

## Back of Beyond

Shortly before Salute Zero Three, my nephew Max expressed an interest in wargaming the "Back of Beyond". A search of the internet supplied a detailed background, army lists and campaign ideas, all conveniently situated on Mark Copplestone's website. The day of Salute arrived and within seconds of seeing the figures in the flesh, I had a bag full of Bolsheviks and an empty bank account. Max had turned Chinese.

Neither of us knew how addictive BoB would become. Mark then produced Mongols and the Mad Baron – these too were a must! Next to be had were most of the vehicles and an armoured train that came from HLBS. Finally, toyshops were raided for lorries and aircraft kits.

For anybody who wants to know the background of BoB, I would recommend either reading Peter Hopkirk's book 'Setting the East Ablaze'; a visit to the South East Scotland Wargame Group website - which has an excellent BoB campaign page - or just pay a visit to Mark Copplestone's site, which has virtually everything you need courtesy of Chris Peers who, incidentally has written two sets of rules perfect for BoB: Contemptible Little Armies (army level 60 – 100+ figures per side), and a Good Day to Die (skirmish level).

People are always asking, what is BoB? I would recommend everyone to read Chris Peers' articles on the Copplestone website, but for those of you who want a very brief outline, here goes!...

BoB starts in Turkistan during 1919, with the new Communist government trying to re-gain the control they lost during the revolution; stirring up the Afghans to invade British-held Northern India, whilst all the time completely underestimating the local Muslims, who under various leaders, including Enver Pasha of WW1 fame, conducted several wars against the Bolsheviks which did not fully come to an end until the 1930's. Mongolia, which was under Chinese rule, suffered horribly at the hands of the "Mad Baron", von Ungern-Sternberg (White Russian), who after capturing the capital city, Urga, went on to invade Soviet Russia, but was beaten back and finally destroyed. The end of our period sees the Bolsheviks meddling heavily in China. Just to spice things up the British had agents monitoring, or confusing, most events. Japan supported the White Russians, while trying to take Manchuria and Mongolia. Tibet fought against the Chinese, and sent some troops to the Baron, Chinese bandits fought everyone, and had a penchant for wearing women's clothing (honest), while motorized columns of heavily armed fossil hunters drove through the deserts hunting for bones.

In the middle of all these events was the Chinese province of Sin-kiang, China itself was going through the first stages of its own civil war, with the country split up into warring provinces ruled by rival Warlords. Fortunately, Sin-kiang was ruled by Yang Tseng-hsin whose skill managed to hold the province together throughout these turbulent times. He was finally assassinated in 1928. Chris Peers takes the approach of *what might have happened had Yang been murdered several years earlier in 1920?* This is the scenario that most people are gaming and who are we to disagree! This approach allows all the combatants to meet in one province, rather than fight around it.

Our campaign goes as follows; following Yang's death in 1920, Sin-kiang has been carved up by two rival warlords: Sun-Tan and Phat-Lip. Serious in-roads are being made into their territories by the ex-imperial treasurer Ka-Ching. We use slightly altered army lists for each of the Chinese armies to add flavour. Two separate Bolshevik armies - bitter rivals of course! - headed by General Assmatski (known to his men as Vlad the Inhaler) and General Boggoff, are invading from the North and to further complicate matters the Mad Baron is invading from the East with a Mongol horde supported by depraved White Russian mercenaries.

The game we are demonstrating at Salute Zero Four takes an incident from the troubled times in Sin-Kiang. Back in Russia, instead of executing the Tsar, some of the high-ranking Bolsheviks have been discovered entering into negotiations with him. In a bid for power, during the confusion and executions that followed, the Tsar was abducted by Vladimir Ilych Proletarski with the aid of Chubski Cheka, the feared Commissar. Chubski's elite shock troops have stolen the armoured train "Comintern Worker" which they have nick-named "Tomassov", after Irena Handl Tomassov, keeper of the troops samovar, and are now heading South on the only route open, for reasons which are probably not even known to them!

Both of the Bolshevik leaders realise the dire consequences of the Tsar falling into Chinese hands; he could rally all the disaffected White Russian soldiers currently serving in warlord armies, he could of course bump into Ungern-Sternberg and together lead an anti-Bolshevik crusade. The only outcome worse than this would be his capture by the *other* Bolshevik leader!

Boggoff and Assmatski both sent their air forces, one old WW1 plane each, in search of the train, and in a display of never to be repeated pinpoint bombing, managed to hit the line and a passing yak, both claimed the yak! Unknown to the Bolsheviks the area of line destroyed lies close to an outpost of the evil Ka-Ching. The officer in charge of the outpost, Li-Pi-Lee, realising that the train possesses far greater firepower and so feigning friendship, has sent a group of coolies to help repair the track, very slowly, while a rider goes to alert the nearest garrison. The coolies, under instruction from Li-Pi-Lee, have removed the track from behind the train, ostensibly to replace the damaged line ahead, but in reality marooning it, something that the Bolsheviks haven't noticed as Irena's got the samovar out and everyone has stopped for a nice cup of tea. Li is concerned that such a quiet part of the province has become so active; he had never seen so many aircraft before, even a Chinese one. On top of this his own patrols have recently encountered several Mongols.

Will help arrive in time for Li? Will either of the Bolshevik armies catch up with the train? Is the "Mad Baron" nearby? How many sugars does the Commissar take? Will any of these questions be answered? Come and find out at Salute Zero Four...

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