



# THIRD REICH Examined

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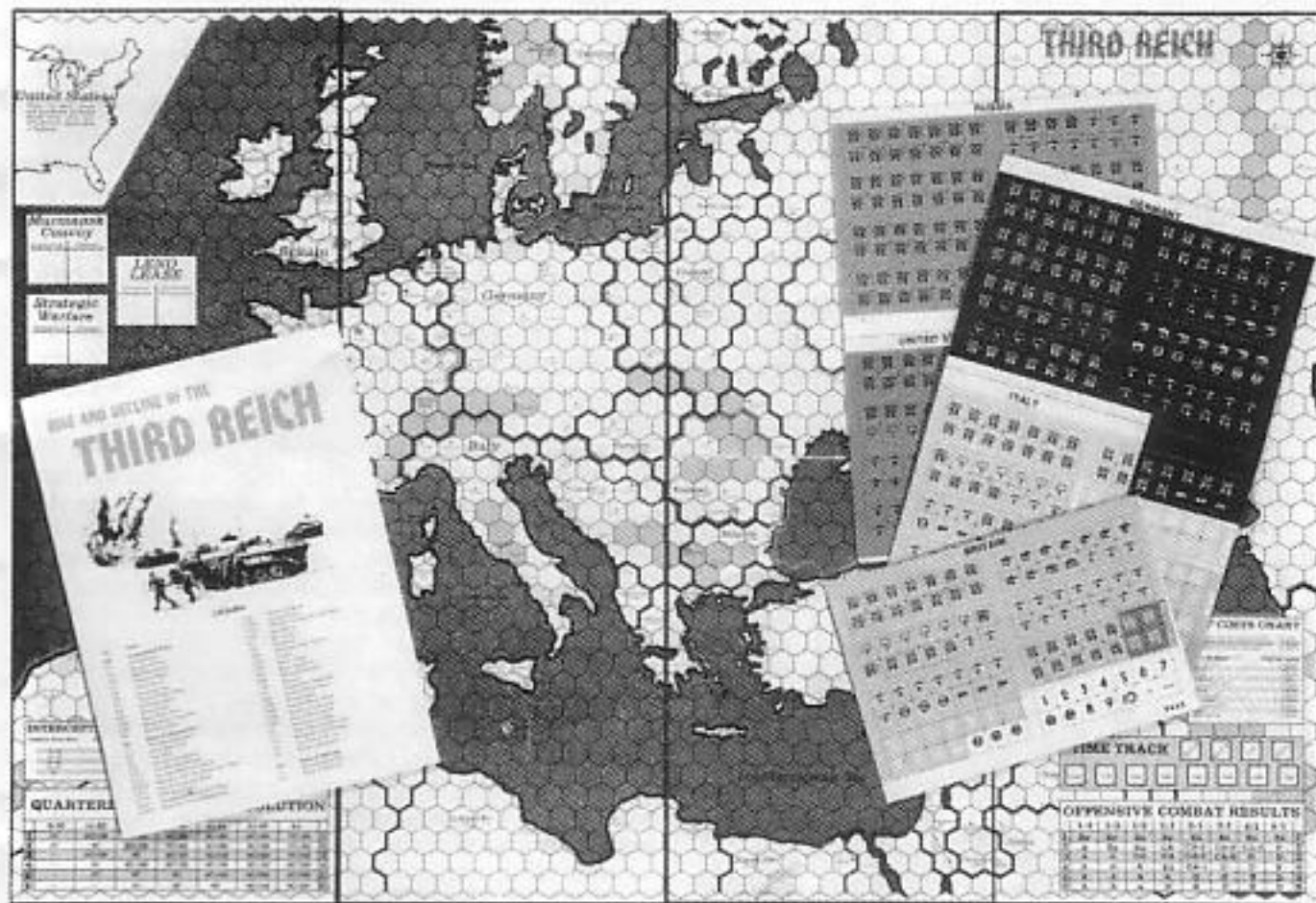


## Introduction

This is not an objective game review. This is not an unbiased article. I make no bones of the fact that my purpose is to encourage more players to take the trouble to learn how to play **Third Reich** properly, and in this context I have to declare a vested interest: I am fed up with the difficulty involved in finding five players of equal calibre capable of more than just committing suicide. Lately my enjoyment has been increasingly marred by the idiocy of opponents and allies alike. Let us hope that the pen is indeed mightier than the cardboard sword, and that I can stimulate *both* new players to try the game *and* established players to improve their performances.

Why is it that, while Avalon Hill tells us that it is ranked third of all their games in popularity, it is so rarely played and even more rarely played to conclusion? Too many **Third Reich** games simply fall apart as an unexpected lunge and the subsequent capture of some crucial capital bring the game to a premature and unrealistic end. The reason, surely, is that almost every player who has ever sat down to play it seriously for the first time recognises intuitively that it is a masterpiece of design, yet can not quite see how to play it and actually win! As often as not a player finds himself defeated by the game as much as by his opponents. The frustration that follows can lead to a player putting it aside permanently, while still voting it 'Best Game' out of grudging respect for its obvious sophistication.

The problem really stems from the way the hobby's attitude to wargames has changed over the years. Gone are those halcyon days of the late sixties which I so enjoyed, when the paucity of games ensured each received proper attention and, while opponents were difficult to find, they at least knew the available games inside out. Today it is the age of pre-packaged disposable games, an age in which Babel-like we find ourselves in the midst of thousands of players very few of whom speak our language, love our favourites. As a result we have become almost promiscuous, flitting from one game to another, increasingly frustrated, dissatisfied and cynical. It is not surprising therefore that **Third Reich** has a comparatively small following: those who give the game only superficial attention will get virtually nothing from it, for it is a game of the old sort, a lady of unimpeachable honour who only surrenders her secrets slowly and modestly over the years to her most faithful suitors. Those who do take the trouble to learn, however, are rewarded at the end of a well-played game with a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment rare in modern designs, regardless whether they be winners or losers. It is a strange fact that so gripping is the game that many good **Third Reich** players play nothing else. If you want to play the game well, the secret is simply to give the game a chance and be willing to learn from the inevitable blunders of early games. And in case that sounds trite, let me at the start confess my own private disaster: in my first game while playing Germany I managed to get myself defeated in just one and a half turns... by the Poles!





# THIRD REICH

## General Description of the Game:

**Third Reich** is a 'Grand Strategy' game with seasonal turns, units representing corps, and hexes about sixty miles across. The map covers the area from the Urals to Morocco, from southern Norway to Suez, which means that (with the exception of the action around Narvik) the whole European War can be properly simulated. Physically, the map is only 32" by 22", quite small by today's standards, yet it is extremely attractive visually and all relevant terrain features stand out unambiguously, apart from a few hexes which have had to be separately defined as either passable or impassable. Because of the scale, the smaller countries have a rather stylised appearance: Poland is roughly seven hexes deep by four hexes wide, Belgium consists of only four hexes, and Luxembourg just one. In fact, once the eye has grown used to it, this does not detract from the game at all.

