SCENARIO: WINGED HORSE 1972

This is a new scenario for Winged Horse, which appeared in Strategy & Tactics #239. The scenario covers the Communist 1972 Nguyen Hue Campaign, sometimes known as the Easter Offensive. It requires players have the original Winged Horse game, as well as the variant counters which appeared in S&T 251.

The scenario has two versions: a short game which covers the main period of the Communist offensive; and an extended game, which includes the ARVN counteroffensive that retook Quang Tri.

1) GAME LENGTH:
Short Scenario: IV March - IV May 1972
Extended Scenario: IV March - II September.

2) STARTING POLITICAL POINTS:
Communist Military = 0; Political = 0.
Allied Military = 0; Political = 0.

3) ALLIED DEPLOYMENT (SET UP FIRST)
a. Special instructions:
Control. Allied controls all cities and Allied base hexes in South Vietnam.
Allied also occupies Svay Rieng and Bases 354 and 367 in Cambodia.
Units. Number in quote marks is the combat strength of the unit. Parenthesized number is the unit identification for divisions, where it can be positively identified.
ARVN Border Ranger camps: These are represented by US special forces camps, but for all game purposes are considered ARVN units. (Historically, the camps were turned over to the South Vietnamese as the US withdrew from Vietnam, and they became bases for border ranger battalions.)
Allied main bases. Hex 3025 (Cam Ranh Bay) and 2015 (Vung Tau) are Allied bases with a defense strength of “3”. Use US firebase markers to represent them, though treat as printed bases.
ARVN Local Forces: These units (“C/R/P”) are drawn at random. If eliminated, they are returned to the Pool and may be picked again as reinforcements per the order of appearance chart.

b. ARVN forces:
I Corps: 1 x “3” infantry division (1); 1 x “2” infantry division (2); 1 x “1” infantry division (3); 2 x “2” marine brigades; 2 x “2” airmobile ranger regiments; 1 x “2” armored cavalry brigade; 1 x “2” counterinsurgency group; 1 x “0-2-0” firebase; 2 x “0-1-0” special forces camps 1 x local force group.
II Corps: 2 x “2” infantry divisions (22, 23); 1 x “2” airborne brigade (1); 2 x “2” airmobile ranger regiments; 1 x “2” armored cavalry brigade; 1 x “2” counterinsurgency group; 1 x “0-2-0” firebase; 4 x “0-1-0” special forces camps 1 x local force group.
III Corps: 1 x “2” infantry division (25); 2 x “1” infantry divisions (5, 18); 1 x “2” counterinsurgency group; 1 x “0-2-0” firebase; 2 x “0-1-0” special forces camps 1 x local force group.
IV Corps: 2 x “2” infantry division (9, 21); 1 x “1” infantry division (7); 1 x “2” airmobile ranger regiment; 1 x “2” armored cavalry
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brigade; 1 x “2” counterinsurgency group; 1 x “3” riverine group; 1 x “0-2-0” firebase; 3 x “0-1-0” special forces camps; 1 x local force group.

Saigon city: 2 x “2” airborne brigades; 1 x “2” marine brigade.

Svay Rieng, Base 354 and/or Base 367: 2 x “2” air mobile ranger regiments; 1 x “2” armored cavalry brigade.

Anywhere in South Vietnam (other than Communist base hexes): 1 x “2” air mobile ranger regiment; 1 x “1” infantry group (NPFF).

Special forces: 1 x “SOG” marker.

US Forces:

Da Nang base: 1 x “2” infantry brigade (196).

Long Binh and/or Bo Bihn: 1 x “3” air mobile brigade (3/1 Air Cav), 1 x 3-3-0 air cavalry brigade (17).

Special forces: 1 x “Omega” marker.

b. Other Allied forces:

II Corps, hex 392:

c. Other Allied forces:

Il Corps, hex 3925: 1 x “9” ROK division (Cap); 1 x “0-2-0” firebase.

Il Corps, Tu Hua: 1 x “9” ROK division (9).

Note: this unit is erroneously shown in the S&T 251 order of battle as withdrawing in 1972; it actually withdrew in III March 1973.

Laos, on any hex not containing or adjacent to a road or trail: 1 x “2” CIA air mobile regiment (WS).

Cambodia, on any hex not containing or adjacent to a road: 1 x “1” Cambodian infantry regiment (KS).

d. Air Available:

US: 3 x SAC, 5 x TAC, 3 x helicopter.

ARVN: 3 x TAC, 1 x helicopter.

2 x “LZ” markers

e. Naval Available:

US: 1 x naval bombardment.

