…

    a. Try to determine the general type of engagement. In the example it is an assault on a determined defensive line. If it is a meeting type of engagement have a couple elements of both sides close together near the middle of the board. If it is a strong counter attack have the attacker with his back to the wall. So depending on the situation, use the middle of the board as your guide and work from there.

    b. Artillery should be placed near the rear; they in general aren't front line troops and will have a major impact if they get good range on opposing units.

    c. Infantry is slow to move and will seek cover. Let them have it and don't put them way back behind everyone else unless they were some kind of reserve.

    d. Armor is fast; it can make up ground quickly and has a good range. Keeping that in mind place them in general somewhere between your advancing infantry and the supporting guns.

    e. Keep a good mix in each column or at least support each column with units.

    f. Use your units that came with the game. This is not to say you need to include them all each time but don't skimp on them either. Keep in mind though that the sides needs to be proportionate to the task. Attackers in general should have more units than the defenders who tend to have the benefit of defensive works to help them.

Again, these are just general guidelines, the situation may dictate otherwise. Use your research and apply it to the scenario design overriding any of these guidelines.

4. **Check Ranges** – Here you will want to examine each units field of fire, what can it hit right away, what is it's line of sight? In some cases you may want the units to come to grips right away and that's fine depending on the scenario but it is good to be aware of ranges.

5. **Modify Terrain** – Now that you have a good idea where everyone is and what can hit what right away it is a good idea to have a look at how the terrain is placed. While you will want to ensure you have the proper terrain available to the situation (in others words a swamp hex in the desert would be out of place) be flexible and have some liberty for the sake of game play. Cover plays an important role in scenarios use it wisely.

6. **Modify Unit positions and quantities** – As you did for the terrain you may now also want to do for the units on the board. Have a good look at where they are placed. How far can they go in one turn? Will they be able to get into any cover? Are they surrounded? There are plenty of variables here but the main point is check unit starting positions so that they can meet the criteria of the situation and

still provide for a good start on playtesting. Quantities of units are also important to have a close look at. If one side is in a strong defensive position it should, in general, have fewer units than the attacker. Assessing a good quantity balance will make for a balanced game.

7. **Write Special Rules** – Here you will want to refer to your historical notes. It is nice to add a little spice to your scenario with a special rule but don't go crazy. I find if there are too may special rules in one scenario it can deter people form playing. I'm not talking about the "The Axis unit is a special forces…" type of rules but rather something particular to the situation that you come up with yourself. In our example scenario the Special Rule was a perfect fit for the Panzerturms. I also try to keep special rules as close to the actual rules as possible so that people can more easily understand and grasp them. Initially, I had the Panzerturms set so that artillery can only hit them with grenades, but everyone else got a hit with armor or grenade symbols…this was starting to get too complicated. So to be more in line with the rules that exist, it was easier to just declare that it attacks like Armor but defends like Artillery. The KISS (Keep It Simple Silly) rule certainly applies here.

8. **First Draft** – Now you are ready to add the final touches to the first draft. You will have to decide how many cards to assign and what the medal count should be. The card count is more important as medal count might actually be discovered through playtesting so more on that in a bit. For Card distribution you will again need to refer to your research. Cards can represent a number of factors such as initiative, commander capability, outcome and handicap to name a few. As a result you'll generally want to favor the side that did win the actual situation with perhaps a card or two more than the other side. To set up a closer outcome, balance the number of cards to each side. My general rule here is the 5, 5 and 5. 5 cards for each side and 5 medals to win. I can then work from there.

After all that, you have only really begun. Now you have to find a victim or two and get them to testplay your scenario.

Stage 3: Refinement
This will either be the hardest part of scenario design or, if your planning went very well, the easiest. In this stage you will be playtesting your scenario and making any necessary corrections in order to get it to the point where you find it is playable yet accurately reflects the situation depicted. Start out by playing it yourself. You were the author so you will be best to determine any immediate problems. Here are some things you will want to look for and how to correct them.

- **Balance:** This can be hard to achieve for two reasons. First, not only do you want it fairly balanced for repeat playability but you also walk that fine line of making it historically accurate and balanced. The idea here is to have the outcome of the game closely match, in the majority of plays, the outcome historically while at the same time, making it a close game. While this may seem difficult (and it certainly will be on some situations), you'll find it more satisfying all around. Balance to these aims can be achieved by using the following methods;

o Cards – This is the easiest tool for balancing a scenario as it doesn't require any redesign of the board layout and can be modified quickly then replayed. If one side is winning when they shouldn't be give the other side another card. If they are still winning, take a card away from them. If your card distribution is more than 6-4 and the 4 side is still winning when they shouldn't be, try another balance method.

o Easy Picks – This one might be controversial but it may be appropriate to your situation so I thought I would mention it. Have the side that isn't supposed to be winning add a forward listening post infantry unit. That unit will be hanging out there and should be an easy medal for the opposing force; this will give them a medal start. Give him a fighting chance though! Again, I don't personally use this one but it is a possibility, just don't make it too obvious.

o Review Terrain – Have a good look at the terrain. This might be an easy way to solve a lot of problems. Removing a woods or adding a hill ((again, situation dictates) will help balance as it will either provide protection for one side or remove it from the other.

o Review Units – While it may seem obvious to do, this is one of the most difficult changes you can make to balance a scenario so be careful. The reason is, if you remove a unit on one side, sure it makes that side weaker but it also reduces the potential for the other side to gain medals and if you are trying to balance in their favor, it makes it harder to do.

o Review objectives – There shouldn't be much room for leverage here if it is a historical scenario but you might be able to split the objective claim so that both sides can use it. This may be just the fix you need so it is worth mentioning.

- **Play to Publish**: It's easy to get caught in a play test cycle where you are constantly playing and modifying. However some of the things you don't even realize start to creep in. Play any scenario enough times you'll start to find yourself developing a specific strategy to defeat that situation. You'll actually want to avoid doing this. You no longer are objective toward the scenario and will start making modifications based on how you are playing. This is the time to stop playing yourself and get someone else to playtest. At this point, you should have a good idea of what the medal requirement to win is. After playtesting I tend to find that at some point in the scenario one side will start to take off from the other in terms of medals won. It would be good to cap it at that medal count. In general though you will be looking at anywhere from 4-7 medals to win.

- **Find Feedback**: Now you'll want to have someone other than you play test. This can be important because as the designer, you are intimate with the scenario and know its strengths and weaknesses. Other people help you get a better sense of how the game would be played out in general. That being said it may or may not be necessary to modify your scenario based on their feedback. One session might have a completely different outcome than you expected but as you know, Memoir can vary in how it turns out. The players themselves might have had a major role in that outcome in how they played it.

The point here is unless you hear from a few people that your scenario is broken, don't jump to fix it the variables form one game to the next are so vast that you could refine to infinity. Know when to let go and start a new one.

By now you will have a pretty polished scenario that is ready to go live. It's time to add the final touches. You will need to write the Historical Background. Again, go back to your historical research and pick out the important stuff (i.e. Who, What, When, Where) and sum it all up in a paragraph or two. Remember, you aren't writing for a high school grade so don't sweat it too much but it should be engaging.

Conclusion
This tutorial has covered the scenario creation process that I go through. It is by no means the definitive guide (I'm sure a few points will come to me once I have already published it) it will certainly give you some insights into how you can apply some of these methods to create your own scenarios. Anyone can write a scenario, it takes time, research and playing to write a good one. If you follow these general ideas you should be able to find a battle that interests you and come up with a scenario you will be proud to post and one that others will be glad that you did.

Ubique.