Where **Third Reich** differs from most other war-games is the stress it lays upon economic considerations. The whole game revolves around not so much military victory as successful management of one's economy. It is no use simply charging off into the wild blue yonder, capturing Paris and Moscow, and then sitting back with a self-satisfied grin asking coyly "Have I won?" The answer almost certainly will be no! The currency of the game is the 'Basic Resource Point' or BRP (irreverently pronounced "burp"), and this is used to pay for everything: troops, declarations of war, and offensives. The facts of economic life are starkly portrayed in the game, for there are only two ways to achieve economic growth, the prerequisite of victory: by saving or through conquest.

Of the two, saving is the slower and more arduous course but is also the more secure since conquered countries can always be reconquered by the other side. Each country receives its annual income at the beginning of the year. In 1939, for example, this varies from 75BRPs (Italy) to 150 BRPs (Germany). A fraction (between 20% and 60%) of whatever was saved the previous year is then added to this income, which is thereby permanently increased for all future years. Finally income from conquered countries is added, though this does not increase the basic rate for future years and is more in the nature of a bonus. The actual growth rates are: Italy 20%, Russia and France 30%, Britain 40%, Germany 50%, USA 60%. Clearly, only Germany and the USA can expect to make much headway by saving BRPs, though Britain is usually forced to do so through sheer necessity.

The economics of conquest are more complex. First of all, units which are eliminated are never dead, only sleeping. They can be rebuilt at the end of any turn subject to available BRPs and the limits imposed by the counter mix. A country with a healthy economy can therefore immediately rebuild its losses, while a country with a weak economy can be brought to its knees by forcing losses upon it which it can not afford to make good. The cost of each unit varies from one BRP per combat factor for infantry to three BRPs per combat factor for fleets, air-forces and paratroops. Then, actually launching an attack costs an enormous 15BRPs a turn; and, finally, declaring war on a player-country (e.g. Russia or Italy) costs 35BRPs, or on a minor neutral country (e.g. Belgium) 10BRPs. Since the conquest of most minor neutral countries reaps only ten or fifteen BRPs (or in the case of player-countries, half their annual income) per year, before deciding whether or not to invade one must take into account the costs of an offensive, a declaration of war, and the replacement of losses incurred in the invasion, and balance this expenditure against the BRP value of the conquered country times the number of years one can reasonably expect to hold it. Will the venture show a profit? If one does choose to invade, it is a good idea to invade as early as possible, so that the conquered country can be incorporated into the victor's economy for the greater part of the game. For this reason the opening moves usually see the Axis grabbing a whole host of small neutral countries as rapidly as possible, in order to ensure a good economic position in the middle game. Obviously, it also makes sense to try and invade several countries simultaneously, so that the expenditure of 15 BRPs for an offensive is put to maximum use.

The mechanics of combat are interesting. Only armoured units have zones of control, costing three movement points total to leave. Combat is voluntary. Terrain does not affect movement at all, only combat. All ground units are automatically doubled in clear terrain, tripled behind rivers in mountains or while resisting amphibious invasion, and quadrupled in fortresses (the Maginot line, the Westwall, Leningrad, Malta, and Gibraltar). The doubling in clear terrain is something new players often have trouble adapting to, though its effect is merely to convert a 4-6 armoured unit into a 4-8-6. Conversely, the weakening of rivers and mountains takes some getting used to as well. But to compensate for this 'inflation' of terrain values, the Combat Results Table is correspondingly mild: 2-1 attacks are as safe as 3-1 attacks in other wargames, and even a 1-1 has a five sixths chance of succeeding, though at the cost of an exchange no doubt. The safe nature of a 2-1 attack has an interesting side-effect: because there is only a one in thirty-two chance of A-elim, and otherwise a certainty of D-elim or an exchange (the CRT is bloody: all combats end with the complete elimination of one side or the other), in 2-1 attacks the die is used not so much to decide the outcome of the battle as the BRP cost due to the casualties suffered by both sides. The result of a 2-1 in nearly all cases is a forgone conclusion: the attacker will capture the hex, and all that has to be settled is the price the defender exacts for the capture of that hex. This makes **Third Reich** almost a perfect-information game like chess, reducing the effect of the die-roll on actual combat to a minimum, and allowing quite complex manoeuvres to be executed with confidence. Properly planned, a player's attack in any particular turn will succeed if he restricts himself to a string of 2-1 attacks, but he may bankrupt himself in the process, so leaving

himself unable to continue the offensive next turn and/or vulnerable to a counter-attack.

The units themselves are quite conventional. Infantry usually has a combat factor of three and a movement factor of three; US and British infantry units have movement factors of four, reflecting greater motorization. A typical armoured unit is a 3-5, though the Germans are exclusively equipped with 4-6s (plus two 5-6s). The extra movement factor given to German armour is in fact very significant, since it allows panzers to infiltrate two hexes of an enemy ZOC. The US armour which it eventually gets mobilised also consists of 5-6s. Air and naval units are rather abstract: 5-factor air-wings and 9-factor fleets, of which only the former may be voluntarily broken down. Air units, the most important units in the game, have a high degree of manoeuvrability being able to move eight hexes and then attack a unit a further four hexes away. They are permitted to perform a wide variety of missions: typically, the attacker adds ground support, the defender replies with defensive air support (DAS), and then the attacker intercepts the DAS with yet more aircraft. Air superiority is therefore crucial to a rapid advance. Naval units are used mostly to ferry units around the place, though they can also be used to bombard a coastal hex or amphibiously assault a beach. The now-standard mechanised movement phase is replaced in **Third Reich** by an exploitation phase in which only armoured units which have not attacked that turn (so far) get a second move, measured from some hex just captured by an attack involving at least one armoured unit, after which these exploiting armoured units also get the chance to attack. Provided they begin the turn on an air-base out of ZOC, paratroops may also drop over a range of six hexes and make an independent attack. Facing an armoured assault it is therefore necessary to build a double line; if paratroops are in range, a triple line is desirable though rarely practical. At the end of the turn between five (Italy) and ten (USA) units behind friendly lines can be moved any distance over friendly territory by Strategic Redeployment (SR). The stacking limit is two units, with paratroops stacking for free.

An innovation in the game which works particularly well is the division of the playing area into three 'Fronts': The Western, Eastern, and Mediterranean Fronts. When an offensive option is taken it is valid for all activity on any one specific front; this has the effect of channelling combat into one or two areas at a time while the rest of Europe remains dormant. Usually 1939 and 1940 involves heavy fighting on the Western Front, for instance, while the Mediterranean is quiet. The action then switches to Russia in 1941 and 1942, after which the Mediterranean becomes hotter and hotter as the Allies try to take the pressure off the Soviets. Finally, in 1944 and 1945 all three fronts are aflame and treasuries become denuded at an alarming rate as the Allies close in on the Axis from three sides. The use of fronts is a simple but effective mechanic.