4) COMMUNIST DEPLOYMENT (SET UP SECOND)

a. Special instructions:

Control. Communists control all cities and base hexes in North Vietnam and Laos; all cities and bases in Cambodia expect Svay Rieng and Bases 354 and 367; all Communist bases in South Vietnam except Iron Triangle. Place a Base Destroyer marker on the Iron Triangle (historically, it was destroyed by massive B-52 strikes).

Units. Number in quotes is the combat strength of the unit. Parenthesized number is the unit identification, where it can be positively identified.

Deployment. Communist units may not be deployed in the same hex as or adjacent to Allied units. VC regiments are picked at random from the Pool.

b. North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces:

North Vietnam: 1 x “6” infantry division (308); 1 x “5” infantry divisions (304); 2 x “2” armor regiments; 3 x “2” infantry regiments; 1 x “1” infantry regiment.

Laos: 1 x “6” infantry division (324); 1 x “4” infantry division (711); 1 x “2” armor regiment; 1 x “2” infantry regiment; 1 x “1” infantry regiment.

Cambodia: 3 x “5” infantry divisions (1, 2, 320); 3 x “4” infantry divisions (5, 7, 9); 1 x “2” armor regiment; 1 x “2” infantry regiment; 1 x “1” infantry regiment.

Dominican Republic: 2 x “4” infantry divisions (17, 304); 1 x “5” infantry divisions (324).

b. US special reinforcements.

On the Allied turn following the one in which US units are “released” (above), the US receives the following reinforcements: 1 x “3” marine brigade (9) [misprinted as a “12”]; 1 x naval bombardment.

4. Reinforcements.

Use the 1972 reinforcement chart, below.

5. Winged Horse variant rules.

Players should use all optional rules from S&T 251, with the following exceptions: 26.0 US Counterinsurgency Army (long since OBE); ARVN Local Forces may be used but they can not be purchased with victory points (they are figured into the reinforcement schedule). Use only the following Campaign Game Special Rules: 1972 North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive and Allied 1972 Offensive Reaction. Players do not receive the special 1972 reinforcements, as they are already figured into the scenario order of battle, below. Also, there is no Communist Laos Reaction (this event was triggered back in 1971, so the units are already in the starting order of battle).

HISTORICAL NOTES:

This scenario got started, oddly enough, around the year 1972. S&T published John Prados’ Year of the Rat, covering the 1972 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) offensive. Year of the Rat was always one of my favorite wargames. It gave a good sense for operational level combat in Vietnam during the conventional phase of the war. The NVA had some powerful divisions with superior cross country mobility, backed up by a few VC regiments. ARVN had a lot of weak infantry divisions but some very mobile airborne, ranger and marine units, all backed up by the might of US airpower—it was what we
### 1972 SCENARIO TURN RECORD & REINFORCEMENT CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>ARVN</th>
<th>Allies</th>
<th>NVA</th>
<th>Viet Cong</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV March</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(none)</td>
<td>(none)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I April</td>
<td>1 x TAC</td>
<td>4 x local force groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>2 x TAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 x “6” division (325)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>1 x TAC</td>
<td>1 x local force group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1 x TAC</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1 x “2” infantry regiment,</td>
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<td>1 x supply unit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>air cav brigade)</td>
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<td>I May</td>
<td>2 x TAC</td>
<td>1 x local force group</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>1 x TAC</td>
<td>1 x “1” infantry regiment</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 x “5” division (312)</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>1 x TAC</td>
<td>1 x local force group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1 x “1” infantry regiment</td>
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<td>1 x “4” division</td>
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<td>1 x local force group</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1 x “1” infantry regiment</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>1 x local force group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>(withdraw: 3/1 airmobile brigade 196 infantry brigade, 1 x LZ)</td>
<td>1 x “1” armored cavalry brigade</td>
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<td>1 x “1” infantry regiment</td>
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<td>I July</td>
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<td>I August</td>
<td>1 x TAC, 1 x local force group</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>1 x “1” infantry regiment</td>
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WINGED HORSE 1972

would call today an asymmetrical situation. Year of the Rat was also a lot of fun to play, combining simplicity with some unique game mechanics. Each side had an army with its own unique strengths and weaknesses, and best of all, it was a Vietnam campaign game in which all those messy guerrilla forces played a secondary role at best!

