

THE CLASSICS: *Battle for Germany*

SPI / Strategy & Tactics #50 - 1975 / Jim Dunnigan
Decision Games / Mike Benninghof (Redevelopment)

Reviewed by Rich Erwin

Battle for Germany was the first of between five and seven wargames (depending on who's story you want to believe) published by **Strategy and Tactics** for the express purpose of creating very simple introductory systems to attract new people to the hobby. (The games, in order, were *Battle for Germany*, *World War I*, *Oil War*, *Punic Wars*, *Dixie*, *Breitenfeld* and *Revolt in the East*.) Of this batch, *Battle for Germany* was my absolute favorite - I wore out two copies during my high school years.

Decision Games has come out with a reprint of this exercise in mindless fun, and while there are some differences with the original, it's still an enjoyable two-to-three hours of creative headbashing.

The map still covers the same territory - most of central Europe - but now we get to take into account the dreaded Courland Pocket. This is mostly a means of testing how well the East German/Allied player can roll dice. Four of his units are stuck there, and an attempt can be made to release or destroy them - a one on a six-sided die sends them to Stettin or Rostock, while anything else means the deadpile. Two Soviet Front units are there as well, and are released to the front once all of the German units' fates have been determined. The artwork the second time around is very well done - clean and functional.

Units in the game are Corps and Army Fronts. The new game has 20 more counters than the original 100, 9 Soviet and 11 German. A dozen of the counters that were in the first edition have been changed. At one extreme, the German 73rd Tank Corps becomes the 73rd Infantry Corps, with no change in factors. At the other, the 1st, 2nd, and 12th SS Panzer Corps, as well as the 1st FJ Corps, have become much more powerful units. There are a few more minor Soviet ally units as well. And the new game has two 15th US Infantry Corps - one should be the 13th US Infantry Corps instead, though it does not affect in any way the ability to play the game, unless typos are your pet peeve. The second time around, the mechanized units have their appropriate M3's, Shermans, Tigers, Panthers and T-34's. Infantry is still in NATO symbology. No Allied airborne units exist, to the dismay of many, with the logic being that, after Operation Market-Garden, the belief in the utility of airborne forces (not to mention the integrity of the units themselves) was badly shaken.

The rules have been rearranged, but are still pretty much the same. One player represents the Eastern Front Germans and Western Front Allies, while the other represents the Western Front Germans and the Eastern Front Soviets. The turn sequence is still Acquire Replacements/Movement/Combat in the following order - Soviets, Western Front Germans, Allies, Eastern Front Germans. The goal is still to acquire cities in order to gain victory points, and Berlin is still the brass ring that determines who will win the game.

The Combat Results Table is still the bane of many a weekend in my distant past. Exchanges are still one-chance-in-three when the odds are between 2-1 and 6-1, and one-chance-in-six when the odds are either 1-1 or 7-1 or greater. Exchanges are not as severe as in many games - the attacker only must compensate for the face value of the defending units, without taking into account the multiples contained in the terrain fought - but it still makes folks hesitate.

Unit replacement still does exist, and it still provides the weakest offensive units available for the Germans and Soviets, while the Allies can pick and choose as they wish. Both German forces can exit units off of the opponent's side of the map, forcing the two nearest opponent's units out of the game to go hunting for jackboots.

Included are the historical scenario, starting in December 1944, Russians versus the Allies once the Reich has been ground to its well-

deserved dust, a three-player variant, a four-player variant, and a "Collapse in the East" scenario that covers only the end of the war on the Eastern Front. Most folks I know tend to stick to the historical scenario, but the three-player scenario isn't bad. Patton's fantasy moves a little on the slow side, and I can't imagine anybody who'd want to be the East Front Germans in a four-player game.

Both the Allies and Soviets fight the clock as much as the Germans. Both German fronts must use time, space and irritation (via being able to move units offmap) to the utmost.

Ironically, the strategy of both the Allies and the Soviets should be, from my experience, continuous attack. Yes, exchanges will nip at your heels, but the Allies have a solid replacement rate (two units per turn), and the Soviets start the game with plenty of units, while the Germans must pretty much make do with what comes their way. And please note that I didn't say a headlong rush - both the Allies and Soviets should concentrate on at least two well-coordinated, high-odds-as-possible attacks per turn.

In the Allied player's case, it's absolutely necessary in order to drive units out of hexes containing the Siegfried line, broken terrain, and occasionally an SS armored unit or two. This will mean more 1-2 odds attacks than your heart might be able to stand, but it is safer than the Exchange-laden higher odds attacks.