An offensive option costing 15BRPs and allowing a player to make a conventional attack on specific hexes of his choice on one particular front is not the only type of ground combat which can be utilised. One can instead choose an Attrition option, which costs no BRPs but which also can not be relied upon to gain ground: it represents the quiet periods which often descend over the front-line and apart from the loss of a handful of hexes and/or units does not usually cause the defender much significant damage. When employing this option, the attacker adds up all his ground factors on that front in contact with the enemy, rolls the die, and consults a different CRT; the defender will be called upon to remove up to seven units (his choice) and surrender up to four hexes (attacker's choice). The hexes chosen for occupation must be in the front-line and must be held by the defender; so by removing all front-line units from a particular hex as attrition losses and leaving it empty, the defender can deny that hex to the attacker. Attrition should not be thought of as merely a way of saving BRPs: at times it can be superior to an offensive. Imagine a defender anxious to hold a city who has therefore placed two heavy armoured units in it. While an offensive option might have no real chance of making any progress, an attrition option used at this point would force the defender to either voluntarily destroy the two powerful armoured units (costing perhaps 8BRPs each to rebuild) or allow them to be pushed out of the



city; quite a dilemma! From this example it should be clear that simply filling up a crucial hex with strong (and also expensive) units is not a satisfactory defence. The best defence is a combination of cheap infantry (which the defender can afford to remove in an attrition option to deny that hex to the attacker) supported behind the front-line by air units (to stiffen the defence in the event of a conventional offensive option).

No thumb-nail sketch of Third Reich would be complete without mentioning its most controversial aspect: at the beginning of every turn, the current BRP status of each country is examined and the richer alliance then gets to move first. What this means of course is that at certain times it is entirely feasible for the alliance moving second in a turn to manipulate a double move! The effect this has on play is analogous to that of the doubling die in backgammon: the threat of its use is often more damaging than its actual use, since the opportunity once taken then passes to the other side. Notwithstanding this observation, if properly timed and executed, a double move will break any defence, and is certainly the most potent single tactic in the game. Some players, considering that it introduces too wild an element to the game, prefer to play without this rule, in my opinion a reprehensible habit, since all the rule does is force aggressive players to exercise a little more caution and always watch their BRP levels carefully. In games where neither alliance has much of a lead by the middle-game, the Axis hand the initiative over to the Allies in the summer of 1942 thanks to the arrival of BRP-rich USA on the scene. This is a quiet time on all fronts other than the Eastern, so there is not too much trouble with the change of initiative occurring naturally in mid-game as the Allies swing on to the offensive. To reduce the effects even more, the designer does not permit the building of the dangerous British or American paratroops until Summer 1942, by which time the change-over is expected to have taken place. Of course, if the Axis hold the initiative beyond this point, they are liable to find themselves in trouble later: a double Allied move in Winter 1943/Spring 1944 or, even worse, Winter 1944/Spring 1945 could prove fatal.

# Strategy in Third Reich



## German Strategy

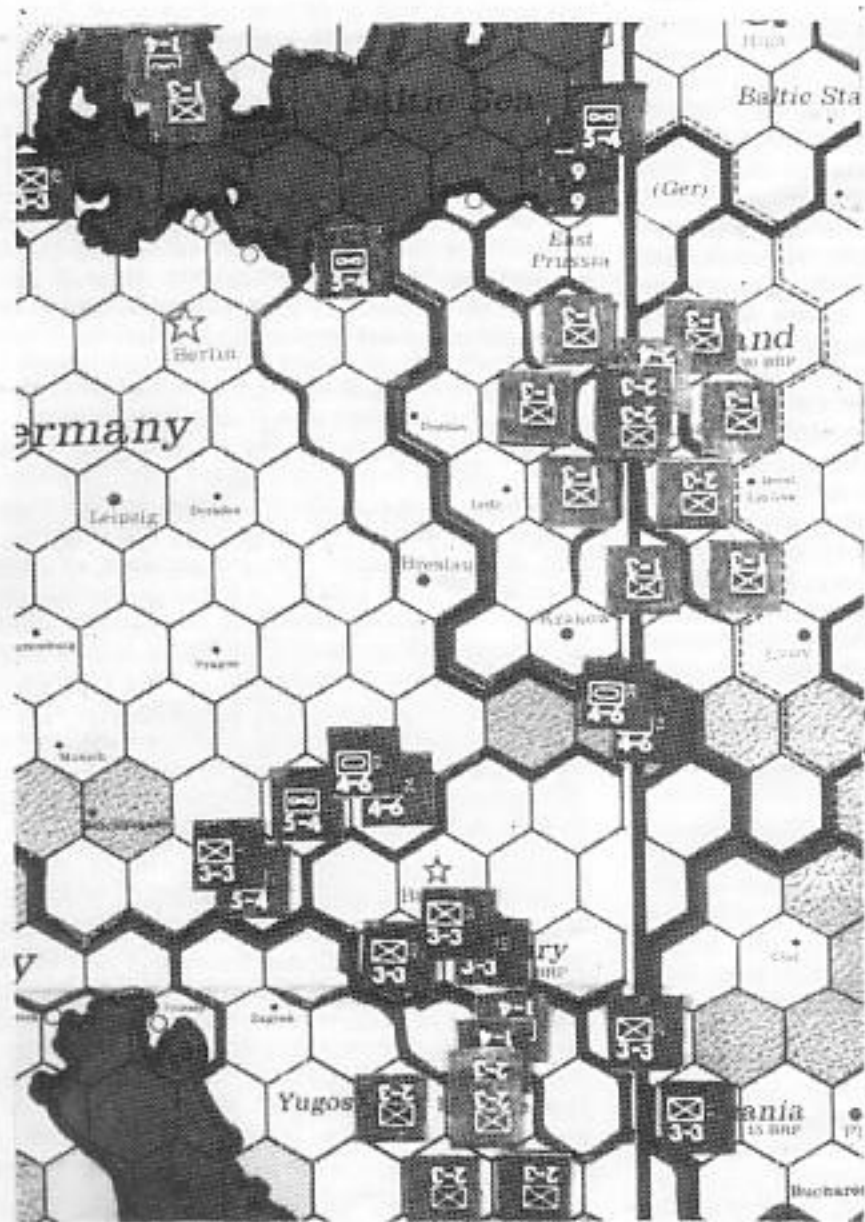
Since I am to consider the strategies available to each player, I will start with Germany because, naturally, it is what the German player does which sets the tone of the game. To place himself in a winning position it is necessary for the German to do one of the following: defeat the Soviet Union entirely or defeat France and Britain entirely or defeat France and severely maul the Soviet Union. So the German player's first decision is whether to start the war with an attack on France or Russia. Since Russia can not declare war on Germany until Fall 1941, there is a strong incentive to follow a

roughly historical course so avoiding the much-feared two front war. Although such a war is not an impossible strain on the German economy, the shortage of Axis units is a major headache which only gets worse the longer the game continues and it is this physical limitation rather than lack of funds which makes such a venture so risky.