Anyway, Year of the Rat inspired me to design Winged Horse, which appeared in S&T 239. My original intent was to include sufficient units with Winged Horse to simulate every major conventional campaign in Vietnam during 1965-75. This proved to be a little too much for the magazine format, so we instead only did the 1965 campaign, the initial US military intervention. Then in S&T 251 we printed up counters for every major unit which fought in Vietnam, as well as campaign game rules and a complete order of appearance. Using all this, you can now re-fight any major campaign which occurred during the Vietnam War, though the game system tends towards the conventional aspect of the war. For the future, I plan to do scenarios for the 1968 Tet Offensive, the 1970 Cambodian incursion, and the 1971 attempt to cut the Ho Chi Ming Trail in Laos.

This scenario gives my take on the 1972 campaign. One difference with Year of the Rat is the addition of several specialized units. These include NVA armor regiments, which are useful in the first turn more for their shock effect than anything else. The NVA proved rather poor in coordinating tanks and infantry in action, so the advantage they gain from these units is transitory. ARVN gets special forces camps and firebases. The former were vital for interdicting NVA infiltration of the borders, and for intelligence operations. The latter can provide combat advantages to ARVN units within a two hex radius (see S&T 251 for the optional rule on this). This reflects a dilemma of Free World forces during the Vietnam War: their firepower tended to tie them to base areas, limiting offensive operations. The NVA does not have separate artillery units since they are figured into the relatively high combat strength of their divisions.

I also tracked down unit locations. Researching the Vietnam War order of battle has been something of a hobby of mine. It can be real intelligence work, sifting through various sources and accounts. There’s actually some good information on the divisions which fought in the war. And you have Shelby Stanton’s Vietnam Order of Battle, which is an excellent source for US units which fought in the war, going down to battalion level. Getting information on non-divisional units, other than the American, can be a little more problematic. This is especially true with the Communists. The numerous NVA regiments in the scenario represent a combination of actual units and replacements which were infiltrated south. The NVA made extensive use of sapper regiments as special assault troops, and to absorb casualties in order to keep their divisions intact. The sapper regiments are represented in the game by some of the “2” strength regiments.

Scenario reinforcements do not quite match those in the S&T 251 order of appearance. This is, in part due to some of the peculiarities of the campaign. A number of incompetent ARVN generals were relieved of command and replaced with more aggressive leaders. So ARVN infantry and armored cavalry reinforcements reflect the new leaders’ superior ability to marshal strength. Consequently, players can add these units to the campaign game order of appearance as a 1972 NVA Offensive reaction force. They appear a number of turns after the one in which the NVA launch the 1972 offensive as per this scenario. As for ARVN local force units and NVA regimental reinforcements, these would be otherwise “paid” for by the players expending victory points. Given that this is a single campaign scenario, I felt it was easier, and more realistic, to show the historical rate of these units appearing instead of using the optional rules allowing players to “buy” them.

Generally, NVA reinforcements represent otherwise available forces which were infiltrated south during the campaign. Some of these units had already been mobilized, but were held back initially. The NVA gets only one supply unit reinforcement owing to the US bombing/mining campaign against the North which resumed in mid-May 1972 and finally used sufficient force to interdict Communist arms imports. The Viet Cong get no reinforcements because by this point in the war South Vietnamese counterinsurgency operations had contained them, or at least stopped the VC from forming regimental level units. In any event, Hanoi saw the campaign as primarily a northern show, though the VC were still useful at the local level for such things as intelligence.

And there was always the bigger political situation. By 1972, President Nixon had opened up US relations with China, and pushed détente with the USSR. This undermined some of the Communists’ outside support, and made the full-scale bombing of the North feasible. On the other hand, the political situation back in the USA made the reintroduction of ground combat forces virtually impossible. Airpower had to be substituted for ground troops, and airpower proved to be the trump. The dilemma for Saigon was that in the years following 1972, the US government’s guarantee of air and logistical support for ARVN would evaporate.

Evaluating who won the historical campaign can be a tricky thing. After some initial reverses, ARVN held on and then retook Quang Tri, the one major city which the NVA had been able to capture. ARVN also proved very successful in clearing the Mekong Delta of Communist forces. The Delta campaign was, in part, a legacy of the US SEALORDS campaign in previous years (and which we covered in another S&T wargame). But in the long run, the North Vietnamese gained the advantage in 1972. The NVA pretty much ended the fiction of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) being a sacerdant border and permanently gained control of parts of the I Corps area. This allowed the Communists to extend their supply lines — the Ho Chi Minh Trail — that much further into the South and stage units forward. The NVA also knocked out some of the critical ARVN border defenses. All this set them up for their final war-winning offensive of 1975. But that is another scenario.