In the Soviet player's case, yes, you can shove back or kill off anything you want to, but you need to be efficient because you are slow, you must cover more territory, and too many exchanges will force you to decide whether to kill off infantry corps (the best bang for your buck), armored corps (the most speed) or fronts (the biggest punch and necessary to officially control Prague, Vienna, Warsaw and Berlin, but slow). You can take losses easily for a while, but realize that your replacement rate declines through the game, and even against a much diminished East German force, you'll need to have one and possibly two well-coordinated attacks to take Berlin.

Italy, sadly, is still the land of 1-2 odds attacks, but absolutely necessary for the Allies in order to stand a chance of controlling enough Victory Point cities.

The Soviets have 18 Victory Points available to them, not including Berlin. All are readily attainable. The Allies have 25 Victory Points available to them, but Italy is not an easy nut to crack and Innsbruck will take a while to acquire, if ever at all - this means around 21-22 readily attainable VP's. This doesn't take into account the sturdy West German forces (now all the more so powerful in the DG version), which, even if required to make two attacks on the first game turn, can still give the Allied player a great deal of grief. Assume Berlin and its 10 VP's is more than likely to fall to the Soviets, and to my mind, while the Allies/East Germans stand a chance, the game slightly favors the Soviets/West Germans.

The East Germans must learn how to die well. In *BfG*, it is through stacking where possible, avoiding encirclement, and holding ground for as long as is reasonable. The southeast is relatively easy to defend, so expect most of your sweating to come in trying to hold onto the northeast, and thus onto Berlin, for dear life. If your opponent doesn't keep his eyes open, be ready to move units via Yugoslavia to the eastern map edge.

The Western Germans have never had it so good. Proper planning can result in two relatively safe attacks required in the first game turn, and from there, you have three to four armored units that can counterattack most attempts to cross the Rhine. Once the Rhine is crossed, your units start to take serious damage, so fall back to your cities; arrange them so that no mad dash to Berlin will be possible except via the south, and that route can be blocked long enough to give the Soviets a shot at Berlin.

One house rule I've used on occasion is that the West Germans must continue to make two attacks per turn after the first game turn, until forced to retreat or until they lose units via elimination or

in each combat. (Can you tell I'm not one of them?)

Despite the minor complaints/concerns mentioned above, the only thing I really felt was missing in this package was a complete order of battle and a bibliography. The order of battle can be extracted from the setup/reinforcement sheet (final nit-pick: the setups for both sides are on the same game aid sheet, so they can't set up at the same time without making a copy of it) but it would be nice to have a concise listing. That, along with a bibliography would be useful for those who want to dig further into the history of this important battle.

If you like operational level WW II games and are willing to work your way through the game mechanics (and probably a couple false starts), I think you will find *Avalanche* a rewarding and challenging game to play. Besides, who can resist a game that has the Herman Goering Luftwaffe Panzer Division in it? But if a dense set of rules is not your cup of tea, *Avalanche* will likely end up being another of those unpunched games gathering dust in your closet.

Battle for Germany (From Page 4)

exchange. The attacks must include at least two SS armored units.

Though I don't quite understand the extra potency of the West German units in the Decision Games reprint, my only real complaint is that the Game Notes available in the SPI version aren't included. These are concise explanations of what to expect of your forces in the given front, and should have been retained.

Still, with the latest *BfG* in my hands, I had to see if it still rang true. Two hours later, the Russians and Allies had a dozen units surrounding Berlin, both the East and West Germans were all but gone, and the path to Berlin for both sides were soiled with the remains of endless exchanged units.

Seems like old times.

Fateful Lightning (From Page 11)

integrated combat system resolved on a single table, and reserve rules that allow for limited intelligence and flanking movements as happened historically. Its weaknesses include detracting map graphics, glitches in the rules and counters, a weak (read this as non-existent) command and control system, and paucity of designer's notes. With a little polish, it would have gained "classic" status almost immediately.

The Battle of Prague (From Page 5)

elevation as the firing unit to a target at a lower height.

Physics and that unyielding law that force equals mass times acceleration also gets a little twisted. Units on a higher elevation get no melee benefit even when horses are charging uphill. That's particularly strange because cavalry pays two MP's to climb a slope but doesn't pay a penalty to charge across it.

Yet for all its simplicity and lack of detail, *Prague* actually doesn't do a bad job of simulating 18th Century warfare. Not in the sense of showing the elaborate and rigid interplay of column and line, but in the overall feel of the battle.

Once the shooting began, those neat ranks of tightly uniformed men broke into a host of local firefights and melees as commanders lost control in the heat of battle. In *Prague*, it's easy to look down at the map and see the Prussian right wing beating in the Austrian left wing, while the Austrian left drives in the Prussian right and the blue and white cavalry charge and countercharge each other. Flushed with success in melee, victorious units advance into the defender's hex, only to be ejected next turn by a counterattack.

That's a lot of fun packed in a small box.

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