But there is a more subtle reason for avoiding a two-front war: the Axis shortage of both units and SR capability makes Russia the best place to use the powerful German panzers: they can cover three hexes per unit thanks to their ZOC and are therefore economical to SR, and from defensive positions they can concentrate rapidly for an attack. But the other side of the coin is that precisely because they are so valuable in Russia, once Barbarossa is under way it turns out to be virtually impossible to extricate them for a subsequent attack on France. What would take their place in the line? Therefore it is not practical to pursue the third strategy (defeat France and maul Russia) by invading the Soviet Union first. So a player who moves eastwards early takes on a burden of inflexibility: from then onwards there is only one strategy he can pursue, the total defeat of the Soviet Union. Conversely, the player who moves against France first keeps his options open much longer: either Britain or Russia can be the second target.

Which ever direction the German chooses, 1939 should be an essentially peaceful year spent picking up Minor Neutrals. A strong economic base is a prerequisite of survival. Except in the most exceptional circumstances, Poland should be taken in the first turn, and Belgium, Holland and Norway by the end of the year. Conquest of these neutrals reaps 65 BRPs per year for an expenditure of 55 BRPs plus losses. They have to be conquered sooner or later, so maximise profit by making it sooner.

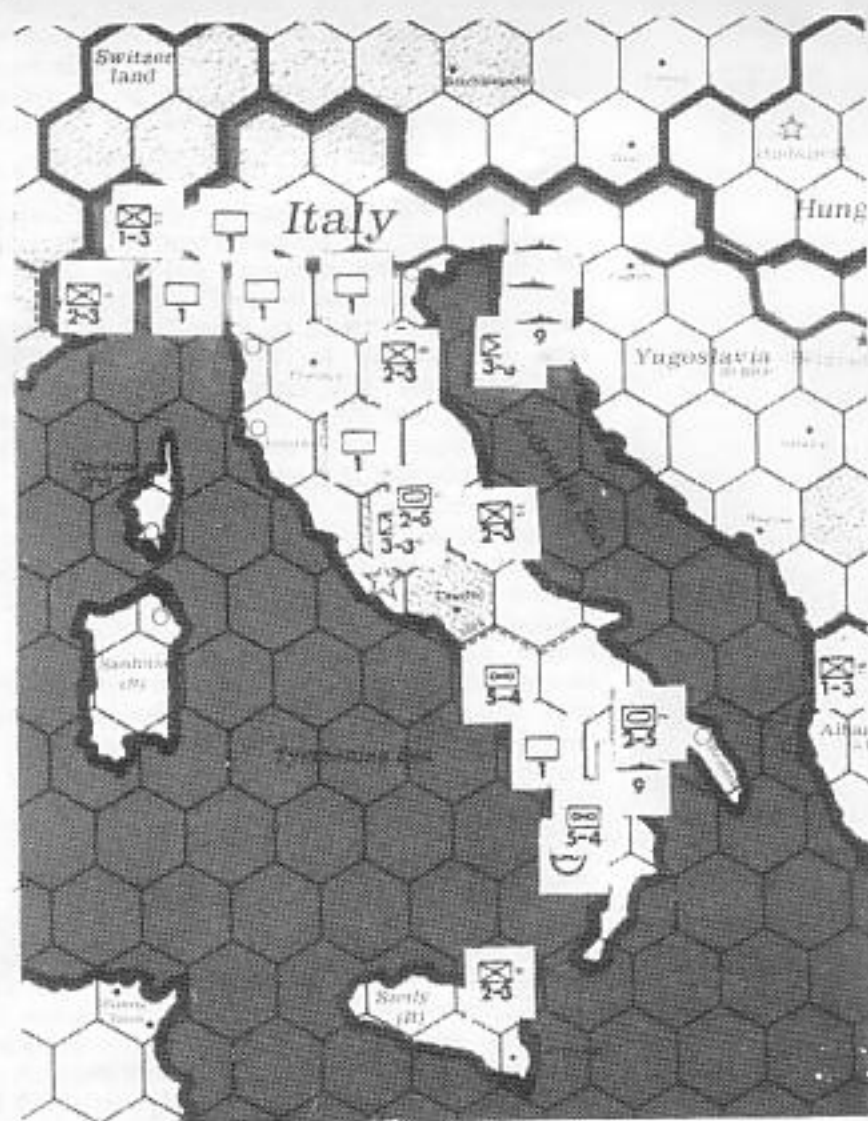
Yugoslavia, however, is a different kettle of fish. It is difficult to lay down a firm timetable for the conquest of this country. In favour of an early attack is its excellent income (20 BRPs). Against an attack are the extra expense of a Mediterranean offensive, its distance from the principal theatres



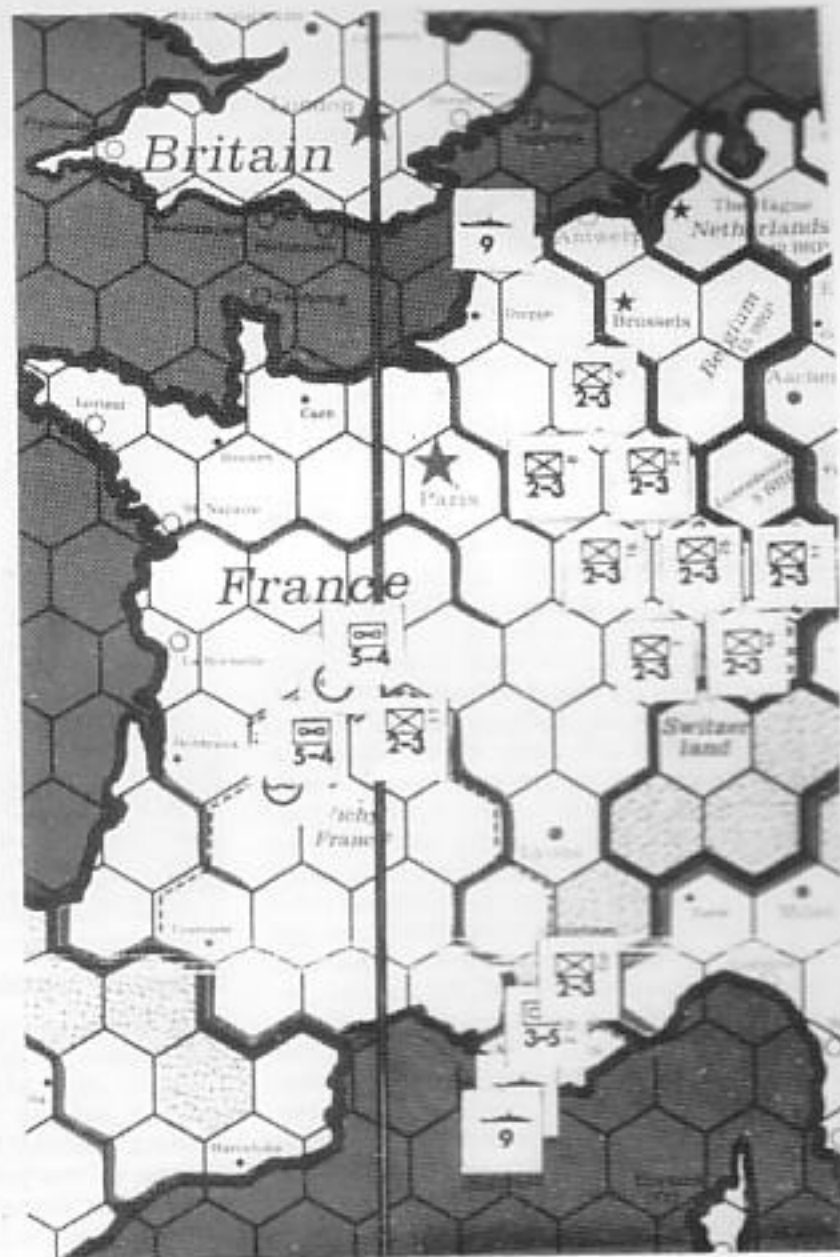
Bold German initial deployment: declarations of war against Denmark and Yugoslavia plus a Mediterranean offensive leave 40 BRPs for unit construction. (One German unit in Finland not pictured).



End of German turn, Fall 1939, after the defeat of Poland and Yugoslavia. An exchange at Warsaw has destroyed two armoured units, and German forces are deployed to resist an Allied double move. Note that, because French and British may not exploit from each other's breakthroughs, the Allies can only advance one hex into Germany on their first turn. Next turn (Winter 1939) Germany can seize Copenhagen, The Hague and Brussels plus either Oslo or Stockholm. 90 BRPs of conquest will allow Germany to build 12 U-boats, a good start to the war.



End of Italian turn, Fall 1939, showing suitable defence if the British threaten an amphibious assault plus double move. If Italy's neutrality is respected, she can still attack Belgrade at 1-1 in the winter from these positions, with the aid of sea transport. The 1-3 in Tirane is essential if Yugoslavia is to be attacked, even though it wastes a fleet on supply duty.



Initial French deployment, maintaining the threat to cross the Rhine. This defence is less effective if there is Italian armour in Turin, Genoa or Milan.

of operation, and the problems of garrisoning it (the beach can be isolated by partisans, and when the British have naval supremacy in the Mediterranean there is some danger of an attack on Salonika).

If the German does want to attack Yugoslavia early, I think the best time is on the very first turn. Whatever combination of armour and air is used in Poland, a minimum of 26 factors is needed there; leaving, after two airfactors for Yugoslavian counterair have been deducted, only eight armour/air factors available. An Avalon Hill ruling allows German units to be set up in the Axis Minor Allies, so with infantry in Rumania and Hungary and the armour and air-force near the German/Hungarian border, it is possible to launch three 2-1 attacks on the first turn: against the hex west of Brest Litovsk, against Warsaw, and against Belgrade. But do not be complacent about setting up! The Yugoslavians can spring some surprises. For instance, it is important to have an armoured unit in position to reach Sarajevo; otherwise the defenders will abandon Sarajevo and hold a hex on the northern bank of the Danube. Bearing in mind the Allies' ability to take a double move over Fall/Winter 1939, a 1-1 attack on Belgrade is best avoided.

An attack on Yugoslavia in Fall 1939 is a bold move, not to be attempted by the faint of heart; exchanges in Poland will lead to economic problems, and for this reason many players prefer to concentrate exclusively on Poland on the first turn. An exchange at Warsaw can be extremely painful. One problem the German player may encounter is Italian antipathy: rightly or wrongly, Yugoslavia has come to be thought of as part of the Italian sphere of interest. However, to let Italy become involved in the conquest of Yugoslavia is very poor house-keeping: the atrocious Italian growth rate of 20% means many of the fruits of victory will be thrown away. It is better to try and come to some understanding, such as future loans to Italy, than let the Italians waste such a commodity.

Scandinavia also deserves some thought. Since

Denmark is a gift, it is nice to capture Norway in 1939 too, if only to get the most out of that western offensive. There are two ways of doing this: an airborne assault supported by five airfactors from G32, or an amphibious assault on the southern beach using both lent Italian armoured units with Oslo falling to exploitation. Both require air support from Denmark, which means Denmark must fall the turn before Norway. But a western offensive in Fall 1939 just to capture Denmark is utterly wasteful. My solution is to declare war on Denmark in Fall 1939 but take an attrition option, bottle up the Copenhagen defenders with infantry on I 31, and send a second infantry unit northwards to capture the crucial G32 hex; then build an air-base there and SR the paratroops to it. Denmark can be eliminated along with Norway, Belgium and Holland in the winter. But one word of warning: in this event, watch out for the Allies staging into Copenhagen. Remember to base the German navy in Königsberg (J36), not Kiel. Also notice that Denmark is left rather vulnerable to Allied counter-attack if Germany also attacks Yugoslavia on the first turn.

I have developed a variation of this Scandinavian strategy of which I have become particularly fond. Instead of seizing Oslo in Winter 1939 with a paratroop from G32, I like to capture Stockholm! Purists will throw up their hands in horror: what a waste of BRPs! But BRPs are not the most important things. Ultimately one wins by controlling objective hexes. There are two in Scandinavia, Oslo and Stockholm, and of all the objectives the Axis may capture they are the most secure. The security of an objective against counter-attack is an important consideration, and in the difficult days of 1944 and 1945 when objectives are falling to the Allies like dominoes you will be glad you had the foresight to capture Stockholm. Remember that one extra objective is all that is necessary to raise the standard of victory by one level. Stockholm should be taken with a paratroop assisted by shore bombardment from two fleets and eight airfactors based in Finland; one additional airfactor

counterairs; in an exchange remove airfactors. While Russia is neutral the Swedish navy is ineffective; later the only feasible way to take Stockholm is by combining the German and Italian paratroops and leaving the German navy out of reach of the Soviet fleets. The dislocation caused by the deployment of twelve Axis airfactors to Finland at such a time however is likely to make conquest impractical.

Having captured Brussels on exploitation in Winter 1939, the German player will find himself adequately positioned for an attack on France in 1940. There is no time to be lost. The ideal time to attack Russia is Winter 1940, as this ensures an immediate double move against the Soviets. I can not over-emphasise the importance of attacking Russia in Winter 1940: it is the single most important event in the game. Indeed, to improve the likelihood of defeating France in Fall 1940, it may be worth while forgetting Scandinavia for the time being and throwing the whole weight of the air-force against France as early as Winter 1939 instead, seizing the Hague with infantry and Brussels with a paratroop. The whole German war machine must be geared to defeating France by Fall 1940.

After the fall of France, the opportunities for invading Britain are usually very slight. The best method is to drop paratroops on a port and then SR into that port; Great Yarmouth and Rosyth are usually the only ones which are vulnerable. Unfortunately, it is easy to thwart such an attack, and an alert British player is sure to do so. In my experience the only real chance to invade Britain requires the capture of Suez and Alexandria late in 1940 bankrupting Britain; unopposed by British offensives, a paratroop attack then has time to establish itself. Needless to say, Suez is rarely captured, if at all, let alone in late 1940! Incidentally, if you do try a paratroop attack, remember to have a fleet available to supply the captured port at the time of SR, since SR may only be to a supplied hex.

More often than not, having knocked out France in 1940 and made a few rude noises at the British

lion across the waters, the Axis will turn east in 1941. Here, a sound strategy is most important. In my opinion, the first target should be Leningrad. Yes, it is a very hard objective to take .... but it is also a very hard objective for the Soviets to retake. The capture of Leningrad should also sink much, perhaps all, of the Soviet navy, before which event there is little likelihood of defeating the Soviet Union. The way to attack Leningrad is with seven infantry units, one Finn, and three airfactors. This 1-1 attack has five-sixths chance of success at a maximum possible cost of 30 BRPs, and a one-sixth chance of total failure costing 32 BRPs, not including the cost of the offensive. After Leningrad, a push on Vologda should result in the end of Murmansk convoys and the abandonment of Moscow. After that, the targets are Batum (if there are fleets in the Black Sea), Tabriz and Sarab; but it is most unlikely that these last two will ever fall to the Axis. Be content with pushing the Soviets back to the Volga. If you hold the Soviets east of the Volga throughout 1942, you may consider Russia 'mauled' and the chances of winning good.

From 1942 Germany is on the defensive. The most critical area to defend is the southern flank of the Russian front, for the Soviets' primary objective is Bucharest. The loss of Axis Minor Allies will shatter any German defence. To this end, I suggest you defend the south, while retreating from Rostov through Dnepropetrovsk to Odessa, with sturdy stacks of infantry; and fight a mobile withdrawal using exclusively armour in the north. You can always afford to lose the north. Ultimately, you should aim to hold a strong defence line from Riga to Dnepropetrovsk: this line can be pushed back three or four hexes before it begins to stretch at all, which should bring a little relief to your tired forces. If you are holding the Dnepr in 1944 you are doing alright.

Do not under-estimate the power of the Americans, particularly their air-force. Unlike the Eastern front, in France there is no room to retreat. Rather than defend all the French beaches evenly, fortify Calais and Dieppe like a maniac, and channel his attack into weakly-held Normandy or Brittany. Aim to hold a line in 1944 from Dieppe to Switzerland, and from the French Alps to Marseilles. The one crucial thing to remember is that he must not be allowed ashore at Calais! Do not try to hang on to Paris needlessly after the 1944 Year-Start Sequence: just concentrate on making an orderly retreat to the Rhine fortresses. Then just hang on, and watch the clock!

Finally, a few words about the Axis' third ally: strategic warfare. Spend, spend, spend on strategic warfare to your maximum ability. Always build U-boats, plus just enough interceptors to defeat last year's SAC. Even continue building U-boats in 1944. Avoid putting too many in the Murmansk Box: they belong in the strategic Warfare Box. After America has given BRPs to Britain, consider switching targets to the U.S. economy: Britain can not now buoy up the U.S. economy, and every U.S. BRP sunk is not going to grow at 60%. Strange to tell, if Germany builds a healthy economy, it is possible to bring the U.S. economy to its knees in late 1944 .... with a little luck!



## Italian Strategy

The Italian player has a very rough time, caught between the animosity of the Allies and the arrogance of the Germans. Help from Germany rarely comes as swiftly or as completely as the Italian player desires; conversely, if Italy's defence shows the slightest weakness, the Allies will pounce on her immediately. In this respect 1939 is the dangerous time. Italy can easily be defeated then, thanks to the Allies' ability to engineer a double move over the first two turns. If initially there is a significant British force on board ship in the Mediterranean, Italy should remain neutral on the first turn. The danger of amphibious assault is real. Neutrality may annoy the Germans, but to my

mind it is unavoidable in this case, unless the naval balance in the Mediterranean favours the Italians.

The most popular time for Italy to join the war is Winter 1939. This will ensure all 1939 BRPs are used, and permits an Italian offensive alongside the Germans in Spring 1940. It is convenient for the Germans too, since in Spring 1940 ten lent Italian airfactors will certainly come in handy. But, under certain circumstances, I am the advocate of a rather more interesting strategy, the prolonged neutrality of Italy, as follows.

One of Italy's many problems is that her bark is far worse than her bite. Because of her appalling economic situation, on the turn on which she declares war she can not take an offensive. Nor, for much of the game, can she both take an offensive and build a fleet in the same turn. However, if Italy, unaided, defeats Yugoslavia in 1939, by careful spending that year she can start 1940 with 100 BRPs, enough to launch an offensive into Egypt on the turn that she declares war on the Allies. This is a genuine threat to British interests, and will force Britain to hold Egypt with a much larger garrison than usual, so weakening France. Italy is thus free to declare war on the Allies with real effect any time in 1940, while in the mean time sheltering behind a mask of neutrality. This is a particularly worthwhile strategy if Germany opens the game with an attack on Russia.

Once the tide turns in 1942, Italy will be the first to feel the Allies' growing strength. She must hang on bitterly in the desert, preserving her fleets and forcing exchanges on the Allies at every opportunity (it takes only one fleet to deploy a rebuilt Italian unit into North Africa, but two to deploy a rebuilt Allied unit: therefore the best way for the Italian player to both attack and defend in the desert is to try to over-load the Allies' sea escort capability by making multiple low-odds attacks, rather than a few selected high-odds attacks). If a reasonable opportunity presents itself, it is worth capturing Cyprus: once the front-line has swung back into Libya, one Axis parachute unit in Cyprus can force the Allied player to waste five units guarding the Middle Eastern ports. On the other hand, the Italian must also guard against an Allied parachute attack on Tripoli from Malta. Once Tobruk and Bengazi have fallen, such an attack supported by heavy shore bombardment will remove the intrinsic supply capability of Libya, further burdening the Italian navy, and leave the Axis supply line from Algiers vulnerable to exploitation westwards from the Tunisian beach. Even more important is the proper garrisoning of the Italian mainland: although an Allied landing is unlikely until airbases have been secured within range of Italy, the disruption even a small raid would cause makes such a move attractive to the Allies once American fleets enter the game. Certainly, the Allies will seize Corsica and Sardinia at the first opportunity. A few German infantry units around Rome and Naples are a good idea therefore, plus Italian replacements in the two islands.

Holding Rome until the end of the Game can be a problem in the face of massive Allied naval supremacy, but at this point in the game the German is almost certain to give the defence of Rome top priority. Italy is easy to defend too, being the perfect arena for attrition attacks. Ultimately, if the Allies do look as if they are about to push past Rome, a last ditch defence in the capital consisting of 1SS, GSD, 1 Fsjr and lent Folgore makes a very convincing garrison.

Finally, here is some advice concerning BRP loans. When Italy is under pressure and spending a lot, it is tempting to fill her coffers with German BRPs. On the other hand, if nothing very much is happening it is equally tempting to rob the Italian treasury every winter to enhance German growth. I believe firmly that it is important to do neither until late in the game. In the early years Italy should be able to make enough headway on her own so long as she does not lose fleets; additionally, only a few BRPs are likely to be left at the end of the year if the Italians are putting up any sort of a fight. An early decision as to the direction in which Axis BRPs are to flow severely limits Axis strategic flexibility from that point on. So, on the one hand, be economical with Italian attacks, but on the other hand do not lose sleep over a few wasted Italian BRPs at the end of the year: keeping your options open keeps you strong.



## British Strategy

Of all the player-countries (excluding the USA), Britain is the hardest to defeat, and therefore the most secure. This security gives Britain a considerable strategic flexibility and so, with the important position she holds right up to 1942 and later, it is no surprise that Britain is one of the most popular choices when selecting sides.

In the opening moves, the status of Italy dominates British foreign policy. In some ways, the sooner Italy declares war the better for the Allies. This is because a neutral Italy, particularly one which enters 1940 with 100 BRPs, is not significantly less of a threat than a hostile Italy: both require a substantial garrison in the south of France, a lesser garrison in Egypt, and a reasonable naval presence in the Mediterranean. Additionally, a neutral Italy is not as susceptible to an Allied counter-attack as a belligerent Italy, due to the 35 BRP burden a pre-emptive Allied strike in that case must bear. Nor is the absence of German units in neutral Italy much of a consolation: German armour positioned between Munich and Switzerland is as well placed to strike at Lyons and Marseilles as at The Hague and Brussels, and is also able to intervene quickly and effectively against any Allied pre-emptive strike into Italy. As often as not therefore, the Italian declaration of war is greeted by the Allies with a sigh of relief: at last the cards are on the table, and Allied counter-offensives against Italy become feasible.

Italy suffers a significant disadvantage in having to set up before the other player-countries, and Britain should take advantage of this. I am a firm believer in a very heavy British initial deployment in the Mediterranean, with a 4-5 and 2-5 on board ship in Alexandria and a further two infantry units with accompanying fleets in Gibraltar. If Italy has set up in Albania, planning an attrition on Yugoslavia perhaps, an immediate amphibious assault on one of the Italian beaches may be possible; such a strategy can be extremely lucrative if combined with a double move. The French fleets should of course be used to intercept Italian interceptors. Alternatively, with this British set up units are still reasonably well positioned to deploy into France in the usual way via Marseilles. Little is lost by deploying in the Mediterranean; the defence of Britain can be left to newly built units.

Throughout 1939 and 1940 the proper defence in France is Britain's most important strategic consideration. Her most important contribution to the game is the delaying of the Axis attack on Russia until 1941. The events of Winter 1940 hypnotise the British no less than the Germans. Even if France falls before this crucial turn, British units should remain on French soil until the danger of an Axis attack on Russia in Winter 1940 has passed, whatever the cost. Strong British units holding out in Normandy and Brittany will be more than a nuisance to the Axis, and may just be enough to prevent early redeployment eastwards.

The defence of Britain is not too much of a problem. While the Axis hold the initiative the Royal Navy enjoys the best of both worlds: able to intercept an invasion attempt at full strength, able to redeploy reinforcements overseas in any turn in which the threatened invasion does not materialise. Once a British port falls into the hands of German ground forces though, little can save Britain from Axis conquest, so it is crucial to defend ports against parachute attack. Fortunately, this is easy: one small unit in the port and another adjacent is all that is necessary. An airborne unit may not attack both a unit upon which it lands directly and

(simultaneously) another unit; nor may it advance after combat immediately after a drop. This means that the unit adjacent to the port will survive what ever tricks the Germans try, thus preventing SR into the port (but watch out if both Axis parachute units are in range!). If a seaborne invasion is attempted, the beaches adjacent to London are the most likely targets, since a bridgehead here leaves the invaders both well positioned for an attack on the capital and immune to attrition. After these two, East Anglia is the most attractive, because a bridgehead here protects the crucial port of Great Yarmouth. Frankly though, a seaborne invasion against a competent British player is most unlikely.

In the middle period of the game, Britain should remain dormant, licking her wounds and trying to stave off the worse horrors of the U-boat war. Attrition options are the order of the day, though a sneak raid on a French beach can cause immense dislocation to the Axis and is well worth 15 BRPs plus losses. Once the Americans arrive it makes economic sense to leave the Western Front to them, and concentrate British forces in the Mediterranean. The earlier the British land in Italy the better. If Greece is still neutral (as she often is) a landing at Salonika with exploiting armour seizing Sofia is well worth a small risk, particularly if you think the Axis are poorly deployed to defend Bucharest (for instance, if the landing is timed to coincide with a large Soviet offensive). A parachute drop on the Albanian port opens up other interesting possibilities. If you see a way to avoid slogging up Italy, take it. The narrow front of the Italian mainland favours defensive attrition, and the British should not expect to be able to capture Rome merely because of historical precedent.



### French Strategy

Once again, Winter 1940 is the crucial turn. France has only one job to do and that is to stay in the game long enough to prevent an Axis attack on Russia before 1941. If France does not fall until Winter 1940, the prospects for Allied victory will already look reasonable.

The opening French defence in Fall 1939 is a problem. I would strongly advise players to ignore the foolish French set-up Avalon Hill recommended in 'The General', the one in which they suggest abandoning the eastern Maginot line hex. Provided a reasonable defence is offered, the likelihood of a full-scale German assault against France on the first turn is very small; but that Maginot line hex is crucial to any French plan to cross the Rhine (in the event of an early attack on Russia, for instance). Whether or not a French player actually intends to cross the Rhine, he should always maintain a threat to do so. Do not be fooled, though, by Italian diplomatic overtures to "demilitarise" the French/Italian border. If the Italians set up away from the border, it is not safe to say "no defence is better than a weak defence" and leave southern France completely empty. The Germans can capture Warsaw with as few as two armoured units: the other two can set up adjacent to the Swiss and Italian borders and capture both Lyons and Marseilles on the first turn against a null defence. Examine the French defence I advocate. Certainly, southern France is weaker than the rest, but not so weak that it is worth the German's while to throw away the free conquest of Poland. He can not get a 2-1 against the Alpine defence, and a 1-1 with five-sixths chance of a breakthrough leaves only one unit for exploitation (a 1-1 with only 50% chance of a breakthrough leaves two units). An exchange would cripple Germany. The risks far outweigh the rewards. One comment needs to be made: if the Italian places his armoured unit in Turin, the French may wish to consider abandoning Marseilles, placing one infantry in each mountain hex and the armour between Lyons and the beach. Frankly,

I would still use the illustrated defence: who cares if a single Italian armoured unit on an attrition option advances out of supply behind the French lines? Note the fleet in Calais ready to supply the two units in southern France (it will also supply the northern French unit if panzers capture 0 23). Also note the reserve infantry in Vichy, positioned to move into Paris or defend the Rhone as required. The slight weakness of the northern French unit is offset a little by a free Belgian deployment and the Belgian airfactor.

At all costs, the French should avoid attacking Belgium or Holland, for much the same reason Russia should respect Turkish neutrality. However attractive short-term benefits appear, the loss of these natural French allies will speed up the eventual conquest of France. If Germany attacks Russia early, be extremely careful about advancing too deep into Germany: the French can defend a short front effectively, but once past the shelter of Switzerland, the infantry becomes very susceptible to exploiting panzers and isolation. On the other hand, small raids are often worthwhile: if Germany attacks Russia in 1939, a double-move attack through Aachen and Essen to deny Belgium and Holland to Germany in 1939 could damage his economy considerably. Be wary about taking a double move though: an Axis double-move riposte is not to be offered lightly. The only time a double move really is demanded is if it is possible to knock out Italy in 1939: in this event give the British all the help you can, because it will win the war for the Allies in one blow. Finally, force the Germans to swap their BRPs for French BRPs at every opportunity; in particular avoid Axis no-loss counterair, force interceptions, sink the Italian navy if given the chance, and use French BRPs for Allied declarations of war and to open up the Lend-Lease route.



### American Strategy

There is little to say; the US has the least interesting role to play. The two big problems the US faces are its slow deployment into Britain and the necessity of hand-feeding Russia all through the game. The worse the Axis losses on the Eastern front, the weaker will be the garrison in France, so keep those BRPs flowing into Russia so that he can take an offensive whenever he wishes; it is no saving to be penny-pinching here. To reduce deployment problems, only build what is immediately needed and use the surplus for growth. The really important American units are the air wings which pack a quite phenomenal punch. Deploy these as soon as practical, and also two armoured units on board four fleets (or encourage the British to keep a 4-5 and 2-5 on board two fleets as a similar threat). All efforts should be directed towards getting ashore and staying there, preferably in 1943. Strike into Germany along the coast using overwhelming shore bombardment, and thus out-flank the Westwall.



### Russian Strategy

The Soviet Union is a fascinating country to play, and is certainly the most important of the Allies. The Russian player must walk a tight-rope: a tenacious defence is essential, but allow too many front-line troops to be surrounded and defeat will be sudden and complete. It is important to stress

that lack of BRPs is rarely the cause of Soviet defeat; more often, defeat follows a massive encirclement resulting in the loss by isolation of so many units that there simply are not enough left (even if all previously eliminated units are rebuilt) to meet the 75 factor criterion. The fact that units lost by isolation can not be rebuilt until the next turn is the Achilles heel of the Soviet Union. Obviously, the Axis will be looking for opportunities for encirclement all the time. The most powerful German unit is the parachute unit, whose speciality is low-odds attacks on the second line of defence. To defend properly, a triple line is necessary, but this is impossible until 1942. The Axis will continue to gobble up Soviet territory until then, for the only practical defence until Siberian reinforcements arrive is a second line set far enough back to be out of Axis air range.

A Soviet attack on Turkey is a very poor idea: Turkey's neutrality aids the Soviets and should therefore be respected. For, once the Axis are past the Bosphorus, defending Turkey increases the frontage for the hard-pressed Soviets by about a third, a terrible burden. Furthermore, Axis control of Tabriz and Sarab will put a strangle-hold on the Soviet economy which could prove fatal. The best way to avoid such a disaster is to leave Turkey alone. The standard one-turn capture of the Nazi-Soviet Pact area followed by peaceful growth may seem boring and unromantic, but at least it is reliable.

Once the Axis assault is under way, defend Leningrad carefully, particularly if like me you station all your fleets there. It is also worth trying to hold on to the Baltic States initially if there is a good chance of denying Tallinn to the Germans at the next Year-Start Sequence. In the early stages of the Axis invasion take attrition options to conserve BRPs; but do not hesitate to take an offensive if large numbers of Soviet units have been surrounded. Forcing units to commit suicide (perhaps dragging some of the Axis armoured spearhead down with them too) and rebuilding them further back is an important Soviet tactic; unfortunately because of the cost it can not be done very often, so it is best reserved for really crucial turns. Do not be nostalgic about Moscow; except close to a Year-Start, abandon it without regret. Do not be afraid to pull back as far as the Don and the Volga. After that, if the Axis are still advancing, as a first priority defend the Caucasus, supplied from Britain; you will find the Axis most reluctant to advance beyond the Volga because of the problems of reinforcement.

A Russian player who finds himself forced all the way back to the Volga should not assume that all prospects for ultimate victory have been lost. A good tactician should be able to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. The problem Germany faces in getting the Axis Minor Allies' cannon-fodder up to the front-line is acute; where feasible, therefore, try to knock out large numbers of small units rather than a few large ones, so straining the German SR capability to its limits. Eliminate the Axis Minor Allies' units at every opportunity; since a Bulgarian or Hungarian unit takes a turn longer than a Rumanian to walk to the front-line, pick on them first if possible. You will find the German line is more and more brittle the further east it is deployed. Eventually, after several consecutive offensives, it will snap, and the Soviet forces will be able to bound forward dramatically until the Germans manage to reform, probably along the Dnepr. Imaginative use of the Soviet paratroops will also pay dividends: odds as low as 1-2 are perfectly acceptable against the German second line provided advance-after-combat has brought friendly units adjacent to the paratroops.

The Axis weakness is not lack of BRPs, but lack of units. The Soviet drive should therefore be concentrated on the south, with the aim of capturing Bucharest. Once Rumania is out of the war, the Axis defence of the east will collapse like a house of cards, and a coherent line is unlikely to be formed further east than Trieste-Breslau-Danzig. Fighting on several fronts at once is expensive though, so husband some resources for the drive into Rumania, and then wheel north through Belgrade, Budapest, Krakow and Breslau to Berlin and victory.